THE NETHER WORLDS OF JENNIFER HALEY —

A CASE STUDY OF VIRTUALITY THEATRE

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Studies exploring the first wave of digital performance foregrounded technology by cataloging experimentation and novel interactions between liveness, projections and code. As exercises in medium, these high tech spectacles demonstrate the aesthetic potential of digital media while introducing key media concepts. Jennifer Haley is a writer with one foot in theatre and one in code. She is uniquely positioned in two interdependent spheres, which makes her particularly suited to engineer a theatrical bridge into the virtual, because at the heart of the contemporary technological revolution is a new level of writing and media literacy. Theatre has been effectively accessing the virtual imagination for millennia, and new technologies create new intricacies for engaging the virtual within theatrical space. Each is a medium defined by action, which host other media, and provide in depth simulations. Haley's plays push beyond the fascination and spectacle of technology to incorporate the mundane reality of the digital into the structure of her work. Haley writes plays specifically to resonate with the similarities she sees between theatre and virtual worlds. Utilizing techniques and tropes from other media and then framing the narrative from within a theatrical world Haley exploits the essence of an active, critical audience and opens a dialog between virtual worlds

and the perceptions of the audience. She treats her media generated worlds as places. Other digital theatre plays may peer through a window into the virtual by dramatizing a conversation through media; Haley sends an expedition over the threshold into another world. A flesh version of an avatar breathing before the audience establishes a material existence unattainable in two dimensional screen media. Haley illuminates the constructed nature of mediatized communication, but she does it dramaturgically deemphasizing the technology and re-centering the human within the virtual drama. Her approach builds a metaphorical bridge between theatre and virtual digital realities. Through a close reading of Haley's plays I will demonstrate how Haley takes the artistic next step for computer technology and theatre.

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For Brian and Life 2.0

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THEATRE AS A BRIDGE INTO THE VIRTUAL

"We've been talking about communication and technology, but somehow at the core of who we are as people — and the core of our imaginations — is this need to tell stories. And as long as that need is there, I don't think theater will ever go away," - Jennifer Haley (Rizzolo).

"Theatre is virtual reality," –Jennifer Haley (Centenary Stage Company).

"You don't see anything outside of your game. You don't see anything that's real!" (Haley, *N3RD* 257)

Playwright Jennifer Haley is positioned at a confluence of technology, theatre and imagination. Haley theatricalizes technologically constructed virtual spaces, fictional game worlds that support the narrative arcs of her characters. Haley is one of a group of contemporary playwrights now blending theatre and computer realities within plays. The virtual worlds in Haley's writing, however, manifest physically in the virtual space of theatre, thereby sharing material reality with the audience. Every play is then grounded in the fluid and contextually based understanding of *what is real* that permeates technologically saturated contemporary culture. By deemphasizing the technology Haley digs deeper into the architectural core of technology and today's culture. Using language and theatrical space, Haley stages the digital. Language organizes a dialogic communion while theatre supports a physical simulation. Without overt technology on stage, Haley's

works are grounded in technology, or more precisely in the *human to machine* relationship, and human to human *through machine* dynamic. In today's screen dominated culture, the eye is an input device moving information to the virtual stage of imagination to be processed. Theatre has been effectively accessing the imagination for millennia, and new technologies create new intricacies for engaging the virtual within theatrical space. There is a deep connection between theatre and computers. Each is a medium defined by action, which host other media, and provide in depth simulations. Haley, while not the first playwright to dramatize the digital virtual, does so with perhaps the clearest voice.

Theatre and New Media Literacy, A Writing Problem

To understand Jennifer Haley's plays it is important to place her within a current cultural context, as a *writer* with one foot in theatre and one in code. Haley's unique position as a writer in these two interdependent spheres makes her particularly suited to engineer a theatrical bridge into the virtual, because at the heart of the contemporary technological revolution is a new level of writing and media literacy. The computer, and more specifically the code and technological infrastructure behind it has transformed every industry and corner of contemporary culture. In "Toward Superlanguage" *The next Generation - Toward Superlanguage* Pierre Levy writes, "After the invention of the hypertext, every act of reading is a potential act of writing," (Levy "Toward Superlanguage"). Spreadsheets, networks and smartphones are physical examples of the transformation from an

analog to a digital world. Levy argues that "the researcher multiplying scenarios by

the exploration of numerical models and the child playing video-games are both

experimenting with tomorrow's writing, with the language of interactive images,

with the dynamic ideography permitting the simulation of worlds," (Levy "Toward

Superlanguage"). We are standing on ground that is re-rendering around us, a

technological revolution comparable to other historical technological revolutions.

In their 2004 essay, "Theatre of Context: Digital's Absurd Role in Dramatic

Literature" Jeff Burke and Jared Stein state that:

> Technology in theatre exists almost exclusively in the spectacle of
> performance, and though it has largely defined the societies of modern
> drama, it has rarely enabled new forms of dramatic literature (Burke and
> Stein 93[1]).

Technology, the key element here, "largely defined the societies of modern drama"

and yet is nearly nonexistent in plays. "Technology creates spectacle," through

computer controlled scenery, lighting, sound and projection effects, but "remains

disconnected" from the text (Burke and Stein 93). Whit MacLaughlin, founder of

New Paradise Laboratories was quoted in a 2013 *American Theatre* article saying,

"Theatre tends to hold its Luddite credentials high. We fancy ourselves to be the

antidote to all that digital stuff," (Mandell "Social Media On Stage: Theater Meets

Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Tumbler, Soundcloud"). MacLaughlin believes getting

the internet and technological culture into "those old-fangled things called plays" is

essential for "reaching young and nontraditional potential theatre goers," (Mandell).

MacLaughlin and groups like the New Futurists are experimenting with theatre and

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[1] "Theatre of Context: Digital's Absurd Role in Dramatic Literature." *New Visions In Performance The Impact of Digital Technologies*.

"possibilities of online storytelling" through new play formats like Twitter plays[2].

Burke and Stein point out that "More adventurous directors and performers have

experimented with emerging technologies enabling telepresence, 'virtual' theatrical

worlds, and many forms of multimedia performance," (Burke and Stein 93). Burke

and Stein list The Wooster Group and Robert Lepage as pioneers in staging

"sophisticated multimedia works with current commercially available technologies,"

however the exploration of the emergent technologies remains mostly in "the

domain of performance art" (94). There's little conversation about digital

technology in plays. Burke and Stein blame the "disconnect" between plays and

other digital performance on an inability to penetrate technology. Focus lingers on

the surface of "a few particular input and output manifestations of that realm:

projections, computer graphics, automated scenery, sound effects, and even

particular types of sensing," (94). A "myopic definition" of what constitutes

technology in performance both "overlooks dramatic literature's own fluidity" and

remains distracted by spectacle. For Burke and Stein the strength and authority of

digital technology is more expansive and less tangible then motion capture and

projection effects. Algorithms, protocols and data "drive every element of spectacle"

on and off stage. "'The digital' is an abstract representational arena that can be

manipulated at incredible speeds by man-made machines, enabling connections

across modal and geographic boundaries, into huge scored datasets, and between

anything that can be digitally represented," (94). What Burke and Stein propose is

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[2] A play consisting of a single 140 character tweet or a connected series of tweets.

that dramatic text, because it's "fluidity" allows for reinterpretation, it is a logical vehicle for exploring 'the digital' theatrically.

> If it is appropriate for performance and installation art to simultaneously explore both digital processes and specific input/output manifestations, dramatic literature—specifically, the play—can incorporate the processes alone into structured text, leaving the particular 'input and output' open for reinterpretation by directors and designers (Burke and Stein 94).

Such plays offer an "intriguing challenge for digital artists and engineers," while the challenge for playwrights is to find ways to represent 'the digital' using "the rules of the play" (94). Burke and Stein experimented with autonomous systems to collect data from the audience before and during a performance that would then be used to tailor their play. While challenging playwrights to represent technology using the rules of the play, Burke and Stein remain as myopic in their definition of technology in performance. Plays may one day contain executable code corresponding to the dramatic text, Burke and Stein however, overlook how language and dramaturgical structure of a play can evoke the digital.

The advantage of writing technology and the virtual into a play without needing any additional technology is stated by Chiel Kattenbelt in *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, "theatre can exist without any technology," (Kattenbelt 37). Theatre integrates and transforms other media while film, television and digital media can only remediate (37). Kattenbelt says that while theatre is unable to record in the same fashion as technology-based media, it can "incorporate all media into its performance space" in the same way that theatre "can incorporate all the other arts." It is this ability **to stage** and transform technological media and analog media into "theatrical signs" that makes theatre in Kattenbelt's argument a

5

"*hypermedium*," (37)[3]. Kattenbelt refers to Umberto Eco's "proprium" of theatre where performers and objects "inserted within a physical space" on stage become signs "framed" in a "performative situation" (Eco 117).

> [A]s components of a live performance, film, television and video recordings are not only screened, but also and at the same time staged (which is not necessarily the same as refashioned). Thus because theatre is the art of staging *pur sang* it becomes preeminently a stage of intermediality (Kattenbelt 37).

The ability to stage or host all other mediums within its space is an essential connection between "the digital" and "the theatrical." Theatre may be the counter to all things digital, but as codex rather than antidote.

According to Boenisch, Lehmann and De Kerckhove, western theatre has been providing this intermedial literacy service from the very beginning in Greece. De Kerckhove argues in his essay, "Theatre as Information-Processing in Western Cultures" that theatre helped educate ancient Greek culture through the introduction of new media technology, the phonetic alphabet. Peter Boenisch agrees in his essay, "CoMEDIA ElectRONica: Performing Intermediality in Contemporary Theatre" stating that the "intermediality" of theatre was embedded in theatre as a "form of art from the very start," (Boenisch, CoMEDIA 35). De Kerckhove suggests theatre was the catalyst for developing an imagination, the internal stage, an important step in moving from an oral to a literate culture.

> Even as the traditional lore of epic poetry was being transcribed and fixed by the written word, it was being fragmented and transformed into theatre. Just as writing involved the "exteriorization" of mental processes, theatre was an exteriorization of memory techniques previously used by the oral tradition (De Kerckhove, "Theatre" 145).

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[3] Italic emphasis in source, bold emphasis is mine.

Hans-Thies Lehmann, in *Postdramatic Theatre*, reestablishes the relationship between theatre and writing, "theatre existed first: arising from ritual, taking up the form of mimesis through dance, and developing into a full-fledged behaviour and practice *before* the advent of writing," (Lehmann 46)[4]. The tangible difference between text and stage is summed up by Bert States, in *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* "What the text loses in significative power in the theater it gains in corporeal presence, in which there is extraordinary perceptual satisfaction," (States 29). Burke and Stein warn that "Theatre is already slipping out of the public sphere, often unable to capture the imagination, intellect, and attention of audiences now accustomed to the swiftness of digital interconnection and vivid images of modern media," (Burke and Stein 100). Kattenbelt admits that cinema assumed much of theatre's place because "film demonstrated itself as more capable than theatre in presenting a possible world that seems to exist on its own, precisely because film is only projection…film provides the illusion of reality" while "theatre provides the reality of illusion," (Kattenbelt 37). This realness of illusion is however, the tangible essentialness that theatre provides as a staging platform to explore virtuality, and all the various facets of a technological, and protocol-dominated culture.

Levy writes that digital media "unfolding its dynamic image on the screen, still derives from a form of writing," (Levy "Toward Superlanguage"). While media theorist Douglas Rushkoff states in his book, *Throwing Rocks at the Google Bus* "It's all code, and it doesn't care about people, our priorities, or our future unless we

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[4] Emphasis mine.

bother to program those concerns into it," (Rushkoff 69). 'The digital' is embedded

in our reality and understanding; it is a matter of literacy, an idea that Robert

Lepage addressed in a panel discussion at MIT:

> [K]nowing what the audience knows about storytelling — twenty-five to thirty years ago the audiences didn't know much about jump cuts and flash forwards and all of this vocabulary that television and rock video and movies that people have seen. Now people have a vocabulary. They are very educated people, even people who have never been to school go listen to stories, go to movies and all that. There is this whole thing that has developed with time and you have to take that into account when you try and convey a story today. If you don't do that, and you try to respect a tradition, and all that, people are at the end of the play before you are (Lepage Panel Discussion: Technology in Stagecraft and Storytelling).

Lepage appreciates that his early adoption of new techniques with the digital makes

him "more vulnerable" to criticism than relying on ingrained methods "that are

accepted and taken for granted," because "we are always wary" and "afraid" of "new

tools" that are unfamiliar. Lepage compares digital technologies to new

paintbrushes and colors that open up a "whole array of possibilities," while still

throwing some people off balance until they become acclimated (Lepage).

Warily the digital has crept onto the stage. A protagonist in one play picks up

the cell phone of the man sitting next to her who has died. In another play, a

character is emotionally bolstered by an online forum. Social media, adult chat

rooms, links, and tweets crack the surface level of the digital. Still screen media got

there first using cameras to interpret digital space, or multiplying screens within

screens. Both approaches remediate with the perspective fixed. Burke and Stein

ask, "What, then, does the digital offer to the collective experience of performance

that can be incorporated into a dramatic text?" (Burke and Stein 101). The answer

is virtuality — a real, though abstract shared space—a stage.

It is a space constructed by code and constrained by protocol. It is a form of writing that "notates mental models" that are "interactive, explorable, mobile, modifiable, branching out into thousands of reservoirs of data," (Levy "Toward Superlanguage"). In other words, the digital offers complex simulations, a mimesis of possibilities that is similar to theatre's role as described in chapter 9 of Aristotle's *Poetics*: the "function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen," (Aristotle *Poetics* IV). Virtuality is an open dialog that may contain scripted elements, but remains fluid. On one level, virtuality is *just theatre*, old fashioned constructs called plays, but perhaps more settled in a scripted footing and unfixed execution; a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Virtuality is a way to use the stage in theatre to contextualize the abstract space endemic to the digital. This space behaves similarly to theatre with a new wrinkle, an unprecedented level of open interactions intertwined with hardwired constraints.

De Kerckhove describes a "spatio-temporal" consciousness model that developed in theatre with the phonetic alphabet (De Kerckhove 145). Theatre exteriorized mental processes on the stage, and in time the novel interiorized these processes into a private theatre of the mind. "We learned to write and read our novels according to the spatio-temporal framework, and the allegorized divisions and distributions of mental processes incarnated by the stage and its actors," (150). Cinema extends the same processes and develops new complexities, while "also gradually undermining our individual controls on imagination," (151). Boenisch writes: "the hotly debated 'new' intermediality of theatre turns out as nothing other than a logical consequence of theatre's genuine 'mediality'" (Boenisch, "CoMEDIA"

35). The intermedial essence of theatre stems from its "physical presence" and real time unfolding which Kattenbelt argues provides the ideal platform— a stage, where the digital may be organized, processed and examined:

> If the expression 'all the world is a stage' is (or seems to be) no longer just a metaphor, but on the contrary a characteristic feature of our mediatized culture, then we really do need a stage on which the staging of life can be staged in such a way that it can be deconstructed and made visible again (Kattenbelt 38).

De Kerckhove credits theatre with creating "the only form of neutral space known to our culture," the theatrical stage which "presents an 'idea of space' as well as a support for the plays' symbolic actions," (De Kerckhove 148). The idea of space inherited from theatre becomes an interior stage.

I define "Virtuality theatre" as a loose classification of plays that use theatre's stage in the capacity of an "idea of space" to process and disseminate "the digital" through action and narrative. Virtuality theatre combines definitions from Steve Dixon and Barry Smith in *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* and Gavin Carver and Colin Beardon's *New Visions in Performance: The Impact of Digital Technologies*, with insight into theatre's media literacy function from De Kerckhove. Dixon and Carver and Beardon investigate an array of performance media, for this study, I am narrowing the focus to theatre. Dixon describes digital performance as: "all performance works where computer technologies play a *key* role rather than a subsidiary one in content, techniques, aesthetics or delivery forms," (Dixon 3). Carver and Beardon apply the descriptor "Virtuality" to a second stage of complexity in digital performance. They select the term "virtuality" as a framework for "referencing a set of interconnected

10

concerns and manifestations of the new technologies described" when discussing digital technology as content in performance at a "conceptual level" and "in terms of models of use," (Carver and Beardon 167). Their "New Visions" include performances with "fully integrated digital technologies in the conceptual, creative and performance processes, opening-up new possibilities of performance and its relationship to time, space and the body...along with the associated, often interrelated notions of interactivity and liveness," (Carver and Beardon 1). "Virtuality" describes a second stage as artist experience develops sophistication, and "the virtual has itself become the subject matter of the art work and its technical role in supporting the work has become secondary," (169). Works in the second stage are described as "deliberately downgrading the role of technology as technique and allowing it to contribute more 'as a whisper,'" so that technology manifests "in conceptual form, as virtuality rather than as technique," (169). Virtuality theatre dramatizes the experiences of people relating through technology.

Carver and Beardon open a discussion on "Virtuality" by identifying three distinctions within the work they reviewed, which are: virtuality as "stored potential," "overcoming space and time" and as "transformation and metaphor," (169). Virtuality as stored potential is working the ability of digital systems to create alternative outcomes or simulations via algorithm. It is the type of virtuality at play in Ruhl's *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, and in the first work examined in Chapter two of this study, *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*. Overcoming space and time as virtuality gets to the communicative heart of network connection transforming the "use of a computer from a solitary to a public act" that is different from

simulation and algorithmic virtuality (168). *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan,

Hudes' *Water by the Spoonful* and Marber's *Closer* fit an overcoming space and time

distinction. *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom* utilizes a bit of this level of

virtuality, but relationships grounded in actions in a virtual world appears most

central in *The Nether*, the subject of Chapter 4. The third distinction is virtuality as

transformation and metaphor which "exploits the convergence of media" inside the

digital "text, images, sounds" and mixed in the intermedial play space of the stage.

Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom and *The Nether* each offer virtuality as

transformation and metaphor. The distinctions of virtuality are nebulous and

overlap, however the virtuality as transformation and metaphor anchors in the

"common bedrock" of digital virtuality and theatrical virtuality, that is the ability to

stage or "represent text, images and sounds" combining meaning to explore "new

relationships of space, time and causality," (169). Piotr Woycicki in *Post-cinematic*

Theatre and Performance uses the term "mediaphor" to describe the type of

metaphor this third distinction creates, one with "unresolved tensions" stemming

from the flesh and blood actor, the "extra theatrical" technological aspect, and the

"conceptual dimension" where meaning is assigned (Woycicki 65). Mediaphor, the

incohesive metaphor fails due to a lack of transparency. "Mediaphors draw

attention towards the disparity between the different media involved in the

construction of the image," (Woycicki 66). Theatre in Woycicki's writing has a part

to play in deconstructing cinema's "spell of realism" and illuminating "cinematic

modes of operation" which pervade digital media from web design to video games

(2).

Mediaphor aligns somewhat with Paul Castagno's "Dialogic Beat" described in his *New Playwriting Strategies: Language and Media in the 21st Century*. The beat, according to Castagno, is a "site of innovation" in tension with "the expected or conventional" unfolding of the play in the moment (Castagno 145). It simulates a real world connection to the digital, "We constantly change roles and levels of speech to fit the given situation. Our lives move at 'cyber-speed': we key in a word and we can instantly access places and information across the globe. New playwriting keys in a virtual, parallel world, where the word is the shifter, where language takes on protean characteristics, providing the material means for transition and transformation," (147). "New Playwriting" or what Castagno sometimes calls "Language Playwriting" uses what he terms "the dialogic beat" with other intermedial, theatrical and language techniques in a innovative approach that is "qualitatively dissimilar from old school, Aristotelian orthodoxy" and now has enough "gravitation pull" to have shifted mainstream theatre (4).

A final cornerstone in theory underlying the concept of "Virtuality theatre" is remediation and the work done by David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their book, *Remediation: Understanding New Media. Cambridge*. Bolter and Grusin do not venture into theatre but their work informs Kattenbelt, Woycicki, and Dixon. The core of Bolter and Grusin's argument is that old and new media strive to invoke a sense of immediacy through dissolving all traces of media to create a sense of realism and transparency, or in contrast by foregrounding and even multiplying the media called "hypermediacy" (Bolter and Grusin 5). The tension between hypermediacy and transparency is old and not novel to the emergence of

13

contemporary "new media." In fact, Bolter and Grusin's argument is that emergent media must refashion itself within the context of existing media which then provokes the old media to adapt in response. "New digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts," (19).

> Where immediacy suggests a unified visual space, contemporary hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on the world, but rather as windowed itself - with windows that open on to other representations or other media (34).

Cinema largely relies on immediacy and transparency, television alternates between techniques while computers use a "multiplicity of windows" that the user "oscillates between manipulating the windows and examining their contents" (33). Theatre is not discussed, which is unfortunate as both techniques exist throughout theatre as they do in the illuminated manuscripts and Renaissance paintings Bolter and Grusin do discuss. Theatre may be too culturally transparent at the moment, obscured by screen media and therefore overlooked.

To recap, "Virtuality theatre" is a loosely classified group of plays that use *the theatrical virtual*—a stage, in the capacity of western culture's neutral *idea of space* to process and disseminate *the digital virtual* through action and narrative. Prevailing themes include three distinctions of virtuality as observed by Carver and Beardon, virtuality as stored potential, as overcoming space and time, and as transformation and metaphor.

14

The Virtual — Playing with Giants

Ralph Willingham begins his study *Science Fiction and the Theatre*, with an argument that contemporary theatre suffers from the ordinary. Willingham quotes C. S. Lewis despairing contemporary literature's loss of a sense of the extraordinary and monstrous in comparison to fairy tales. Giants raise the narrative according to Lewis, "The whole quality of the imaginative response is determined by the fact that the enemies are giants. That heaviness, that monstrosity, that uncouthness, hangs over the whole thing," (Lewis 8). Leveraging this idea from Lewis, Willingham argues, "Today's theatre has become ordinary because so much of it is about ordinary people facing ordinary problems. Modern playwriting, in Lewis's terms, suffers from a lack of giants," (Willingham 1). Giants are the appropriate scale to begin to comprehend digital virtuality. Computers reduce everything, "all texts, images, sounds, colours and movements to indifferent binary computation of zeroes and ones" while also providing the ability to integrate and combine complex systems, writes Boenisch:

> …computer technology allows the merging of mechanical, electrical, and electro-magnetic systems into a single electronic system, while also short-circuiting industrial, technical, scientific, artistic and aesthetic networks. In this context, concepts such as the cinematic or the theatrical no longer make sense, because today all kinds of codes, data and functions are all collected up into bits, bytes, and little silver disks (Boenisch, "Aesthetic" 104).

Boenisch calls for "a new conceptual framework" for theatre and "the proliferation" of the digital. Using the "intermediality" of theatre to examine the trappings of the digital "offers a perspective of *disruption and resistance*" able to "perforate *the meaning*" (Boenisch, "Aesthetic" 115). The gain is disrupting the illusion of one

15

cohesive reality, homogenized, globalized and universal which is "confront[ed]" on the intermedial stage, Boenisch says, "one reality forcefully inscribed in recent years, which so blatantly contradicts all the slogans of cyberspace democracy and manifold globes of virtual realities with equal rights," (115). Boenisch's words sync with those of Alexander Galloway in his book *Protocol*, because it is the paradox of digital technology. Galloway states, "The founding principle of the Net is control, not freedom," (Galloway, *Protocol* 142). To achieve "the ultimate goal of a freer and more democratic medium" explains Galloway, "Protocol" the decision making process embedded in code, demands universalization and homogeny. The type of control is technical "based on openness, inclusion, universalism, and flexibility" and "not this or that limitation or individual freedom or decision making" (142). There is, however, a degree of skewed perspective and privilege, because the men who crafted the internet[5] are a technocratic ruling class — open to anyone who has the ability to contribute, but that ability restricts membership to: "a relatively homogeneous social class: highly educated, altruistic, liberal-minded science professionals from modernized societies around the globe," (Galloway, *Protocol* 122). What Boenisch sees as blatant contradiction, may be in fact a lack of literacy born out of a reluctance to engage more deeply with the complexities of computers, code and the distributed systems it creates. Galloway points out that "protocol is a type of controlling logic that operates outside institutional, governmental, and corporate power, although it has important ties to all three," (122). Rushkoff's

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[5] For more information on the gendered history of computer programming see Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's: "On Software, or the Persistence of Visual Knowledge," *Grey Room*, No. 18 (Winter, 2004), pp. 26-51.

words are worth repeating, that code "doesn't care about people, our priorities, or our future unless we bother to program those concerns into it," (Rushkoff, *Throwing Rocks at the Google Bus: How Growth Became the Enemy of Prosperity* 69). Lastly, Levy exhorts for "humanists and the pedagogues, the creators and the authors" to embrace the "possibilities of the new writing." Levy warns:

> No situation could be worse than that in which the cultured men and women isolate themselves in the territory of the alphabetical text and leave the language of tomorrow into the hands of technicians and salesmen. Separation almost always brings about barbarism (Levy "Toward Superlanguage").

Here, at the node that connects the intermedial theatrical stage with the monstrous giant that is the digital, virtuality, protocol and language is where I position Jennifer Haley, writer.

In one sense, Haley isn't doing anything very new. She follows the old writer's adage to *write what you know*. Haley knows technology enough to write theatrical worlds that engage on deeper levels with the relationship between people and technology. She poses sticky and provocative questions. The code, as Rushkoff says, "doesn't care" but people should, because people decide ultimately what concerns are programmed into the code.

> I like marrying cerebral ideas and questions about the way things work and questions about morality and questions about code, and wrapping those into the emotional stories—finding out what the emotion of even those questions are in these stories about people and technology (Haley "The Subtext. Episode 3: Jennifer Haley")[6].

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[6] Haley, Jennifer. "The Subtext. Episode 3: Jennifer Haley." Interview by Brian James Polak. Audio blog post.@ *This Stage*. LA Stage Alliance, 10 Aug. 2015. Web. 10 Aug. 2015

In general, Haley's work toys with *Virtuality* either through digital virtual spaces, the virtual realms of fantasy or the virtuality caused by the mind through drug use or disease.

In a 2015 interview in *American Theatre* Haley says, "I'm interested in technology because it's giving us a way to live alternate lives," (Tran). She adopts genre structures to "lull people" into the story: in *Breadcrumbs*, using the essence of a fairy tale; in *Neighborhood*, using a video game; and in *The Nether*, using television procedurals," (Tran). Haley is now comfortable with a technology playwright mantle, telling James Polak in an interview that "I didn't know this is where I was going, but now that I'm swimming in this pool I really like it. It feels right," (Haley "The Subtext. Episode 3: Jennifer Haley." Interview by Brian James Polak). It is not technology, however but the power of the imagination to create, append or obscure reality that echoes throughout Haley's plays.

Haley told John Good in an interview for the London production of *The Nether*: "it's interesting to do these kinds of stories in theatre because the audience has to do so much," (Haley "In Conversation with Playwright Jennifer Haley." Interview by John Good). She enjoys theatre as a platform for her stories because the audience collaborates in the creation by constructing the world "in their own minds" when she writes "it's a beautiful forest and boom, they do all the work," (Haley "In Conversation with Playwright Jennifer Haley." Interview by John Good). Theatre audiences learned the ability to mentally construct virtual worlds in the era of classical Greek theatre according to De Kerckhove. Through the bridging of a real physical stage with the abstract and new alphabet an "idea of space" became part of

regular thought that laid the foundation of the Western imagination. This "idea of

space" was a "visually biased and highly flexible" cultural "collective imagination"

combining theatre and literature (De Kerckhove, "Theatre" 148). Over time new

media is grafted into the collective and theatre adapts, according to Boenisch, "I

suggest that theatre turns into *a new medium*[7] whenever new media technologies

become dominant, and, in addition, that theatre adapts and disperses the new

cognitive strategies, just as it did in ancient Greece," (Boenisch, "Aesthetic" 111).

Virtuality is then, according to De Kerckhove and Boenisch, hard-baked into theatre

at its source in the Western world.

Haley writes plays specifically to make similarities she sees between

theatrical and virtual worlds resonate. She connects both concepts through the eyes

of role-play, as an actor. For Haley, by inhabiting "self-created fantasy worlds"

theatre penetrates the essence of digital experiences:

> The way people inhabit avatars in a virtual world is not unlike the way actors
> inhabit characters onstage. Theatre is really appropriate for telling stories
> about identity and living out different characters in worlds that you've
> created. (Haley "In Conversation with Playwright Jennifer Haley." Interview
> by John Good)

The two features Haley mentions reoccur in her work, the self-created fantasy

worlds and fluid identities. The writer succumbing to dementia and her pliable

caregiver find themselves inside a fairytale in *Breadcrumbs*. The teenagers in

Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom drag their families through a wormhole into a

video game. The romanticized Neo-Gothic Hideaway contrasts with an antiseptic "in

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[7] Emphasis in original.

world" in *The Nether*. *FROGGY* fractures the protagonist into up to four persona

facets playing out layers of memory and consciousness.

> I'm fascinated by who people become and who people can become in these
> virtual worlds. This current technology allows us not only to change our
> identities, but also to live in these self-created fantasy worlds. How does that
> influence our psychology? (Haley "In Conversation with Playwright Jennifer
> Haley." Interview by John Good).

Haley achieves resonance between the theatrical and digital dramaturgically

through writing. She deemphasizes the technology directly and re-centers the

human within the virtual drama.

The lack of overt technology to perform Haley's plays and the re-centering of

the human may seem contradictory for a "technology playwright", however the shift

of focus from technological frame and human center is how Haley penetrates

technology. She isn't dazzled by the novelty, neither is she renouncing it. As Neel

Keller, associate artistic director at Center Theatre Group in L.A. and director of the

world premiere of *The Nether* tells Tran "It's one of the ways that, without using

technology, [Haley]'s making the plays feel technological," (Tran). She writes

episodic narrative arcs that unfold over time completing the whole story. "Life is

not experienced narratively anymore, or in a straightforward way," Keller calls it

"unthreading the narrative" which he says caused some confusion during the

rehearsal process for *The Nether* (Tran).

Jeremy Herrin, the director of the London premiere of *The Nether* has similar

thoughts about Haley's non tech approach to technology, in a talk back following a

performance at The Duke of York theatre in London Herrin said,

I'd been reading over the years, from my time at The Royal Court, of playwrights trying to grapple with the internet and trying to put the internet on stage. And I had never read a play that managed successfully to theatricalize it or to deal with any of the issues. *The Nether* was the first play that I thought really came to grips with it and really explored it. Crucially, Jen found a way to put it on stage by not putting it on stage, (Headlong Theatre. *The Nether - The Nether - Jennifer Haley and Jeremy Herrin in Conversation*).

Haley's scripts draw upon genre and lack direct emphasis on technology. Instead, she combines the structures of technology into the techniques of her plays adapting techniques used in cinema, television, and the internet into her stories using language and structure.

Utilizing techniques and tropes from other media and then framing the narrative from within a theatrical world, Haley exploits the essence of an active, critical audience, and opens a dialog between virtual worlds and the perceptions of the audience. Haley uses theatre as low tech space to stage high tech culture tapping into the phenomenological, semiotic and historic essence of theatre as a relevant platform to stage new media. It may be that Haley's professional experience as a web designer lends her work a depth and distinctive approach. She told Polak, "I was a web designer for 13 years. That's how I supported myself as a playwright."

I have always been interested in computers. I learned Basic when I was 13. Always interested in code. Always interested in the way things work, and the systems that underlie reality. And I didn't even know that about myself for a lot of years (Haley, Jennifer. "The Subtext. Episode 3: Jennifer Haley." Interview by Brian James Polak).

In an interesting coincidence, Haley became a web designer only after failing to get into a graduate playwriting program upon her first application, "it was really this door that wouldn't open in my writing life that led to becoming a web designer,"

21

(Haley, Jennifer. "The Subtext. Episode 3: Jennifer Haley." Interview by Brian James Polak). Working in web design provided an income and an edge in crafting plays that bridge theatre and computers. "It's not really about technology," Haley tells Tran, "The technology for me is just an interesting way to examine these really limitless, long-standing, global questions of identity, and waking life versus dream life," (Tran). In an interview with KERA Art&Seek radio program Jerome Weeks writes in his blog post, "Haley argues that all of this focus on technology — in her own work background, in her plays and their production designs — has been misleading," (Weeks) In the corresponding radio feature Weeks quotes Haley saying:

> Virtual realms are just our latest form of fantasy and we may think we create such fantasy because we want all the cool gizmos, but unwittingly our fantasy worlds often reveal the human contacts we truly need in this reality (Weeks).

Once again the pivot point for Haley is the "idea of space" De Kerckhove describes that connects theatre, writing, and imagination— a virtual "idea of space" of fantasy and thought.

Haley's plays penetrate technology by using this "idea of space," and her method accomplishes two things. First, it opens the script up to production in many types of venues. Haley's plays work within minimalist black box facilities. The technology required to produce the play is the minimum requirement for theatre, the ability to be seen and heard by the audience. Haley consciously writes her plays with simple low-tech productions in mind. She commented on her choice to keep her plays flexible in a June 2015 co-interview published online for *The Believer*, "I think my desire is that anything I write is something you could produce anywhere,"

22

(Haley, 2016. Web.). Such a sentiment only seems unusual when considering the defined worlds of Haley's plays. In Haley's work technology is approachable by production standards, and by dramatizing the tech content the concepts of technology open up for the audience.

Secondly, Haley's dramaturgy remediates theatre as a relevant platform in new media criticism. Haley treats her media generated worlds as real places, and shows them fully manifest on the stage. Other digital theatre plays may peer through a window into the virtual by dramatizing a conversation through media, Haley sends an expedition over the threshold into another world. Her virtual worlds share equal material presence with the "real world" in her plays. Fully dramatizing the virtual develops a deeper sense of realness, because theatre is a platform for reality based simulation. In other words, a flesh avatar breathing before the audience establishes a material existence unattainable in two dimensional screen media.

A theatrical delivery structure lends material reality to Haley's hypermedia techniques and layers of intermedial references that intentionally disrupt ways of seeing, relating, and querying contemporary culture. Haley's worlds onstage invoke other media through her use of genre archetypes and media tropes placed within a theatrical frame. This is significant because it moves the artistic discourse of digital performance beyond the aesthetic and spectacle of technology to a more nuanced engagement with technology in contemporary culture. Haley's use of genre and screen media tropes as narrative shortcuts enables her to exploit intermedial tensions. Her structure and use of language mimics techniques more common to

cinema, television, and even graphic novels. This creates a dynamic in her plays

reminiscent of Woycicki's "mediaphor" and Castagno's "dialogic beat."

By dramatizing virtual spaces as physical places Haley creates a dioptric

mediaphor. Haley's approach builds a metaphorical bridge between theatre and

virtual digital realities. She draws attention to the similarities between theatre and

digital spaces: actors and avatars; stages and screens; relationships, selections and

action. Haley connects theatre and online gaming saying, "The very foundation of

theatre is actors letting a new personality infiltrate their body—they put an avatar

onstage...When people go online and play different characters, it becomes theatre.

They're living out other stories," (Tran 17). By dramatizing virtual interactions

Haley employs a distancing effect that places the viewers outside the mediatized

cultural aura. Putting the virtual onstage offers a new perspective on the

mechanisms of digital culture. Enacting a virtual game world within the virtual

theatre world is a 21st century version of the play within a play. In other words, she

constructs a dioptric or refracting tension contained within the play. Haley's

selection of theatre as a narrative delivery structure puts the audience temporarily

inside a constructed bubble on stage that is disengaged from outside media. At a

time when media literacy has become critical, Haley's work emphasizes the

importance theatre plays in supporting new media literacy. In this study I will

examine through close reading two of Haley's plays: *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of

Doom* and *The Nether*. These plays represent the composite structure Haley uses to

create fantastical digital worlds on the theatrical stage.

Jennifer Haley: A case study of Virtuality Theatre

Haley is best known for her prize winning play, *The Nether* and is one of several notable emerging playwrights mentored by Paula Vogel. Originally from Texas, Haley settled in Los Angeles attracted by the sunshine and opportunities to write for stage and screen. She founded the Playwrights Union, a networking group for Los Angeles area writers. "It seemed like less of a cliché than [being a playwright in] New York. I like sunshine and I don't mind driving — those are not things that stop me," Haley told *LA Weekly* writer Steven Leigh Morris in April 2013. She lived in North Hollywood with friends who shared her interest in theatre. "I was interested in TV, but I was not running around hunting down that dream." Instead Haley earned a living as a web designer while practicing theatre at home with friends, "We had performance salons in this house…Making theater in our house the whole time. I think that's an unusual first three years for someone in L.A." (Morris). The Humana Festival of New Plays picked *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom* for their 2008 season. In 2012, *The Nether* won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize granting Haley professional recognition, and the freedom to pursue writing full-time. She began writing for Netflix on the original series, *Hemlock Grove* (Rizzolo). Her work with Netflix continues in *Mindhunter*. The body of Haley's work revolves around themes of human imagination and technology as a bridge to intimacy and communication. Three full length plays, *Breadcrumbs*, *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom* and *The Nether* have been published while *FROGGY* and *Sustainable Living* remain in development. This study examines *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom* (*N3RD*), *The Nether*, and *FROGGY*, three plays partially set in virtual game worlds.

25

Technical culture pervades both *Breadcrumbs* and *Sustainable Living*, though neither play engages with virtual "game" spaces.

Role-playing games, in particular the massive, multi-player games and open world simulations navigate a boundary between linear scripted story-telling and unscripted simulation. Each of Haley's plays examined in this study engage a different type of virtual game environment exploring the dichotomy between identity extension and puppet avatar. Haley brings the ontology of the environmental game space into her plays. She incorporates the action within the game world into the on-stage world making the virtual game space as real as the virtual dramatic space. In Haley's work the world of the play includes another world, often a world of the game. The structure of the game world shapes the play world. In *N3RD* the game structure is embedded in all facets of the text from the character descriptions as "types" to the patterns of the abrupt line length with only occasional capital letters. The contrasting scenes of *The Nether* juxtapose a vibrant virtual game world with a drab, detached physical environment. The comparison in the narrative structure models the appeal of virtual reality. *FROGGY*'s multi-level media abundance demonstrates the cacophony and inundation of late capitalist consumer culture in America. These plays share dramaturgical markers with the work of other notable students of Vogel reflecting Castagno's theory in *New Playwriting Strategies: Language and Media in the 21st Century* is that "Vanguard playwrights" influence the development of "New Playwriting" and its use of language and media. Haley's plays are unique in their emphasis on the importance of imagination coupled often with a virtual, technologically constructed, game

world. These evocative plays draw attention to the theatrical medium, and the flesh and blood embodied performance of humans struggling in space. Haley's plays embrace a contemporary posthuman existence. Most importantly, Haley centers the human in the drama. The theatrical becomes an interface with the "real" virtual. The use of technology to engage with the digital theatrically is a complex intersection of emerging theories. I explore the field of current research related to the use of digital media in performance in the next chapter, Staging the Apparatus: Utopia, Dystopia, and Noise.

Using the organizing structure of a video game, Haley compiles dioptric parallel worlds which twist and turn in dark disorienting loops like a carnival roller coaster. Chapter three: Dioptric Unresolved Metaphor: Mediaphor as Structure in *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom* focuses on Haley's first published and professionally performed script. Every scene within the rigid and violent world of *N3RD* shifts location moving from interior private places to open public spaces. Haley initiates a style of using screen media archetypes and tropes as narrative source code, constructing a mediaphor, which according to Woycicki is a metaphor that foregrounds media purposely, provoking an unresolvable intermedial tension. Foregrounding the media is a key element of *N3RD*'s structure: a stage play referencing movies that performs like a video game. Haley uses this clash to create a certain dissonance between the theatrical setting and the content. She recycles components from online gaming and horror films. The staged survival horror role-playing game is an entertaining thrill ride that also showcases the relevance of theatre as a perceptual training space for media literacy. Part of that literacy is

peeling away the packaging of suburbia and its virtual counter-world to reveal a dark structural politics of consumerism and protocological control.

In chapter four: *The Nether* as an Interface: Melodrama in the Rhizome, I apply Galloway's arguments from *The Interface Effect* to explore how Haley uses realism and a transparent interface to disrupt the virtual. The transparency and immediacy of her approach lures the audience into the narrative world, where they engage in active spectatorship comprehending instinctively their role as observer. Haley constructs a scenario where people prefer the comfort of a customized algorithmic world over a physical environment left to fend for itself. Haley uses pedophilia as a device positioning the audience at the beginning of the play on moral high ground, ground which is unstable and quickly loses a path. "What can be gained by spending so much time in something that isn't real?" Detective Morris asks the pedophile programmer Sims in the third scene. Sims responds, "Just because it's virtual doesn't mean it isn't real" (Haley, *The Nether* 8). The virtual Sims discovers, complicates reality similar to how the radio complicates Liveness for Auslander, or the photograph complicates history according to Flusser. In the opening of *The Interface Effect* Galloway says, "Like it or not the new culture is networked and open source, and one is in need of intelligent interventions to evaluate it," (Galloway, *Interface* 1). With *The Nether*, Haley provides an "intelligent intervention" in an easily digestible form: the crime procedural, but transplanted to the phenomenologically complex stage where the diorama of the virtual may be studied, and evaluated with some distance.

I conclude my study of Haley's virtual nether worlds in chapter five:

Embracing Novum: The Place for Technology On Stage. Technology at the end of

20th century opened new levels of communication complexity. Successive ripples

have impacted an array of industries from print shops to network television.

Aesthetically technology tends to be framed through utopian optimism, think

Kuberick's *2001: A Space Oddessy*; or dystopian despair as in Scott's *Alien*. These

extreme views are presented visually as either pristine surfaces with impenetrable

systems, or gritty utilitarian gadgets probably held together with duct tape. Both

perspectives position technology as other and unknowable. Representing

technology as *other* is dangerous. Theatre's value within the technologically

structured and media skinned material world is providing a human scale platform

to observe the coded environment through narrative simulation. Theatre's

advantage is comprehending an unreal real, or rather an understanding of the

virtual that comes baked in. The duo nature of illusion and "real like" simulation

onstage in real time constructs a human scale model that invites a comparison and

analysis unlike other media. The onstage simulation component of theatre is similar

to the narrative device of the "novum" used in science fiction to construct logical

worlds related to the reader/viewer's reality. Haley uses "novum" as it would be

used in science fiction to organize cohesive worlds. She also deploys novum

theatrically embedding her work within the construct of theatre. Haley's more

recent plays evolve from the techniques she developed in *N3RD* and *The Nether*.

These new works are bolder and more complex pieces engaging thematically on the

struggle in American culture between consumption and connection. Virtuality

Theatre emerges organically from its culture. Haley is a writer at the right time with the perfect balance of dramaturgy and geek to illustrate the strength of very old media in showcasing new media tales.

Remediation theory tells us that everything new is mostly something old repackaged and hyped. Interfaces are imperfect allegories for the purpose of communicating to or through machines. The rigidity of the code constructing the interfaces and driving the algorithms is demystified when identified as writing. A working literacy in this new level of writing, that of the digital networked era, is required to maintain a reasonable degree of autonomy in a sea of algorithms and protocol, and concepts like the virtual, the posthuman, and liveness provide useful tools of navigation. Adding Theatre to Flusser's list of disciplines provides a human scale platform suited to raise "the capacity to decipher technical images" (Flusser "Our Images" 5). Haley's plays become templates for deeper excursions into the nether worlds of technological culture.

CHAPTER II

STAGING THE APPARATUS: UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA,

AND NOISE

"Computers are arenas for social experience and dramatic interaction, a type of media more like public theater, and their output is used for qualitative interaction, dialogue, and conversation. Inside the little box are other people,"
-Allucquère Rosanne Stone (Stone 16).

"On the one side, there is a strange mysticization and godlike awe of technology. On the other, there are the reactions of performing artists who feel that technology will compete with and potentially usurp their central role as human performers,"
-Chris Salter (Salter 1).

"So much technology talks so much it forgets what it was talking about, it becomes an end in itself, and exhausts us,"
-Patrice Pavis (Pavis 189).

Utopia, dystopia and noise, three facets of contemporary computer culture as illustrated in the words of Allucquère Rosanne Stone, Chris Salter and Patrice Pavis. Complex, interdependent threads make up the emergent area where technology and the virtual interact on stage. The variety of terms given to this category or genre of theatre illuminate the emergent and fluid nature of this area of performance. Studies either riff off the core term "media" such as new media, intermedial, multimedia, coMEDIA electrONica[8]; refer to a techno specific designation like the digital or cyborg; or tack a "post" onto a secondary descriptor: postdramatic, post-

[8] Refers to Peter M. Boenisch's 2003 essay. "coMEDIA ElectrONica: Performing Intermediality in Contemporary Theatre." published in *Theatre Research International*.

cinema, posthuman, and the umbrella of postmodern or post-postmodern. Cameras, screens and projections tend to dominate what has been written, but the conversation stays narrowly focused on the mechanical, the presentation of the technology, and what impact comes from the use of technology in performance.

Histories

Three main threads of discussion regarding new media digital technology and performance follow ideas of progressive development, intermedial tension, and coded structure. Evolving artistic adaptation of digital tools and techniques in performance is also influencing a growth of new poetics. Related development explores the writing of the Virtual, identity and agency of the Posthuman, and how technology reframes the idea of liveness and history. Steve Dixon, Amy Jensen and Chris Salter have each contributed broad general histories of new media/digital technology in performance from distinct approaches: progressive, intermedial and structuralism. Carver and Beardon provide a selection of case studies offering an alternative perspective of an artistic adaptation of a tool that is still evolving. James Carey's influential essay about the telegraph offers a suggestion of where new research is delving into ideas of "new" writing, the posthuman, and liveness. Dixon provides the most comprehensive documenting of the movement in *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*. Dixon's argument is that contemporary digital performance is modern rather than postmodern descending directly from the early 20th century Futurism.

"Digital performance is an extension of a continuing history of the adoption and adaptation of technologies to increase performance and visual art's aesthetic effect and sense of spectacle, its emotional and sensorial impact, its play of meanings and symbolic associations, and its intellectual power," (Dixon 40). Dixon traces the historical grounding of technology in theatre from the Greek *Deus ex machina* to Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* before exploring how digital theatre as a whole expands beyond the theatrical space and into the virtual. Digital performance is then examined through the lens of various theories and context from liveness and posthumanism to the rise and fall of the CD-ROM. Regarding more contemporary concepts, Dixon praises the importance of video games in digital theatre studies: "rather than representing simplistic, inconsequential, or 'plebeian' experiences, video games should now be viewed academically as the most prolific and dramatically effective form of 'popular theater' of the contemporary age," (Dixon 21). Dixon falls short of penetrating the mystique of technology. His examples focus on the "techniques, aesthetics, or delivery forms," and overlook theatre where the computer technology or digital culture represents the key content. The lack of coverage for digital content in theatre is perhaps explained by the limited number of theatrical dramas that engaged directly with computer themes and content in the 1990s. The number of technologically and computer themed scripts has been on the rise since the early 2000s even as new technologies emerge, embed into the culture and fall into obsolescence. Dixon tracks the arc of technology in performance from novelty to obscurity with a chapter on "The Rise and Demise of the Performance CD-

ROM," noting how the art form of the performative CD-ROM arrived just as the technology to replace it was developed (640).

In addition to Dixon, broad historical perspectives regarding technology and performance can be found in Jensen's *Theatre in a Media Culture: Production, Performance and Perception since 1970*, and Salter's *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*. Salter forgoes any examination of specific digital technology from CDs to MMOs and projected images. Instead he focuses on physical space and how technology transforms the relationship between people and processes within space. The relationship of technology to people, process and space is the concept of being "entangled" and therefore unable to separate and distinguish "form and operation of the work," (Salter xxxv). Like CDs, Salter avoids video games and online social software feeling that others have explored theatrical and performative impact on those topics (xxxiv). Salter's strength is design and grounding digital and theatrical performance in space. Jensen approaches new media and digital performance from an intermedial perspective" in: *Theatre in a Media Culture: Production, Performance and Perception since 1970.* Jensen views media as a deliberately adopted "internal influence on the new language and structures" of theatre (Jensen 187). Because theatre uses the language of culture to communicate it is the language of the culture that is new, and new media culture uses a "visual, mechanical language of technology and mass-media," (189). The interaction between audience and performance occurs in a hybrid, intermedial space, where the audience participates in theatre through transcoding the performance, "meaning is dependent upon continual and rapid negotiation between

projected meaning and perceived meaning, reality is dependent upon the spectators' participation, and presence is no longer dependent upon temporal or spatial relationships," (189). What is novel about digital and new media technology in theatrical performance is that it is not new at all, but reflective of theatre's ongoing role in culture.

In *New Visions in Performance: The Impact of Digital Technologies* editors Gavin Carver and Colin Beardon assemble a collection of case studies showcasing the integration of technology into theatrical performance from dance using motion capture to remediated drama in front of game engine driven projected scenery, and how theatre is made more accessible through the internet. Attention is paid to digital performance as it relates to time, space, the body, interactivity and liveness. The essays are presented as a sample of digital performance across a variety of venues from national theaters to academic stages. Common themes surface from interweaving digital technology and theatrical performance. In their concluding essay, Carver and Beardon advocate that the time for exploring technique has passed and now is a time for *examining virtuality[9]* in performance as a model of stored potential, as a portal beyond space and time, and as a metaphor (Carver and Beardon 169).

In his 1989 work *Communication As Culture*, James Carey included a crucial examination of the dynamic connectedness between technology, language, culture and thought. The essay, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph," traces the complex history of telegraph and how the idea of time and space were

[9] Emphasis is mine.

forever altered by the introduction of railroads and corresponding telegraph lines.

Developments in technology influence cultural concepts. Prior to the development

of the railroad the idea of time was soft. Time was linked to the movement of the

sun. Each settlement maintained an isolated tracking of time. Carey describes how

the interconnections between expansions of the railroads hardened time, shrank

space, and separated communication from transportation (Carey 17). Telegraph

lines marched alongside the railroads allowing the communication across distances

at a rate that had previously been unthinkable. Commerce changed because it was

now possible to modify prices based on the knowledge of goods in another part of

the country. The concept of time hardened as it became more important to

communicate the departure and arrival of trains. Individual towns adopted railroad

time, standardizing time across regions and leading to the creation of time zones

(18).

According to Carey, language adapted as the telegraph influenced the style of

literature into the 20th century (8). The wire, he writes, also restructured

journalism altering the language, shifting the political focus to an objective

commodification of information and the foregrounding a reporter over the editor

(9). The telegraph initiates a new abstract place, the virtual: "an aspect of space, a

continuation of space in another dimension," (20). By standardizing time, argues

Carey, geography is overlaid by a grid "used to control and coordinate activities"

(19). The new level of communication, separate from the physical constraint of

geography evolved over time from beacons to electrical signals then radio and

images. Carey ends the essay drawing a correlation of the impact of the telegraph

on time, space, language and ideology with the computer "reworking practical consciousness coordinating and controlling life" (21). Carey's essay illustrates the influence of technology across complex interconnected systems.

Remediation

Jay David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin argue in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* that there is a deep seated cultural demand for immediacy and hypermediacy from media technology. Bolter and Grusin call it the "double logic of remediation," (Bolter and Grusin 5). Remediation is the theory of how new media performs digitally by presenting itself as a novel refashioning of a more familiar media. Media communicates through invoking either immediacy through erasing all indications of a media frame, or hypermediacy which calls attention to the frame (11). Hypermediacy and immediacy each represent the desire to present reality.

In *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* editors Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt draw on the work of Bolter and Grusin's *Remediation* which did not explicitly discuss theatre. Chapple and Kattenbelt provide a compass to navigate the interaction of mediums and meanings between the theatrical, virtual, cinematic and sonic spaces. Their compass orients the position of the body in space and time in relation to images (visual theatre), words (literary theatre) and sound (musical theatre). The vertical axis of the compass situates "live" and "mediatized" and the horizontal separates the digital from the analogue (Chapple and Kattenbelt 23). Like Dixon, Chapple and Kattenbelt focus on performance where digital technology

37

manifests in techniques, aesthetics, and delivery forms, however their pivot point puts theatre at the center.

Digital content itself is not discussed, however Chapple and Kattenbelt do argue that because theatre interacts on an intermedial level between text, sound, the media of the component arts, and the relationship with the audience, then intermediality in theatre stems from "the inter-action between performance and perception," rather than technology (21). Technology and media may be used as a type of performer where the digital builds a further layer of coding into the space (22). Chapple and Kattenbelt argue that the alchemy of media and meaning in the performance space plays off the perception of reality and disorients the viewer. "[D]igitization changes theatre into a modular non-hierarchical inter-active non-linear process," placing the audience inside "a world of signs and media" where they must navigate references "to signs, which refer to other signs - all of which are staged and framed by the performance," (23). Theatre becomes the pivot position orienting on the intermedial stage space at an ephemeral point in time: "Between the bodies and minds of the audience, and the bodies and minds of the performer(s) is a medial exchange that is bigger than any technologically produced media may achieve," (22). Technology as technology, and technology as content complicate the theatrical space. The sign systems evolve in cultural parallel while *Intermediality* provides a tool—a compass model positioning theatre and performance central to new media discourse.

Interfaces and Code

Alexander Galloway argues that the self-conscious and image driven focus of contemporary western culture is a surface manifestation of the distributed control of computer code. Galloway endeavors to illuminate the mechanisms of code and how it interacts with culture. In his 2004 book, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*, Galloway applies critical analysis to protocol, the textual structure of networks and computers. Protocol, according to Galloway is a "distributed management" system facilitating interactions "between autonomous entities" with an embedded goal of total universal acceptance regardless of "source, sender, or destination" (Galloway, *Protocol* 243). Galloway writes, "protocol is a type of controlling logic that operates outside institutional, governmental, and corporate power, although it has important ties to all three," (122). Keeping the system open, inclusive, democratic and flowing is essential, according to Galloway, to maintaining control in a distributed network world (243). The text of protocol is written in an executable hyperlanguage which, Galloway says, is unlike natural languages moving beyond attempting to persuade to enacting actual material change. This is the base nature of code, to act, to perform precisely what it says. Protocol "is a machine for converting meaning into action," (166). By its nature protocol "consumes diversity" striving for universalism "though negotiation" and is standardized "for tactical purposes only" (243 and 147).

Protocol is synonymous with possibility. From the perspective of protocol, if you can do it, it can't be bad, because if it were bad, then it would have been outlawed years ago by protocol. Hackers don't care about rules, feelings, or opinions. They care about what is true and what is possible. And in the logical world of computers, if it is possible then it is real (Galloway, *Protocol* 168).

In *Gaming Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, Galloway analyzes video games as a cultural form. Video games are according to Galloway, an action-based medium (Galloway, *Gaming* 2). Galloway selects "action-based" as a classification to avoid confusing the physical action of games with the theoretical concept of "interactivity." Video games and computers, Galloway says, are action-based from a literal perspective of running programs, functioning drives, rendering screens and interdependent exchanges between player and machine (3). Galloway writes:

What used to be primarily the domain of eyes and looking is now more likely that of muscles and doing, thumbs, to be sure, and what used to be the act of reading is now the act of doing, or just 'the act.' In other words, while the mass media of film, literature, television, and so on continue to engage in various debates around representation, textuality, and subjectivity, there has emerged in recent years a whole new medium, computers and in particular video games, whose foundation is not in looking and reading but in the instigation of material change through action (4).

The player and the machine collaborate in a "cybernetic relationship" and the actions of each are equally important says Galloway (5). The video games are "cybernetic software systems involving both organic and nonorganic actors" according to Galloway (5). The player operates a machine that is more than a toy, says Galloway "In our day and age, this is the site of fun. It is also the work site," (5). Galloway draws the idea of diegetic and nondiegetic space from film theory to flush out his definition of video games (7). He categorizes elements of "gamic action" into concepts like "Pure Process" and "Subjective Algorithm" (8). An "ambience act" is

40

action in the software that occurs to construct the world of the game independent of the player. In an "ambience act" the game becomes "a purely aesthetic object" just like a painting or film according to Galloway (11). Galloway goes on to examine theoretical ideas of play from the perspective of an algorithmic machine framework. Here Galloway builds off Huizinga, Caillois and Flusser, illustrating the role of the player as *homo ludens*" (24, 130). Galloway concludes that "Video games are allegories for our contemporary life under the protocological network of continuous informatic control," (106). He argues that games obscure "the fundamental social transformation into informatics that has affected the globe during recent decades," (106). Due to its recent emergence, games have yet to develop an artistic "countergaming" movement which Galloway predicts will eventually come (126).

In *The Interface Effect*, Galloway delves deeper into understanding "the nature of the machine" (Galloway, *Interface* 12). The computer according to Galloway is "an anti-Ring of Gyges" permitting the wearer to wander while tracked and obscuring the world, "The world no longer indicates to us what it is. We indicate ourselves to it, and in doing so the world materializes in our image," (13). Galloway criticizes remediation theory as "full of holes" leading inevitably to "a feedback loop" (20, 21). At issue is a misrepresentation of the computer, a tendency to classify it like the other media it simulates, "if cinema is, in general, an ontology, the computer is, in general, an ethic," says Galloway, an ethic as a rule set constrained by definitions and "principles for action" (22). As a programmed ethic the computer favors narcissism because it renders the world in refection of the user. Galloway's stance is toward structuralism:

41

new media may be defined via reference to a foundational set of formal qualities, and that these qualities form a coherent language that may be identified across all sorts of new media objects, and above all that the qualities may be read, and may be interpreted, (23).

He proceeds to break down the components and function of interfaces as control allegories. Galloway proposes a relationship between the coherence and incoherence of political and aesthetic values to position interfaces into categories: Ideological (propaganda), Ethical (Brecht, hypermedia), Poetic (Aristotle, transparent) and Truth (un-representable, perhaps Nietzsche) (51). The ideological presents coherent aesthetics and coherent politics. The ethical uses coherent politics but incoherent aesthetics; it breaks the rules and calls attention to itself, so the ethical is hypermediated. In contrast the poetic uses coherent aesthetics and incoherent politics, it is transparent. The final combination of incoherent politics and aesthetics has no clear example according to Galloway, it represents "truth" though he offers "nihilism, radical alterity, the inhuman" as alternatives and associates the classification with Nietzsche or Derrida (50). Ultimately Galloway argues that in Post-Fordism, the ludic capitalist system is bolstered by computer users trading their time and data as an always on labor force. He uses the aspect of the "Chinese Gold Farmer" from video games as an allegory for "how identity exists online, a portrait not so much of the orientalized other, but of ourselves," (121). What Galloway does is redirect emphasis from the surface spectacle to the structure underneath technology and in context of the culture.

Lawrence Lessig also places emphasis on the architecture of code and its ability to regulate behavior online through control. In his 2006 book, *Code: Version 2.0* Lessig argues the value and consequences of regulation by code on the internet.

At present the internet remains a frontier space, however like historical frontiers in

the embodied world the frontier online becomes more regulated as lawmakers set

precedents regarding virtual objects. His thesis is that regulation of the internet

depends on its architecture also known as code—referring to both software and

hardware (Lessig 151). Lessig's optimistic stance is that as more activities of daily

life move online, the regulation via design code will bypass unwanted negative

behavior. Lessig explains that the foundation of cyberspace architecture was

constructed initially by noncommercial interests, and a second wave was built by

commerce. The next development of the internet Lessig argues is up for grabs (7).

The primary concern becomes one of transparency. Lessig argues it is imperative

that code based regulation be transparent especially when used to regulate the

activity of people who are not technologically literate (328). Without transparency

and technological literacy the regulation by code becomes ingrained in the

experience of the internet and not questioned by the user which Lessig feels

deteriorates the structure of democracy and trends towards tyranny and anarchy

(138). The type of code used to regulate is important in influencing whether the

regulation protects a culture based on democratic values or exploits the

technological illiteracy of the mass in favor of an elite few (139). Open code, Lessig

argues, are like public records, and can be verified independently to ensure it

performs as intended, and without invasive action. According to Lessig, open code

is also susceptible to being copied by others which therefore limits commercial gain

for the code creator (140). Closed proprietary code is protected as intellectual

property. However, being closed the code means that the code may operate in

undisclosed ways purposely or with unintended results warns Lessig. The code's

closed nature prevents any verification and the user must trust the code does not

hold malicious actions (139). Lessig's approach is from a legal perspective and he

has a tendency to oversimplify. His premise intersects with Galloway. Lessig sees

code as the true power in our culture through the dominance of technology, and

perhaps more by the technological illiteracy of legislative and judicial bodies (324).

New Poetics — Writing Beyond Aristotle

With *New Playwriting Strategies: Language and Media in the 21st Century*,

Paul G. Castagno broaches the idea of an intermedial theatre by providing

dramaturgical structures and concepts bridging an Aristotelian foundation with

practices utilized by contemporary playwrights. The book is split between a

theoretical approach and being a practical text book for playwrights. Castagno

illuminates the influence a first wave of "new playwrights" had on developing new

techniques and structures in contemporary scripts. These new voices include Mac

Wellman, Susan-Lori Parks and Paula Vogel who represent part of a vanguard of

writers and teachers guiding additional new playwrights. For example, Vogel in her

position teaching at Brown and Yale advised and mentored later waves of "new

playwrights" including Sarah Ruhl and Jennifer Haley. Castagno contrasts the "new

language" playwriting with the familiar "monologic" playwriting typical of American

realism and Aristotelian dramaturgy. New playwriting, according to Castagno is

dialogic, which is a term he borrows from Mikhail Bakhtin (Castagno 10). The

44

dialogic play presents a conflict and clash of multiple voices and perspectives, and uses language to construct rather than reflect a reality (15). Castagno captures concepts and techniques useful for engaging with late twentieth and early twenty-first century plays representing a time of significant transition in theatre and theatre writing. The weakness in the book is its divided nature between critical thought and practical writing textbook, and the narrow focus only on American playwrights. Castagno, however reanimates a conversation on the inherent value and craft of theatrical writing which has been since the emergence of postmodern theory both unfashionable and overlooked. Castagno dovetails with Woycicki's post-cinematic and Lehmann's postdramatic theatre.

Like Castagno, Hans-Thies Lehmann is attempting to describe "an aesthetic logic of the new theatre" with his *Postdramatic Theatre* (Lehmann 18). He strives to position late twentieth century and contemporary theatre structures and concepts. "The new theatre, one hears and reads, is not this and not that and not the other, but there is a lack of categories and words to define or even describe what it is in any positive terms," (19). Lehmann dates postdramatic from the 1970s and ties it with the increased importance of media in daily life (22). Postdramatic theatre follows on logically from Brecht and other mid twentieth century movements. He describes postdramatic theatre as an attempt, "towards a restitution of chora: of a space and speech/discourse without telos, hierarachy and causality, without fixable meaning and unity," (146). Postdramatic theatre, Lehmann posits, passes the burden of the dramatic to images for the audience to evaluate from a calm distance, rather than remain helpless spectators of traditional tragedy (184). Postdramatic theatre is

"post-Brechtian" theatre according to Lehmann as it moves beyond adherence to a fable and discards both rationality and politics as they occur in Brecht (33). Lehmann's and Jensen's audience are alike, each engaged with transcoding the performance from their personal mediatized perspective.

Woycicki builds off of Lehmann's "politics of perception" in *Post-cinematic Theatre and Performance*. For Lehmann, theatre's politics come from the tension of transcoding signs rather than overtly political content. Lehmann refers to "politics of perception" also as an "aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)" (Lehmann 184). Being embedded within a culture of mass media which molds perception, Lehmann argues theatre relies on "indirectness and deceleration" and the tension from uncomfortable, irrational and taboo content (Lehmann 184, 187). Woycicki describes "post-cinematic" theatre as "a cultural reaction" to the domination of cinema. Post-cinematic theatre like Lehmann's postdramatic theatre resists "culturally and institutionally dominant conventions and aesthetics," (Woycicki 5). The "post" in post-cinema can refer to a historical/chronological placement of looking back at what was the dominant medium of cinema from a new dominant medium similar to how postmodernism follows modernism. Another signifier of the "post" in post-cinema uses the prefix as a way to identify a cultural response to the mainstream dominance of the cinematic medium. In this case the post-cinema is the counterpoint to cinema. This second approach is the one Woycicki emphasizes (Woycicki 16). The dominance of cinema adjusted as technology advanced. Film gave way to television and then to cable, the internet,

46

and mobile technology, however the construct of cinema as a structure underscores all these media.

> The medium of film – formerly more or less exclusive to cinema became absorbed by television and eventually remediated through the aesthetics and representational modes of other platforms. Hence, perhaps ironically, the popularity and cultural dominance of cinema tropes and conventions grew as a result of remediations. This in turn inspired avant-garde art practices and theories to exhibit a reaction to this cultural dominance of cinema – a relation that has cultural, aesthetic and political implications. It is no coincidence that these post-cinematic art forms, including theatre, use intermedial strategies to do so, since the very dominance of cinema as a cultural phenomena is to a great extent a result of remediation and in the same sense so is the post-cinematic reaction (17).

In the early years of cinema, film was perceived to hold an advantage in conveying reality over the theatrical medium. Woycicki explains how the technical ability of film through cutting and montage to show disparate events unified through relational narrative resonated as more real and transparent. Woycicki describes how the perception of reality is an illusion as argued by Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. Film constructs an illusion of movement due to the visual effect of watching a sequence of still images at a consistent film rate. Movement, therefore, according to Woycicki, becomes a defining aspect of cinema. As cinema grew in dominance it became a "map for ways of perceiving reality," and specifically "an affective map," shaping cultural attitudes and identities (20). Woycicki argues the deconstruction of dominant aesthetics coupled with critical self-reflection and reference as the strongest tie between post-cinematic and postdramatic theatre (28). "[Post-cinematic theatre and postdramatic theatre] are also potentially based upon a fascination with the aesthetics of illusion, representation and narrative that they set out to critique, interrogate or, conversely, enhance," (29). Post-cinematic

47

theatre, however, focuses specifically on illuminating the tropes and constructs of cinema, using theatre as context to deconstruct and examine the codes, structures and expectations embedded in the culture by cinema's dominance as a media (247). Post-cinematic theatre uses what Woycicki identifies as a "mediaphor," a tool that is "a metaphor with inherent, unresolved tensions" – the tension comes from the balance between the flesh and blood actor, the "extra theatrical" technological aspect, and the "conceptual dimension" where meaning is assigned (65). The mediaphor is the idea of a metaphor with a third presentational aspect. Mediaphors "draw attention towards the disparity between the different media involved in the construction of the image," while metaphor requires a seamless transparency to convey meaning (66). The tension between immersion, transparency, and the acceptance of perceived reality is the key concept of Woycicki's argument. Cinema presents an illusion of reality projected in two dimensions while theatre presents a reality of illusion presented in three dimensions (32).

Ralph Willingham approaches playwriting as becoming mundane. He refers to an essay by Eric Overmyer where Overmyer compared theatre to topical "Movies of the Week" (Overmyer 448). Willingham argues in his 1994 book, *Science Fiction and the Theatre* that the genre of Science Fiction has the potential to thrive in theatre if playwrights can manage to master intertwining the effectiveness of stage writing and the power of science fiction to grapple with challenging questions while aiming at new horizons. Willingham believes science fiction as a theatrical genre has failed to flourish because the playwrights were writers unfamiliar with the

genre leveraging the trappings for entertainment, not pushing "the boundaries of theatre" but content to remain "safely within them" (Willingham 3).

> The genre's influence on drama has been mostly cosmetic; that is, the alien encounter, space travel adventure, or human-machine conflict is an end to itself, not a means to something more significant (Willingham 34).

Plays concerning typical science fiction situations were thin vehicles for spectacle and inadequate adaptations of other material. When science fiction has been written for the stage, according to Willingham, it tends to be from a writer who is unfamiliar with the genre, and then relies on over simplified concepts like monsters and space travel, or assumes science fiction requires massive spectacular settings best showcased in cinema. Arguably the same claim of mostly cosmetic elements for entertainment value could be said about much science fiction in cinema. He argues the steel core of science fiction in literature is more like Darko Suvin's idea of the "novum" a central innovation that drives the narrative. Suvin wrote *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* in 1980. In it Suvin describes a "novum" as a "mediating category whose explicative potency springs from its rare bridging of literary and extraliterary, fictional and empirical, formal and ideological domains, in brief from its unalienable historicity" (Suvin 64). The novel idea may be technological, environmental or character based, but it is rational and plausible mental experiment that "determines the whole narrative logic" (70). Further, Suvin states that science fiction constructs alternative, speculative worlds around the novum that are parallel to the world of the author which separates science fiction from other speculative genres like fantasy (71). Suvin relates this component of science fiction's ontology to Brecht's alienation effect:

49

Though I have argued that SF is not—by definition cannot be—an orthodox allegory with any one-to-one correspondence of its elements to elements in the author's reality, its specific modality of existence is a feedback oscillation that moves now from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality to the narratively actualized novum in order to understand the plot-events, and now back from those novelties to the author's reality, in order to see if afresh from the new perspective gained. This oscillation, called estrangement by Shklovsky and Brecht, is no doubt a consequence of every poetic, dramatic, scientific, in brief semantic novum," (71).

Suvin describes two characteristic devices that incite the oscillation feedback between the "zero world" of the writer and the displaced reality of the narrative: a "voyage" to a new or unknown destination or "catalyzer" that transforms the world into something new (71). Science fiction for Suvin is "a historical genre" (64).

The alternate reality logically necessitated by and proceeding from the narrative kernel of the novum can only function in the oscillating feedback with the author's reality…because it is as a whole—or because some of its focal relationships are—an analogy to that empirical reality," (75).

Suvin is clear, science fiction is not allegory, but is reflective of its source culture "an analogy, somewhere between a vague symbol and a precisely aimed parable," (76). The novum presents "insight into imaginary but coherent" possible worlds, simulated outcomes that could occur if the "zero world" of the author developed the novum, and so the novum is both "born in history and judged in history—this novum has to be differentiated not only according to its degree of magnitude and of cognitive validation…but also according to its degree of relevance," (81). It is the enlightening and cautionary aspect of the novum that is lacking in much of the science fiction theatre Willingham examines which treat novum set ups like voyages through time or space "condescendingly or superficially," (Willingham 13). Willingham points out that Beckett and the Absurdist playwrights presented science fiction like locals, but were too mired in contemporary issues to "rise on the crests

of new horizons" as would be expected of science fiction (10). Willingham says, "the theatre must await the arrival of a gifted science fiction dramatist before it can begin making significant contributions to this genre," (146). Willingham also advocates for the genre as a relevant framework for contemporary culture. He calls for "skilled dramatists who respect the legacy and theatrical potentials of science fiction" to write science fiction plays on par with the genre in literature (34). While Willingham's call for playwrights who can write science fiction that parallels literature while constructing it to function successfully on the stage makes sense I wonder if he missed a deeper connection between the novum and theatre that has perhaps hindered the development of science fiction theatre. Suvin's novum establishes a rational, logic driven simulation of "what if" within the constraints of a defined world, a world of the play as it were. Theatre already does this, at its heart the stage is a place for "what if" and an alternate "virtual" reality that plays out logically and rationally. The simulation aspect of theatre is perhaps too transparent that it is easily overlooked; however the growth of the digital virtual presents a new platform for simulating a novum. The rise of the digital virtual may have in turn shed light on how theatre creates an oscillating feedback estrangement situation just like science fiction. However as theatre is a collaborative exchange between performer and audience the world of the play constructs analogies to the audience's reality. Suvin writes that "the essential tension" of science fiction is between society represented by the variety of readers and "the encompassing and at least equipollent Unknown or Other introduced by the novum" (Suvin 64). Science fiction is a social genre engaging through a logical method with thought experiments

aligned with the philosophy of science (65). With the emergence of playwrights

engaging with the virtual more research into comparisons between science fiction

and theatre is needed.

The Virtual

Scholars approach the idea of "The Virtual" from a variety of perspectives, as

a rhizome, as cinematic, as an escape and as theatre. In his 1995 essay[10], "Toward

Superlanguage" Pierre Levy optimistically describes "the virtual" as: "a continuous

and pulsating space" (Levy). Levy's concept of the virtual is an organized and

emergent intelligence, not an artificial intelligence, but a perpetually updating

collective intelligence (Levy). He visualizes the virtual symbolically as a galaxy:

> If ever such possibilities see the light of the day, then the Book, the library,
> the immense proliferating and crazed corpus of knowledge would cease to
> hang above our heads and to confound us. The transcendence of the text
> would begin to wane. We would perhaps be less irradiated by the spectacle
> of media. The immanence of knowledge in the humanity producing and
> utilizing it, the immanence of people in texts, would become more visible. By
> the intermediacy of virtual spaces giving expression to them human
> collectives would surrender to an effervescent writing, to a process of
> reading inventing them and their worlds, (Levy).

As "collective intelligence" and "collective memory" Levy's virtual represents a next

level in the technology of writing (Levy). The virtual, for Levy reorganizes and

"unfold[s] itself anew for each navigator according to his interests and his previous

traversings of the virtual world," (Levy). There's a shadow of utopianism and

technological determinism in Levy's concept. Levy's virtual must still be embedded

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[10] An English translation by Riikka Stewen is available from the University of California Irvine School
of the Humanities at: http://faculty.humanities.uci.edu/poster/syllabi/readings/levy.html.

somewhere material, though in this essay he avoids the grounding of the virtual in the physical in favor of focusing the relationship between writer and text. His position is high level and algorithmic.

In his 1997 essay "Welcome to Virtuality" Levy embeds the virtual in language as a part of the "continuous self-making of the human", the virtual forms a distinct human plane of abstract thought (Levy "Virtuality" 10). Levy begins by linking the idea of the "virtual" historically and practically to virtual sight provided by eye glasses or virtual chewing through dentures. He states that such devices open the boundary between the body and outside realms. The virtual is not a "disembodiment" Levy argues, but "a complex re-embodiment, an heterogenesis of the body," (10). Virtualization pioneered in medicine evolves into information and communication. However, conceiving of the virtual as imaginary is misleading according to Levy, "the virtual is not the opposite of the real but the opposite of the actual," and in today's world virtuality is grounded in software (11). The distinction between virtual and actual according to Levy comes from the transcoding of binary data into an image. The data is virtual and the image constructed from the data becomes actual on the screen; however Levy notes that images rendered in real time from calculations made on an open flow of input are "more virtual" because they rely on an unstable and ephemeral tether to the hard drive and software (12). Such fluid virtualities include video games, hyper linked documents and simulations which Levy calls "virtual messages" that are dependent on their "initial matrix" and live input (12). Levy then differentiates degrees of stable actualization and interactive actualization by comparing the computer generated effect images in an

animated film with the rendered environment of a video game. In the film, only the

artists and engineers that work on the digital effect participate in a virtuality, the

audience watching the completed film experience an actualized image (12).

However, in the video game, the image renders in real time in direct response to

input from the player(s) or the machine. In this situation, that "[i]nteractivity is

actualisation," because the player through their actions causes the software to

recalculate and render the image.

> A virtual world emerges from the coupling of a living user in a dynamic
> situation with a digital model that can generate a huge quantity of different
> messages. Interacting with the digital model users explore and actualise a
> virtual world. When interactions can enrich or modify the model, the virtual
> world becomes a vector of collective intelligence and creation (12).

The virtual world exists on a plane of actualization that is "deterritorialized"

according to Levy; the virtual uncouples information from geography. Information

in the virtual world also becomes plastic. Here Levy makes one of his main

assertions, that in the virtual world "every act of reading has become a potential act

of writing," (13). Through modifying or linking the user, who Levy calls "the

navigator" writes or at least edits the actualization of the document on screen. Levy

states that "collective intelligence" extends from culture and "the digitalisation and

virtualisation of information" raises us to a new level of collective intelligence with

dynamic and fluid coordination of systems and data across distributed networks:

> Rather than using static records, we can now share constantly evolving
> dynamic memories in real time. We can share, trade and collectively refine
> simulations, which are externalised and exchangeable dynamic mental
> models (13).

Virtuality, Levy declares, "is not an imaginary or false world" but is the level where

understanding is achieved: "the very dimension through which truth and lies can

exist" or "propositional thinking" using "language" and the "mental tension" of "interrogation" to access new avenues of "logical truth" (16). Art may "play the virtual against the possible" he says, "One of the most interesting ways open to contemporary artistic research is probably the discovery and the exploration of new kinds of truth brought by the dynamics of virtualisation," (17, 16). "A new aesthetic dimension" can reconnect those estranged by the upheaval of the "great deterritorialisation" comforting and resettling people into the virtual, which is according to Levy "the human race's new house" (17).

Like Levy, Manovich notes the importance of selection and the fluidity of authorship embedded in digital media. In his 2002 book, *The Language of New Media* Manovich argues that software interfaces (operating systems, individual programs and web based software) act as representations of culture. He writes that the structure of old media (photography, cinema, newspapers, television, magazines etc.) paralleled the structure of mass production and industry, achieving a logical symbiosis from the culmination of the industrial revolution. New media structurally resembles the postindustrial world where the desires of the individual supersede the value of conformity to the masses (Manovich 41). His approach is largely through a cinematic lens.

Manovich identifies three "operations" of New Media: selecting, compositing and the virtual which he calls "teleaction" and describes as "a new conceptual space" (161). The first operation, selection, stems from the nature of the computer where "authentic creation has been replaced by selection from a menu," writes Manovich (124). Selecting turns the artist from creator into assembler of ready-made components. But is choosing a

55

programmed filter from a menu in a paint program truly different from an artist selecting

store bought paints and brushes? Manovich argues it is the practice of assembling work

from pre-scripted options available from a menu or database has become standard practice

(130). Selection through software becomes a form of authorship simulating one "unique

path through the elements of a work" (128). Compositing is new media's second operation

according to Manovich. Compositing is the "process of combining" various elements into a

single unified composition (136). The result, Manovich says, "is a virtual space" (138).

"Teleaction" is how one accesses the virtual space constructed from selecting and

compositing in Manovich's third operation of new media (161). Manovich defines

teleaction as "acting over distance. In real time," (167). Manovich recognizes that the act of

teleaction, of entering the virtual is collaborative, stating that the user or view "employs the

operation of teleaction" only through the interface constructed by the writer (161). The

virtual is a new level of conceptual space, Manovich calls for further development of

aesthetic theories around the interaction of the virtual. He says the culture has been "slow

to accept the primacy of information space over physical space" which leads to fetishizing

the virtual (165). Primarily Manovich is writing about a new media aesthetic regarding the

performance of human to computer interfaces in software and on the internet. Two things

are paramount for placing Manovich in context. His writing reflects the recklessly

optimistic emerging digital dot com world of the 1990s. Second, as a film maker, Manovich

approaches new media as software with a cinematic bias. The cinematic lens does offer

powerful insight into the mechanisms of computer media, but the aptness of his approach

blinds him to areas distinctly different from cinema such as networks. Manovich

establishes a baseline providing concepts connected to the aesthetic and largely

mechanical attributes of digital media.

In her 2011 book, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They

Can Change the World*, Jane McGonigal argues that contemporary western culture is

broken and that the rise of video games as a dominant media outlet reflects a desire

for more meaningful work. Contrary to the myth that games are frivolous escapism,

McGonigal breaks down the biological and psychological triggers virtual worlds

support that have dissipated from daily life: challenges and a reason to work,

obstacles that can be overcome with tactics and creative thinking, and feedback

systems that gage progress towards a goal (McGonigal 21). According to McGonigal,

video games are not about competition but meaningful work. Ideally, these games

are difficult, challenging work that people choose to do because the activity creates

pleasure. In games, McGonigal writes, people work to overcome unnecessary

obstacles, fail frequently, and adjust tactics until success is achieved. This process

includes powerful chemicals triggered in the brain which reinforces feelings of

gratification. Good games reward players by providing intrinsic rewards. Games

make people work hard and offer measurable evidence of effort. They offer the

opportunity to be successful, connect with other people and be part of something

larger than themselves. The virtual world provides a sense of productivity and

social interaction lacking in real life (McGonigal 51). McGonigal describes two

emotional responses that games illicit which make them powerfully appealing: flow

and fiero. Flow is the feeling when working at the limit of ability, where razor focus

is required and time becomes irrelevant. It is a response to challenge, interesting

challenge, McGonigal says, "When you are in a state of flow, you want to stay there: both quitting and winning are equally unsatisfying outcomes," (24). "Fiero" McGonigal explains is the "primal emotional rush" of victory which is expressed universally by most people by throwing the arms over the head and cheering (33). McGonigal writes:

> Scientists have recently documented that fiero is one of the most powerful neurochemical highs we can experience. It involves three different structures of the reward circuitry of the brain, including the mesocorticolimbic center, which is most typically associated with reward and addiction. Fiero is a rush unlike any other rush, and the more challenging the obstacle we overcome, the more intense the fiero (33).

Beyond exploring how game designers construct simulations that court flow and fiero McGonigal explores alternative reality games and ideas to entice some magic from video game worlds back into the real world. McGonigal's writing is loose and casual, buzzy, using over-hyped generalizations that act as attention grabbers more than precise rhetoric. She avoids any discussion of how reality came to be "broken", but then her emphasis is on what can be learned from the effectiveness of video games to engage players psychologically, and how those lessons may be applied to real world issues. Scratch the surface of McGonigal's message and there are traces of McLuhan underneath. McGonigal's strength is in illuminating the psychological hooks that keep players working in good games, and her emphasis is that the drive for players is satisfying work. Peripherally, McGonigal exposes the manipulation that game developers/writers use to draw players.

Brenda Laurel made the connection between the virtual experienced through working with computers and the virtual of theatre in her 1991 book, *Computers as*

Theatre. The book was "ahead of its time" according to Foreword author Don

Norman, who realized he understood the book on a much deeper level a decade

after it was published (Norman xii). He encouraged Laurel to publish an updated

second edition which she did in 2014. Laurel parallels the digital space with

theatrical space stating that both work with "the representation of action" (Laurel

23). The book was written for software engineers to improve interface designs.

Laurel employs the idea of the digital virtual as theatre "not simply as a metaphor,

but as a way to conceptualize human-computer interaction itself," (28). "People

seemed to regard 'interactivity' as the unique cultural discovery of the electronic

age" says Laurel (28). But interactivity is subjective Laurel argues, stating "You

either feel yourself to be participating in the ongoing action of the representation or

you don't," (Laurel 29). She gives two principals that anchor computers to theatre.

The first "representing action with multiple agents" is the ability to role-play (30).

The second is that "the cultural conventions of theatre, film, and narrative" are

deeply embedded in our cultural psyche therefore basing the model for human-

computer interaction on theatre "is familiar, comprehensible, and evocative," (30).

Laurel describes her argument as a "poetics of interactive form," (41) Laurel

compares Aristotle's concept of catharsis in theatre with Brecht's extended notion of

catharsis after the performance when applied to everyday life where Brecht posited

that "the representation lives between imagination and reality, serving as a

conductor, amplifier, clarifier, and motivator," and Laurel asserts that, "it seems to

me that computer-based representations work in fundamentally the same way: one

participates in a representation that is not the same as real life, but which has real-world effects or consequences," (37).

> Designing human-computer experience isn't about building a better desktop. It's about creating imaginary worlds that can have a special relationship to reality—worlds in which we can extend, amplify, and enrich our own capacities to think, feel, and act (39).

Laurel strives to demystify technology, comparing it to nature as a colossal force "evoking both wonder and fear" but which is mechanical, mundane, "an extrusion of humanity" not a force of malevolence or the sublime (216). Laurel ends by connecting technology and nature in a concept she labels "Gaian Gardening" as a driving value for good design, seeking to "nurture" with "mindfulness" the emerging technologies because as extrusions of humanity, technology becomes an extrusion of the Earth (217). The second edition is fairly dated as a text for software designers, but works to illuminate the relationship between the digital and the theatre. The connection between technology and the Earth places Laurel parallel to the writing of Katherine Hayles.

Posthuman

Richard Jordan advocates for a designation of digital theatre as "Posthuman Drama" in his 2014 article, "Digital Alchemy: The Posthuman Drama of Adam J. A. Cass's I love You, Bro." Jordan draws from the writing of Katherine Hayles and Steve Dixon to define six features of a posthuman play. Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* argues that we became posthuman when we began to interact with another entity, human or

machine, through a screen (Hayles 1999, xiv). Hayles redirected the concept of the

posthuman from something cyborg and futurist to something grounded in the

mundane and the present. Hayles began her journey after reading Hans Moravec's

Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence. Moravec's assumption

that the consciousness could be separated from the body provoked Hayles (1).

Hayles defines the concept of the "posthuman" as "three interrelated stories" dating

from World War II. The three threads of the posthuman narrative are: the

separation of information from the body, the cyborg as "technical artifact and

cultural icon" and "a historically specific construction" based on the disembodied

consciousness and the cyborg (2). For Jordan then a posthuman play "explores

moral, emotional and existential implications" of life in the digital age (Jordan 41).

Posthuman drama equates humans with intelligent machines and may contain

characters that are nonhuman agents (42). Overt technology is not required to

perform posthuman drama, "digital technology is an imperative feature of the plot

— a silent character central to the conflict" (43). Next Jordan requires that

posthuman drama must be set in the digital age and that posthuman adaptations of

classical or pre-digital works would be derivative readings. Posthuman drama uses

fluid structures of time, space, materials and reality and is not bound to linear logic

structure (44). In this regard posthuman aligns with postdramatic, however in

Jordan's final criteria the classifications divide. Posthuman, for Jordan, is driven by

narrative, while not restricted to linear model "an identifiable story [is] being told,"

(44). Jordan argues that the Aristotelean unities may be fluid but remain central to

the structure of posthuman drama: "it is the interplay between unity and

disintegration — 'I' and 'we' — that should drive the play forward...a posthuman play presents an 'I' unravelling[sic]," (45). Themes of identity and agency figure heavily as posthuman drama.

Liveness, Images and a Sense of History

In the background of discussions of media and technology in performance is the discourse on "liveness," where Philip Auslander and Peggy Phelan mostly represent a scale of pristine "live" performance on one end and corrupt "mediatized" productions on the other. According to Auslander, critics such as Phelan and Pavis see mediatized and live performance locked in a melodramatic duel to the death (Auslander 46). "It is not realistic to propose that live performance can remain ontologically pristine or that it operates in a cultural economy separate from that of the mass media," (45). Phelan posits that when "live" performance is recorded it can no longer be considered live and is both lessened and in opposition to performance ontology, however Auslander argues that the idea of "live" performance is defined by recorded reproduction, that the "live" cannot exist outside of an "economy of reproduction," (Phelan 146, Auslander 57). Phelan continues to define performance by limitations of time and space and the ephemeral moment of the present. She compares a technological mishap on her laptop with the human microphone of the Occupy Wall Street protest (Phelan 2014, 116). Phelan relates the human microphone to the automated algorithms of high-frequency trading (HFT) systems used by Wall Street (118). The computer

controlled trades operate in fractions of time beyond the human capability. She

asserts that performance lives in the present, and while the present remains

nebulous and somewhat fluid it is bound by human time and labor: the time

required to draw breathe and then vocalize a message. The exchange of information

via the human microphone is an example of oral communication, but is also an

example of a local area network (LAN) as argued by Alan Liu in his essay "Friending

the Past: The Sense of History and Social Computing." Information is passed

through intermediate relays (Liu 2011, 5). Liu argues that the wide area network

(WAN) arrived not with computers, but with writing and print (8). "Store-and-

forward networking" he writes progressed from oral to print to digital culture. Liu

links disconnected digital texting to oral tradition, and illuminates how the

technique of moving information has upgraded while remaining principally the

same. In this essay Liu is advocating for a social media platform that connects

academics with historical and likely deceased scholars. RoSE (Research-oriented

Social Environment) "is a system for exploring the humanities that encourages you

to seek out relationships between authors, works, and commentators—living and

dead—as part of a social network of knowledge. RoSE is a library that is a

community; and a community that is a library," and currently functions as a

demonstration project[11]. From Liu's perspective history is tangible and connectible,

from Phelan's it is "a narrative of lost and found," (Phelan 2014, 119).

For Vilém Flusser, history began with the technological invention of writing

and ends, at least in the west, with photography. In 1983 Flusser wrote his essay,

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[11] See http://rose.english.ucsb.edu/

"Our Images" as part of his book *Post-History*. The essay summarizes the historic

dichotomy that Flusser believes exists between images and text. He describes a

polarized and class based relationship between the organizational structure of

images and that of text. In a series of technological upheavals the ruling classes

control the images and access to text literacy. Eventually image making is

automated to machines creating what Flusser calls "technical images" (Flusser "Our

Images" 3). Flusser calls the technology that captures technical images "the

apparatus[12]" which would include cameras and other instruments, tools, systems, or

processes that mechanically or chemically create images using a program (3).

"Apparatus transcode symptoms[13] into images. The apparatus' program derives

from texts: for example from chemical and optical equations. So that the apparatus

transcode symptoms into images in service of texts. They are boxes that devour

history and spew out post-history," (4). It is Flusser's claim that the programmed

apparatus claims technical images are objective which they are not, but their

message is more opaque and therefore more difficult to decode. The programmed

apparatus then influences and programs the users through the constraints

embedded in its programming. "Events precipitate themselves toward the

apparatus" and are also "partially provoked by the apparatus," (5). Flusser claims,

"All of history, politics, art, science and technique are thus motivated by the

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[12] Flusser's "apparatus" is more than a device; he uses it in a film interview to describe the communist state of Romania. See Flusser, "Vilém Flusser - We Shall Survive in the Memory of Others." *Vimeo*. Waltzing Android, 2015. Web. 02 Nov. 2017. <https://vimeo.com/150514386>.

[13] A symptom is evidence "causally linked" to something and differs from a symbol; Flusser says which is codified through language and consensus to stand for something. He uses the word "dog" as an example of a symbol and dog paw prints as an example of a symptom. He also states that since the automated act of transcoding symptoms turns them into symbols the distinction is elitist and false (Flusser "Our Images" 4).

apparatus," and the primary apparatus of influence at that time according to Flusser was television (5). Flusser did not live to see the main development of internet and network culture, but his words resonate prophetically, "Whoever is programmed by technical images lives and knows reality as a programmed context," (5). The escape from the programmed context, according to Flusser comes from decoding the technical images using a new critique, what he calls "technical imagination." He calls for raising technical literacy and using it to develop "the capacity to decipher technical images" (5). He advocates for the use of multiple disciplines including: "informatics, cybernetics and game theory," (5). Best known for *Towards A Philosophy of Photography*, his writing is compact, provocative, and interdisciplinary though he very rarely references other scholars. His method, however, is multilingual. He wrote in Brazilian Portuguese, German, French and English using translation as an opportunity to rework ideas through the nuance of language[14].

Flusser's idea of post-history describes the connection between writing and organization of context in linear structure—history and how the automation of image making via the apparatus disrupts and destroys the conception of history (4). Flusser's post-history is not to be confused with Fukuyama's political arguments. Flusser is making a *liveness* argument. Because the technical image complicates time similar to music on the radio, the mind now must orient the image in context.

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[14] In a collection of interviews and film clips posted on *Vimeo*, Flusser can be seen using his multilingual approach where he draws upon the German to illustrate his argument regarding photography and history. He uses "aufnehmen" the term for "to take up" as in to record, or photograph, and "sachverhalte" which is the term he uses for contexts. See Flusser, "Vilém Flusser - We Shall Survive in the Memory of Others." *Vimeo*. Waltzing Android, 2015. Web. 02 Nov. 2017. <https://vimeo.com/150514386>.

Is it a photograph taken a century ago or last week, and what has been altered? The

apparatus which constructs technical images via internal programming adds an axis.

What was a linear structure of history through writing becomes a virtuality.

CHAPTER III

DIOPTRIC UNRESOLVED METAPHOR: MEDIAPHOR AS

STRUCTURE IN *NEIGHBORHOOD 3: REQUISITION OF DOOM*

> "It's like that movie. Maybe our house is built on an Indian burial ground.
> Maybe the neighborhood. Maybe the whole country."
> (Haley, *N3RD* 254)

> "The message was that even if teens could get adults and authority figures on their
> side, the latter would prove to be ineffectual, and the end result would remain the
> same: death, defeat, poverty."
> (Kvaran,"'You're All Doomed!' A Socioeconomic Analysis of Slasher Films" 960)

> "'What is the underlying reality?' is the question we keep coming back to,"
> (Haley, Samuel French Promotional Video)

Suburban Zombies: a collective algorithmic simulation

In *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom* nothing is what it seems. The houses

mirror each other. Stories don't add up and characters have radically different

experiences before our eyes. The trivial becomes brutal and deadly. Haley takes

parallel virtual realities of an online game and a suburban American planned

community and combines them onstage into mirrored worlds that interact along a

nebulous boundary. Haley asks, what is real? This is a trick question in theatre

where nothing, and everything, is real. The nature of theatre to construct a

materially real illusion in a physical space clashes with the concept of a video game,

which displays an image of reality on a screen using light. The video game world is

not part of the physical world, but a virtual space entered mentally through a portal.

Putting an online game world onstage creates a certain dissonance within the space.

The unreal takes on physical dimensions, especially when presented as direct action

rather than as actors interacting with game systems and screens. Tension builds a

level of incongruity and discord between two different ideas. Yet the action inside

the game world informs what's going on in the suburban part of the play and vice

versa creating a *mise en abyme*.[15] Both realms are not completely opposed, but

suspended in a taut balance, so that the audience holds focus on each

simultaneously.

To understand Haley's refracting frame structure requires applying tools and

ideas from film and media studies. Haley's plays are "post-cinematic" hybrids,

intermedial works that Woycicki describes as works that "interrogate their cultural

and political foundations" and "have the potential to radically change our

perceptions" (Woycicki 1). Woycicki argues that post-cinematic theatre exposes

and resists the politics of perception through deconstructive interaction between

media which drawn the audience into an active spectatorship with the performance.

Plays like *N3RD* raise the audience's consciousness to the structure of cinematic

experience especially regarding mainstream realism through exposing the trappings

of cinema within a theatrical space. The performance within performance is a

classic theatrical tool to engage the audience reflectively with the performance

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[15] *Mise en abyme* means a self-reflecting work, a frame story or play within a play such as The
Mousetrap within *Hamlet* (OED).

(Woycicki 4). The cinematic and gamic elements of the play are consciously

constructed by Haley, "I decided I want this to be structured like a traditional horror

film" (personal interview). She took inspiration specifically from horror films of the

1970s (personal interview). Part of the play's structure is deliberately modeling

film and games. Equally media influences the piece unconsciously through cinema

and digital elements of contemporary culture Haley is drawing from. The

alternating pattern of monologue interludes and two character scenes may have

been a cunning transcoding of the 1970s cinema style of using split-field diopters to

cheat deep focus cheaply. More likely it was an inspired adaptation of cinematic

techniques that foreground the medium to provoke comparison of competing

images. The result is a composed structure using the form of video games and

techniques of film to underscore and inform the play theatrically through actors,

voice and staging. Woycicki refers to post-cinema as a "cultural phenomena" which

drives how we perceive and engage in the world drawing on what he labels a

"cinematic gaze." From the visual structure of web sites to the aesthetics of graphic

design and everyday storytelling illustrate how "cinematic tropes and conventions

influence and shape the forms of our culture and the expectations we may have

when perceiving them," (Woycicki 14). Haley is a playwright who understands

media and whose technique is intentionally intermedial and mainstream. She wants

to engage her audience through the familiar and then bring something new into

focus to challenge them. To achieve this she relies on genre, tropes, and intermedial

references. *N3RD* was her first commercial success largely because of the novelty of

her voice. She chose to write about video games and zombies. The "cool" factor is

high and gets people of all ages interested in the play. Underneath the novelty is a smart play open to theatrical interpretation. The intermedial contrasting structure provokes dialog. Woycicki acknowledges that post-cinematic theatre is a recent and challenged concept. He places post-cinematic theatre with intermedial theatre on the fringes and related to new media art, computer games, DVDs and happenings.

　　According to Woycicki the primary concept of the post-cinematic, hybrid plays comes from reflecting retroactively on the cultural significance of mainstream cinematic realism as a mass media, "post-cinema is not so much an aesthetic, stylistic phenomenon as one that concerns a cultural critical re-framing of cinema," (Woycicki 15). Woycicki's principle can be adapted to include the digital not so much as a critical re-framing because the digital is still a fluid and emergent media, but as a cultural critical consideration. The digital is positioned to surpass cinema as the mass media. In *N3RD* the characters fail to consider the digital, but in ways related to personal perception. The teens adopt the technology without question, while the adults dismiss it. Neither pause to consider, to see what is really happening. Haley is not glorifying or demonizing the digital, she is illuminating it for consideration. In a contemporary culture that pushes polarizing perspectives taking a mid-field stance is radical. To consider *N3RD* will require examining an analog camera gadget called a split-field diopter, breaking down Woycicki's concept of "mediaphor", and delving into slasher movie tropes and video game elements.

　　The structure of *N3RD* connects pieces of an overall narrative arc playing a dialogic and dialectic role. In addition to adapting cinematic techniques, Haley utilizes models specifically horror movie tropes and video game artifacts building an

intertextual resonance. The dissonance plays in conscripting the audience to find

meaning between disparate media threads. Haley borrows multiple methods,

tropes and devices from film and video games, infusing the play's narrative with

meaning lifted from other media. In a series of disjointed scenes and monologues

Haley alternates between foregrounding the play within a play format, and sinking

into the narrative. As the play progresses it becomes harder to recognize the

boundary between worlds: video game or suburban neighborhood? It becomes

difficult to know what is real. With *N3RD*, Haley engages the first distinction of

Virtuality described by Carver and Beardon, which is the virtual as "stored up

potential", that is as "algorithm" (Carver and Beardon 168). Haley structured *N3RD*

as a video game, an action based exchange between a player and a machine, but it is

also structured as a virtuality along the lines of Levy's virtuality aesthetic:

> A virtual world emerges from the coupling of a living user in a dynamic
> situation with a digital model that can generate a huge quantity of different
> messages. Interacting with the digital model users explore and actualise a
> virtual world. When interactions can enrich or modify the model, the virtual
> world becomes a vector of collective intelligence and creation (Levy
> "Virtuality" 12).

In *N3RD*, Haley "deterritorializes" (to borrow Levy's term) the virtuality of an online

game not only from geography, but from the digital. The narrative plays with

overlaying the virtual game suburb with the material suburb, blurring the actuality

of the events as they occur, and culminating in the ambiguous ending. In addition to

the narrative device, by dramatizing the video game simulation Haley

deterritorializes the virtual from the digital, foregrounding the construction of

virtuality not as a technological actualization of code, but as a human generated

thought simulation, a conceptualization of possibility that uses technology to externalize and share collectively (11).

The gamic elements encoded by Haley serve as novelty hooks appealing to a sense of contemporary relevance by promoting a play about video games; the gamic elements also reinforce the deterritorialization, the disconnect and tension of a digital virtuality actualized as a theatrical virtuality. Two structural gamic properties stand out: characters identified as player types, and the "walkthrough" monologues. The play alternates between these second person point-of-view monologues, and two character scenes. Drawing the audience into the world of the play, the walkthroughs simultaneously emulate a common horror movie trope, and a standard video game tool, while also foregrounding the apparatus of theatre. The opening monologue sets the scene: this is a dead end, under surveillance, where things cannot be trusted:

> the house you want is third from the left
> as you face the cul de sac
> all the houses look the same
> be careful
>
> move toward the house slowly
> you will hear the sound of your
> footsteps
> in the street
> do not walk too fast (Haley, *N3RD* 177)[16]

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[16] *N3RD* uses capitalization for important game elements only. The text also avoids punctuation and contains intentional abrupt line breaks. The penultimate scene however follows standard capital and punctuation use in a prose format. Block quotes will reflect how the text appears in the script. For in line quotes I will use a / to represent the line break.

Productions often interpret the monologues using additional layers of tech, further

emphasizing the hypermediatized effect[17]. Sacred Fools 2010 production

incorporated cinematics and 8bit animations projected onto a house shaped screen

reminiscent of SimCity (Rock, Ben and Jaime Robledo, directors. Interview with

NEIGHBORHOOD 3 Director Jaime Robledo). The 2009 production at the University

of Waikato in New Zealand created a user login screen projected as the backdrop for

the opening. The projection altered to an appropriate computer generated

background for each scene. A live actor performed all monologues wearing a

headset with microphone. He steps on stage to address the audience directly, while

images illustrating elements from the monologue are projected on the

background[18]. The headset positions the walkthrough actor like a customer server

representative helping a game player directly to advance past an obstacle. Linfield

College created a three person chorus who performed the monologues in filmed

segments projected onto widows in the upper story of the background house. The

chorus then appeared physically on stage for the final monologue in which they

dressed zombiekllr14 in his armor[19]. What is reinforced by the monologues is the

algorithmic foundation of the drama, a sense that this narrative has unfolded before.

This time through things *could* be different. The text suggests actions the player can

take that may prove beneficial:

[17] See NEIGHBORHOOD 3 Teaser Trailer for the Sacred Fools Theater Company production in April 2010 directed by Jaime Robledo (https://youtu.be/Nir21o-3H2A).

[18] See Student Theatre: Neighborhood 3 - Part 1: The Kitchen, University of Waikato Theatre production in November 2009 directed by Gaye Poole (https://youtu.be/Unzxhejtr2s).

[19] In the Linfield production the penultimate scene between Blake and Joy played out as live performance on the stage with a reverse angle film projected on the window screens of the house. The film was precise enough to the actor's movements it created the illusion that the image was live (*Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*).

as you approach the house
you will see on the sidewalk
a Claw Hammer

pick this up
you will need it later (177)

The walkthroughs also disrupt identifying a protagonist. Linking each scene with

tenuous, even dream-like connections adds to an overall foreboding sense of the

neighborhood, where the houses are identical, and present a veneer of normalcy,

before the content changes before the audience's eyes. This world may be scripted,

but the outcome is not fixed:

like all other houses
this house will have a
flesh colored brick façade
and a welcome mat in front of the door

hint: if you kneel down and
take a closer look at this mat
you will see the word
'welcome' becomes
'help me' (177)

On the surface *N3RD* is a thriller about the generational divide and technology

resonating themes of communication and disconnect. A closer reading of the

language and structure reflects the constrained and presentable appearance of

corporations and media where there is an answer (or product) for every need.

The residents of Haley's neighborhood are caught between fear and

products. Modeling the play on a horror film, Haley argues there is an impending

doom for American culture summoned by a constructed manifestation of fear. The

gamic structure underscores how Americans are complicit in purchasing a virtual

façade, trading freedom and real connection for order and security. The play's title

reveals its nature. A "requisition," is a formal type of request from a larger governing authority, and "doom" refers to death, destruction or some dire fate (OED). On top of that, the game is the third expansion, and isn't there something rather final about a third installment— the end of a trilogy?

The "neighborhood" element is perhaps the most profound level of the play. Computers and the digital redefine social space, as Bolter and Grusin describe, video games like television tend to dominate physical space, and with online connectivity create a new level of "collective experience" (Bolter and Grusin 102). The collective experience in online games is similar to an audience experience, however the online game offers "a world parallel to, yet distinct from, their contemporary social and physical space, a world with its own ecology, economics, and perhaps even physics," (103). In *N3RD*, the online world significantly mirrors the game player's real world, an alternative neighborhood. Reflecting each other through technology, both neighborhoods are suburban, planned communities more intent on rule breaking then relationship building. By viewing Haley's neighborhood as a model representing America, or more precisely a recognizable image of "the American dream," as a place of harmony, plenty and family values—complete with trademarked logo—the play becomes a virtual dream descending into a nightmare. In *N3RD*, residents relinquished freedom to an outside authority for an illusion of status, security, and convenience. A world primed for destruction, and purchased by the residents who are now set to be destroyed. Fear inside the neighborhood conjured a monster into reality that grows more powerful the longer the residents refuse to face their creation. To escape, they must defeat the monster within their

own home, and they have only one chance, because in the last chapter resurrection has been disabled. Haley could be speaking to global threats like climate change or the concerns regarding technology like the fear of uncontrollable A.I.[20] Haley is warning America specifically, to look at the world around us clearly; to be willing to find answers; to ask the difficult questions; to live with differences and unpleasantness; or to succumb to mindless consumption and denial until brutally destroyed. She suggests this destruction lies in the very objects the neighborhood residents covet, *things* which add a little convenience, or entertainment to life, as a reward for contributing to the market economy. Inside the apparent safety of a closed community, the residents are too busy fighting each other to recognize that small things have enormous consequences. Doom can still be averted; that's what is stated by the neighborhood's final house.

Haley's darkly humorous peek into suburbia was written following a financial meltdown, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and during a cultural zombie renaissance. Her early concept was a supernaturally infused meditation on suburban life inspired by interactions of her own family. After receiving feedback from mentor, Paula Vogel, Haley restructured the play to mirror classic horror films and adopt "an organizing principle of video games," (personal interview). Haley stripped much of the supernatural from the script, except the zombies which she felt

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[20] The problem of uncontrollable A.I. is complex and more related to how such technological advances integrate with human civilization at a practical level legally, economically, and socially. The problem is people both in constructing the code and using it. For more information on concerns regarding superintellegent A.I. see João Medeiros' Nov 2017 interview with Stephen Hawking for *Wired*, "Stephen Hawking: 'I Fear AI May Replace Humans Altogether'", and Sam Harris' response to The Edge Annual Question 2015 "Can We Avoid a Digital Apocalypse?" which was published at *Edge.org* in Jan 2015.

symbolically supported the narrative. The restructuring, Haley believes, led to the

commercial success of the play (personal interview). In this chapter, I explore the

framework of Haley's dioptric mediaphor as a structure. How does the dioptric lens

work in the play? Where do cinematic elements, especially horror tropes impact,

complicate or illuminate Haley's message? How do the unseen zombies function

within the twin realities of *N3RD*? Haley feels more inspired in *N3RD* by horror

cinema, but where does the use of game media bleed through having a stronger

impact? How does Haley use her layered text to convey the underlying message

regarding identifying what is real? How does the final house represent a cinematic

harbinger and algorithmic simulation warning young and old the real monster is us?

Synopsis and Structure

The structure of the *N3RD* calls direct attention to the text indicating

immediately the unique nature of the play. The play consists of ten, two character

scenes. Each scene is titled after the location where the scene takes place such as:

kitchen, living room or driveway. The titles are generic and impersonal which

reinforces a sense of algorithm, of a narrative unfolding in response to selection.

The label is "living room" as opposed to "Vicki's living room." Living room is the

third step, the third level as it were in a series leading to "the Last Chapter" and the

"Final House" (Haley 186, 216). The structure of the first eight scenes differs from

the final two scenes. The final scenes are formatted like a typical playscript with

standard capitalization, prose phrasing, character names in all capitals and stage

directions. For the bulk of the script the text resembles online chat in short phrases consisting of lower case characters. The character names are also completely lower case and the period after the names is the only punctuation other than apostrophes. Capitalization becomes a textual way to emphasize gamic elements. Makaela offers Trevor "Chocolate Milk" which apparently provides an increased power in the game known as "Sugar Rush" (178, 187). The capitalization sets these few terms apart within the script as proper nouns within the world of the play, and mimicking how digital objects with metadata can be linked in online chat to provide additional information. The abrupt line breaks provides a sense of rhythm and tone for the lines without character directions. Haley notes that the line breaks indicate a pause, but these are "emotionally motivated" and the "briefest of pauses" which should sound "almost natural" and especially "not robotic" (175). The formation of the text resembles casual speech and digital chat; it also resembles the auditory scripted speech of videogame characters reinforcing the idea that the play is actually a game. Most characters appear in only a single scene, so the language structure provides a codex for performers to recompile the text for the audience. Meaning in *N3RD* is therefore, on the line, and manifests as spoken like spontaneous conversation rather than labored by subtext.

Each scene begins with a "walkthrough" monologue written in second person. The production notes indicate these monologues may be voiceover recordings or live performances (175). The monologues identify important clues for the audience, and connect the scenes within one master narrative following interlinking stories between families within a suburban, planned community,

neighborhood. Rather than a scene by scene breakdown here is a brief summary of

the larger narrative. Each scene orbits the central, larger narrative with oblique

references to events in the neighborhood and its parallel game world. The

neighborhood teenagers are enthralled with a new computer game, the third and

latest expansion of a survival-horror genre, massive multi-player online role-playing

game, or MMORPG. The game's technology builds a virtual game world mirroring

the neighborhood right down to the identities of the residents in each virtual house.

Tyler Prichard, an unseen character in the play, leads a large group of the teens

playing this game, and many of the scenes revolve around their actions offstage.

Tyler is a reckless, entitled and privileged teen known for his ghoulish behavior

within the game (185, 204, 212). Events in the game appear linked to events in the

real neighborhood including the death of a cat (204, 212). Meanwhile players strive

to complete each game level in order to advance to the "Final House" which

represents the end game phase. They trade commodities inside and outside the

game in order to further their game play. Female players trade explicit real world

selfies in exchange for in-game upgrades (237). A few players recognize the

disturbing connection between worlds, and quit the game (218). Players only

advance within the game by killing zombies who appear as adult residents in the

game neighborhood. Players must avoid the "Neighborhood Association" which

actively protects the resident zombies. Everyday objects found in the game are used

as weapons against the zombies (177, 197, 215). Upon entering the "Final House,"

players must confront their own family in order to escape the neighborhood and

thereby complete the game (220, 232). Meanwhile, in the "real world" of the

79

neighborhood, the players' parents struggle with their mundane conflicts involving jobs, relationships, and lawn care while puzzling over the teens' obsession with the video game. In the final violent scenes, the boundary between virtual and real remains heavily blurred. Haley suggests staging the ending closer to realism than the preceding scenes, stating that she wants the audience to feel "somewhere recognizable, comfortable, and may imagine, for a little while, that none of what's happened previously in the play is real. However, the violence should be dramatic, unbelievable, and loud—perhaps with stupidly spurting blood, like a video game," (175). In the very brief final scene the teenage Blake "shoves himself away from the computer. Shivering. He looks around the empty room," and calls out the last line of the play: "Mom?" (257). The moment mimics a horror movie trope: where there is an apparent return to normalcy and safety, before the monster or maniac jumps out at the lone survivor. This final jump scare technique extinguishes all relief gained from the end of the horror, and replaces hope with a deep sense of dread. Executed correctly the final moment of *N3RD* provides a momentary reprieve followed by despair and confusion.

A Certain Dissonance: diopters and play structure

The virtual defines contemporary culture. In "Theatre as the art of the performer and the stage of intermediality", Kattenbelt places theatre at a critical nexus for a culture gripped by hyper-reality as reality. According to Kattenbelt, "all the world is a stage" no longer functions solely as metaphor, but describes without

additional embellishment today's reality, and as such, the theatrical stage functions to make the various layers of context and media visible (Kattenbelt 38). It is the flesh and blood of material performers working in real time, Kattenbelt believes, that anchors the hyper-reality on stage in a human scale. The theatrical stage becomes a necessary platform of literacy and engagement for a technological and media saturated culture. Film, Kattenbelt explains, took up the burden of dramatic narrative by being better equipped to immerse viewers as invisible witnesses to projected realities. Cinema does this by embracing transparency, limiting perspective to the camera view and making the most of what the mechanism of a camera can do (37). Transparency, in cinema is the "illusion of reality" while in theatre transparency means the "reality of illusion" emphasizing the "corporeality of the performer and the materiality of the live performance as an actual event, taking place in the absolute presence of here and now," (37). Kattenbelt suggests dramatic art (of which film is now dominant) is about "the actuality and causality of action", but theatre also uses "lyrical and epical dimensions" which function within the techniques and devices theatre employs (37). Cinema can operate on a lyric level within the constraints of the medium, with the main one being the single perspective. Film is one to many, offering one definitive complete composition. Theatre in contrast, is multiple to many. Rather than an invisible witness the audience is complicit in the action on stage. The collaborative input of individual theatre artists doesn't fully synthesize into a "composition" but remains somewhat fluid, more of a "contexture" says Kattenbelt, hinging on that corporeal exchange between performer and audience (31).

As the dominant dramatic media audiences have become quite literate in cinematic and televisual techniques and devices. At the same time technology has moved from industry, to office to the intimacy of our lives. The stage is intermedial argues Kattenbelt, and in today's digital reality "we really do need a stage on which the staging of life can be staged in such a way that it can be deconstructed and made visible again," (38). Intermediality does not, however specifically require actual media technology onstage. Jensen illustrates the challenge theatrically adapting a technological intimacy that is capable of "influenc[ing] our physical reality":

> Through the application of technology, the virtual has become tangible—with perceptions being a crucial component to our physical reality. Reality, therefore, has been altered for us by technology. Correspondingly, the presentation of reality in the contemporary theatre has to be presented differently from how it was presented in the past, whether or not technology is employed in that presentation, (Jensen 7).

Reflecting cinematic techniques and digital interactions from the theatrical stage illuminates media constructs, and does so within a multiple–to-many, in other words a social environ: "The performer and spectator are necessary to each other" writes Kattenbelt, "because together they hold the responsibility for the realisation of the performance," (Kattenbelt 33). Mediaphors, according to Woycicki offer just the "deconstructive aesthetic" Kattenbelt and Jensen call for in staging a contemporary reality.

Mediaphor: a *mise en abyme* of the actor

Mediaphor is a multi-layered concept of Woycicki's refinement of Pluta's idea, who in turn was building off of principles from Lepage. Woycicki defines

mediaphor initially as "a deconstructive stance towards cinematic metaphors" which is "achieved by means of a *décalage* of the actor's presence on stage" (Woycicki 62). *Décalage* is according to Lepage "a strange impression of...disparity" (qtd. in Pluta 194). Woycicki's "Mediaphor" stems from Izabella Pluta's idea of "the Mediaphoric Body" in her 2010 essay "Instance: Robert Lepage and Ex Machina, The Andersen Project".

> The contextual outline [of Lepage's *The Andersen Project*] frames a particular focus on the phenomenon resulting from the incorporation of the actor with particular media (here, theatre and cinema). The body is transformed and becomes host to a role through the configuration of multiple elements of the spectacle, a role *other* than that of the character. This role is born of the *coexistence* of different media. In this process, various techniques of acting are thrown into relief, and hybridity — or *métissage* with medial elements — brings about new forms of expression. This situation is usefully explored in terms of the "mediaphoric body", a notions that helps to articulate the intermediality of the actor rather than simply that of the media in play (Pluta 192).

Métissage is Lepage's term for hybrid acting, or "a mixing or crossbreeding" of techniques as associated with performance mediums, in this case theatre and film (qtd. in Pluta 192). The hybrid of acting techniques offsets the actor within the stage space like a theatrical picture is a picture, a *mise en abyme*:

> [Lepage] generates the mediaphoric body that is situated between two aesthetic universes, theatrical and cinematographic, thus introducing the stage actor to the screen actor. Lepage thereby proposes a *métissage* of theatre acting and film acting, and generates a *mise en abyme* of the actor as defined by the dramatic stage (Pluta 194).

Pluta writes that the mediaphoric body arises from the interweaving of three levels of meaning: "the living, the media-related and the metaphorical" as combined components of a performance (Pluta 192). According to Pluta, "The living" is represented by the flesh and blood actor, while the "media-related" is an "extra-

theatrical" element in the stage performance such as a projection, screen, camera or device. "The metaphorical" element remains conceptual and semiotic. Pluta fuses media into metaphorisation to achieve "the mediaphoric body," a intermedial and theatrical construct (193). The mediaphoric bridges multiple universes, in the case of Lepage's *The Andersen Project* notes Pluta "the virtual and the actual, the theatrical and the cinematic, the real and the imaginary" (194). The mediaphoric body reflects a hybrid acting technique employed by an actor performing both as character and as the "extra theatrical" element.

Woycicki decouples mediaphor from the actor's body, placing the concept within the performance as "an example of a 'bad' metaphor *par excellence* — a metaphor with inherent, unresolved tensions," (Woycicki 65). The mediaphor is metaphor with a third presentational aspect, one that is unstable. Mediaphors says Woycicki, "draw attention towards the disparity between the different media involved in the construction of the image," while metaphor requires a seamless transparency to convey meaning (66). Such a intermedial metaphor relies on an unresolvable tension, which Woycicki describes as "mediaphor," a metaphor created onstage between physical actors and additional media used theatrically together to achieve a further meaning (Woycicki 65). Lepage constructs mediaphor by incorporating projections and cinematic features with a flesh and blood actor. The disparity between cinematic acting and theatrical acting is clearly shown. Haley uses theatre to dramatize the additional media concept, rather than putting new media directly in play with physical actors,   She constructs theatre within theatre which is then mirrored again within the play's narrative of virtual worlds in conflict

84

as *mise en abyme*. Haley draws on her depth of knowledge of theatre and the digital to transcode digital media theatrically. I call the intertextual *mise en abyme* device Haley uses a *dioptric mediaphor*, because like the split-field diopter lens in film, Haley's technique brings two distinct grounds into focus in a way that elicits comparison, disorientates, and alters both perspective and the relationship to space. Haley uses the technique in her first commercial work, *N3RD* and continues to refine her approach in later works. Using the dioptric mediaphor structure, Haley continually provokes an examination of what is real.

Mise en abyme with an actor as character and avatar is the mediaphor at work in *N3RD*. It exists in the execution of the walkthrough monologues constructed to mimic gamer websites explaining the details of how to most effectively play a game. It peaks out in the unease of moments where things seem oddly connected to the video game, such as when Ryan tries to tell his dad about the similarity between a part of the game and the death of his real cat (Haley, *N3RD* 212). From the start of scene 6 "front yard" the play is openly *mise en abyme* with at least one character looking out from the game world, though it is possible that the entire play is, in fact, the game world. Makaela spells it out in the opening scene:

> that sound like something out of a horror movie
> like you're about to play this video game
> and you think it's just a game
> but actually it's real
> but these teenagers don't know it
> but the audience knows it (183)

The audience thinking it is just a play about a video game, now knows it is really a play about a video game that's real, but the players don't know it's real. Right from

the start it's clear that *N3RD* is *mise en abyme*: a horror movie inside a play about a

game. *N3RD* only works as a play. It might be adaptable to another medium, but

would lose much of what makes it work if for example lifted off the stage and filmed.

This is because the essence of the play is what the audience does in putting together

the elements like a puzzle. Fleshing the action out more visibly though film or

computer graphics removes the doubt about whether the character is in the game

world, or the game is in the real world.

Mediaphor, Woycicki writes, engages the audience in "a more reflexive and

writerly role" assigning meaning to the level of performance (Woycicki 39).

Woycicki's idea of the "mediaphor" characterizes the intermedial and intertextual

exchange occurring between the presentation of a concept onstage and the

audience's knowledge, but "Mediaphors draw attention towards the disparity

between the different media involved in the construction of the image," (66). The

presentation comes wrapped in metadata, a relationship to an embedded cultural

database that challenges the audience to unravel the data, and connect the dots.

Mediaphor describes a theatrical metaphor rooted in disruption and anachronism,

an "inherent, unresolved tension" stemming from a material actor, an "extra

theatrical" intermedial aspect, and the "conceptual dimension" where meaning is

assigned (Woycicki 65). Jensen writes that technology today influences "physical

reality" by presenting the virtual as "tangible" our reality is notably altered (Jensen

7). In interacting with the virtual we perceive it as real, therefore presenting such a

virtual as a digital object or projection is less real within the stage environment.

Haley's choice to dramatize the virtual openly connects more to the perceived

reality of the digital than any screen or projection could. Jensen says, "…our lexicon

of associative perceptions has been exponentially enhanced through mediated

messages. Reality…must be achieved on the stage today through association, rather

than through imitation, as it has been in the past," (7). A screen, projection or film

would be an imitation, while the theatrical approach accepts the virtual. Kattenbelt

says that "Theatre is transparent because it foregrounds the corporeality of the

performer and the materiality of the live performance as an actual event, taking

place in the absolute presence of here and now," (Kattenbelt 37). The actor

performs a video game character, but the physical reality of the flesh and blood

actor establishes a material realness to "zombiekllr14" that resonates the

attachment the audience may have experienced with a digital avatar or relationship.

The realness represented by zombiekllr14 magnifies to horror when in the next

scene, revealed to be Blake, he casually confesses to murdering Barbara (Haley,

N3RD 255). The audience experiences both Barbara and Blake (zombiekllr14) as

real, but Blake did not see Barbara as real, only as an obstacle in his game.

Theatre requires only the willing engagement between audience and

performer to construct a virtuality, extra technology even to represent technology is

unnecessary. Theatre is intermedial by nature argues Kattenbelt, "a hypermedium"

that fuses other arts and embeds media platforms (Kattenbelt 37). *N3RD* becomes a

virtuality play without requiring any additional technology. *N3RD* is a mediaphor

for late capitalist decadence. To be a mediaphor according to Woycicki and Pluta,

N3RD needs to combine "the living" with a "media-related" component and a

"metaphorical" aspect — "the living, the media-related and the metaphorical"

87

(Woycicki 65, Pluta 192). "The living" is met by the flesh and blood actors. One central metaphor is that the adults of the neighborhood are zombies, ironically not living, as portrayed in the game world. The parents are mindless undead driven to consume. The "extra theatrical" and "media-related" element comes from dramatizing the video game. Christopher Balme defines intermediality in theatre in his 2001 text: *Einführung in Die Theaterwissenschaft*[21]. According to Balme intermediality in theatre occurs when transcribing across mediums, through intertextuality, and when attempting "to realize in one medium the aesthetic conventions and / or visual and listening habits of another medium," (Balme 154).[22] *N3RD* intersects with all three of Balme's criteria. Haley transcribes a video game onstage; comprehension of Haley's game world requires intertextual understanding of horror films and video games. Haley draws upon rich cultural ties to films like *The Exorcist* and games like *World of Warcraft*. An original scene cut from the final version of the play involved a mysterious old man at the door of a neighborhood home and a frightened adolescent girl inside. The man wishes to see the girl's mother and the girl doesn't want him to enter. Haley recycled, condensed, and remixed the scenario from *The Exorcist*, though her version casts doubt upon which of the trio: the priest, the mother or the girl is afflicted by religious mania or demonic possession:

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[21] Introduction to Theatre Science (My translation).

[22] Bullet 1: Intermedialität bezieht sich auf jede Transposition eines Stoffes oder eines Textsegments aus einem Medium in ein anderes. Bullet 2: Intermedialität ist eine besondere Form der Intertextualität. Bullet 3: Intermedialität ist gegeben, wenn versucht wird, in einem Medium die ästhetischen Konventionen und/oder Seh- und Hörgewohnheiten eines anderen Mediums zu realisieren. My translation (Balme 154).

It's this very tense kind of dialog where he really just wants to see the mother and the girl won't let him see her. And you can never tell whether he's part of this kind of crazy, like intensive religion that she's joined and he wants to bring her back into the fold. And the daughter's protecting her from a cult basically. Or whether the mother is truly processed by a demon and he has come. And he's the good guy. And he wants to exorcise her demon and the daughter is keeping her prisoner upstairs because she's feeding off of the demon (Personal Interview).

The scene did not survive the restructuring that Haley did following Vogel's insight into an organizing principle of a video game. It was Haley's favorite scene, and cutting it was "a killing your baby kind of thing" because it no longer fit. In the deleted scene, the girl "D" (the manuscript identifies characters only by the role in the neighborhood: F, M, S or D presumably for father, mother, son or daughter) has a monologue challenging the mysterious man on her doorstep:

it's not the body that's vulnerable
it's the mind
looking for the perfect story
the beginning
middle
and end
with an eternal solution
this body is not a vessel
but a conduit
there is no righteousness
only a sorting of confusion
into an illusion of control
throw your holy water on me churchman
to exorcise your fear
or grab me and let's wrestle
the second lid is folding back
you see me now
you can't describe
a vampire
an angel (Haley "Neighborhood" 46)

While sorry to lose the scene, Haley feels commercial success came from the more measured restructuring of the play as a traditional horror film grafted to a video

game (Personal Interview). She, however, managed to incorporate the dread, and doubt concentrated in this one scene into the major themes of the play. *N3RD* emphasizes that in contemporary America it is the mind, and the imagination that is haunted, and vulnerable to excessive fear driving an ever demanding need to look like there is control. In suburbia, "there is no righteousness" no virtue in the manicured lawns and tidy pocket park, because the resident's fear has drained their life essence. Their "illusion of control" is "only a sorting of confusion" (Haley, "Neighborhood" 46). The authority of the Neighborhood Association has no real impact, and is limited to containing the mess as each family implodes. The digital in contemporary culture is both a blessing and a curse, "a vampire" and "an angel" (46).

Dictating Focus: diopters and split screens

Haley's method of engaging mediaphor as a narrative structure dispels digital mystique with flesh. *N3RD* requires only theatre: language, gesture, and voice in space. The dissonance of mediaphor comes from how Haley constructs contrasting perspectives of interdependent hyper-realities. I compare the effect Haley employs to cinema's split-field diopter lens. The split-field diopter lens is used in film to economically and aesthetically create separate areas of focus within a single shot. The technique was used heavily by filmmakers in the 1970s and is described in detail by Paul Ramaeker in his 2007 essay, "Notes on the Split-Field Diopter" (Ramaeker 179). Using a diopter lens creates an illusion of deep focus with

a discreet blurred space between (181).[23] The lens works similar to bifocal glasses, with part of the camera lens covered by refracting glass bringing the foreground into sharp focus while the other half of the lens focuses further away (180). According to Ramaeker, dioptric images in film added a sense of realism and suspense that was somewhat voyeuristic (186). The optical effect is also disorienting as the competing focus tends to flatten the image to the point that depth is lost. The technique is also helpful in generating forced perspective effects. In *N3RD*, Haley achieves a similar dioptric split-field environment onstage without cameras, lenses or screens.

To define Haley's technique as a dioptric mediaphor, I'm building on Woycicki's concept of a mediaphor with Haley's reliance on a structure that mechanically foregrounds the apparatus of the media. She mimics the use of split-field diopter lens in cinema. Ramaeker refers to the lens as an "obscure", "little discussed", and "forgotten" device whose technique contributes to a discourse on "spatial illusion" in relation to the picture plane (196). Haley's dioptric construction is more post-cinematic influence than a conscious effort. Her foregrounding method is as mechanical as a split-field diopter. The small half lens placed over a camera primary lens dividing the frame into multiple focal points. Haley's cinematic technique is reliant on the unique construction of her text. Haley selects dynamics that mimic a dioptric shot by how she divides each character's reality within a scene, giving the audience an oscillating omniscient perspective. Split-field diopter

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[23] According to Ramaeker diopter split-field lens were used in the 1970-80s in films like *Jaws*, *All the President's Men* and *Dressed to Kill* often to get a "deep focus" effect when true deep focus could not be achieved. Actual deep focus keeps the entire image in focus, but requires a small aperture, wide angle and a large amount of light (Ramaeker 187).

lenses place multiple and distinct focal points into a single composite layer. The

composite sacrifices depth for an impression of wide panoramic perspective.

Ramaeker compares diopter shots to optical illusions. Like an optical illusion, a

dynamic tension results from the oscillation between multiple areas of focus and the

missing depth cues (183).

> Due to its fundamentally compound nature, the diopter image inherently
> bears an alternately dialogic and dialectic relationship to contexts of space,
> narrative and style: the image may be read straightforwardly as providing
> significant focal depth as motivated by the narrative, or as an obvious artifice,
> calling attention to the image as an image, (184).

The split-field diopter builds a sense of immediacy and suspense by showing

"simultaneous actions" in a single shot which develops a voyeuristic documentary

type essence says Ramaeker (186). Because the viewer is privy to in the wider

image with multiple focal points, they have a more distanced, omniscient

perspective. The immediacy and sense of things unfolding spontaneously before the

camera is ironic and an illusion, according to Ramaeker because diopter shots

require precise and extended set-up to achieve (186). The split-field diopter lens

typically is a ringed cap that fits over the camera lens with half the lens area covered

by convex glass, "essentially bifocal glasses" writes Alan Pakula in a 1976 article

about his experience using diopters while directing *All the President's Men* (Pakula

775). Pakula preferred diopters to enhance counterpoints for the characters, "to

represent how reporters see and how they look at things and their perceptions,"

(775). Director of Photography Gordon Willis says he used diopters in *All the*

President's Men "when backgrounds were just as important as foregrounds," (Willis

522). Emphasizing background and foreground was the same reason

92

cinematographer John Bailey used diopters decades later for *In the Line of Fire*,

write Bob Fisher and Chris Pizzello in their 1993 *American Cinematographer* article

"*In the Line of Fire*: An Action Film for Existentialists" (Fisher and Pizzello 42). In

standard use the split-field diopter divides the image into contrasting focus points:

foreground and background. Between the extreme focal points is a distinct blur

field which is then either hidden in the structure of the shot, or purposely exposed.

Hiding the blur field is common in films adhering to rigid realism and transparency,

thereby encouraging viewer to immerse themselves into the narrative. However,

the blur field is exposed when action crosses it, the shot pans or zooms, or when no

attempt in composition is made to camouflage it (Ramaeker 195). Exposing the out

of focus area is used in films that prefer to call attention to the medium of film,

rather like the split screen shot.

Director Brian De Palma favors both cinematic techniques in his films which

are explored in the 2015 documentary *De Palma*. He believes the strength of cinema

as a narrative medium is emphasizing focus "you're telling the audience what to

look at," (*De Palma*). He began using split screen when presented with the challenge

of filming *Dionysus in 69*, a film presenting The Performance Group's adaptation of

The Bacchae. To meet the challenge of representing the intimate environmental

theatre piece, De Palma relied on split screen shots. Split screen, De Palma says, is

an intellectual exercise distancing the audience from the film, "The thing about split

screens is that the audience has a chance to sort of put two images together

simultaneously and something happens in their head. You're giving them a

juxtaposition," (*De Palma*). While useful for building suspense or humor, De Palma

found when filming *Carrie*, the technique is "too intellectual" and "not good" for

action sequences (*De Palma*). He began working with diopters as a way of blending

the audience's imaginative work in split screen with the narrative drive the director

serves, "You're putting something very big in the foreground juxtaposing it against

some other piece of information in the background," (*De Palma*). Split screens

provide the audience with a distinctly divided picture plane that forces the viewer to

select where and how to focus attention. The effect underscores context. Films like

Marc Webb's *(500) Days of Summer* (2009) and Hans Canosa's *Conversations with*

Other Women (2005) employ the technique to overlay a character's internal, private

virtuality with the actual world. The juxtaposition of the split screen is a distancing

effect that calls attention to the medium, while the split-field diopter shot can be

more subtle. With a diopter shot the intellectual exercise of juxtaposing information

from the two perspectives of a split screen is reduced to smaller, limited areas of

focus compounded within a single image. The audience can still choose what to

focus on. The overlaid composite, however emphasizes or spotlights the important

features. It's a more guided juxtaposition. Split-field diopters and split screens are

two techniques cinema uses to create complex tensions between multiple points of

view. Theatre, not being constrained to the sequential frames of film, also has

techniques for guiding focus and the juxtaposition and comparison of different

details. Virtual plays like *Water by the Spoonful*, rely on a staged structure similar to

cinematic split screen. However, dividing focus between a screen and physical

performance becomes a "performative situation" where according to Umberto Eco

in "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance" the screen is more than a screen but also a sign (Eco 117).

Haley wrote *N3RD* with two interdependent, but conflicting realities within the play: the "real" world and the game world. While each two character scene behaves like a split screen montage, the interconnecting walkthrough monologues more closely resemble split-field diopter shots. They are specifically like the suspenseful diopter shots from the point of view of the killer in De Palma's *Blow Out*. No matter how the walkthrough is interpreted there is a noticeable foregrounding of the theatrical staging between the walkthrough monologues and connecting scenes. Like the dioptric blur field this foregrounding reveals the edge between worlds. Each walkthrough transitions the action up to the penultimate scene with a small degree of continuity. Written in second person point of view, the monologues exist on the edge of game world, directing an unseen player through the neighborhood. Because the monologues instruct the player on how to navigate the game, they must exist outside of the game world. They convey, however, information directly from the game, and therefore represent crossover points between the two worlds of the play. The audience experiences the play through this unknown player's eyes, while the monologues guide the audience to important details, objects and game tips. With each monologue the play tips into the game world briefly. The effect is simultaneously cinematic and game like, resembling both a split-field diopter shot in a suspense film, and the perspective of a first person game. As mentioned above, the monologues also function similar to the blur field created by the split-field diopter lens by exposing a nebulous transition in focal

plane. The viewpoint during each monologue puts the game world in the extreme

foreground, before switching to emphasizing the real world at the start of each

scene. This point of view swapping creates disorientation by coinciding with

transitions in space, time, and characters. As the play progresses the scenes more

closely resemble split-field diopter shots than split screen. The transition coincides

with the growing sense of disconnect and unreality within the play. The

resemblance is virtual, or rather theatrical. Haley asks the audience through the

construction of her scenes to hold in their minds two different and even tangentially

related realities. In scene 8, "street" Barbara while seeking her family finds a seven

foot tall armored fighter wielding a hammer (Haley, *N3RD* 248). In her reality she's

on the street in her neighborhood. The fighter, "zombiekllr14" knows he's inside a

computer replicated version of his neighborhood (241). Barbara sees corpses

covered in post-it notes, while "zombiekllr14" sees game generated blood spatter

effects (251). Their exchange is the most extreme disparity between realities. In

the penultimate scene 9 "the final house" Blake and his mother have different, but

parallel experiences. In the prior scenes, the game world's prominence dominated

the foreground with the real world receding. This scene reverses that, reality is

more strongly at the front then at any other point in the play, adding to the

disorientation effect when Blake's mother seems to pluck objects from the game

into a physical form.

Dioptric relates to lenses and is defined as "Serving as a medium for sight;

assisting vision (or rendering it possible) by means of refraction (as a lens, the

humours of the eye)" (OED). In cinema the effect is linked with a lens that allows for

multiple focal points in a single shot. The dioptric lens effect works within Haley's

plays through language and the theatrical medium. Haley bends, distorts and

refracts digital culture through a constructed virtual game world presented on a

stage. Each virtual platform refracts the content. The difference in distortion

between perceiving the performance through the medium of stage and perceiving

the performance additionally through the fictional game medium, also staged,

creates double refractions. Meaning is inferred through what the audience sees in

this forced perspective. Using language, Haley coded dioptric foreground and

background into the text itself. The regular shift of voice from second person

monologues to dialogue in two character scenes emphasizes the theatrical framing.

The dialogue is broken in short phrases. This staccato and variable rhythm mimics

natural speech, and mirrors the foreshortened phrasing of online chat and text

messaging. The technical precision required by the actor to perform the short,

broken phrasing is also similar to the technical constraint placed on actors in a split-

field diopter shot. The bulk of the play has only the unembellished text to work

from. Stage directions don't appear until the penultimate realistic scene. An

audience not seeing the flow of text on the page, instead receives the aural effect of

naturalistic sounding yet highly controlled and constructed speech. What diopters

do, according to Ramaeker, is sustain a "oscillation between a sense of depth and a

flatness" in the compound image resulting "in a kind of continuous, dynamic tension

in the perception and interpretation of the image between an *intended* illusion of

three-dimensionality and an awareness of actual, even aggressive and obtrusive,

two-dimensionality," (Ramaeker 183). The constructed naturalism of the speech

combines with the oblique way the characters speak to trivialize the dialog into inane every day chatter. Except the intrusion of weighted game terms heightens the speech. An ironic sense of the everyday, and a documentary like presence are also a traits of dioptric shots, which Ramaeker explains, is how the effect was utilized in *All the President's Men* (188). By invoking the medium the distance between "surface and depth" becomes fluid, in this way dioptric effects help the audience "connect plot strands" (192). Likewise, on stage the shifts in voice, the elliptical disjointed narrative, and characters interacting from different realities keep the audience semidetached from action, and a critical distance from the drama. The dioptric distinction distances the audience through the extreme emphasis on two comparison focal points. In *N3RD* this manifests in multiple binaries: the physical presence of two actors, intertextual resonance with cinematic and gamic elements, and generational divide between parent and child. The abstract staging of all but the final scenes puts only the actor's bodies as consistent focal points. Only two actors on stage underscores the conflict and the comparative difference in each character's perspective, creating a dissonance on stage between the composite realities. Haley courts this dissonance, describing the tension and antithesis as "combative" and fascinating (personal interview). A combative dissonance between images is the effect achieved in film with a split-field diopter lens. The lens compares the difference between here and there, while obscuring the middle ground between. Haley's composed binary, a figurative dioptric lens embedded in the structure of *N3RD*, achieves a similar exaggerated effect that calls direct attention to theatrical performance. The artifice of the medium is foregrounded.

98

Haley constructs the dissonance she admires in other media. The variance between

what characters say and see, and the detailed content of the walkthrough

monologues take the place of a physical diopter lens.

POV Perspective: seeing what's real

With the opening monologue the audience knows the play begins at a dead

end, in a house on a cul-de-sac where all the houses look the same. In addition, two

distinct and creepy details are given. The cloned houses each have *flesh* colored

façades; and this house's welcome is also a façade where "Welcome" on the mat

becomes "Help me" (Haley, *N3RD* 177). The welcome mat's transformation works

on multiple levels. It exposes the fluidity of objects in this story; things are not what

they seem. The use of the phrase, "Help me" is an intertextual reference to horror

movies like *The Exorcist*, *The Fly*, and *Amityville Horror II: The Possession*[24]. Perhaps

most ominous, it is the house, the family structure in *N3RD* that cries out. The first

emotional plea in the narrative comes from a constructed thing. Deciphering which

part of the house requires help is part of the fascination in *N3RD*. The family in this

house is heading for implosion and since all the houses are the same, then all the

houses and families in this neighborhood are equally threatened. The second

person point of view (POV) in the opening monologue is another structural

intertextual tie to horror films. It is the power of cinema to "manipulate point of

view" through editing states Carol Clover in her 1987 essay "Her Body, Himself:

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[24] In *Amityville II: The Possession*, the words that appear on the possessed boy's arm are actually "Save Me" (*Amityville II: The Possession*. Dir. Damiano Damiani. MCR, 1983.)

Gender in the Slasher Film" (Clover 190). The horror genre relies heavily on camera

work and POV, according to Clover, in particular the interweaving of the personal

perspective of the monster with the objective third person perspective of the hero:

> The "play of pronoun function" that underlies and defines the cinefantastic is
> nowhere more richly manifested than in the slasher; if the genre has an
> aesthetic base, it is exactly that of a visual identity game. Consider, for
> example, the by now standard habit of letting us view the action in the first
> person long before revealing who or what the first person *is* (216).[25]

By intercutting the scenes of *N3RD* with the walkthrough monologues Haley is

replicating the "I-camera", the killer's POV that has become a staple of horror

cinema (190). The "I-camera" introduces the killer's perspective early in the

narrative, establishing a level of suspense while withholding the identity of the

killer. The *N3RD* monologues operate on a level like the "I-camera" killer's eyes

sequences in *Halloween* or *Friday the 13th*, but they are also gamic artifacts. In a

slasher film the killer's perspective is a distancing device building tension while at

the same time reminding the audience of the camera apparatus, and therefore the

fictional frame around what is being watched. A gamic walkthrough however, is a

"how to" device designed to educate the viewer on a procedure to replicate. Typical

walkthroughs for games are text or video based, but their purpose is not the visceral

reaction of the slasher I-camera, but a methodical, tutorial process. Viewed as a

movie or game, one aspect of the intermedial connection of Haley's walkthroughs is

hot and visceral, while the other is cold, and technical.

The walkthrough monologue, notably, is in second person and speaking

directly to the audience: "move toward the house slowly/you will hear the sound of

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[25] Emphasis in source.

your/footsteps/in the street/do not walk too fast" (Haley 177). At the end of the monologue comes the direction to, "enter/the kitchen". When the scene begins, the shift is disorienting. Two people in the kitchen begin an exchange, but unlike the monologue they do not acknowledge the audience. The POV has shifted from second to third person (178). Clover writes: "A figurative or functional analysis of the slasher begins with the processes of point of view and identification," (Clover 207). Who exactly approached and entered this house picking up a "Claw Hammer" on the way? Whose footsteps echoed in the street?

As the scene unfolds the strangeness of the monologue recedes into the background. There is no further reference to the "Claw Hammer". In an awkward exchanged charged with sexual tension, and inhibition two teens are discussing a game, "Neighborhood 3". Trevor is "dying to play Neighborhood 3" and Makaela responds with a metatheatrical speech. In her amusement over Trevor's desire, she exclaims that the game is right out of a horror movie. Makaela's musing suggests the game world is prominent. Trevor provides the next metatheatrical moment responding that he knows how to play, because he has seen "all the walkthroughs," and therefore knows "what to look for/in the game" (183). The audience has also just experienced a walkthrough. Trevor's statement confirms for the audience that the between scene transitions, the walkthrough monologues, describe what to look for in game, therefore the walkthroughs as a device suggest that the audience is watching a game. Additional information about the game is given by the characters in this first scene: the game is violent, constructed from the real world neighborhood using satellite data, and some of the teens are approaching end game,

101

the ominous "Last Chapter" (186). The first scene, "kitchen," establishes important game elements and sets up a thematic pattern that flows from scene to scene. A somewhat suspicious leveling system can be inferred from Makaela's comparison of multi-level marketing to a "pyramid scheme", "scientology", and "the mafia" (180). Like the game, the play also follows a leveling system with each scene representing the next rung up the ladder.

The second walkthrough monologue transitions from the kitchen at one house to the front door of another. Again the POV shifts to second person giving directions to use the hammer to smash a "Garden Gnome" and retrieve a note inside that will be needed later (188). This time the POV shift into and out of the monologue is not new, what is new and disorienting is that only the monologue connects the scenes. The characters are not directly connected. The first walkthrough appears to be Trevor's perspective as he's the visitor in Makaela's kitchen (178). The second walkthrough is Steve's perspective as he's the one approaching the front door with the broken Garden Gnome (188). The audience is again presented with an indication that they are actually watching a game. Whether the audience picks up on the structural clue or not, they will have understood that the walkthrough monologues provide the connective tissue of the narrative. Every scene may contain different characters within the same neighborhood afflicted by the game craze, but the walkthroughs will guide the audience through the story. At this point the play is similar to a fun house or theme park ride twisting, undulating, and then pausing to witness a thematic vignette before the next thrill in a sudden turn or drop. The second scene begins from Steve's POV, but ends as Leslie's. Leslie

again rejects Steve's offer to glue the gnome stating that "his time/is up", at which

point the walkthrough monologue begins with instructions to enter the house and

proceed upstairs (197). The walkthrough does not specify *who* enters the house.

The front door is, however Leslie's house, and it is implied that she was going back

inside to continue preparing for the evening's intervention, therefore the POV at the

start of this walkthrough appears to be Leslie's. This walkthrough sends the

audience upstairs into a bedroom to drink a "Glass of Red Wine" before exiting to go

back downstairs:

> you have just moved through
> a secret wormhole
> in the Neighborhood
> you are now in a house
> on the opposite side
> of the subdivision (198).

Via the walkthrough Leslie's POV becomes Kaitlyn's and while it is not immediately

apparent, the play has returned to the Prichard house from the first scene. Kaitlyn is

coming back downstairs from Tyler's bedroom, the same bedroom Makaela snuck

into to retrieve the *N3RD* game (199). Tracking the POV through each scene it

becomes apparent the audience is watching the game from a player's perspective as

they move toward the "Final House."

On another level, the discontinuity with each scene transition and the strange

cross over of game ambience into the neighborhood scenes erodes the gamic aspect,

and foregrounds instead a horror movie dynamic. Makaela's words resonate

"something out of a horror movie…you think it's just a game…but actually it's real"

(183). If the audience is indeed watching a horror movie then the neighborhood

walkthrough's by cinematic convention are likely to be the monster or killer's view.

103

In her 2016 essay "'You're All Doomed!' A Socioeconomic Analysis of Slasher Films,"

Kara Kvaran links horror movies and specifically the slasher genre in the 1980s and

again in the 2000s with financial crisis: "slasher films served as a parable of the

modern capitalist economy" especially for the target audiences of adolescents and

young adults (Kvaran 968). Kvaran's essay builds on the Vera Dika's 1990 book,

Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle in

which Dika argues that the slasher or stalker film evolved from the particular

tensions rising from a disconnect between the social narrative and economic reality.

By the 1980s social narrative shifted from "pacifism and extended personal

liberties" to self-determination and crisis management. Dika places slasher films

alongside the Western, citing a "more conservative stance" in behavior and a

"readiness to use violence" against threat as a shared undercurrent in both genres

(Dika 138). The 1980s slasher films are also a "counterpoint to the dominant

ideology" adds Kvaran, these films grew in an otherwise optimistic era yet "through

incredibly violent allegory represented the failings of the modern economy,"

(Kvaran 955). The connection between the slasher films in the Regan era and the

first decade of the 21st century is again economic uncertainty, and recession writes

Kvaran. It is significant that each of the main slasher franchises were rebooted in

the 2000s along with other horror classics.[26] However, the reboots are darker,

grimier, and take themselves far more serious than their original versions.

Comparing the original and remade narratives the message to the audience is that

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[26] *Halloween* was remade in 2007, *Friday the 13th* in 2009 and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* 2010.
Romero's heavy satire of consumer culture with survivors of a zombie apocalypse sheltering in a
shopping mall, *Dawn of the Dead* was remade in 2004.

things "have gotten worse," writes Kvaran, "the surface optimism of the 1980s is absent in the remakes," (966). The reboots shift their main characters from solid middle-class positions to harsher economic realities writes Kvaran (965). The reason for this argues Kvaran is that instant awareness the potential personal impact of economic news is now "part of everyday reality for most young people in America", through "the ubiquitous presence of new media" as a primary source of news consumption (967). An instant awareness of information and potential impact doesn't fully explain the hopelessness apparent in the 21st century reboots. Information may be instant, comprehension however is not. In *N3RD* the danger stems from imagination limited to fear. Fear is a potent emotion; it grabs attention in a dark street or a dramatic headline. Slasher films do well in difficult times because for the industry they are inexpensive to make:

> From the consumer perspective the films represented, to their largely teenage audience, the perils of coming of age in those very same harsh economic times. Summer camps, small towns, and suburbs, the very hallmarks of safe middle-class America, the world their baby boomer parents created for them was, in fact, not safe at all. They were faced with the tough reality that they would not be as financially successful as their parents. In slasher films, this looming uncertainty took the form of an unstoppable serial killer, (956).

Such films serve allegorically argues Kvaran, providing a catharsis for young adults coming of age in economically and politically uncertain times (953). While the new films were successful the studios shied away from the risk of continuing with sequels, "these films no longer represent a sure financial bet" writes Kvaran (968). It seems the studio's fear echoes the audience, a sequel "would not be as financially successful" as its parent film, best not risk it. Risk, however, is something each

neighborhood player accepts in order to advance to the Final House in the Last Chapter, where "you can't resurrect" (223).

In the Final House abstract realistic staging and naturalistic dialog replace the transitional monologue and abstract elements used up to this point. Throughout, the walkthrough monologues have served to orient the game world for the audience. Presumably the audience needs no help in understanding a realistic staging. However, the abrupt change in staging serves to misdirect the audience by indicating that the prior scenes were unreal, perhaps generated in the game, and this scene as taking place in the *real*, real world. Realistic staging sets a tone of safety and familiarity, which is Haley's intent. The illusion is short-lived, as Blake's actions in game now manifest inside his physical house. Blake reports into his computer headset that he has lost his weapon in the game. "I'm unarmed," he states, "I dropped my hammer somewhere on the stairs," (Haley, *N3RD* 256). His mother has found a bloody hammer on her stairs which she brandishes at Blake exclaiming, "You don't see anything outside of your game. You don't see anything that's real!" (257). The audience now knows that the Claw Hammer acquired in the opening walkthrough monologue was Blake's. Blake has been identified as "zombiekllr14". Has everything been from Blake's perspective as he plays the game? Perhaps not literally, the unfolding of scenes implies that the perspective is relative to the player. Upon reaching the "Final House" each player in turn experiences it as their own house. Several game weapons appear in the walkthroughs which are later reported to have been used by the end of the play; however it is the "Claw Hammer" picked up in the opening walkthrough that is the weapon for the final showdown. As it is

106

Blake's hammer, it follows that the play is from Blake's perspective; or is it? Blake

faces off with Joy in his bedroom. The showdown resonates on multiple binaries;

there is also a symbolism in the names. Blake raises a weapon not only against his

mother but against what she represents, the hope, clarity and good feeling, the

optimism and joy that fear, panic and desperate control smother.[27]

Two perspectives come to a head in a pitched moment of vulnerability and

power, parent and child as reflected in the play's character binary. Joy, wields a

gore smeared hammer while screaming at her cowering son. Fear has a special

power in this world. The play states that in this neighborhood, in this game,

"imagination/creates reality" and fears manifest into a physical threat, a monster

(231). Both Steve and Joy recognize their own monstrosity reflected in their child's

fear, and in their moment of clarity and apology each is slain. Blake responds to his

mother, not as her son, but as "zombiekllr14". He grabs the hammer and uses it to

destroy the "zombie" before him. Chelsea also responded to her father's plea with

her preferred game weapon, a golf club (240). Tyler stabbed his mother with the

BBQ fork (221). All over the neighborhood, families implode in violence.

Morning in America

There is an intertextual resonance with slasher films and *N3RD* in the

brutality of the violence, the disturbance of the setting, the ineffectual adults, and

the lone survivor. The similarities with slasher films are stronger than with zombie

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[27] On names, I suspect Blake may be a nod to William Blake and the imagery of this scene is reminiscent of his painting: The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun.

pictures, even though the classic monster in *N3RD* is the zombie. Zombies work within the game layer of the play, while the cinematic layer draws more from the trappings of another kind of horror narrative. In a slasher film the killer is a single relentless and human force, says Kvaran, using "a melee weapon" an object just "lying around," (Kvaran 957). Horror strikes an expected safe place like "a school, a small town, a summer camp, a suburban neighborhood" that according to Kvaran "has been perverted by the killer," (957). One by one a group of young people is tested against the killer without aid from adults or other authorities. Kvaran writes that Slasher films "taught teenagers that when trouble hit, be it financial or homicidal, they would be on their own. Young adults would be expected to navigate this new dangerous world without any help from authority figures," (960). Few adults inhabit the slasher world, and those who do often refuse to acknowledge the danger. In some instances "adults and parents actually make things harder on the adolescent heroes," says Kvaran, "the behavior of the adult characters blatantly, if metaphorically, betrayed the young adults in the films," while "well-meaning" their intentions "to try to safeguard their children" are "completely counterproductive," and while "the children's lives improve in the short term" they end tragically (960). The *N3RD* adults are more concerned with a hypothetical fear, that their teens may be playing online games with a pedophile, than with the alarm raised by a few teens that something very wrong is happening between the game and the neighborhood. Doug uses motivational quotes to avoid unpleasantness and emotion when speaking to his son. Similar to *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, well-meaning adults become complicit in the violence effecting their families. In this film, the teens are being

picked off in their dreams by the vengeful spirit of a child murderer, Freddy, who

was himself slain by the neighborhood parents in order to protect their children. By

murdering Freddy in the backstory, the parents provide the conduit for Freddy to

attack the children from beyond the grave. Actor Robert Englund who played

Freddy describes the parents as near villains, "all the adults are damaged: They're

alcoholic, they're on pills, they're not around," (Marks and Tannenbaum). Kvaran

considers *Nightmare*, to be the most explicit, of the slasher franchises she examined,

in criticizing the actions of adults in relation to consequences dealt on the younger

generation. The nightmare in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* is the corruption of an

idyllic middle-class neighborhood by a brutal force whose rational has been

deliberately hidden.

> [Freddy's] backstory most clearly reflects the shortsighted economic policies
> of the era. Middle-class life in the suburbs was good for kids but the
> economic situation and policies created in the 1970s and 1980s were having
> a negative impact on young adults' futures, and those in power did not want
> to hear it. They wanted Reagan's 'Morning in America.' In fact, *A Nightmare
> on Elm Street* was released in 1984, the same year that Ronald Reagan ran for
> reelection and released his famous campaign advertisement. Adults in the
> world of *Nightmare* were unwilling, or unable, to grasp the long-term
> consequences of their actions, and were the most responsible of those in any
> of the franchises for dooming their offspring, (961).

Believing they resolved the threat of Freddy in the past the adults are particularly

blind and resistant to their teens fears of a dream boogieman. In *A Nightmare on

Elm Street*, writes Kvaran, the parents "constantly try to get the teenagers to go to

sleep," the one action that directly exposes them to danger, but because of "the

authority figures' myopic worldview" the parents "refuse to see the dangerous

situation that they created," (961). A similar dynamic plays out in *N3RD* where the

adults refuse to act and instead continually enable the game playing which has

109

become the sole avenue of connection for the teens. Leslie doesn't want to disturb

her daughter when she's gaming (Haley, *N3RD* 195). Vicki prefers not to know what

her son is keeping secret (198). There's a harmonic parallel between *Nightmare* and

N3RD, Haley even includes a textual cameo for Freddy. Chelsea, the "level 90 gothic

cheerleader/with a plus 12 proficiency in the Golf Club" dressed as Freddy for the

neighborhood Halloween party (236). The *N3RD* parents are just as damaged as the

ones in *Nightmare*, and the boundaries of reality have a similar dreamlike edge in

the play. Even the ironic twist on the myth of "Morning in America" rings out with

the abrupt and brutal collapse of family after family. As Barbara frantically searches

for her husband and son, her words eerily echo real world events: "all the houses

with/yellow tape/no one will tell me/what's going on" (243). Kvaran connects the

trend of rebooting the slasher franchise films to the 2008 housing crisis:

> Home ownership, for decades one of the main hallmarks of the middle-class
> American dream, became something of a trap. By the end of 2006 many
> American home owners were defaulting on their mortgages in increasing
> numbers. The foreclosure rate in 2008 was 225 percent higher than it had
> been in 2006. Many found they now owed more on their homes than the
> houses were worth (Kvaran 965).[28]

Something more than a generational divide, and more than a communication

disconnect of digital kids *vs.* analog adults separates *N3RD*. Layers of façades and

controlled appearances peel away revealing hidden fear. The fear of "death, defeat,

[and] poverty," (960). Leslie's house is in foreclosure and she's taken out a new

credit card to pay for her alcoholic husband's rehab. Her daughter Madison found

out and has given up on everything except completing the game (Haley, *N3RD* 218).

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[28] Kvaran cites: Eileen A. J. Connelly, "Economic Crisis Timeline: A Decade in Review," *Huffington Post*, 18 Dec. 2009, and Stephanie Armour, "2008 Foreclosure Filings Set Record," *USA Today*, 3 Feb. 2009.

Kvaran writes that "In slasher films the trappings and protections of modern society merely create an illusion of safety," (Kvaran 962). Leslie hides the foreclosure and credit card documents from her family, and prioritizes fixing food for unwelcome house guests. The safety of the suburb with its lawn care rules and pocket parks becomes a gauntlet of gore and monsters under flickering streetlamps. "The accoutrements of modern society do not help the victims in slasher films," according to Kvaran, failure of technology and conveniences "highlight the idea that the teenagers in the films, and in the audience, were betrayed by modern society. Places that were supposed to be safe were, in fact, dangerous. People who were supposed to protect them were, in fact, useless," (961). Who precisely are the victims in *N3RD*? The adult characters show a willful insistence to overlook and forget what disturbs them. Kaitlyn warns Vicki, her ex-boyfriend's mother, to pay attention to her son, "if you don't/look at something/it can kind of/blow up" (Haley, *N3RD* 207). Vicki obscures every indication that there is a problem with her family. She puffs herself up as a good parent for respecting her son's privacy and repeats her mantra, "we give him/everything/he needs" (204, 207). When the idea that something is wrong becomes too apparent Vicki shuts down the conversation, dismisses Kaitlyn and sends her brusquely on her way (207). Steve half-jokingly implies he'd like to fire his daughter. Like the damaged parents of Elm Street, the adults in *N3RD* evoke little sympathy, and the teens are the ones taking up arms against their families, though shrouded under the precept of a game.

In a slasher movie there is usually a single threat, a monster against a multitude of victims, culminating in a showdown between the monster and "The

111

Final Girl" (Clover 201). This formula is honed to a point in the slasher with a relentless killer almost mechanically dispatching each victim that crosses their path. Clover defines the Final Girl as the "one character of stature who does live to tell the tale" who stands out as a protagonist gradually separated from the pack (207).

> She is intelligent, watchful, levelheaded; the first character to sense something amiss and the only one to deduce from the accumulating evidence the patterns and extent of the threat; the only one, in other words, whose perspective approaches our own privileged understanding of the situation (207).

Angela Weaver, A. Dana Ménard, Christine Cabrera and Angela Taylor conducted a quantitative analysis of the most financially successful slasher films in recent years to determine the characteristics of the Final Girl trope. In their essay, "Embodying the Moral Code? Thirty Years of Final Girls in Slasher Films" they determined that the sole survivor in a slasher film will be a girl, specifically one who is an attractive, modest, independent and resourceful (Weaver et al. 45). However, their results indicate that little more than half of the time the final girl is not the lone survivor and may be partnered with a "Final Boy" (40). The study provides empirical data for a theoretical discussion dating back to Clover's 1987 "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film" essay. Weaver et al. conclude that while their results support some prevailing hypotheses, "the Final Girl is a far more complex character than she is usually imagined to be," (41). The Final Girl is defined by Weaver et al. as:

> A primary character who out-lives all (or almost all) of the other primary characters, who survives one or more attack attempts by the killer, whose battle against the killer is the focus of the final act (i.e., final 1/3rd) of the film, and who is ultimately instrumental in destroying (or seemingly destroying) the killer (38).[29]

Only Blake is left at the end of *N3RD*, alone on stage calling for his mother. Does Blake ally with the Final Girl (or Final Boy trope)?

From Clover's definition, Makaela or Kaitlyn are a better fit. Each sense something is amiss and see patterns in the actions connecting the game and the real world. Neither survive more than one attempt by the killer as put forward by Weaver et al., however each character in the play only faces the "killer" once within the structure so this component doesn't fit. Makaela and Kaitlyn's battle with the threat is nullified by their withdrawal from the game so it doesn't occupy the final act. Makaela, arguably is in fact the *first* girl in the play, who by deducing the "extent of the threat" in the opening scene, and refusing to play subverts the trope (Clover 207). Blake on the other hand charges into a digital recreation of his own bedroom, oblivious to the danger until his mother finds his bloody hammer on the stairs. He is not levelheaded or watchful as Clover's "Final Girls". His showdown does occupy the end of the play and his experience is the perspective the audience is left with. Whether or not he destroys the killer is more complex. Blake kills Barbara and Joy, and may or may not have killed other characters in game depending on how the POV

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[29] For additional discussion of the Final Girl trope see: Clover, C. J. (1992). *Men, women, and chainsaws: Gender in the modern horror film*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.; Reiser, K. (2001). Masculinity and monstrosity: Characterization and identification in the slasher film. *Men and Masculinities*, 3, 370–392. doi: 10.1177/1097184X01003004002; Rockoff, A. (2002). *Going to pieces: The rise and fall of the slasher film*, 1978–1986. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Publishing.; Trencansky, S. (2001). Final girls and terrible youth: Transgression in 1980s slasher horror. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 29, 63–73. doi: 10.1080/01956050109601010; Wee, V. (2006). Resurrecting and updating the teen slasher: The case of Scream. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 34, 50–61. doi:10.3200/JPFT .34.2.50-61

of each scene is interpreted. If each scene is in fact a game scene advancing toward the Last Chapter then perhaps Blake is the character "whose perspective approaches our own privileged understanding of the situation," and therefore the one most closely matching Clover's Final Girl (207).

Haley however has a greater subversion for the intertextual trope. *N3RD* doesn't have a "Final Girl" because it has a "Final House" (Haley, *N3RD* 253). The Neighborhood collectively is the victim. In each family, those playing the game advance by defeating the zombie residents of the neighborhood. All the houses where the game is being played are mapped and marked in a "key for points of/Zombie infiltration," (195). To escape the neighborhood and finish the game the players must enter the "Last Chapter" and find the "Final House" (215). Entering the Final House initiates a showdown between the player and their family, "cody said/in the Final House/there's a wormhole/once you go in/you take your family with you/they appear to you as/Zombies/and finally you can/kill them/without/remorse" (232). One by one the players drag their families through the Final House wormhole. Escaping the neighborhood is the same as escaping the parents, another element *N3RD* shares with slasher cinema. According to Clover, "It is this disabling cathexis to one's parents that must be killed and rekilled in the service of sexual autonomy. When the Final Girl stands at last in the light of day with the knife in her hand, she has delivered herself into the adult world," (Clover 211). Clover points out how in many films the killer is caught in a "psychosexual grip" from a parent:

The difference is between past and present and between failure and success. The Final Girl enacts in the present, and successfully, the parenticidal struggle that the killer himself enacted unsuccessfully in his own past-a past that constitutes the film's backstory. She is what the killer once was; he is what she could become should she fail in her battle for sexual selfhood (211).

For Clover, the narrative in the slasher film is psychological, about "sex and parents" (211). Kvaran's argument is socioeconomic, the slasher is about failure and success where survival depends on severing parental narratives in order to adapt to the reality of the moment however brutal (Kvaran 954). Kvaran writes that the killer took the form of limited employment, growing inequality, higher tuition, the fear of nuclear war, and market crashes: "The teenage audience of slasher films would soon be thrust into this adult world, and it was a terrifying place; moreover, they could not count on modernity or authority figures to help them," (956). In these stories "the adults are unwilling to acknowledge the...consequences of their actions and more kids die as a result," (961). The final girl survives, because she alone became aware of the danger and through her actions endures against the odds (Kvaran 958). In *N3RD* there isn't a final girl though, there's a Final House. When Blake pushes himself back from the computer, and calls for his mother, the question of POV and "What was real?" is left for the audience. Haley explains in a short promotional video for Samuel French:

There's the switcheroo at the end where we have the naturalistic set. One of the things I like about that is that if we are going along in a more abstract environment, and suddenly we're in a naturalistic set, will the audience suddenly now think that now: "Oh this is real." And then the very last scene is the twist of: "But is it?" It doesn't matter once again what exactly the container is—what you're looking at—what is the underlying reality, is the question we keep coming back to (*Jennifer Haley on Producing Neighborhood 3*, Samuel French).

From Blake's perspective the ending offers a second chance to get up from his

computer and talk to his mother as Barbara begged him to do.

It is the house that calls for help at the beginning of the play (Haley, *N3RD*

177). The house mirrors all the other houses on the block, and is interconnected by

wormholes (207). The imagery of mirrored houses and wormholes recalls a

carnival fun house. If every house is the same, then every house needs help. The

victim in this horror ride is the neighborhood itself, the planned and coded structure

that needs to adapt fast to the very real, very brutal threat facing it.

> we thought
> when we moved here
> we were moving
> up
> but all the Neighborhoods
> are mirror images
> all the Neighborhoods
> fold onto each other
> don't go in
> the Final House
> there are no levels
> there's no moving up
> there's no
> getting
> out (253).

Escaping a fun house maze requires first becoming aware of the obstacles and traps

designed to mislead, frighten, distort and distract.

Consumers There to be Damaged: *N3RD* and the Zombie MacGuffin

One layer of *N3RD* functions like a classic slasher film, on another plane the

play functions like an open world video game. In the game world, the threat and

opportunity for player advancement comes from violently destroying zombies who

reside in the neighborhood. Not a single zombie however appears on stage. The

zombies serve as both a classic MacGuffin apparatus driving the plot and as

symbolic cultural monsters. According to Kyle William Bishop author of *American*

Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture,

zombies are a uniquely American monster being the "only canonical movie monster

to originate in the New World," (Bishop 31). The main tropes of the modern zombie

monster, writes Bishop, originated from George Romero's 1968 film, *Night of the*

Living Dead which differentiates the infectious, mindless, ravenous and all-

consuming corpse from the enslaved puppet minions of voodoo folklore (94). Like

older folklore monsters, zombie narrative acts as a lens to view the fears and actions

of a "society or generation" argues Bishop:

> the zombie functions primarily as a social and cultural metaphor, a creature
> that comments on the society that produced it by confronting audiences with
> fantastic narratives of excesses and extremes. By forcing viewers to face
> their greatest fears concerning life and death, health and decay, freedom and
> enslavement, prosperity and destruction, the zombie narrative provides an
> insightful look into the darkest heart of modern society, (Bishop 31).

For Romero, the criticism intended in his 1968 horror was social, "What we were

talking about mostly was the disintegration of the family unit and of the

community," Romero tells Mark Gatiss in a 2010 interview (Gatiss). *Night of the*

Living Dead reflects the civil unrest of America during the Vietnam and Civil Rights

era, while Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* a decade later satirizes the growing emphasis

on consumer culture. In his first film Romero added two features to the folklore of

the zombie "limited autonomy and insatiable cannibalism," writes Bishop (Bishop

139). *Dawn of the Dead* is set within a shopping mall where Romero balances

horror with satire (Gatiss). "Seeing them walking the corridors it actually occurred to me that this is us, this REALLY is us," Romero tells Gatiss, "There is something about desire. Zombies desire to be us. They desire to eat us. And we desire running shoes and candles that smell nice," (Gatiss). For Bishop, Romero's "mall zombies" illustrate "an exaggeration of the late capitalist bourgeoisie" where "blind consumption without any productive contribution" shifts the colonial zombie slave to a post-colonial thrall of "their own consumerism," (Bishop 139).

The 21st century cinematic zombie maintains much from Romero's mall zombie. Today's undead are less likely to be relentless, plodding corpses, but fierce, fast, and infected. Starting with Boyle's *28 Days Later* zombies became significantly more aggressive. Boyle's film is a favorite of Haley's (personal interview). Peter Dendle explains in his essay, "Zombie Movies and the 'Millennial Generation'" this trend may be media centric, stemming from filmmakers adapting to cinema audiences now "comfortable with visual fragmentation, multiple points of view and 360 panoramic sweeps, speeding and slowing time sequences, and rapid-fire cuts and transitions" (Dendle 179). To increase intensity some frames in action sequences were removed in the 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead*, Dendle describes the effect as "a panicky, strobe-light feel" that intensifies the action (179). In *N3RD* Haley's truncated dialog has a similar frenetic effect:

No
do not
go in
maybe
it's not
too late
if some of you
don't
go in
maybe
oh god
cody (Haley, *N3RD* 252).

Zombie stories become strong cathartic outlets for cultures torn by war, economic

instability, hardships and natural disasters. Bishop argues that the renaissance of

zombies in pop culture occurring in the first decade of the 21st century relates

directly to the events on 9/11, the subsequent ongoing wars in Afghanistan and

Iraq, and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Bishop 27). Haley's play about a

virtual zombie invasion of a suburban neighborhood slots neatly into the zombie

renaissance with one key difference. The template for a zombie apocalypse

narrative includes a dystopian landscape of collapse, and a rag tag collection of

survivors torn between in-fighting and evading the mass of undead that seek to

consume them. Haley turns this trope inside out. The zombies in *N3RD* live in an

idealized environment of trimmed lawns, affluence, and order. Haley shrouds the

true identity of her zombies until late in the play, but from the first scene the

zombies are tied to the residents of the neighborhood, because the game maps the

player's own neighborhood into the game (Haley, *N3RD* 184). The dystopian

zombie landscape exists however within the *mise en abyme* of the game. The gamic

identity of the zombies appears at the front of the script where the characters are

identified not as "characters" but as "players," indicating the theatrical gameworld within a play (175).

Haley's selection of zombies as her symbolic monster resonates against both the suburban setting of the play and the virtual online game within the play. While the zombie originally spawned in cinema it is also a favorite choice for video games. Zombies as video game monsters begins with Capcom's 1996 *Biohazard*, but has it's roots in Romero's films says Bishop (Bishop 16). *Dawn of the Dead* blends social satire with gore comments Gatiss in his 2010 BBC Four documentary series *A History of Horror with Mark Gatiss*. The film has "one of the highest body counts of any film to date" though the bodies are technically "already dead" (Gatiss). The protagonists fire on the zombies like contestants in a carnival shooting gallery. Romero compares the zombies to the Coyote in Warner Brothers Roadrunner and Coyote cartoons, "I think the zombies are the coyotes of monster land. They are there to be damaged," (Gatiss). Romero ruminates that the zombie's nature, "They are just so sort of *schlubby*," which forgives the violence acted upon them. Romero remarks, "There is a certain kind of enjoyment from seeing the coyote fall off the cliff," (Gatiss). Entrenched as acceptable fodder in video games, Haley places zombies into the "Final House" end-game as the parents of the player. As a social and cultural metaphor Haley's zombies reflect the excesses of American culture disconnected from the extremes left in the wake of war, waste, financial, and natural disasters. Like Romero's first zombies, the *N3RD* zombies illustrate decadence and the ruin of family and community. The Final House, like Clover's Final Girl, represents the choice between failure and success, as goes the house so goes the

neighborhood, and the country. It's Blake, the teen who finds himself at his

computer calling for his mother, but *N3RD* while gamic and cinematic in turn is

neither. This is a stage drama of zombification, a virtual simulation in real time and

real space intended to unsettle an audience of the living.

Disturbing Reflections of Us

Haley on stage like De Palma and Hitchcock in film, uses "techniques that

remind us that we are watching a film and that emotional involvement is only one

pole of cinematic experience, paired with analytic detachment," (Gottlieb and

Brookhouse 47). The compositions, especially the use of a dioptric foregrounding

effect, illuminate the crafted nature of the image and flatten the perspective. Haley

intentionally disturbs the transparent reflection of realism, there's more going on

than a video game about zombies in suburbia. With *N3RD* Haley established a

template for more complex digital dramaturgy that she pushes further in *The

Nether*. In *N3RD*, Haley used the techniques and aesthetics from cinema and video

games to construct a mediaphor. This *N3RD* mediaphor resembles Brian De Palma's

films in the early 1980s. De Palma capitalized on using the split-field diopter lens to

emphasis two distinct fields of focus in a single shot. Haley's technique diverts

attention to the act of watching a play. Shifting between different notions of reality,

Haley uses the perspective of an unstable point of view to frame the nonplace of

suburbia as a violent slasher film, or a survival role-playing game. The idyllic façade

of the neighborhood in the daylight collapses into nightmare, reflecting the myopia

of the adults with the desperate grapple for control exerted by their children. The

zombies in this tale are creatures symbolizing the excesses and extremes of the U.S.

represented by the virtual reality of suburbia. The killers who stalk the zombies

reflect an impending economic doom relentless as a storm. The symbolic zombie

apocalypse descending on America is the natural consequence of an American

dream model adopted, packaged and sold like cookie cutter houses along a cul de

sac. Too much is planned, coded, and scripted. "I've been a web designer for many

years and I am very familiar with the internet. I'm familiar with coding," Haley says

about her inspiration for *N3RD*:

> I watched these dynamics play out with my parents, and my brothers, and my
> brother's friends and their parents, in this neighborhood—this suburban
> neighborhood that, I found, was very planned. It is almost like you design a
> video game, and you design a neighborhood. And these suburban
> neighborhoods are so planned, it doesn't leave any room for—I don't think—
> adventure, and so the kids make their own adventure, (Jennifer Haley on
> *Neighborhood 3 Requisition of Doom*, Dir. Samuel French).

N3RD itself is a theatrical harbinger demonstrating it is not too late, to question, to

see, and to adapt— to push back from constructed images, and call out for more

nurturing connections.

In the next chapter I examine how with *The Nether*, Haley spins the rampant

parental fear of the pedophile in *N3RD* into a new investigation of reality. Adopting

the techniques of a television police procedural, Haley applies the trappings of

realism to construct an intertexual interface between the audience and the play,

replacing the split dioptric view with a transparent cinematic gaze.

CHAPTER IV

THE NETHER AS AN INTERFACE:

MELODRAMA IN THE RHIZOME

> "*The Nutshells[30]* are essentially about teaching people how to see....
> So much of our culture has gone digital,
> and that's where craft shines, because it's three-dimensional.
> You can't really understand it from the Internet, or from a flat page;
> you have to investigate it fully in the round,"
> (Nora Atkinson, Smithsonian American Art Museum).

> "I would wake to my bedroom wall aglitter with sunshine, the sound of wind washing through the leaves, and my mother at the window. She said, The only way you hear the wind is if it has leaves to blow through."
> (Haley *The Nether* 46).

> "I need to remind you this is a business," (Haley *The Nether* 63).

In *The Nether* Haley returns to virtuality as the setting for her drama, in this instance showcasing a very contemporary cultural transition, the movement of a culture and an economy run on things to one driven by play. Leveraging the aesthetics and techniques of realism, Haley immerses the audience within the "knotty problems[31]" posed by technology, or more precisely the conflicts and

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[30] *Murder Is Her Hobby: Frances Glessner Lee and The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death* was an exhibition of 19 true crime dioramas constructed by Frances Glessner Lee in the mid 20th century. These virtual reality tools were used to train law enforcement on proper crime scene analysis. For more information see the Smithsonian American Art Museum Exhibitions (https://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/nutshells).

[31] "These knotty problems" is a turn of phrase I've leveraged from comments made by *The Nether* director Jeremy Herrin in a post-show talk back in May of 2015. (*The Nether - The Nether - Jennifer Haley and Jeremy Herrin in Conversation*. Prod. Headlong Theatre. Perf. Jennifer Haley, Jeremy Herrin,

emergent qualities of distributed systems and human beings. This is "a new socioeconomic landscape" writes Galloway in his essay, "The Unworkable Interface," one he calls "ludic capitalism," which replaces the organizational structure and labor of industrialization with a fluid framework reliant on "flexibility, play, creativity, and immaterial labor" (Galloway, "The Unworkable Interface" 933). Play in this landscape "is a synthesis of these two influences: romanticism and systems theory," (934). Galloway is referring to a general notion of play within the economy, specifically the dynamic complex interactions between neoliberal market values and digital technology. With *The Nether*, Haley theatricalizes the internet and an aspect of ludic capitalism. Haley's narrative constructs a playful interface that allows social taboo to provoke a dialog between the background of technology and code, and the foreground of cultural norms and tolerance. Drawing from Galloway and States, I argue *The Nether* operates as an interface for the audience between the real and the virtual as a "romantico-cybernetic" allegory for contemporary virtual life (934).

Haley captures the complexity of the internet theatrically and metaphorically by dramatizing role-play. "Crucially, [Haley] found a way to put [the internet] on stage by not putting it on stage" says director Jeremy Herrin, "There was something really fantastically producible about that sort of icky, neo-Victorian world" (Headlong Theatre. *The Nether - The Nether - Jennifer Haley and Jeremy Herrin in Conversation*). Haley constructs a diorama; a spectacular, life-size, partly translucent model in three dimensions designed to help the audience see

and Sarah Grochala. *Youtube.com*. Headlong Theatre, 26 May 2015. Web. Post show talk back at The Duke of York theatre in London.)

"something very dangerous and very difficult" that is also complex, multi-dimensional, and very relevant (Headlong Theatre). Haley's neo-Victorian metaphor encapsulates the cultural and economic value shift from a society obsessed with the manufacture and acquisition of things to one captivated by "non-things." *In Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design*, Flusser writes that 'Non-things' are information and experiences (Flusser, Shape 85). For Flusser, the Industrial Revolution is the best model, to examine and predict what will happen to a culture that is no longer "concerned with things, but with information, symbols, codes and models," (88). The working class decline because they are the makers for things, while the "managers and apparatchiks" who produce "non-things" rise says Flusser (87). The values of production and acquisition which formed the moral foundation of the middle class transforms consumption, writes Flusser, "Life in an environment that is becoming immaterial takes on a new complexion," (87). The home transitions from a shelter and personal retreat to "the nucleus of an interpersonal network," (83). Devices that bring the world into the home also reveal the home to the world offering "unimaginable totalitarianism" at one extreme, and cooperative unity at the other (83, 84). Work changes in response. Flusser writes how the hand is reduced to fingertips tapping "on keys so as to play with symbols" (89).

During the transition from an industrial world of things to the ludic capitalist realm of non-things Flusser warns of a developing "new imperialism", where those few who "have control over information" will "dominate" the rest, and he warns that these elites will go on to "sell this information at inflated prices to a dominated humanity," (88). In their own way Galloway, Rushkoff, and Lessig also caution about

125

the power dynamic between a technologically literate elite and everyone else.

Historically every technological advancement created a new literacy for the general

population paired with a new elite controlling the new medium, writes Rushkoff in

his 2010 book *Program or Be Programmed*. The wrinkle with digital media is the

abstract distance between human language and code, and the elite programmers

who create a functioning reality for everyone else. Rushkoff writes, "And this time,

the stakes are actually even higher. Before, failing meant surrendering our agency

to a new elite. In a digital age, failure could mean relinquishing our nascent

collective agency to the machines themselves. The process appears to have already

begun," (Rushkoff, *Program or Be Programmed* 14). A fairly homogeneous group

constructed the digital, writes Galloway, this technocratic elite consists of mostly

white, affluent and well educated men primarily concerned with scientific and

technical advancement (Galloway, *Protocol* 122). Programmers and protocol dictate

how data is transferred, identity is traced, what can be seen and said in the digital.

What is important to remember is that code is written not divined. "[T]hese are

choices," Lessig writes, designed by programmers not dictated by physical laws

(Lessig, *Code 2.0* 318). The digital is biased towards possibility, explains Galloway

"From the perspective of protocol, if you can do it, it can't be bad" (Galloway,

Protocol 168). Ideology must be selected and designed into the coding by the

programmers. If the technocratic elites are left alone to program without

connection and critique of the general population then the bias endemic in the

medium will shift toward the machine. Rushkoff advocates comprehending the bias

in the technology as the strategy to command the tool rather than conform to it

(Rushkoff, *Program or Be Programmed* 34).

What does ludic capitalism, non-things, romantico-cybernetic play, and technological elites have to do with a stage play involving pedophilia? A theatrical interface provides a way for narrative to engage with technology's current cultural dominance and process potential dreams and nightmares. Haley's use of mediaphor in *The Nether* again employs *mise en abyme*, this time featuring the hallmarks of realism and television's police procedural. Haley embeds a 19th century world of "things" simulation, the very essence of "non-things" within a speculative near future. She intertwines nostalgia with dystopian daydreams into a staged science fiction thriller. Science fiction always operates as a lens to view contemporary culture (Suvin 64). While uncommon on stage the novelty of the genre used earnestly on a theatrical platform exposes the mechanism and human craft behind technology in a way uniquely rooted theatre: the art of material simulation in real time and space. Pedophilia is only the lure, though a complex and barbed one. Pedophilia performs as a unifying element that starts the audience at a point of moral comfort, a position that is compromised as the narrative unfolds.

The Nether is a virtuality fairy tale: dark, alluring, and a bit gruesome. The narrative acts as an effective and poetic interface for today's "ludic capitalist landscape", which according to Galloway grows out of the values of neoliberal economism and the decentralized distribution of data (Galloway, "The Unworkable Interface" 934). Play is now a primary component for how society functions. Visible not only in leisure options, such as the futuristic role-play platform present in *The*

Nether. The Hideaway is an online pleasure palace, a virtual brothel specializing in

sexualized age play. Sims' primary enterprise is sophisticated make-believe in a

digital sandbox of his creation. Play is also embedded in the complex interactions of

markets, and the devices and processes used by e-commerce and social media.

Galloway writes:

> Play is the thing that overcomes systemic contradiction but always via
> recourse to that special, ineffable thing that makes us most human. It is, as it
> were, *a melodrama of the rhizome*,[32] (935).

What is meant by "melodrama of the rhizome"? Galloway is riffing off his

"romantico-cybernetic play" as a method of engaging with digital systems, and

Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome from their *Thousand Plateaus*. The

rhizome replaces the linear organizational structure of hierarchy with planar

exchanges (Deleuze and Guattari 13). Galloway is writing about software interfaces

as aesthetic and utilitarian devices. Romantico-cybernetic play rises out of postwar

culture fusing systems theory with romanticism, according to Galloway it is a

practical expression of poetry and design: "one is expressive, consummated in an

instant; the other is iterative, extending in all directions," (934).

> The world's entities are no longer contained and contextless but are forever
> operating within ecosystems of interplay and correspondence. This is a
> notion of play centered on economic flows and balances, multilateral
> associations between things, a resolution of complex systemic relationships
> via mutual experimenting, mutual compromise, mutual engagement, (934).

Romantico-cybernetic play is also at work in Rushkoff's "sharing economy" where

peer-to-peer exchanges become commodified applications that disrupt industries[33].

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[32] Italic emphasis from source.

Algorithms are deployed to "combat inefficiency and idleness" allowing anyone with

the app to exchange their time or property for currency (Rushkoff, *Throwing Rocks*

at the Google Bus: How Growth Became the Enemy of Prosperity 47). The sharing

economy is also known as "the low-wage gig economy" writes Rushkoff, behind the

business practices and consumer responses is a "mechanism" at play subverting

businesses, consumers and investors:

> forcing them to compete against players with digitally inflated poker chips. It's the pressure rendering CEOs powerless to prioritize the sustainability of their enterprises over the interests of impatient shareholders. It is the unidentified culprit behind the news headlines of economic crises from the Greek default to skyrocketing student debt. It is the force exacerbating wealth disparity, increasing the pay gap between employees and executives, and generating the power-law dynamics separating winners from losers, (4).

Sharing is however a misnomer, a holdover from online exchanges before

commodification, "it's not really sharing; it's selling" says Rushkoff, "Uber is no more

a taxi service than Airbnb is a hotel chain. These are apps—beautiful ones but

ultimately very simple ones—that make their money by encouraging people to

engage in freelance versions of previously regulated industries," (47). How different

is Doyle really from the Uber driver risking his car for a few dollars and a couple

hours? He is immaterial labor sharing his time for someone else's gain. Comparing

Galloway's words on "romantico-cybernetic play" with Doyle's speech from *The*

Nether reveals a dematerialized relationship parallel.

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[33] For more on what Rushkoff calls the "sharing economy" see *Throwing Rocks at the Google Bus: How Growth Became the Enemy of Prosperity* pages 44-54.

But there are no longer physical barriers to that contact. Now we may communicate with anyone, through any form we choose. And this communication — this experience of each other — is the root of consciousness. It is the universe wanting to know itself. Can't you see what a wonder it is that we may interact outside our bodies? It's as revolutionary as - discovering fire! (Haley, *The Nether* 23).

While Doyle speaks specifically of disembodiment, step back a little and he is also addressing an interaction of "non-things". According to Flusser humans work through sensing the environment (Flusser, *Shape* 90). The loss of "things" shifts the sensing from direct manipulation through handling to a direct engagement with the imagination and programs (89).

Galloway also links "romantico-cybernetic play" with what he calls the "juridico-geometric sublime" building off of Debord's description of the "nature of games"[34]. Romantico-cybernetic play engaging with the "juridico-geometric sublime" is Galloway's flavorful way to describe the rules and potential of code as the infrastructural foundation of contemporary culture (Galloway, "The Unworkable Interface" 934). There are three fundamental components of the "juridico-geometric sublime," and the internet provides an illustrative example of these elements says Galloway. They are:

the universal laws of protocological exchange, sprawling across complex topologies of aggregation and dissemination, and resulting in the awesome forces of "emergent" vitality, (934).

Manipulating these elements of "romantico-cybernetic play", call them the three Cs: control, complexities, and consequences, is the craft of the "poet-designer," Galloway's quintessential player with the skills and fortune to navigate the currents

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[34] Guy Debord, *Correspondance*, vol. 5, *Janvier* 1973 - *décembre* 1978 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2005), 466 (Galloway's translation).

of ludic capitalism (934). The "poet-designer" creates value from commanding data, harnessing networks, and exchanging tokens for labor. That value may come from dominating data exchanges for advertisement, constructing a central portal for online convenience shopping, or disrupting an industry grounded in the material world with new technology. The result of the poet-designer's enterprise is the interface, a mechanism of exchange and communication in today's world. Galloway argues the interface is a control allegory, a romantico-cybernetic concept that facilitates exchange, but is inherently flawed and "unworkable" (935). Galloway applies theatrical theory and concepts to software. He examines the software user interface in terms of politics and aesthetics, "a perspective on what form cultural production and the sociohistorical situation take as they are merged together," (935). He uses Aristotle's *Poetics* and Brecht's concept of alienation to anchor the two most common of his four classifications of interfaces. Aristotle represents a "Poetic" interface which is one that is aesthetically coherent and politically incoherent. The "ethical" interface aligns with Brecht for being aesthetically incoherent and politically coherent (953). Galloway presents a method for engaging with the interface critically, but more importantly he offers insight into how within this utilitarian device aesthetics and technology combine.

Haley's conscious application of transparent realism is key to understanding the interface of *The Nether*. Haley contrives the order of the timeline, controlling the moment when crucial identities are revealed. Within this constraint the drama behaves as a transparent piece of realism. Looking through an invisible fourth wall, the audience observes either a future interrogation room or a virtual 19th century

house. Haley's stylistic choice of realism works on multiple levels. It is the same device as that used by Ibsen and Chekhov. It is the creation of a sense of immediacy through transparency, that is by erasing "the act of representation" and offering a "unified visual space" (Bolter and Grusin 33). The transparency of realism is an attempt to present an "unmediated" interface. For some the aesthetic is "the ultimate goal" of representation and predates 19th century realism on stage by several centuries of perspective painting (30). The transparent, realistic interface is the aesthetic of choice for most films and dramatic television including the police procedural. Haley gets double the intermedial resonance from encouraging realism in *The Nether*. She connects the play to the theatrical roots of realism in the 19th century, to the immersive realism of television crime drama, and the speculative novum of hyper-sensual virtual reality.

The interrogation scenes with Morris are reminiscent of Chekhov. States notes that at the start of Chekhov's plays, "characters are already sitting," and the characters live "a continuing past tense." "Nothing puts the play so securely in the realm of endurance as this 'discovered' tableau," (States 72). *The Nether* opens with Morris and Sims in tableau literally sitting across a table from one another (Haley, *The Nether* 5). This picture repeats in the second scene swapping Sims for Doyle (9). In Chekhov "furniture becomes the seat of discontent; to be in one world and to dream of another is to confer on one's living space the status of a prison," (States 72). Sims refers to the interrogation room as a "perverted" space made to "twist people" and "terrorize them" through "psychological torture" (Haley, *The Nether* 69). Productions of the play find interesting ways to capture the 19th century

fantasy atmosphere and bleak future diorama. Adrian W. Jones designed an

enormous dollhouse on a revolve for the world premiere in Los Angeles (Center

Theatre Group. *The Nether Time Lapse Construction*). Laura Jellinek's utilitarian

brick background contained hidden openings into the back-lit world of the

Hideaway at the Lucille Lortel Theater for the NY premiere (*The Nether* MCC

Theater at The Lucille Lortel Theatre). In London, Es Devlin's award winning multi-

level media design for Herrin's production effectively used scale to offset the

physical from the virtual. The interrogation is rooted to the stage floor, with only a

table and two small functional chairs at the front of an apron before the proscenium.

The height above and to the sides is oppressive in its openness especially when lit

by the projection of hundreds of video captures of the exposed Doyle. The amount

of data that constructs the identity online dwarfs the physical being. The Hideaway

scenes are elevated and cut into the space behind the interrogation room.

Projections of high resolution close up video of poplar leaves frame the opening of

the Hideaway. The scale of the images and the raised position lend a dioramic and

almost dollhouse aesthetic (*The Nether*, The Duke of York's). Devlin's media design

uses projections, animation and video to transition the audience in and out of the

virtual world.

States says that Chekhov's rooms behave as background "because there is

very little onstage that holds a hidden meaning. The Chekhov room is a communal

locale," (States 72). The interrogation room is also an impersonal utility space.

States paints a dark view of Chekhov, one with a "peculiar tension between word

and scene, figure and ground" (74). Chekhov was also known for silence, pauses

133

that give the audience time to consider "the tactile world" of the furniture that
"encroaches on the human" (73).

> SIMS: This is a violation of my rights. My lawyers are the best in the field. You won't keep me out for long.
>
> MORRIS: Long enough to locate and detain your children.
>
> SIMS:
>
> MORRIS: What's wrong, Mr. Sims?
>
> SIMS:
>
> MORRIS: I thought you didn't have any children.
>
> SIMS:
> (Haley, *The Nether* 7).

Similar pauses pepper scene two with Doyle. The scene ends with a long pause from

both Doyle and Morris before Doyle concludes the scene with "I have nothing to

say," (10). The pauses of Chekhov slowly and relentlessly take over "you can hear

the ticking of the objects and the ceaseless flow of future into past: the world is no

longer covered by conversation," (States 73). Haley's final interrogation scene ends

in silence with four consecutive exchanges of pauses until Sims finally gives Morris

the location of his server. This weighted silence is a reflection on the prior scene,

the past where Doyle killed himself (Haley, *The Nether* 66). According to States,

"Time gives itself away in Chekhov as space gives itself away in Ibsen," (States 72).

This dynamic can be seen in the atmosphere of *The Nether* where the interrogation

room mimics Chekhovian space and The Hideaway reflects a home out of Ibsen. For

States, Ibsen is "the epitome of the nineteenth-century realistic theater's faith in

tropological discourse," (States 76). According to States Ibsen's worlds are

ideological with meaning built out of "blocks of metonymy and synecdoche" (76).

134

Sims constructed The Hideaway to support his ideology. It is a changeless world "outside of consequence" (Haley, *The Nether* 18). It is also a world of things: a phonograph, a game of jacks, a stuffed rabbit, a cake made of ice, cognac, and an axe are all things handled by the characters inside The Hideaway. Jensen describes theatre as a "polemical response to the production and reception of reality," (Jensen 11). For Ibsen and Chekhov reality was grounded in the materiality of things in space. The reality of Haley's audience includes many interfaces which pretend to not be there. By contrasting the aesthetic of 19th century realism in a 21st century drama about a virtual world Haley is helping the audience see the interface.

The scenes in the virtual Hideaway operate as *mise en abyme*, being both chronologically in the past, and inside a digital simulation. The realism is doubly disrupted by physical actuality of a virtual play-realm, and the levels of role-play of each character. The characters inside the Hideaway simulation perform for each other, but not the wider audience. In this way, the transparency of realism remains intact. The audience watches through the fourth wall experiencing both a dreary near future, and then a spectacular sensory immersion. Like Dorothy exiting her house into Munchkinland, the contrast between in-world and The Hideaway is important. Technological advances have made the virtual more beautiful, more engaging, and more accessible to everyone, but at a price. While the richness and opportunities of the virtual grows, the abundance of the physical world declines. Trees have been lost.

There is a symbolic resonance between Iris and the poplar sapling. Sims is exposed by Morris locating the rare tree planted in his real garden, which is similar

135

to how pedophiles can be exposed by tracing virtual images to their real computers.

Haley baits her audience combining the salaciousness of pedophilia with an opulent and nostalgic 19th century setting. Most brazenly she places the material flesh of a child on stage inside a narrative involving child sex and murder.[35] The body is an actual representation of Morris' "materials of the earth" with the appearance of a child and the symbolic weight of the lost trees. Morris uses an argument for realness being equated to physicality, "It's incredible what we have done using the materials of the earth. Not only have we built roads and cities, but we have created tools for our imagination," (Haley, *The Nether* 35). Yet Haley puts a child's body onstage as a proxy for the minerals, water and rare elements used for the purposes of industry and human pleasure.

The trees also represent a connection to things that cannot be untethered. As bags of flesh humans rely on the physical environment to stay alive this is a fact that is often unseen. Morris' argument that Sims would reject Doyle because he was an old man is contradictory. She says, "Yes, that's who he was. He was in the body God gave him...As in what we are given. What we are made of. The materials of the earth" (69). Sims built The Hideaway because of "who he was" and his body, his biology, the materials of his flesh that desired the taboo. Haley consciously selected pedophilia because of the weight of taboo. It was the most stage-able, and most horrible, bad behavior online she could use to provoke a dialog with the virtual. In a radio interview with Nicole Powers Haley said:

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[35] In the production notes Haley urges productions to cast "an actress who will appear on stage as a prepubescent girl," (Haley, *The Nether* 74). The note cites States as a reference for how a young actress will distance the audience from the play. This direction is not mandated and many productions have cast young adults as Iris.

I wanted to do something about bad behavior in virtual reality. And I kind of thought—I thought well what can you do in virtual reality that we still don't want you to do there? Pedophilia was the first thing that came up for me. I can't think of anything that you would do in virtual reality. You know in *Grand Theft Auto* you are already running people over and killing prostitutes. Sex with children. I knew this would push buttons. I knew this would get the ethical debate going, (Powers).

Her research uncovered complexities regarding pedophilia and the taboo around it that offered her a new perspective. She discovered she could have empathy for a pedophile and that empathy is reflected in *The Nether* through Sims (Powers). Part of her groundwork came from Luke Malone's 2014 episode of *This American Life* called "Tarred and Feathered". The report breaks down some of the most socially and legally troubling aspects of pedophilia. Haley told Powers:

Pedophiles, not all of them have horrible childhoods. It could be a sexuality that's as ingrained as anyone's sexuality whether it's heterosexual, homosexual. There are people it seems who are actually genetically inclined towards being pedophiles (Powers).

There is conflict between the legal definition of pedophilia and the taboo regarding it, which exposes people to punishment and greatly discourages scientific research into the subject. Johns Hopkins Professor Elizabeth Letourneau is one of the leading researchers in child sex abuse and she says this is "a gigantic black hole in science," (Malone). In their 1990 paper "Legal, Social, and Biological Definitions of Pedophilia" M. A. Ames and D. A. Houston advocate for revising definitions. According to the research that has been done there is a biological difference between being attracted to a child (before puberty) and an adolescent (after puberty) (Ames and Houston). Another issue is that pedophilia refers to being attracted to a child; it does not mean the person has ever acted on that attraction (Malone). This description matches Sims as a man attracted to children who chose

to build a virtual fantasy rather than risk being tempted in the physical world.

Computers add further complexities to the issue.[36] Pedophilia meant to represent

bad behavior online becomes a deeper and richly symbolic mediaphor. In the world

of the play consenting adults have engaged in sexual ageplay using a computer. No

actual children were involved, except there is a child's body on stage. According to

Carla Reeves in her 2018 article "The virtual simulation of child sexual abuse: online

gameworld users' views, understanding and responses to sexual ageplay" sexual

ageplay between adults in the flesh is considered at worst a deviant fetish, however

the exact same activity conducted through the medium of a computer is taken as

"simulated sexual abuse of children" (Reeves). The fantasy image generated

through the medium is considered "more real" than the actions between flesh and

blood. The virtual is more real than the physical. Which simulated act is more

disturbing the sex or the murder?[37] In *The Nether* sex compels Morris initially to

investigate, but she acquiesces much easier to sex than murder. Perhaps she

realizes that the simulated action is not the same as committing the action in the

physical world. There is value in a simulation even when the simulated action is

abhorrent. Some researchers think so. In her 2016 article for *New Scientist*, "Could

Sex Robots and Virtual Reality Treat Paedophilia?" Aviva Rutkin reports on current

research efforts. "It's difficult to do objective research on paedophilia not least

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[36] For more reading on sexual ageplay using computer game worlds see: Reeves, Carla. "The Virtual Simulation of Child Sexual Abuse: Online Gameworld Users' Views, Understanding and Responses to Sexual Ageplay." *Ethics and Information Technology*, 2018, doi:10.1007/s10676-018-9449-5, and Farrell, Jason. "Second Life Wonderland." Sky News, Sky, 2007, youtu.be/dN_jr6xjs90.

[37] A link between violence in media and violence in the physical world is regularly put forward by politicians and advocates, but science does not show this. For a recent comprehensive look at the subject see Kugler, Dimitrij Tycho, et al. "Does Playing Violent Video Games Cause Aggression? A Longitudinal Intervention Study." Molecular Psychiatry, 2018.

because of the moral and visceral revulsion it often provokes. But it may be time to wrestle with these fears" (Rutkin). Scientists are "cautiously optimistic" that computer simulations and other technological interventions may prove "safer options" in treating pedophiles, but the work is slow (Rutkin).

Simulated murder scenes used to train investigators; simulated pandemics for crisis management; simulated warfare for defense planning; and simulated fictional stories across mediums for entertainment, education, and human understanding. With a difficult and complex issue before anything can be resolved it must be recognized and discussed. The purpose of pedophilia in *The Nether* is to raise the stakes enough to focus attention on the ethics of the digital. Pedophilia is there to make the audience care deeply, protectively, even fanatically about the "shining little girl" Iris while also reviling the "middle aged science teacher" and "successful business man" (Haley, *The Nether* 2). Iris represents an image, an idea, and a commodity.

The play grapples to find a stable position within shifting currents of control, complexities and consequences. *The Nether* engages in dialog about the nature of online relationships and the consequences of choosing a customized algorithmic existence over the physical environment. The "materials of the earth" are "what we are given" Morris says, making the most of those precious materials, our bodies, our relationships, and our time is the challenge (69). Pedophilia is a powerful and taboo subject that dominates responses to this play, however pulling back reveals today's "sociohistorical situation" intertwined with "cultural production" on a global scale (Galloway, "The Unworkable Interface" 935). The wider structure of the romantico-

cybernetic parable present in *The Nether* is awash in primary colors, and swims into focus if Sims, the programming pedophile, is replaced with Google, Amazon, or Facebook.

Synopsis and Structure

In the near future, the internet evolves into a virtual reality space known as "the Nether"[38] where users engage directly in virtual realms for work, study, and play existing through avatars (Haley, *The Nether* 13). Realms inside the Nether exist to cater to every function and desire. In contrast to the near total engagement online, the physical world has declined. "Nature" and "natural material" such as cotton, grapes and trees have become luxuries available only to a privileged few (13). Such decline is offset by the promise of the virtual world. Occasionally users abdicate existence in the physical world for permanent life online. These real world ex-pats are known as "Shades," (23). Tucked within the Nether is "The Hideaway," an adult realm constructed by Sims where his avatar Papa, plays host. Sims' realm offers sensations no longer available in the physical world (29). Sims' code "is the closest anyone has come to perfecting the art of sensation," (31). A virtual Victorian style home and grounds offers four resident child avatars to entertain guests, "not just images of children" but "the sound and the smell and the touch of them," (31). Guests may engage with the realm's residents however they desire, and desire tends

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[38] Haley capitalizes "Nether" in the world of the play giving the word more weight than today's internet. I have adopted this use of capitalization. The play when referenced by title will be written as The Nether while when referring to the global communications network that exists within the world of the play it will be referenced as the Nether.

toward sexual and violent appetites. The Hideaway promises confidentiality, total

immersion, and experiences outside of consequence. In return, guests are required

to remain in character within this constructed world of late 19th century era

opulence and domesticity (8).

Unfolding in contrasting, two-actor scenes that alternate between the gray,

near future "real world," and the vibrant virtual home, *The Nether* paces like the

television police procedural format Haley consciously mimics (Rizzolo). Sims stands

accused of "Solicitation. Rape. Sodomy. Murder," as his accuser, Detective Morris,

equates the activities in Sims' realm with actions in the real world (Haley, *The*

Nether 6). Morris, an investigator representing the wider Nether community argues

that his code is too sensual and real. She fears people abandoning the material

world to become "shades," like her late father. Sims suspects she wants his code for

commercial gain, "You want my code…You want to sell it to Disney," (31). At the

center of their arguments is Iris, a precocious nine year old resident of The

Hideaway in Sims' employ. Sims' defense is that Iris is not really a child, but an adult

engaged in consensual adult role-play, and his realm is properly registered (11).

Morris counters that the Nether community's policies changed, and the two engage

in heated debate about identity, sex, and consequences. In alternate scenes Morris

interrogates Doyle, a 65 year old science teacher who has a long history in Sims'

Hideaway. Morris hopes Doyle will lead her to Sims. She has a detailed account of

activities in The Hideaway obtained by her inside agent, Mr. Woodnut (20). Using

Woodnut's report, Morris attempts to bully Doyle. She threatens to expose his

activities in the Hideaway to his family. Doyle however intends to become a shade,

is ambivalent about exposure, and cares only about "keeping" Iris (10). Doyle's

emotional tether to Iris sounds very unsettling until it becomes clear that Doyle

actually *is* Iris, and Morris is really Woodnut. The entire situation is a bizarre

relationship tangle orbiting "something real," which Morris believes is the only thing

that proves love (36). Something real is somewhat nebulous, for Morris it is the

void she carries of her father's decision to become a shade. For Doyle, something

real is a token representing when his life held meaning, a distinguished teaching

award (56). Meanwhile, Sims connection is to a real sapling of a poplar tree in his

garden (46). In the end Doyle commits suicide, after the detective obtains the

information she needs to shut down The Hideaway, and banish Sims from the

Nether (66).

The play lingers, difficult to dispel. At one point Iris asked, "Am I special, not

just as Iris...Do you love me?" (64). Iris and Papa both miss trees, and he shares with

Iris that he has planted a real sapling (46). The scene appears as an intimate

portrait of a father and daughter. Still the audience is privy to the sexual

relationship between Iris and Papa, but not to Iris' true identity. In each

performance I attended, members of the audience shifted in their seats at this point,

uncomfortable with a tickle game layered in foreboding and sexual taboo (*The

Nether*). At the end of the scene, labeled as "A Sunny Spot," Iris spontaneously tells

Papa, "I love you," and according to the stage directions "Papa hesitates" (46). Iris'

proclamation in that sunny spot remains tainted by the taboo of pedophilia, like a

lead weight in the stomach (*The Nether*). However, in the final moments of the play,

Haley revisits an abridgment of the Sunny Spot scene as an Epilogue: word for word,

and action for action. Significantly, this time Iris' part is played by the adult Doyle

turning the world turned upside down. What was dark and tainted becomes tender

and warm. "What is real?" asks *The Nether.* Is reality only what can be sensed and

quantified in the physical world? Which is more meaningful, a physical object or an

internal feeling? Can an idea really be a crime? How does simulation in the virtual

impact the material world? What is important, being able to trace the complexities

of the grooves and their context, or controlling a safe space separate from criticism

and change?

Sims in Control: working as intended

An interface, as defined by Galloway, is a relationship effect, a "liminal

transition moment in which the outside is evoked in order that the inside may take

place," (Galloway, "The Unworkable Interface" 938). The interface is the frame

around a painting, "Once upon a time," or the dimming of the house lights. It is

something familiar to the theatre audience. In contemporary digital culture,

interfaces are everywhere. When the infrastructure of society is based in code the

interface is where "one glob of code can interact with another" says Galloway (938).

Behind the digital interface exists a world of machine language: the database,

algorithms, networks and systems of protocol. In *The Language of New Media*,

Manovich writes that the database is the heart of "the creative process in the

computer age" (Manovich 227). Databases are how the apparatus organizes

information, as referenced records in tables that can be queried, filtered and sorted.

The interface accesses the database, using algorithms as tools to recall and represent data. Narrative and databases are organization structures; each making "meaning out of the world" (225). In telling the narrative of *The Nether*, Haley uses narrative to connect the audience with the apparatus through metaphor and the theatrical platform. How her play engages an audience mirrors how software interacts with users in real time on a piece of hardware. Theatre operates through simulating narrative exchange in real time, and a physical space. Software uses allegory and narrative exchange in real time, but in virtual space.

Theatre is a uniquely suited platform to examine the infrastructure of ludic capitalism. Creation in the digital, writes Manovich "can be understood as the construction of an interface to a database," (Manovich 226). Sims as a character embodies the idea of control. In the world of *The Nether* he has developed the ultimate sensory interface so effective it has become threatening, "the closest anyone has come to perfecting the art of sensation" (Haley, *The Nether* 31). Sims personifies ludic capitalism in *The Nether*, a successful businessman who crafted a lucrative adult role-play realm. Like the titans of today's technical world Sims comes from an elite and privileged background (46). Technology companies are mostly male and mostly white, especially in technical positions[39]. Sims echoes the tycoons of tech commanding the transition of old industries to new: from physical

[39] According to Conner Forrests 2014 article "Diversity Stats: 10 Tech Companies That Have Come Clean" the tech leaders are over half men most companies having a 70/30 ratio. The statistics on race were predominately white. (Forrest, Conner. August 28, 2014, 5:00 AM PST, "Diversity Stats: 10 Tech Companies That Have Come Clean." *TechRepublic*, TechRepublic, 28 Aug. 2014, www.techrepublic.com/article/diversity-stats-10-tech-companies-that-have-come-clean.). For additional information on gender in the tech industry see also: Alfrey, Lauren, and France Winddance Twine. "Gender-Fluid Geek Girls." *Gender & Society,* vol. 31, no. 1, 5 Dec. 2016, pp. 28–50., doi:10.1177/0891243216680590.

stores to online one site shopping, automated cars and delivery, and little devices to

"assist" while tracking ever increasing amounts of data. The first C is Control, a

troubling aspect for Galloway, Lessig, Flusser, and Rushkoff. Sims embodies control,

represented by what Galloway calls "the universal laws of protocological exchange"

(Galloway, "The Unworkable Interface" 934). Sims writes the code to create his own

world. There is a utopian optimism to control, the technological answer for every

problem. There is also blindness.

Protocol is the system of control that facilitates operation across networks

and platforms. Galloway describes computer protocol as, "a set of

recommendations and rules that outline specific technical standards," (Galloway,

Protocol 6). Protocol is the tool for embedding a structure of "voluntary regulation"

in a distributed and fluid architecture (7). Protocol characterizes "a political

conundrum" where enforced homogenization ensures the openness "to facilitate the

ultimate goal of a freer and more democratic medium," (147). The foundation of the

internet is, and has always been control writes Galloway, "It is a type of control

based on openness, inclusion, universalism, and flexibility. It is control borne from

high degrees of technical organization," (142). The control is mechanical and driven

by architecture, but that architecture is designed. The architecture in turn

influences the software that runs on it, and the culture that interfaces with it. As the

technology advances it has become less noticeable. In the past going online was

conscious, it blocked a phone line, caused a distinct technological noise and could

only be accessed from limited locations. Now being online is often persistent, silent,

and most everywhere. The new interfaces are friendlier, simple enough for a small

145

child to use. It becomes easy to forget about the code. In a talk back sponsored by

the 2015 Headlong Theatre production of *The Nether*, Artist and co-founder of Blast

Theory, Matt Adams expressed how ludic capitalist culture troubles him:

> I find it deeply disquieting how over a billion people in the world relate to
> many of their friends is on a platform that is a privately owned system, that is
> designed as a profit making device in which every utterance, and every form
> of utterance is carefully crafted according to the needs of a business, rather
> than social or political concerns (*Theatre and Technology*).

The profit centered undercurrent of the internet, while unnerving, is a manifestation

of the neoliberal, ludic capitalist world. The "clarion call" of ludic capitalism

according to Galloway is "be more like us", he warns however, "To follow such a call

and label it nature serves merely to reify what is fundamentally a historical

relation," (Galloway, "The Unworkable Interface"935). Galloway argues that the

interfaces are encoded with political and aesthetic positions (935). The challenge

today is to comprehend the digital facade which involves choosing discomfort, and

stepping even temporarily outside the bubble constructed by algorithms.

By selecting theatre as the platform for the tale of *The Nether*, Haley makes a

statement towards such comprehension. In his essay, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein"

Roland Barthes identifies a deep historical relationship between theatre and

geometry, "The theatre is precisely that practice which calculates the place of things

as they are observed[40]," (Barthes 69). Theatrical staging, as part of a triangulation,

writes Barthes, provides a "masking effect" for the precise arrangement of spectacle

placed before the observer (69). What Barthes describes is simulation, where the

performers play off the designed and constrained view of the audience. Notably, he

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[40] Italic emphasis in source.

groups theatre with cinema, painting and literature as "dioptric arts" because each

works to represent an image that has been cut out, an imaginary tableau, for critical

observation (70). Like Galloway's interface, Barthes' tableau takes a

"propaedeutical" position aesthetically and politically through what is included in its

view:

> The tableau (pictorial, theatrical, literary) is a pure cut-out segment with
> clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that
> surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while
> everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light,
> into view. Such demiurgic discrimination implies high quality of thought: the
> tableau is intellectual, it has something to say, (70).

States aligns theatre with the museum, but argues that the art begins outside and is

brought into the space with the audience, "a certain roughage of hard-core reality

that continuously nourishes the illusionary system," (States 39). The nature of

theatre is in the ability to provide a material simulation that stimulates a sense of

immediacy and potential. States writes:

> The actor takes us into a world within the world itself. At bottom, it is not a
> matter of the illusory, the mimetic, or the representational, but of a certain
> kind of actual, of having something before one's vision—and in the theater
> one's hearing—to which we join our being (186).

Simulation is a shared feature of the theatrical and the digital arena. Both platforms

use geometry to present a model of *what if*, a dynamic diorama playing out a

situation based on a set of constraints, scripts, and algorithms that fill in the blank

spots. Digital simulation however carries a level of authority based on the

mechanical origin of the output. Storm tracking, market fluctuations, insurance

fraud, and social media connections are routinely modeled by algorithmic

simulation. Like theatre, such simulations are complex fictions rendered from a set

147

of rules. How to distinguish technical projections, propaganda, advertisement, and hyperbole is a constant battle. The digital model provides insight, and is as fallible as the humans who programmed it. Theatre works from the position of the fallibility of the flesh, the physical, and fragile action of people which disrupts the most realistic and immersive performance. The imperfections; a missed line, a slow cue, or an audience cough reengages the connection between performance and audience in the immediacy of the performance. The simulated *actual* is understood to be a pocket reality, a virtuality. Adams, during the *Nether* talkback commented on the importance of theatre in a digital culture:

> I see it as part of my job to get in among that change. Not to deny it or pretend it is not happening. It is not that long ago that it was common place in theatre to talk of theatre as in opposition to electronic media. There was recorded things 'bad' and live things 'good.' That it's not too long ago that that really was a widely held view (*Theatre and Technology*).

Adams felt *The Nether* demonstrated how theatre can challenge the cultural shift stemming from technology, to "interrogate" and examine the "fine lines" and "philosophical questions" that come with today's digital reality (*Theatre and Technology*). The value rests in the accepted nature of theatre's virtuality; that pocket reality evoked by mutual consent between performer and audience. Integrating elements of the digital theatrically offers a practical low cost approach for productions, and unwraps the technical-mediating package to a content core.

Unwrapping and decoding messages is a survival skill in digital culture. Theatre, as Adams points out, has had a tendency to ignore or dismiss the digital. This tendency may stem from a wider cultural leaning to expect too much or too little from technology, to see technology as a savior or destroyer. Technology for

148

Haley is never categorized as "good" or "evil." Examining and interrogating the

control embedded in our digital world is essential. Seeing past the glamour is

"imperative" says Galloway, because technology does not eliminate control, but

restructures it according to a "new logic of organization" (Galloway "Protocol" 318).

According to Galloway, "the digital is always understood as a type of artificial life

system which may produce 'intelligent' emergent properties just as organisms do,"

(319). Lessons can be extracted from recent emergent events, like technological

storm systems developing out of protocological controls, network relationships, and

hive or swarm behavior such as 2014's Gamergate controversy. Torill Mortensen

explains how the tools of the system were exploited to promote agendas in her 2016

essay "Anger, Fear, and Games: The Long Event of #GamerGate". The very openness

of the structure allows behaviors that can be deployed to disrupt, distort and

discredit:

> Through this variety and very visible exploitation of weaknesses in the
> different systems, [GamerGate] taught us how technology designed for
> increased openness can be utilized to create echo chambers and to silence
> opposing voices, (Mortensen 13).

The lessons are slow to be absorbed; it seems Mortensen's words apply just as well

to the more recent Facebook/Cambridge Analytica privacy scandal. Echo chambers

are one of the darker distortions in algorithmic culture. The sensory manipulation

experienced in *The Nether* already exists not as the sight, sound, and feel of a child

or a tree, but in the way computers use interfaces to influence behavior. In

Throwing Rocks at the Google Bus Rushkoff describes how software manipulates

humans, "rewarding people with pleasing graphics and sounds when they balance

their checkbooks online or reach a target weight as measure by digital scale"

(Rushkoff, *Throwing Rocks at the Google Bus* 91). The effect is working as intended.

Commercial values dictate the algorithm's objective, which is to maximize time

spent actively on a web site. According to Rushkoff, the principles of the market

shape the design of the algorithm (Rushkoff 91).

Within *The Nether* Sims' code offers various incentives to keep his guests

returning to the Hideaway and paying money to be there. He maintains a seductive

environment full of images, sounds and sensations lost in the material world,

represented by a beautiful Gothic Revival house surrounded by a vault of trees

(Haley, *The Nether* 7, 42). Sims offers the guests an in-realm currency earned

through repeated visits that may be used to purchase enhancement items such as

dancing shoes (33). Finally, Sims encourages the guests to violently destroy the

children as a way to enforce a distance and a disconnect between the guests and the

workers. Haley regards the axe for Sims as "a way to make people complicit in the

world," creating a community through a shared experience of bad behavior. For

Sims destroying the Hideaway children disrupts the inhibition of a player more than

even the taboo sex act, "that once this sense of right and wrong dissolved [the

player] would be of the world," (*The Nether - The Nether - Jennifer Haley and Jeremy

Herrin in Conversation*). Building a community around his realm insulates and

normalizes Sims, which is the argument Morris makes against him (Haley, *The

Nether* 30). Sims responds with neoliberal ludic capitalist rhetoric, that he's

providing a valuable market service, a place for pedophiles to "blow off steam" (30).

He sees no harm in his use of coding to provide such an experience, but bristles at

the idea of his code being appropriated by another commercial interest. An

150

opportunist extracting value to further his immediate interest, Sims neglects his

community both in-world and online. He refuses to listen to Iris when she asks for a

birthday party. Engaging with her might have uncovered the vulnerability,

loneliness, and despair her "behinder" was grappling with. He plants the rare

sapling in his own garden for his enjoyment, and he neglects to stay informed on

changes within the greater online community all of which contribute to his downfall.

He dismisses his employees to "boarding school," they are his disposable immaterial

labor. Sims is a contradictory creature of control, an illustrative embodiment of

limited thinking regarding code and protocol as a cultural support structure.

Complexities of Metaphysical Certitude

The Nether is Sims' tragedy. He starts the play with "I want to go home," and

ends it with "You cannot know how much I love you," (Haley, *The Nether* 5, 73).

Sims bookends the play with home and love, yet he is a pedophile, reviled by society.

Haley's fractured storytelling positions the audience to pass judgment on the man in

the interrogation room at the opening then pivots to a more complex perspective at

the end. *The Nether* provokes questions challenging complex social topologies

illuminated by digital culture. Foremost are the ideas of pedophilia and the

tolerance of interactions between consenting adults. Deeper down is the general

notion of objectification, image and use. Doyle seeks the life of a shade because his

value in the physical world has withered like the trees. He connects with the

saturated fantasy online because unlike his real life, the Hideaway engages him.

When Doyle can no longer pay to play he becomes part of the machine. If Sims is a narrative stand-in for the commercial masters of ludic capitalism then Doyle embodies a dark aspect of the romantico-cybernetic labor force. A new labor, *homo ludens* as described by Flusser is an entity evolving into a world economy driven by information and experience:

> This new human being in the process of being born all around us and within us is in fact without hands. He does not handle things anymore, so in his case one cannot speak of actions anymore. Nor of practice, nor of work for that matter. The only things left of his hands are the tips of his fingers, which he uses to tap on keys so as to play with symbols. The new human being is not a man of action anymore but a player: *homo ludens* as opposed to *homo faber*. Life is no longer a drama for him but a performance. It is no longer a question of action but of sensation. The new human being does not wish to do or to have but to experience. He wishes to experience, to know and, above all, to enjoy. As he is no longer concerned with things, he has no problems. Instead, he has programs, (Flusser, *The Shape of Things* 89).

Drawn to the Hideaway by curiosity, Doyle spends all his money playing in the make believe of the Hideaway, and must transition to becoming an employee in order to stay in the realm. Doyle's value for society has been automated. He was one of the best teachers in the country, "an inspiration to future scientists" (Haley, *The Nether* 22). Once automation removed the need for teachers, a man dedicated to serving lost his place, his identity, and his community. Online he reconstructs himself. His new fulfillment however comes at the expense of a connection to his old life. Sims argues that Doyle was happy in the Hideaway, and that the place sustained him. Morris counters that Doyle's connection was to Sims personally (68). Both perspectives reflect a narrow view, and the truth is likely more complex.

Doyle as Iris seems to revel in his position within the Hideaway. He enjoys opportunities to engage as a teacher as shown when Iris teaches Woodnut the game

152

of jacks, and explains the mechanics of the phonograph (27, 34). The teacher role is also apparent in Iris' story about Antonia and the eggs (42). Beyond Doyle's pleasure in retaining his role of teacher even while performing as Iris, three things indicate that Doyle may be in pain and struggling. First, Doyle through Iris requests a birthday party because he wants "a day that is all about me" that specifically includes Hideaway guests (17). Second, Doyle is preoccupied by the nature of God (18). Finally, his in-world affairs are resolved leading Morris to deduce Doyle intends to forsake the physical world for a permanent digital existence (23). He's not depressed, he says, only sad (24). Doyle is a detached old man desperate for connection who spends a great deal of time rationalizing the Hideaway and his activity there. His character dramatizes a "death of despair" as outlined in Anne Case and Angus Deaton's 2017 paper, "Mortality and Morbidity in the 21st Century," which examines the rising mortality rates of older white men in the United States. "Deaths of Despair" characterized by Case and Deaton are those befalling old white men who die from suicide, drug overdoses, and complications from alcohol abuse. It's a trend in the United States which Case and Deaton link to midlife distress and a complex interaction between pain, addiction, employment, marriage and isolation (Case and Deaton 437). Technology and globalization is one factor that has "reduced the quantity and quality of opportunity in the labor market" (430). Case and Deaton found automation and globalization to be a commonality that further interacted with cultural changes in family dynamics (438). The displacement in employment is connected to "cascading effects on marriage, health, and morbidity— and, ultimately, on deaths of despair," say Case and Deaton (437). The "recipe for

suicide" emerging from the data correlates to "a loss of the structures that give life a meaning," (430). The men most clearly affected by deaths of despair in Case and Deaton's data are working class, middle aged men with little to no education beyond high school.

> Ultimately, we see our story as about the collapse of the white working class after its heyday in the early 1970s, and the pathologies that accompany this decline, (439).

Doyle would not be included in this demographic as a middle school science teacher who passed up offers to teach university in order to work with public school kids. However, Doyle exists in a speculative near future, one that has progressed further in automation and technological disruption of the labor market.

In the world of the play, work and school have been virtualized. The majority of people work in "office realms" in the Nether while the schools are converted to "education realms" (Haley, *The Nether* 13). Such work may not be fully automated in a way that reflects the replacement of factory workers with robots or receptionists with voice mail software. Following the "Single School Act" Doyle describes his duties as a teacher being reduced to "walking behind the students, terminal to terminal, making sure they weren't hacking through the school firewall to engage in porn," (22). He has been automated because his agency and options for interacting within his profession have been diminished and offset by scripts. Doyle's is a passionate and award winning teacher shunted by a cultural revolution, and his is only one story provided to represent the majority of workers in the speculative future world of *The Nether*. His identity is made irrelevant by systemic changes in his profession. He's approaching retirement age. He defines his

relationship to his wife by the statement that she would not leave him if his actions in the Hideaway were revealed, and he's equally distant from his adult daughter (22). Doyle's life ties are frayed before the Hideaway provides a lifeline. He adopts the persona of a professor at the "University of Metaphysical Certitude" to conceal the time he spends online and the money he makes (10). He declares to Woodnut that he would kill himself if he betrayed Papa, and his ultimate actions reveal this was not an idle threat (65). While Papa's rejection and Morris' manipulation impact Doyle's decision, he had already taken steps to sever his connection to the physical world. Doyle believes that the point of technology is "to cast off the limitations of physicality and become pure spirit," (38). According to Case and Deaton physical pain is one of the contributing factors to deaths of despair (Case and Deaton 437). Haley gives no indication that Doyle suffers any specific pain, however he claims that "Physical sensation is inconsequential," (Haley, *The Nether* 22). Acting as Iris and presented with the axe, he assures Woodnut that he feels only the pain he wants from the violence inside the Hideaway. Doyle won't answer when Woodnut asks how much pain that is stating, "That's rather a personal question," (54). Doyle may suffer from physical pain "in-world", with a specific non disclosed ailment or simply the pain of age, and the loss of "thick hair the color of wheat," (38). He notably refers to his body as a "bag of flesh" that is "unrecognizable" (23). Speaking to Morris in the interrogation room there is an underlying tone of loneliness, isolation and pain. He talks about overcoming "physical barriers" to connect with others, being able to be see in "any form we choose", and to "interact outside our bodies" (23). At the end of the scene Doyle redirects Morris from emphasizing the content

155

in the Hideaway to the context, "Your agent listed facts in his report. But the next time you have a chat by the water cooler, don't ask him, *What did you see? What did you think you were required to do?* Ask him, *How did you feel?*[41]" (24). Whether from physical, emotional or mental pain, Doyle's suffering echoes in his words. Severing his connection to Iris and the Hideaway also removes the tether to a new sense of meaning he developed through Iris. When Sims threatens him with "boarding school" Doyle sees once again his identity is irrelevant within the system.

Doyle takes his own life just off stage, following in the footsteps of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. *The Nether* borrows this dramatic device, and reflects back on the realist tragedies from the height of industrialized capitalism by answering the report of a gunshot with the silent, mechanical breathing of a digital girl. Doyle initially deflects his despair by burrowing into a nostalgic fantasy. He transforms from an aged and obsolete man in a world restructured by technology into a bright, 9 year old girl from the late 19th century. Both Doyle and Sims are romantically attracted to 19th century, middle class ambience. Haley selected the period for Sims fantasy world as a symbolic refuge for today. She stated in a 2015 Headlong Theatre talkback she felt the period both parallels "a major technological revolution" and evokes "a *Alice in Wonderland* quality" Haley wanted, (*The Nether - The Nether - Jennifer Haley and Jeremy Herrin in Conversation*). Director Jeremy Herrin felt the selection of the Victorian era was ideal, and lent a distasteful element suitable for the play, "There is something sort of icky about the construction of childhood innocence, and the technological revolution," (*The Nether - The Nether - Jennifer*

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[41] Italics in source.

Haley and Jeremy Herrin in Conversation). Victoriana transcodes the romanitico-cybernetic attraction to the construction of an idealized virtuality that eases the anxieties of these men. For Sims, the fantasy is one of his own desires, to be Papa, and head of household in an exclusive, upper middle class estate. He's a respected business man who literally codes the rules in his realm allowing him to indulge his every whim and desire. In-world, Sims must conform and mask himself. In the Nether, however he comfortably uses his own likeness for his avatar (Haley, *The Nether* 49). He dictates the specifics for each of the children he employs. In contrast, Doyle selects a younger version of himself as his initial character in the Hideaway. He returns nostalgically to a point before he lost meaning in his life. When Doyle accepts the role of Iris, her appearance and age are fixed. The beauty and violence of the Hideaway is a selective framing of 19th century domesticity, and doesn't include the grittier realities of life in that era.

The digital platform supports the romantico-cybernetic play driving ludic capitalism like a virtual "juridico-geometric" game board (Galloway, "The Unworkable Interface" 934). Galloway lifts the term "juridico-geometric" from writings on games by Guy Debord. In the late 1970s Debord set about designing and publishing a board game based on war. Like chess, the two player game used a grid and tokens that represented each faction's troops. Galloway details the game and in his 2009 essay, "Debord's Nostalgic Algorithm"[42]. Debord's game adds the complication of a communications network that must be maintained around

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[42] Galloway also created a digital simulation and supporting website: http://r-s-g.org/kriegspiel/about.php.

geographic obstacles (Galloway, "Debord's Nostalgic Algorithm" 137). Galloway

argues that Debord understood the nature of games:

> Debord was thus intimately aware of the true reality of games, that they are a conjunction of two elements: the "juridical" element, meaning the spheres of politics and law, and the "geometrical" element, meaning the realm of mathematical processes and spatial logics (137).

The game occupies a separate algorithmic plane from film or text, from "spectacle"

or "narrative", with "a finite set of rules that, when executed, result in a machine

able to simulate political antagonism," (137). According to Galloway, Debord's idea

of games has only the systems theory part in place. In relation to the digital it lacks

the romantic element, so he adapts Debord's phrase calling it "Juridico-geometric

sublime" (Galloway, "The Unworkable Interface" 934). This is a terrific way to

conceptualize virtuality, the space where romantico-cybernetic play occurs. The

juridico-geometric sublime is a place of code, a plane where the rules, or what's

allowed, interdependently adjusts with what's possible. The sublime element, the

romance manifests in the relationship of human to machine, which is a posthuman

view, often polarized as utopian, or dystopian. Technology will save us, or doom us.

According to Katherine Hayles in her book, *How We Became Posthuman:*

Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics posthuman thought is a

"point of view" that shifts historically by initially losing its body through privileging

information over embodiment (Hayles 6). The belief that humanity will transcend

the limitations of the body keeps man at the center of the universe, a position

gradually displaced by advances made in scientific understanding by Newton,

Darwin, Einstein and others. In the wake of atrocities committed in World War II, it

is not surprising that one branch of thought sought a way to re-place humankind on

a more rational and perceptually nobler ground. Evolution of human into the

disembodied posthuman resolves many issues that plague humanity. As an

integrated part of the intelligent machine every problem can then be articulated into

a logical equation leading to a simple binary switch. Technology and industry have

not found ways to integrate human consciousness into computer generated virtual

worlds, but the desire to do so relieves us of the burden of responsibility to self and

society. Humanity becomes immortal, by shedding the body. The argument

becomes: if the conscious mind is released from the oppression of feeding, cleaning

and caring for the flesh of the body, then Man becomes free from the body's desires

and society's rules, and Man transcends the material constraints of being human

(Hayles 3). This is Doyle's belief, that he can transcend his body becoming a

disembodied entity defined not by age or gender, but by relationships to others

(Haley, *The Nether* 23). Morris fears the cyborg, her posthuman perspective is

grounded in the material, though it is difficult to distinguish how much of her

argument is belief and how much is her manipulation of Doyle (Haley, *The Nether*

35). Virtuality, according to Hayles, comes from a "cultural perception that

information and materiality are conceptually distinct and that information is in

some sense more essential, more important, and more fundamental than

materiality," (Hayles 18). Hayles argues that ignorance of the "material processes

involved" privileges information over the physical (19). Data then becomes "more

essential" and "more mobile" and "pattern is predominant over presence"

disconnecting data from structure (19). For Morris, the privilege of information

159

over the material triggers an outright rejection of virtuality. Biased by her personal

trauma of abandonment by her shade father, I have no doubt she will continue to

campaign against virtuality, and feel justified in adding Doyle's death to her arsenal.

Morris finds comfort in a memory of trees even though she is unsure the memory is

real (Haley, *The Nether* 65). Perhaps, she believes by forcing enough people out of

the Nether the attention will instead be given to the material world. The poplar

trees represent the abundance lost in the physical world. Morris however

underestimates the power virtuality offers to the material realm. In the Hideaway

the trees are just another consumable, another image of seduction, but they are one

that inspires Sims to act in the physical world. Planting an actual tree in the garden

is the selfish act of a privileged man, but the key is the action.

The interconnection between the virtual and the material eludes Morris.

After getting what she wants from Sims, she attempts to explain her actions, "I didn't

like the Hideaway. I loved it. I wanted to stay there forever. I wanted to stay in that

beautiful home with Iris. But if I had, who would I have been?" (70). Sims answers

simply, "Detective Morris," then asks almost as an afterthought, "Is that your real

name?" (70). Sims is saying who you are in virtuality is who you are in the physical

world. Morris fears the evolution of man into machine. Sims however, is a more

grounded idea of the posthuman by bridging a virtual and a real world. He is part of

"a cybernetic circuit" described by Hayles, where what he wants and what he sees

participates in "a distributed cognitive system" linking the represented and the

embodied "through mutating and flexible machine interfaces," (Hayles xiv).

Virtuality whether evoked by text or drawn by algorithms creates a simulation that

allows for the analysis and testing of ideas. In addition, the fulfillment found within the virtual world amplifies the need to recreate the fulfillment though not necessarily with the same action in the real world.

Consequences: a child's body onstage

Everything on stage contributes visually, scenically writes States, "the stage picture leads us by the senses into its world," (States 51). The final topic in this study of *The Nether* is the importance of Iris. Iris, a character named with precision leveraging three intersections of symbolic meaning: as the goddess of the rainbow and messages, as a blossom of a rhizomatic bulb, and as the aperture for human sight. The most provocative choice Haley made in *The Nether* is the inclusion of a virtual character with the appearance of a 9 year old girl. Referencing States in the script, Haley strongly advocates for the casting of a child actress, because the physical presence of a child onstage establishes a firm tether to reality and keeps the audience aware of the theatrical framework. Children are "stubbornly real things" writes States, that refuse "to settle into the illusion," (States 37). Haley states in a Samuel French promotional video that she found the script colder, creepier and more disturbing in workshops when Iris was read by a teenager or young adult (*Jennifer Haley on The Nether*). In the post-show talk-backs for the Headlong production Haley said:

I saw it in development with a college student. She was about 20 years old. She played the role and it was so creepy, because you could just do anything with an adult. And it was very cold and very creepy. And then in the next workshop there was a twelve year old actress in New York who was in the role and suddenly the play had so much more warmth and the audience was removed from—the audience knew that nothing truly bad was going to happen to this child. Really it was that native warmth that a child brings that I realized was really important to the chemistry of the play (*The Nether - Jennifer Haley and Jeremy Herrin in Conversation*).

In the UK's West End production four young actresses shared the role in order to comply with child labor restrictions. Not all productions of *The Nether* follow Haley's advice. Many international productions have elected to cast a clearly older actress and then delve into the darker edge of the play. Unhampered by the need to keep the child safe, Iris is presented, held, and handled more like the sex object she plays[43].

The child's body on stage works in three ways. Firstly it anchors the audience, reassuring them that the performance will be safe because of the inclusion of an actual child. The audience will not witness overt sexual or violent interaction with the child. The child actress adds a sense of warmth to performance largely due to this feeling of security in the audience. Next the presence of a child's body re-inscribes the real taboo being engaged in by the adults in the audience as they experience the narrative in their imagination. Haley describes more intimate interactions between Iris and Woodnut via a messenger, by having Morris read Woodnut's account the narrative goes a step further than any actual action shown onstage. "I approach the little girl and fold her into my arms. Her skin is covered in goosebumps, which quickly fade in my embrace," (Haley, *The Nether* 29). The rest of

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[43] *Die Netzwelt* Göttinggen and Staatstheater, Germany; *The Nether* El teatro de la gente Madrid, Spain; *Underlandet* Bergen Norway; *Podsvet* Nova Gorica, Slovenia; *#cehennem* Istanbul.

the report, Morris says is "classified" (29). Finally, the actual physical child onstage

disturbs the audience as they become aware of the young actress working within

the context of the play. Stowell-Kaplan who reviewed the UK production for *The*

Drama Review in May 2015 and *Front Row* host Kirsty Lang from *BBC Radio 4* each

wondered how much of the play the young actress understood. (Stowell-Kaplan 162,

Lang). [44] Guardian reviewer, Michael Billington called the use of a real child a "cheap

trick" intended to shock the audience (Billington). For Stowell-Kaplan, the

argument within the play balances on the concept that no actual child is involved in

the sexual activity of the Hideaway, which she finds ironic and only "half true"

because while no children are actually involved in the fictional world of the play,

real children perform Iris onstage. This discomfort threads like a raw nerve through

the play, and represents for Stowell-Kaplan, "the quiet power of the theatre," (162).

Pedophilia becomes window dressing, a hook to hang deeper questions on.

On the Elizabethan stage companies of boys abused audiences with heavy

satire, they could say things that would not have been tolerated by censors if spoken

by adult companies. According to States, these child actors got away with it because

the satire was candy coated coming from the mouths of babes:

> [I]n comedy and satire, where actors spend a good deal of time flirting with
> the audience, children would be in their element. The point is not so much
> that they are children but that they are conspicuously *not* identical with their
> characters, (States 32).

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[44] While there was discussion of impact of sexualized dramatic roles for this play, the impact of such roles seems ignored for film. In 2012, the year before she appeared as Iris in the world premiere of *The Nether*, Brighid Fleming played a young girl sexually abused by her father in an episode of the NBC drama, *Awake* (IMDb).

The Nether is not a satire, though the actress portraying Iris has a similar effect on the audience, because she too is not identical with the character. The 'abuse' the audience may be said to suffer is the discomfort of their own imaginations while watching and then imagining a child, Iris, in sexual and violent interactions with adults Sims and Woodnut. Presenting Iris in the flesh gives the audience a real model for the drama in their mind. Far from inoculating the audience, the physical flesh of the child is both troubling and reassuring. The immediate threat is abated. The audience knows the child actress is not in real danger, and also knows, selfishly, by her presence they will not be subjected to witnessing the child in simulated sex acts. Simulated violence against children can be tolerated in this play to a point. Papa strikes Iris towards the end of the play, but importantly the assault occurs at a point when the audience knows Iris is really an old man. Simulated sex stops in the script with a stage direction, "IRIS lifts her dress over her head and stands in her knickers," then Woodnut "moves toward her" and the scene is over (Haley, *The Nether* 28). Stage directions are notoriously ignored and this particular direction was altered by Herrin's Headlong/Royal Court production. In that production Iris did not begin to remove her dress before the end of scene. Four actresses shared the role of Iris in the London production ranging from age 10-12. In a promotional video for Samuel French, Haley discusses the responsibility of working with young actresses, "I almost feel with children if it's on the table—and these topics are on the table with girls much younger than this as they have to be to make sure that they know how to keep themselves safe. If it's on the table and it's discussed it is actually a lot less scary then if it is a big secret." (Jennifer Haley, producing *The Nether*). The

164

script avoids explicit sexual description or interactions. There is still plenty to

disturb the imagination. As mentioned, many European productions have elected to

cast older actresses, using clearly adolescent or young adult bodies to portray Iris

may avoid issues of safety and labor laws related to a child actress but it also

realigns the consequence of the child's body. In this casting option Iris is not a

child's body, she is normalized as an object of desire. That may be the source of the

"creepiness" Haley found when work-shopping the manuscript with a 20 year old

actress. With a fully grown female body there is no cultural taboo in being attracted

so this casting choice puts the audience more directly in the skin of the pedophile.

Dress her up in a Victorian style girls attire and now there's a mature and sexualized

body bursting out clothes meant for little girl. It is also probably easier to imagine

this Iris in sexualized situations, and there is less restraint on directors from

pushing the boundary for physicality in the play. Surreptitiously tucked in *The

Nether* is the paradox of Iris. The audience watches a young actress while

navigating through layers of illusion. Iris is a child actress, a computer created

image, and a 65 year old man. The prominence of each definition of Iris shifts with

the audience's attention. When Iris first appears in the play, her status as a visible

child changes to a computer created image when she suggestively teases Papa who

rebukes her, "that joke is too old for you," (Haley, *The Nether* 17). The audience is

reminded that the child is not a child in the story, and simultaneously reminded that

she is clearly a real child onstage. Before Iris first appears though, the audience

knows Sims has built an online realm where he and his clients can gratify their

"tendencies toward children" (13). So the first appearance then of Iris as a child is, I

believe, a relief, a reassurance that the play will not cross certain lines. In my experience watching the young actresses interact with the men on stage kept me in the story. All physicality between Iris and the men is heightened by the awareness of the sexual nature of the character's relationship, but because the touching stays appropriate, the non-sexual connection between the characters can become more prominent, more paternal. Papa touches Iris' cheek, and Woodnut waltzes with her standing on his feet. Haley, however, doesn't let the audience forget the nature of Iris' relationship to Papa and Woodnut. Iris' time is allocated to service her "guests" and Papa (36). When Iris' identity is eventually revealed as Doyle, her identity as a 65 year old man begins to oscillate with the image of the child while she is regularly submitted to the authority of Morris as investigator and Sims as employer.

The living presence of the child adds dramatic weight to the stage, similar to *The Trojan Women* or *Medea* where the appearance of children first alive and then dead, anchors the tragedy. Interestingly, once death occurs in *The Nether*, instead of a corpse brought before the audience as in classic tragedy, the audience witnesses the uncoupled avatar of Iris mechanically breathing, a body no longer inhabited by Doyle. The vitality of the breathing child now distances the audience from the violence and trauma the narrative inflicts upon the off stage body. The stubborn realness of that actual child reminds the audience of the un-realness of the theatrical space. Grounded once more in the safeness of the theatre other concerns and thoughts percolate and disrupt.

When Morris as Woodnut asked Iris what can be gained by hacking a little girl to pieces, Doyle through Iris explains:

166

The revelation is when she resurrects and comes to stand before you again. Images, sensations - those are engaging. It's the relationships that matter (Haley 19).

Doyle's suicide occurs in diegetic space. Then he suddenly appears again before the audience at the end of the play, just as he had assured Morris he would, "It's okay, Mr. Woodnut. I always resurrect," (Haley 53). The final moment of the play becomes self-referential with the "revelation" presented for the audience as Doyle resurrected in the flesh. The epilogue serves the narrative as a dream or a memory, but for the audience, Doyle's body reappearing in place of Iris' to echo the earlier scene turns the meaning inward.

CHAPTER V

EMBRACING NOVUM: THE PLACE FOR TECHNOLOGY

ON STAGE

"It's all about windows! Windows, windows, windows! The very outlook of
civilization depends on our ability to experience one state and visualize another!
When someone says 'modern technology,' we immediately think of - the Internet,
new forms of energy, genetic engineering — but what I see — what any humanistic
architect should see — is the capacity to build structures that shape not just the way
we exist, but the way we think,"
(Haley, *Sustainable Living* 1).

"What is called for now is a human response
to the evolution of these technologies all around us,"
(Rushkoff, *Program or Be Programmed* 19).

"...a combination of ancient and current technologies ... The floor roots us in our here
and now — on this earth, in this country, on this particular spot of land — while the
windows, the windows, free our minds to fly in the universal realm of continued
possibility!"
(Haley, *Sustainable Living* 2).

I place Haley's work in a box I've labeled Virtuality Theatre. The label is a

loose categorization intended to call attention to plays that dramatize digital,

technological, and new media experiences with a purpose of understanding the

mechanics and exchanges between people through machines. One attribute of

virtuality is as stored potential where the linear path through the narrative is an

instance within a range of occurrences. In *N3RD* this concept of virtuality runs like

an algorithm applied to each teenager's track through the game. The play may be

understood as a collage of encounters from a range of players stitched together in a

chronological order showing how the "game" of Neighborhood 3 works as a

montage. Alternatively, the play may be the experience of a single player only as he

navigates through the game's obstacles until eventually confronting his mother in

the final house. Virtuality as stored potential is common to theatre as a platform.

Theatre models and simulates "a paradigm of collective 'thinking'" says

De Kerckhove in "Theatre as Information-Processing in Western Cultures", theatre

embodied virtual actions that represented situations not as real, but as potential

(De Kerckhove 147). Every production begins anew, every performance runs

through the script sharing milestones and moments with each occurrence unique.

Stored potential is arguably the purpose of theatre, repeating the performance

process for the marginal variations experienced and observed. Reviving and

reinterpreting plays from the past reframes the piece contextually to the present.

Without stored potential what would be the benefit of re-staging *Oedipus*, *Hamlet* or

Godot? Old works find new resonance because of the potential within the play to

shape meaning for audiences in different cultures and ages. Virtuality also

overcomes the constraints of the physical world which is another commonality

shared with the theatrical platform. In Virtuality Theatre the ability to cross space

and time becomes technological. De Kerckhove explains that theatre's effect is "to

arrest and co-ordinate spatial and temporal relationships, and to remove the

spectators from direct physical participation in the action," establishing a mental

conception of space (De Kerckhove 146). For States staged action progresses as a

"fluid painting" in its own pocket reality which offsets it from the physical world

169

creating "a composition in time and space" (States 50). Suvin describes a "reality displacement" achieved in science fiction through narrative devices that present the "zero world" of the audience against the world of the story (Suvin 71). A "feedback oscillation" occurs between the "norm of reality" and the narrative world offering new perspective. One device that can be used to displace reality is a journey by setting the story in another time or place. The other is the novum, a catalyst that organizes a new locus (71).

An Aesthetic of Innovation

Concluding this study of Haley's work I want to return to Suvin's concept of the novum. The fictional novum device is some type of innovation or novelty around which the narrative world in science fiction is organized in parallel to the real world of the author/filmmaker and of the reader/viewer. Suvin states that the novum is "totalizing" and poetic, weaving an entire world around the narrative. It is through the novum that the story "can be analytically grasped," (Suvin 64). He argues this creates an "essential tension" in science fiction between the viewer and those in the story which "estranges the empirical norm" of the implied audience (64).

> [Science Fiction] does not posit another superordinated and 'more real' reality but an alternative on the same ontological level as the author's empirical reality—one should say that the necessary correlate of the novum is an *alternate reality*, one that possesses a *different historical time* corresponding to different human relationships and sociocultural norms actualized by the narration. This new reality overtly or tacitly presupposes the existence of the author's empirical reality, since it can be gauged and understood only as the empirical realty modified in such-and-such ways, (Suvin 71)[45].

An example of the use of novum can be seen in the Netflix series *Black Mirror* from conscious "cookie" devices to autonomous mechanical bees, each episode uses some novum to put a poetic alternative realty before the viewer. Haley's writing is similar in approach and tone to *Black Mirror*, but her work has been tailored for the stage. Her plays carry additional layers of meaning as theatre.

Suvin's refining of the novum as a science fiction device relies on a concept of the novum from Brecht and is tied to his estrangement effect. The novum according to Brecht is "an aesthetic of innovation" (Jameson, *Brecht and Method* 94). For Brecht the novum can be a theatrical device. The novum works beyond the inner logic of the narrative setting to the structure of the narrative world. Consider *Hamilton*, as a work of musical theatre it offers a theatrical novum of staging the story of the American Revolution through the musical and cultural lens of contemporary Hip Hop. Lin-Manuel Miranda's method is not innovative, but the distinct combination of musical transcoding and cultural references transforms the narrative into something actually new. Theatre historically was a platform for innovation showcasing technological developments alongside social and political ideas. In the 20th century this role appeared to be side-lined by shiny new

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[45] Emphasis in original.

mediums, but cinema, radio and television did not destroy theatre merely temporarily eclipsed it. The digital is the next phase in a long line of media. As seen Chapple and Kattenbelt's intermedial compass, theatre remains the kernel at the heart of performative media as a deep rooted source code. Blast Theory's Adams challenges theatre artists to rise to the challenge of engaging and "interrogating" the digital as Haley has done in *The Nether*:

> This work is a great example of those misgivings [about the digital] and looking at those fine lines that are philosophical questions that come into play with these new changes. What I would say is that we are trying to make work that acknowledges those changes and tries to understand the ways in which intimacy is being changed, community is being changed, trust is being changed (Headlong, *Theatre and Technology*).

One way for theatre to take up this challenge is through the novum, and in particular through combining Suvin's science fiction novum inherent to the story with Brecht's theatrical novum of an aesthetic of innovation. The two sides of novum work in partnership. Haley employs narrative novums in her work, and each piece also utilizes a theatrical "novum". In *N3RD* the narrative novum is the GPS integrated game software and in *The Nether* it is software that perfects virtual sensation. The narrative novum works as a science fiction device on stage as it does for film or literature. The novum creates an oscillation between the logical alternative reality of the story and the viewer's reality. The oscillation through estrangement illuminates the relevance of the story for the world of the viewer (71). The theatrical novum challenges the audience and the art. Puppetry, media, music, historical setting, environmental staging are all examples of theatrical devices that could be used as a novum. In *N3RD* the theatrical novum is seen in Haley's game style language. By using both a narrative and theatrical novum Haley's plays push

"the boundaries of theatre" which meets the challenge Willingham argued was missing in science fiction on stage (Willingham 3). Haley succeeds through the advantage of theatre's grounding in space and time. From walkthrough monologues to a graphic manuscript Haley's theatrical novums foreground the apparatus of theatre. Other playwrights are writing Virtuality Theatre and introducing science fiction novums alongside theatrical ones such as Padmanabhan's *Harvest*, Gable's *The 15th Line*, or Washburn's *Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play*. Haley consistently uses her voice to explore the value of theatre to represent the digital. Theatrical principles determine how to represent and embellish such interactions. In *The Nether* Sims and Doyle know each other only through avatars. Morris disrupts their long established and intimate relationship. The disruption hinges on the nature of relationships mediated by technology and their voluntary withholding of identifiers. Haley crosses the threshold into the virtual by actualizing the Hideaway and its residents in the flesh. Virtuality is a shared communal space removed from the physical world, but anchored to the material world. It is a layer of different limitations and dynamics. Overcoming space and time in the virtual raises the idea of stored potential to another level of complexity. Haley uses Virtuality Theatre to probe deeper into the convergence of media and mechanisms that both enable and direct human communication.

Haley's writing provides innovative approaches to dramatizing digital culture that challenge assumptions about theatre and media, and it's still early in her writing career. Following the success of *The Nether* Haley began to write for television while continuing to develop work for the stage. Her developing plays,

FROGGY and *Sustainable Living* show a continuation of the style and ideas reflected

in Haley's published work, but with more self-assurance and bolder risks.

Embracing Novum: World Building L.A. Stories

In *N3RD* Haley organized the narrative around a game and a horror movie

using dioptric mediaphor techniques that emphasized multiple focal points. The

effect was hypermediation which according to Bolter and Grusin psychologically

creates a sense of reality through the awareness of the theatricality (Bolter and

Grusin 71). Hypermediacy mimics "the rich sensorium of human experience" by

emphasizing the windows as devices connecting meaning across media (34). The

audience must process the performance the way they process other hypermediated

media such as a television news cast or a web site, where attention continually

oscillates between the content and how it is presented (33). In contrast *The Nether*

relied on immediacy via transparency to invoke a spell of reality. With immediacy

the "medium erases itself" in order to immerse the viewer fully into the content

(70). Transparency provides a sense of authenticity by putting the viewer "in the

presence of the objects represented," (70). Both hypermediacy and immediacy are

embedded in theatre as a platform. Cinema appears to monopolize immediacy,

however the effect is an illusion, while theatre literally puts the viewer "in the

presence of the objects represented" with the actual flesh of the actor and material

objects. States refers to theatre as a "brief seizure in the real" and "an induced

dream" quoting Sartre (States 202).[46]

In her recent works Haley continues the dramaturgical techniques developed

in *N3RD* and *The Nether*. Haley adds additional complexity to her engagement with

the virtual in parallel style tracks, one hypermedia and one transparent. Each of

these newer plays are still in active development, and subject to change. Each

continues Haley's thematic analysis of American consumption and individual

disconnect. In earlier plays Haley's use of setting has been somewhat nebulous;

however her newer plays are rooted in a specific place, Los Angeles, California and

the surrounding desert. The new plays rely on a cultural familiarity of L.A.

particularly in association with film and television. Characters in both plays are

defined by their work in the entertainment industry. Rooting the plays in a real

place is representative of Haley moving beyond a minimalist structure of two

person scenes and evolving more complex and dynamic scenes for several actors.

Virtuality in these plays is omnipresent without apology or emphasis, and yet these

plays are more directly tied to the physical real world than either *N3RD* or *The

Nether*. The Virtual commands the world of the play as if comfortable with its place

on the stage. There the similarity between these two plays ends as how each

engages and shapes the virtual is different. *FROGGY* follows dramaturgically from

N3RD emphasizing hypermediacy. Alternatively *Sustainable Living* relies on

transparency for the entire play. It settles fully into realism with a single location, a

constrained duration of time, and a strictly forward narrative progression. In

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[46] See Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, p. 252.

comparison, *The Nether* applied realism loosely, and cinematically allowing a discontinuity of time and reordered chronology in service of the plot. Haley's technique reflected the style of a television police procedural intersplicing an interrogation in the present with dramatization of the events leading to the "crime" shown in flashback. *Sustainable Living* more resembles Ibsen as a domestic middle class drama with the grit of marriage at its heart.

By comparison *FROGGY* is a hypermediated festival, labeled a "graphic noir play" in collaborative development with director Matt Morrow, composer Nathan Leigh, and multimedia designer Jared Mezzochi (froggyfroggy.com). The production concept in development involves an integrated projection design that uses a game engine to respond in real time to actor movement. Reveling in a noir style, the play is a thriller that takes Haley's dioptric mediaphor from *N3RD* and explodes it into multiple overlapping focal points. *N3RD* followed a single story arc with scenes existing in parallel planes of game and real world. The action was always a single forward track. Haley once again enters a game world for part of the action in *FROGGY*, but this time on multiple simultaneous and overlapping levels. Parts of the action are elements of memory, consciousness and fantasy that interweave and exchange with each other. The processes of the protagonist's mind take the stage theatrically presenting the hypermedia oscillation between media and meaning. The narrative of *FROGGY* is a brutal thrill ride into the mind of an obsessed woman investigating the mysterious disappearance of her lover. This is Haley's most edgy and unconventional work to date. Haley goes boldly beyond textual choices made in *N3RD*. There she codified the play with line breaks, capitalization and punctuation.

176

Haley wrote *FROGGY* graphically similar to a storyboard, or comic layout. She composed the play in Adobe InDesign, a page layout program that is the antithesis of word processing. Haley includes structural graphic elements in the script. She divides the pages with rectangles, uses arrows to direct flow, emphasizes action with star burst polygons, and deploys familiar corporate logos along the protagonist's journey like signposts. The image elements represent visual stage directions rather than illustrations. *FROGGY* captures the relentless importance of narrative, where even in data driven culture the mind develops meaning and significance between seemingly unrelated data. The stage acts like virtual memory within a computer. Submerging the play in dioptric exchanges, Haley presents a hypernarrative that is heavy on spectacle. The play constructs a living database on stage processing Froggy's queries, filters and exchanges from memory, imagination, flashback and perception.

Haley uses a reality TV style to pay homage to *A Doll's House* with an updated reboot plucked from Norway and planted in L.A. Continuing stylistically more like *The Nether*, Haley's *Sustainable Living* uses transparency to immerse the audience in the narrative. Unlike *The Nether*, Haley confines *Sustainable Living* to a single set unfolding over one long night. This is Haley's longest play, a two act presentation of her take on the quintessential American living room drama. In the play a California couple struggles on the precipice of 21st century life. Emily considers exposing her children's daily lives on reality TV in order to fund her eco-charity project (Haley, *Sustainable Living* 16). Her husband, Darren faces ruin as a technological innovation he misapplied proves dangerous (86). The drama of this upper middle class living

room play eerily reflects today's issues. Darren and Emily seem secure, but are exposed on all sides and unable to weather the smallest shock (120). *Sustainable Living* is set in Emily and Darren's living room of vaulted glass on a California foothill (1). Realism is the genre of things according to States, where "The characters insist on talking about things, as opposed to doing things in the open world," (States 68). He says that the rigidity of the dominant set anchors the realistic play, "too much furniture, or walls that were too tight, created the effect of an unchangeable world, a 'fated' world" (States 132). What is more rigid than glass? The set however, as literally transparent, has the opposite experience of feeling too tight.

There is no computer world in *Sustainable Living*; instead the protagonists live inside a structure with vaulted glass walls and no personal clutter (Haley, *Sustainable Living* 14). Their minimalist aesthetic reflects a desire to escape the bombardment of stimulus in the outside world according to architecture critic Herbert Muschamp, "The private living space has taken on the guise of objectivity: neutral, value-free, as if this were a found space," (Muschamp, "Blueprint: The Shock of the Familiar" 66). Emily appears to channel Muschamp with her found space like living room which she claims "works best aesthetically when it's free from clutter" (14). She clarifies that she means this makes the room better for "creating a free-flow of ideas and possibilities" (15). Her metaphorical fishbowl holds an unchangeable ambiance that is also unnervingly exposed. The structure resembles Flusser's "new house" that is connected perpetually to the outside world:

178

> Lacking roofs and walls, such architecture standing wide open to the world (i.e. made up entirely of reversible windows and doors) would alter the nature of existence. People would have nowhere to cower any more, nowhere to go to ground or take cover, (Flusser, *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design* 84).

Flusser's "new house" is one that the outside world penetrates through technology. He describes the technology that connects the home to the outside world as transforming the safe private world of the home into "Swiss cheese" (83). Windows which expanded the home slightly into public space have transformed into screens opening the home completely replete with multiple applications using the idea of "windows" as an interface. Flusser writes, "Home-as-one's-castle has become a ruin with the wind of communication blowing through the cracks in the walls," (83). Darren and Emily's house is their dream, their identity, and their undoing. The house is constructed from an innovative glass designed to withstand the intense, but only periodic forces of a roller coaster. Unfortunately the glass cannot tolerate the constant day to day strain of being installed in a house (Haley, *Sustainable Living* 86). The glass is symbol for the pressures on the human family living in today's contemporary culture. It is also a device to encapsulate the family as a specimen. States notes that realism as a genre reflected scientific development while at the same time the stage *became*[47] a laboratory where "heretofore unarticulated social processes and species could be examined under the strong light of the new electrical lamp," (States 61). In addition according to States the living room was the natural choice to showcase the overlapping tensions between "the private and social spheres" according to States (66). Haley's high stakes dinner party plays out under

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[47] Emphasis is mine.

all that glass fated to crack under the strain. The mediaphoric element is the

symbolic glass working on multiple levels. The transparent windows open to

possibilities as Darren proclaims in his long monologue (Haley, *Sustainable Living*

2). They also expose the inhabitants to the outside world representing Emily and

Darren's financial peril and strained marriage. The house is a showcase for their

environmental and aesthetic values, but like a showroom the image is also a

theatrical façade. The glass breaks without warning and the natural flow cooling

system doesn't work. Emily and Darren are in over their heads, and their plight

resonates with the struggle of pursuing personal fulfillment in a practical world.

Aesthetics and ideals succumb to getting ahead or just getting by.

Faced with no real options out of crisis Emily begins to consider

transparency as a possible way forward.

> [W]hat if I had nothing to hide? What if none of us had anything to hide?
> Wouldn't that be refreshing? What if everyone could see everyone, right
> down to our skeleton? And we weren't ashamed or afraid of anything? (84).

Darren's proposed bone house is open to the sky, a surrender of the old idea of the

house where according to Flusser walls "protect the secret place of the heart,"

(Flusser 81). The "new house" connects people instead of providing shelter from

the elements Flusser writes:

> Lacking roofs and walls, such architecture standing wide open to the world …
> would alter the nature of existence. People would have nowhere to cower
> any more, nowhere to go to ground or take cover. All they would be able to
> do would be to offer one another their hands, (Flusser 84).

Thematically *Sustainable Living* lands in apocalypse as both the "revelation" the

characters discuss and as a world altering crisis at least for them. The characters

struggle in an external diorama with a tragic perspective shift on the idea of what

sustains life. Beginning as an echo of classic realism the play devolves into

something closer to reality television. Linda, who in the play is a reality TV

producer, suggests that people "secretly long for apocalypse" (Haley, *Sustainable

Living* 39). Rushkoff calls this feeling "apocalypto," which he defines as "a belief in

the imminent shift of humanity into an unrecognizably different form," (Rushkoff,

Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now 245). Apocalypto is a coping

mechanism in a culture experiencing perpetual stress of what Rushkoff sees as a

collapse of narrative.

> The hardest part of living in present shock is that there's no end and, for that
> matter, no beginning. It's a chronic plateau of interminable stresses that
> seem to have always been there. There's no original source to blame and no
> end in sight. This is why the return to simplicity offered by the most extreme
> scenarios is proving so alluring to so many of us (247).

Apocalypto occurred historically associated with religion writes Rushkoff. He

compares current secular doomsday believers to the believers of the past. However

today's "devotees" do not see a connection for "their version of the apocalypse."

They argue their impending crisis is "scientifically justified" rather than messianic

whether the believers assume the end will come from nuclear war, viral pandemics,

or killer A.I.:

> But this urgency to envision an imminent endgame is more characteristic of
> the religious tradition than the scientific one. And the extent to which we
> believe the harbingers of doom and rebirth has generally depended on the
> extent to which we feel dislocated from meaning and context (260).

Rushkoff associates the collapse of narrative to the rise of the remote control (21).

He goes on to relate storytelling trends beginning in the 1980s that evolve into

hypermediated television programs including reality TV and a more open

experiential format of drama. Calling this shift in narrative structure a "collapse" is

hyperbole. Narrative has not completely failed or disappeared. I would characterize it more as narrative crash or recession of specifically linear Aristotelean narrative. Similar to an economic shift, linear narrative has waxed and waned through history. Just like apocalypto which Rushkoff states emerges at various times in history in anticipation of a great, usually religious, change (260). The promise of the twenty-first century heightened what Rushkoff calls a "leaning towards the future" for several decades before dissipating in an anti-climactic Y2K non-event and a horrific terrorist attacks of 2001 (10). The gears shift from full focus on future to a constant management of now that Rushkoff calls "a chronic plateau of interminable stresses" (247). Apocalypto then becomes an escape by being an end; Rushkoff writes "Apocalypto gives us a way out. A line in the sand. An us and a them. And, more important, a before and an after," (246). What Rushkoff has touched on is a shift in narrative possibilities empowered by the digital, one where the emphasis is on open ended continuation. Two tracks of recessive narrative can be gleaned from Rushkoff's analysis. One is an open emerging riddle of multiple plots, many characters and perhaps an emphasis on mystery and puzzles. Rushkoff compares the worlds in these stories to "giant operating systems" where the characters and the audience work to puzzle out "how their universes work" by "making connections and recognizing patterns" (34). Such open world narrative Rushkoff says was once considered bad writing, but now may be a new genre that is "presentist" in focus where "writers are more concerned with the worlds they create than with the characters living within them" (34). World building as a genre seems perfectly logical in the digital age. Connected stories in

sequences and series are not new, but digital technology provides a previously

unprecedented realization of speculative worlds. No longer background and

transparent, place becomes pivotal in contemporary narrative. Flusser calls the

narrative offerings today a "cultural revolution" because technology provides the

creation of "alternative worlds alongside the one taken by us as given. That we are

going from being the subjects of a single world to becoming the projections of many

worlds," (Flusser 65). While "spectacle" was one of Aristotle's elements of drama

setting was not, and in world building place overrules plot and character.

The other branch of world building is represented in hypermediated meta

comedies and the "improv" like crisis mode of reality TV. Rushkoff analyzes shows

like *Community* and *Family Guy* that use satire and other techniques to foreground

the media:

> They don't work their magic through a linear plot, but instead create
> contrasts through association, by nesting screens within screens, and by
> giving viewers the tools to make connections between various forms of
> media. It's less like being walked along a pathway than it is like being taken
> up high and shown a map. The beginning, the middle, and the end have
> almost no meaning. The gist is experienced in each moment as new
> connections are made and false stories are exposed or reframed. In short,
> these sorts of shows teach pattern recognition, and they do it in real time,
> (28)

Rushkoff's description of the hypermediated worlds of these shows being like a map

is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome. They also describe the rhizome as

"a map" that is "entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the

real" (Deleuze and Guattari 12). According to Deleuze and Guattari the rhizome is

fluid in form and presentation (12). It and Rushkoff's description are also similar to

Levy's "cosmopedia" which is what he calls an emerging in the moment "galaxy" that

is rendered and updated "in real time" through the actions of its explorers (Levy

"Toward Superlanguage"). These shows construct "a coherent temporal map of the

universe in which they are living" says Rushkoff, "less about what will happen next,

or how the story will end, than about figuring out what is actually going on right

now—and enjoying the world of the fiction, itself," (Rushkoff 32). In addition, the

recession of a linear driven story creates a narrative vacuum according to Rushkoff

which manifests in "sensationalism" in an effort to find drama through heavy

spectacle with "increasingly lewd, provocative, or humiliating imagery" (66).

Reality TV replaces structured narrative with "pain, humiliation, and personal

tragedy" to establish tension and "immediate sensation for the viewer" (37). In

Haley's play, Linda argues the value of what she produces:

> Television, reality or otherwise, is storytelling, which heightens everything
> so we can see the bones . . . the bones of what's at stake, without sacrificing
> our own security. I may have a cathartic experience reading a novel about
> someone's kid dying, but I don't want it to happen to me. We long for
> existential crisis *vicariously*[48], (Haley, *Sustainable Living* 45).

Both of Haley's developing plays rely on world building and a minor theme of

apocalypto. *Sustainable Living* begins as living room drama that unwinds into the

sensational, and *FROGGY* explores an internal world of a mind grappling to construct

narrative out of experience in order to find meaning.

Narrative is how the mind organizes experience. It is the technology humans

developed to negotiate the "unpredictable three-dimensional environments

populated by diverse autonomous agents," writes Hayles in her book, *How We*

Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis (Hayles, *How We Think* 179).

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[48] Emphasis in original.

She states that "narrative is essential to the human lifeworld," (181). Through

narrative humans make sense of the world, making narrative the "essential

technology" as well as one of the oldest (180). Hayles defines humans as "meaning-

seeking animals" (180). As a technology narrative is tied to language and according

to Hayles adapts in response to "the evolutionary needs of humans" (179). In this

way narrative co-evolved with media, shifting from oral to text with the

introduction of the alphabet. Theatre puts narrative in space (De Kerckhove,

"Theatre" 146). The novel "interiorized theatre" into a personalized psychological

construction of the imagination (150). With film, narrative becomes a visual

dimension of light and sound for the masses, then television and mobile technology

take the mass message into the home and onto the pocket screen for more and more

private consumption, which, according to De Kerckhove, "gradually undermin[e] our

individual controls on imagination," (151). De Kerckhove argues that theatre

evolved out of memory techniques or oral storytelling adapted to the new structure

of the phonetic alphabet and giving sensory meaning through action in space and

time (De Kerckhove, "A Theory of Greek Tragedy" 24). In *FROGGY* Haley reverse

engineers this process. She stages the relationships between memories and

juxtaposed thoughts which combine pattern recognition with intuitive insight in

order to find meaning. A narrative skeleton emerges, one that is disjointed and

"completely crazy" as Haley calls it (personal interview). Haley was inspired by neo-

noir films like *Chinatown*, so she lifted "the kernel" of Froggy's story from Daniel

Clowes' 1993 darkly surreal graphic novel, *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron*.

That was about a man who sees his ex-lover in a porno. He goes to a porno house and he sees her in this pornographic film, and he goes in search of her. He goes in search of the production company to find out what happened to her. And then the story goes in wild directions (Personal Interview).

Haley admired Clowes' premise so much she lifted and restructured the story because she believes "that you borrow from other stories, especially the ones you love" (Personal Interview).

I borrowed the kernel of that idea and I changed the sexes. I'm very interested in playing with the traditional stereotypes of how men and women are presented in the story and flipping that a bit. I made it a woman who sees her ex-lover in a video game—he's the star of the video game. She finds out who the production company is and goes off in search of him. But *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron* the story is just completely crazy, (Personal Interview).

She samples plot points, and re-purposes images and elements into a new narrative.

The first thing of note about *FROGGY* is the graphic text. Unlike a script, *FROGGY* is visually constructed of bordered rectangles containing text. The rectangles are known as "panels" like in a comic or graphic novel, but unlike those visual media the panels do not contain illustrations. The panels should be understood like stage directions, Haley notes:

All action outside the panels is considered "real-time." Action inside a panel corresponds to memory, video game, or dream. Panels may be defined in the space by location, light, or projections (Haley, *FROGGY*, title page)[49].

The panels have a smaller, lightly shaded, rectangle occupying the top edge that contains bold text. This text is exposition and narrative spoken by the character

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[49] All references cited for *FROGGY* come from manuscript "v4c" dated March 2014 unless otherwise noted. This was the manuscript version available for download from Froggyfroggy.com. As of this writing the download is no longer available. Version "v4b" is the earliest manuscript I've seen. It is dated December 2011 and was available for download until replaced by "v4c". Version "v6c" was a revision used in a week long workshop intensive at Center Theatre Group in June 2015. This version was exploratory and following the workshop Haley returned to the structure reflected in "v4c". Therefore for the sake of this study version "v4c" will be the official script.

"WOMAN 1" also known as "Woman in Frog Mask/Voice of Froggy" (title page). According to Haley's notes on "Reading the Script" the Voice of Froggy is intended to "be amplified through a sound system, like a movie voiceover," (title page). In addition to the panels the script uses polygons in the form of multi pointed stars and rounded pill shapes with a drop shadow. These shapes emphasize sound effects which are intended to be "created by the actors" (title page). Interpreting the visual language of the manuscript rests on decoding the shapes and their orientation on each page. What will directors, designers and actors make of the number, sharpness and depth of points on a star? The pill shape indicates "echoey footsteps…" coming from inside the video game (4). How does the drop shadow used only on that shape inform the quality of the sound? Does the placement of the sound within, next to, or overlapping a panel communicate the timing of the sound? Most pages have two or three distinct panels, however occasionally the panels evaporate leaving what looks like a traditional script. These panel-less pages appear along the main narrative track, which is the real time for the character of "WOMAN 2" also known as "Froggy" (title page). Peppered throughout are symbols, icons, corporate logos, and text boxes with thicker borders open to interpretation through practical or media effects. In this play Haley foregrounds theatricality, it is intentionally hypermediated:

> Actors may pick up and drop character in plain site [sic] of the audience. Effects and transitions may also be obvious. In other words, in terms of theatre-making, there is nothing here to hide (title page).

The "narrative skeleton" of the play follows Froggy's quest to investigate the disappearance of her lover Michael who after missing for over a year suddenly

appears as C.I.A. agent "Tiger" in the artwork of an action RPG game. Froggy

acquires a bootleg copy of the game before release (9). The game's narrative tracks

Tiger who is hunting down the leader of "a rogue army trying to take over" the US

government (11). Froggy plays Tiger while he hunts rogue leader Coyote. She then

goes looking for the production company hoping to find Michael. She ends up at a

quasi-ghost town-theme park that is a front for the production company which uses

video games to distribute snuff films. Michael took his own life as the culmination of

the game/film. Answers in hand Froggy places a miniature American flag on the

grave of a trucker's cat. The cat was poisoned by the production company as a

message to the trucker and punishment for helping Froggy.

The recession of narrative associated with identity and myth is a major

theme in *FROGGY*, specifically the narrative represented by the game. In "The Last

Empire" game the United States has fallen as an icon of democracy and guardian of

freedom. The game's "hero" is a government agent ordered to assassinate the

leader of the rebel army, an elusive figure known only as Coyote. The hero's

objective is state sanctioned murder. The situation gets worse. The enemy of the

state that Tiger/Michael has been sent to kill turns out to be just a kid. Coyote calls

the US "a sad monster" and challenges Tiger to "question what he believes" (44).

Tiger is trapped by his reliance on the identity of being the hero, and following

unheroic action he sees nobility only in self-destruction. Violence is framed as the

loss of a heroic American identity: the warrior, the secret agent, or the cowboy. The

men in Froggy's life are all disillusioned and traumatized by their lost hero role. Her

father, a Vietnam veteran succumbs to alcoholism (51). Her brother also became a

solider in the first Gulf War. He was allegedly killed by "friendly fire" though Froggy

intuits he took his own life (14, 51). Her lover, Michael tries to fulfill a hero's role by

acting in action films and "looking death in the face" (6). He also carries trauma

from his brother's suicide, another soldier who killed himself while serving in

Afghanistan. In addition, Michael struggles with mental illness, the Voice of Froggy

describes him as "the bi-polar actor" (4). Michael picks up the hero mantle for one

final role. He voluntarily performs Tiger for Smileyface Productions new video

game. After achieving Tiger's mission to save the United States by murdering a

teenage boy, Tiger reports not to the government but to "Management" (48). Tiger

is now disillusioned, "I thought I was fighting for good," he says (48). "You made

that up yourself" Management responds (48). Management now requires Michael's

execution, because the game was only a false front for the real business of death as

entertainment. Michael requests that his executioner wear a mask to look like

Froggy (49). Voice of Froggy ruminates on this request in her epilogue:

> And was it his idea to put the gunman in a frog mask? Maybe so. Not, I think,
> out of symbolism, but because he wanted to die at the hand of someone who
> loved him. Or maybe I'm making all of that up. But at least it's in an order I
> can understand (54).

Voice of Froggy is processing her grief over her lost men while finding a way to put

herself back as the hero of her own story. Five times she replays a single scene in

different media and contexts. It occurs first as part of a TV soap opera when she's a

child (1). The scene is then part of an action movie she worked on with Michael and

obsessively watches after he disappears (2, 6, 27). She then lives the scene as part

of her mind piecing together the video game, a forgotten film clip, a journey through

a theme park ride and conjecture (49). In the scene a masculine "hero" leaves the

189

woman he "loves" because he will "only keep breaking [her] heart" (1). Froggy transforms from outside critic of this scene, to passive viewer, to participant, and finally achieves some level of acceptance by "saving" a lost girl in a cave and leading her back to the light (54). *FROGGY* is a puzzle style world where Froggy, the audience and before that the performers must figure out what things mean. Haley constructs the piece balancing tension between narrative and symbolism. In this piece Haley draws from neo-noir films like *Chinatown*, Clowes' surreal graphic novel, and a structure resembling a database. There are four partitions to the virtual world of *FROGGY*: Froggy's investigation, "The Last Empire", Little Froggy's memories, and Froggy's past with Michael. Each of these spaces can be thought of as a table in a database that the Voice of Froggy queries to draw relationships between records or moments.

Conceptually Haley and director Matt Morrow intend to incorporate game engine processing and interactive projections that will bring the parts of *FROGGY* to life. The projected setting and displays will respond to actor movements. This idea puts flesh actors within a simulated computer world in a way that creates thematic resonance between the narrative, consciousness and databases by turning the scenery into windows looking out rather than backdrops closing in. The "combination of ancient and current technologies" as Haley writes in *Sustainable Living* is reflected in the concept of *FROGGY* (Haley, *Sustainable Living* 2). The stage "roots us in our here and now — on this earth, in this country, on this particular spot," (2). Combining multimedia projections and drama is not new, and using a

190

game engine within performance has likewise been done before[50]. The structure of

FROGGY inverts and interiorizes the relationship between the performer and the

projection. Like a model of consciousness the projections become windows like

those referred to in Darren's *Sustainable Living* monologue which "free our minds to

fly in the universal realm of continued possibility!" (2). *FROGGY* seems to scale the

machine up in order to put the human perspective inside the computer.

　　FROGGY is not explicitly a database, but behaves somewhat like one. While

rooted in narrative there is I'll say a suspicion of database. Manovich initially

presents database as the "natural enemy" of narrative before further reasoning that

each is a method of meaning making (Manovich 227). Hayles states that narrative

and database are in no way enemies as Manovich so briefly suggested but are in fact

"natural symbionts" (Hayles, *How We Think* 176). Each is a method of

understanding the world. Narrative is the linguistic technology humans need to

makes sense of their place in a three dimensional space, and databases are a

technology that machines use to model the world (192). Haley wants the "thematic

resonance" to be more visceral than intellectual. To accomplish this she followed

her "instinct" to "root [*FROGGY*] in narrative, and then try to spring off of that,"

(Personal Interview). According to Hayles, databases require narrative to

meaningfully interpret results. Narrative benefits from database in contemporary

culture because it lends "cultural authority" through testing "the generality of its

insights" (176). The character of the Voice of Froggy provides such narrative

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[50] See "Play it again, Sam: film performance, virtual environments and game engines by Michael
Nitsche and Maureen Thomas in Carver and Beardon's *New Visions in Performance* pages 121-138

interpretation for the moments of memory and processing Froggy's experiences

with her intuition. Remove the Voice of Froggy and the play loses cohesion,

becoming image and noise without relation.

Part of the thematic resonance Haley has constructed with the Voice of

Froggy is a connection to the 1946 John Ford film, *My Darling Clementine*. In Ford's

film the titular Clementine is Doc Holiday's abandoned girlfriend who pursues him

from Boston to Tombstone. Ford's film is a highly fictionalized telling of an

American legend, the shootout at the O.K. Corral. Ford's work in turn influences the

ideal of the American hero. In *FROGGY* Haley is developing connections between

despair, masculinity, Hollywood and the myth of the American hero. Michael is

disconnected and broken, like the tuberculosis-suffering Doc Holiday he abandons

his lover because he no longer measures up to the myth of the American man.

Michael is a moody, absent, lost boy trope. He's one of the "broodingly soulful young

men" critic Nathan Rabin argues that writers and directors place as protagonists in

stories to be enchanted by an effervescent "Manic Pixie Dream Girl" trope who only

serves to venerate him (Rabin). Froggy should be the Manic Pixie Dream Girl to

Michael's tortured soul, "just [a receptacle] for his intention", but Froggy subverts

that story by claiming her own narrative (Haley, *FROGGY* 29). According to Hayles

"narrative enters in the interpretation of the relations revealed by database

queries," (Hayles, *How We Think* 182). Froggy begins her story depressed

questioning a "hole at the edge of my life" where she feels a sense of abandonment,

incompleteness and longing (Haley, *FROGGY* 5). She initially looks externally for

answers in consuming (6). Discovering Michael on the video game poster becomes

her call to adventure in her own hero's journey.

For plays rooted in the intangibleness of the virtual the attention continually

redirected to the medium of theatre reinforces the value of theatre as a platform to

decode the digital. As theatre is the original platform for temporal/spacial

storytelling, theatre is therefore the archetype medium for world building. World

building is also the structure of the digital for models, simulations, and interfaces.

Hayles writes that "databases are models of the world" (Hayles, *How We Think* 192).

Manovich defines digital media as being databases "under the surface" (Manovich

226). If the digital can be reduced down to an interface with a database, and

databases require narrative to "interpret or explain them" then the symbiosis

between database and narrative is reasonably apparent (Hayles, *How We Think*

176). Theatre provides space for memory and narrative as De Kerckhove argued

regarding theatre's essential role in the adoption of the alphabet in ancient Greece.

Now theatre once again becomes "a place to organize, process, and classify" cultural

artifacts of media literacy (De Kerckhove, "Theatre" 145). According to

De Kerckhove the stage supports "a revolution of sensory relationships pertaining

to the major modes of transmitting and exchanging information on a personal and a

social level," (De Kerckhove, "A Theory of Greek Tragedy" 24). Theatre provides an

ideal platform to model the abstract, three dimensional world of the digital in real

time and represent the stories of virtuality in human scale, and Haley is busy making

templates for aspiring playwrights of tomorrow.

APPENDIX:

INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER HALEY AND MATT MORROW

This interview between Michelle Yeadon, Jennifer Haley, Matt Morrow and Pier Carlo Talenti took place on Friday, June 12, 2015 at Kendall's Brasserie and Bar near the Center Theatre Group Company Offices at the Music Center Annex in downtown Los Angeles. The interview occurred following a final table reading of FROGGY after a week-long workshop at the Center Theatre Group. After the reading, Center Theatre Group resident dramaturg Pier Carlo Talenti invited Haley, Morrow and myself out for a drink and chat.

Morrow: (Speaking in mock demonic voice towards recorder.) Jennifer Haley is the devil.

Yeadon: (Laughs) You know that I have to copy off everything that is on the tapes.

Morrow: That's what it'll say if you play it backwards

Haley: That's going to be in your dissertation. Your cologne dragon voice.

Morrow: (Funny voice again, much laughing.) Where are my dragons?

Yeadon: Ok, so the first question is: what is a "graphic novel play?" What prompted you to write one? And what research influenced the

writing of *FROGGY*?

Haley: So I didn't know what a graphic novel play was when I started it.
I just know that I was fascinated by graphic novels. And I think
what fascinated me was the juxtaposition of text and image.
Where you'd see a piece of text, often a narrator would give a
piece of text and then cite the image that was connected to the
text — was actually somewhat dissonant or it was combative with
what the text had just said.

So there was a certain dissonance created by graphic novels. And
I was also attracted to, they were usually like really, the adult
graphic novels are like dark and psychological. And I had an
emotional response to graphic novels that I hadn't had to most
kinds of media in a while. So what was the second part of the
question? What attracted me?

Yeadon: What research influenced?

Haley: I just read graphic novels, and my favorites were *Black Hole* and
the one that I kind of—that was the inspiration for *FROGGY* was
Like A Velvet Glove Cast in Iron. That was about a man who sees
his ex-lover in a porno, he goes to a porno house and he sees her
in this porno—porn, pornographic film, and he goes in search of
her. He goes in search of the production company to find out

what happened to her. And then the story goes in wild directions. But I took the kernel of that story — I really believe that you borrow from other stories, especially the ones you love.

So I borrowed the kernel of that idea and I changed the sexes. I'm very interested in playing with the traditional stereotypes of how men and women are presented in the story and flipping that a bit. I made it a woman who sees her ex-lover in a video game—he's the star of the video game. She finds out who the production company is and goes off in search of him. But *Like A Velvet Glove Cast in Iron* that is just completely—the story is just completely crazy.

And I still really hang on to narrative and love using narrative as the skeleton of the play. But I aspire one day to be brave enough to go off into the ridiculous kinds of places that *Like A Velvet Glove Cast in Iron* does. And having the thematic resonance be—I mean you really have to just sit back and let the thematic resonance be something that you feel and not something that you think. Someday I'll do that. Someday when people will just do my plays just because of who I am. And I'll be like well take this one—take this messed up—phantasm OK!

Talenti: Because we can't say no. She's so fucking famous, we can't say no.

Haley: We'll make money off it no matter how weird it is.

Talenti: Or it will put us under the ground, either way it's just gonna….

(Much laughter.)

Yeadon: Well a follow up to that is: was there any kind of formal prompt

for this? Was this like a challenge from a writer's group?

Haley: The formal prompt for me—my formal prompt that I gave myself

was—what would it be like to write a play in the style of a graphic

novel. So the first—and you'll appreciate this as a design

person—I was at the Millay Colony, which is um in New York.

And it's just for a month, and it's the old property of Edna St.

Vincent Millay, pretty amazing female playwright. And I was

staying in the barn, which is where they house four of the artists.

The barn is supposed to be haunted. You sleep in the barn and

my workspace was in the barn. And I had no idea other than the

prompt of: write a play in the style of a graphic novel. And at the

tail end of this relation—

Morrow: Was it a prompt you gave yourself?

Haley: It was a prompt I gave myself. And I was at the tail end of

probably kind of the craziest—I would say fucked up, but it

wasn't even on the scale fucked—it wasn't even like that bad,

really I don't think. It was just like, I had been with someone who

was really kind of narcissistic, and who I had been on this like

roller coast ride for like a year. And it was finally over right at the

time I was supposed to write this play. And I really went into that

first day in the studio like I had no idea what I'm going to write. I

just wanted to write a play in the style of a graphic novel. And I

love this one: *Like A Velvet Glove Cast in Iron*.

So the first thing I did was instead of opening up a word

processing program I opened up InDesign. I was like OK, let me

just layout story in a different way, because I'm pretty dialog

heavy most of the time. So to not use dialog as the spine so much

as imagery as the spine—its interesting dialog is still sort of a

huge spine in *FROGGY*, I haven't quite given up on that. But just

laying out the story in boxes made me tell it in a different way.

Yeadon: So there was no outside prompt at all?

Haley: Meaning what? Outside?

Yeadon: Are you aware that there are two other graphic novel plays that

were written by California playwrights at the same time?

Haley: You know the only other play—the other play that inspired me

was a Dan LaFranc play. And I don't/can't even remember the

name of it[51]. It was like a superhero play, but I remember the way it was laid out. Because I didn't understand the play. So I wasn't enamored of the story of the play, but I was enamored of the layout.

Yeadon   Who wrote that?

Haley: Dan LaFranc

Yeadon: I'm not familiar with that one.

Haley: Yeah

Yeadon: I'll write down that name.

Haley: Yeah, yeah, you'd be interested in it.

Yeadon: There's Katie May in San Francisco did a play commissioned by ACT called Manic *Pixie Dream Girl* and then it was produced in August when *The Nether* was going on in London it was produced off Broadway this last summer. But it premiered at A.C.T.[52]

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[51] Dan LeFranc: *Troublemaker* or *The Freakin Kick-A Adventures of Bradley Boatright* seems to meet this description however in a follow up email (July 20, 2015) Haley stated the play was *Origin Story*. *Origin Story* is a story of a supernatural comic book in a Midwest town known as Nowheresville where strange and fantastic events have puzzled the town (newdramatists.org/dan-lefranc/origin-story).

[52] *Manic Pixie Dream Girl* was commissioned and developed by Playground. The play was the first full production at A.C.T.'s Costume Shop through a free-rent program. Katie May was awarded the PlayGround Fellowship for 2011. *Manic Pixie Dream Girl* premiered in January 2013 and later played as part of The New York International Fringe Festival of 2013 (The Present Company, Hurwitt and Holy).

Haley: Where? Who produced it?

Yeadon: I'd have to look it up. I have it saved in a file somewhere.

Haley: Is it in the Geary?

Morrow: No, it was at the Costume Shop. Was it commissioned by ACT? I don't even think it was actually an A.C.T. show, I think it was a rental.

Talenti: They use the Shop, they do rent out the Shop to small theaters.

Yeadon: At A.C.T. it's the Costume Shop

Morrow: I think it was the Costume Shop and I think it was a company renting the space. I don't think it was an A.C.T. production.

Talenti: Yeah because Carey[53] would have referred to it by now.

Yeadon: And then Matt Pelfrey, here in L.A. did a play called *NOgoodDEED*.

Talenti: Matt Pelfrey was in the Writer's Workshop six-seven years ago and he works in our subscription sales department.

Haley: Oh really. I've heard his name.

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[53] Talenti is referring to Carey Perloff, Director and A.C.T. Artistic Director who also attended the FROGGY workshop on the day of the interview and gave feedback to Haley on the current draft of the play.

Talenti: Yeah nice guy.

Haley: Yeah

Yeadon: I find it interesting that three, that I've found, three California

playwrights in the same year—[54]

Talenti: I saw *NOgoodDEED*[55]. I saw it in the Pasadena Playhouse, had a

smaller studio space upstairs, I saw a production of it. Yeah, I

remember it now.

Yeadon: So that was a big curiosity. Ok.

How much does the structural form—that visual form developed

in *FROGGY* — has that influenced your work now going beyond

FROGGY. Have you continued to use that visual formatting in

other writing?

Haley: No. I haven't really started—the only thing I started after

FROGGY, well I started *The Nether*—No. The answer is no.

Yeadon: Ok.

Haley: I think I'm still struggling with how to tell the story of *FROGGY*. So

[54] I am incorrect here. This was not the same year but rather between 2009 and 2013 multiple graphic novel styled plays emerged primarily from California writers.

[55] *NOgoodDEED* by Matt Pelfrey was produced by Furious Theatre Company at [Inside] the Ford, Ford Theatres complex in Hollywood in January 2012.("Furious Theatre Goes [Inside] the Ford With Pelfrey's No Good Deed." @ This Stage Magazine. N.p., 19 Jan. 2012. Web. 24 June 2015.)

I don't feel like I've mastered the form. I don't feel like I've

captured it yet. I don't feel like I understand it yet.

Talenti: (Getting up.) Sorry, I have to go.

Haley: Bye.

Talenti: Sorry to interrupt, I gotta go.

Yeadon: (To Talenti.) That's fine.

Haley: I'm not sure how it will influence the plays I write in the future.

Not sure. I usually try a different thing with every play. So.

Yeadon: And this draft is actually less visual, the draft you read today.

Haley: In some ways yes, yes it's more… it feels like it's moving more in

the direction of being explicable in the very psychologically real

realm as opposed to a more purely visual, experiential and

emotional realm. Hmm?

Yeadon: Yeah, because what's interesting is with May and Pelfrey's plays,

they are very traditional manuscripts.

Haley: Uh huh.

Yeadon: And while they are listed as graphic novel plays their protagonist

is a graphic novelist or comic book artist—

Haley: Oh so it's very like …

Yeadon: —that seems to justify the use of that medium. And that isn't the case in *FROGGY,* which I found very interesting in the script.

Haley: I think my hope for *FROGGY* would be that the spine of the story becomes so sure that the imagery can actually…what's the word I'm looking for? The imagery could become more symbolic because there's a narrative spine that's keeping it together in a way.

I will say the other thing that's influencing the path of *FROGGY* and I don't mind talking about it—I think it's a fun thing to talk about because it's kind of reality based—is that for *FROGGY* what we eventually want is a really incredible video design and potentially even game design. And that the requirements for a budget—the budget of a show that we're imagining—in some ways requires that it is accessible to a wide range of people. So I've never seen this as an experimental piece, or an avant-garde piece, or a piece only for people who are comfortable with avant-garde or experimental work, only they would enjoy it.

I've always—with all my work—I want to like transcend age, experience—I want people of all ages to be able to enjoy it—tap into it—I want people to be able to come into the work and come

out feeling like they know. They kind of have a real profound sense of what it was about, as opposed to "I kind of think" or "I...ya know?" So my instinct then is to root it in narrative, and then try to spring off of that.

Yeadon: Where are you with the technical side because a lot of work was done on that with the game engine?

Haley: I mean honestly where we are on the technical side is there's a lot of great work that has gone into it, but until the story is determined, you know....

So as you've seen from the website we did a lot of work on this game as this kind of first person shooter perspective of an actor who is interacting with a piece of scenery—moving through a piece of scenery that is very over the shoulder first person—first person shooter perspective—but what we're discussing now is a model for the game that's either not first person shooter at all, or we're trying to create a hybrid between you know active combat in the game and character development. And actually you know I would love to see—would love to see games that would do both you know.

I mean the thought is that—this is the generalization—that men like the first person shooters more, and women like the stories

more.

But once again, in keeping with my desire to see how much you can get people of different backgrounds, different ages, and different perspectives on the same—on the same wavelength on a show—What if a video game could do that! What if a video game could appeal to an eighteen year old man and a thirty four year old woman like SUPER appeal to both. So maybe what *FROGGY* becomes is creating that game that could do both, as opposed to trying to satisfy traditional models which is usually skewing more one or the other.

So our—to go back to the original question the media that we've designed for the game has been first person shooter and I mean my question right now is if it becomes more of a character based game, where does that—what happens to that design? And I don't know. I don't know. I think I've held onto the first person shooter because I've held onto that design and maybe I need to let that go to. The design needs to come off the story.

Morrow: Uh huh

Haley: The story needs to come first, so it's very possible that we throw out everything we've done before. (Laughs.) And we've done, you know, several workshops, and had several video designers

engaged and—We've got material—that it might all go away.

Yeadon: So where does *FROGGY* go from here?

Haley: It just goes into a re-write. And I think the question is—it's interesting at the beginning of the week when I first heard this draft, I went home. And the actors weren't attuned to it either, and the actors have to really get attuned to the style of *FROGGY.* So it's understandable—but I went home, and I thought: well I don't hear it anymore. I don't know what I've done. The re-writing I've done has taken the magic out of it. (Laughs.) And I thought well if the magic is gone, then I'm not interested anymore, you know. But then we came back, and we had such a great work week with the actors. I was like—once again, I was like "oh the magic is still here." So maybe it can morph into a new format—a new execution of the story. I think that's the challenge.

If you have a story you want to tell, can you find the exact right way to tell it. And I think *FROGGY* is still searching for that. I mean Matt and I—the director—we always knew the emotional journey. We still know the emotional journey. And now it just— but it's so clear in the workshops we've done—the presentation of the material—that people key into some of it, but there is some of it where they are like, "really?" They have a lot of questions.

206

They are not quite sure about this or that. There is something in the execution that is still not telling the story. In general, people are absorbing it and understanding it.

So how do we tell the story? Not just in a way that we selfishly are like, "Oh we get this! We know exactly what this is. We love it!" (Laughs.) To you know a general—an audience will come and I'd say—well this is ridiculous, but to put a percentage on it—but let's just do it for fun—and say 70% of the audience goes "Uh!"

Yeah I think there is something um...I mean what's interest/we've been talking about *Mr. Burns A Post Electric Play*, are you familiar with that play? Have you read that play?

Yeadon: I've not read it, but I've heard about it.

Haley: You should totally read it. I think you would enjoy it. But I talked with Anne[56] recently. And it sounds like there really is this fifty-fifty thing. Fifty percent of people *love* it. Fifty percent of people *hate* it. And I just think—I think Anne is so brave for standing on that mark.

My mark—but I also feel like that is just who I am as a person—my mark is more seventy-thirty or eighty-twenty of like, wanting

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[56] Anne Washburn is the author of *Mr. Burns, A Post Electric Play*.

people to be able, to like, understand where they are in the play. And understand where they are at the end.

So how do you execute it in the way where you—it's so funny I'm coming down with these mathematical things where—how do you reach that—the percentage of people who you want to reach, or the kind of person you want to reach. Because when people don't understand what's going on they disengage. And they get pissed off. And you know maybe you want that to happen. Maybe you're like, "I wanna piss people off!" Cool. But if you don't, then how do you…?

And I also love genre. And I love how genre—I think genre is a shorthand for people—so "It's a horror story. It's a thriller. It's a noir. It's a…"—you know. You just get people so fast that way. You just knock out a whole bunch of exposition story-telling just by throwing yourself into a genre. And then how do you honor that genre?

Because the best genres—you know my favorite movies are like—my favorite movies would include like *Blade Runner* and *Chinatown*. You don't come out of those movies, kind of trying to figure out what happened. You know? You come out of those movies going "Whoa!" You *know*. You know in your bones what

happened. So even if your mind doesn't know, your deeper

intellect knows. So I don't even feel it's like pandering to making

sense. So how do you tell the story so that the deeper intellect

gets it. And isn't thrown out because you as the writer sees things

and think you're hitting points that you are not really hitting for

them. It's like communality in—in the language of storytelling.

Yeadon: So it was a week-long workshop this week, right?

Haley: Uh huh.

Yeadon: And did you go into it with the new draft at the start of the week?

Haley: Uh huh.

Yeadon: And then rewrites throughout the week?

Haley: Uh huh build from there. Yeah so—and Matt feel free to jump in

here—I feel like the response to the previous draft—and from

people who I trust—the response was: there is something really

cool here, we don't entirely get it. We can't entirely draw the lines

between the dots. We see the constellations, the constellations

really—there's something there. Something's not completely

coming through. So I'm like OK, I respect that. I hear that. What

can we do? How can we start narrowing it down? So that's what

this draft was about.

But interestingly, with this I feel like it's been a half-way step between the old draft, and what it could become. And the only thing I can't answer—I still feel like if I take the next step with it and the magic goes away, then I just want to take a step back. I'm not interested in losing the magic. But can you keep the magic of the story, but in a way that where once again that first majority of people can come in and go, "let's have a really—a fulfilling and comprehensible experience."

Yeadon: I'm going to backtrack on your—what you were just saying about genre with the next question. You've already given interviews on *Neighborhood 3* over the years.

Haley: Uh huh.

Yeadon: I just want to follow up there. So specifically in the production notes you call up *World of Warcraft*, that was part of your inspiration as well as *CSI*, and specifically the *CSI* episode that is mentioned in the play. What other games, films or media did you intentionally research and draw from in crafting *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*?

Haley: Oh I did all of the 70s horror films. I watched *The Exorcist* in its full form. Because I had seen it as a child, but only piecemeal on television. So all of the worst scenes were taken out. So I had

210

seen it with commercial breaks on television. They did include

the head spinning around thing and the throwing up. But you

know they didn't include, the like you know, the crucifix scene

and the—So when I watched that and like—I guess it was 2006

when I watch—I was like "oh I'm gonna watch the original

Exorcist!" (Laughs.) And I was like "Oh I remember this from

when I was little!" And I knew it was a little hardcore and I

watched it. And I was like (Horrified groan/gasp sound) "Uuh!

What's happening!" (Laugher from Morrow.)

I mean they just don't make movies like that anymore. They

just—it's so sad. The movies of the 70's are gone. Um so I

watched that. *Poltergeist*. *Shining* has always been one of my

favorites. *Rosemary's Baby*…basically, I mean if you just made a

list of the classic horror films, that's what I went back to.

Yeadon: Any of the zombie pictures?

Haley: I watched *Night of the Living Dead*. Um one of my favorite films is

28 Days Later—so I had already seen that. I can't say that I'm so

huge in the horror genre. So *Neighborhood 3* was actually—and if

you're at all interested Michelle, I'll try to dig these up and send

them to you, this would be interesting to look at.

But my first draft of *Neighborhood 3* was a meditation of

monologues—suburban monologues that involved witches, vampires, exorcism/exorcists—it was basically supernatural. And then the first—when I had the first draft read, my teacher, Paula Vogel was there. I was out of graduate school but she came. And she said, you know what I hear is an organizing principle of video games.

And after that comment, by the second draft I had taken out the vampires, and the witches and everything else and I just left the zombies because I thought the symbolism was interesting in terms of parents in suburbia and—why would you buy a house in suburbia anyway and in a planned community specifically? And then the video game is an organizing principle, because she gave me that note.

But the original—the original stuff was—I love it! I mean in some ways once again with *Neighborhood 3* there was—I came to a point and it was kind of happening when I—after that note from Paula—but it was also about draft 3 or so, 'cause I still was including these very—it was really this kind of meditation on theme. And at draft 3 or 4 I decided I want this to be structured like a—you know like a traditional horror film or like a traditional film period. Where it is, like you lead up to this like climax, and then you—you know—and every scene takes you—is more

intense. So I made a very strategic decision to structure it that way as opposed to a looser meditation on theme. And that was—

Oh it's so interesting because I love the former version. And yet choosing the later version is what made it commercially viable. I feel very strongly that that's what took it to Humana and that's what.

But there was a scene I loved in one of the first drafts where—like I said—it was all just these bizarre suburban dialogs. It was always two people. They weren't connected at all. So like *Neighborhood,* where you can trace the story through the dialogs; these dialogs were not. Strictly meditation on theme.

And there was a dialog between a young girl, a teenager, answers the door to a priest. The priest is looking for her mother. He keeps asking to see her mother, who you know is upstairs in the house. And the girl won't let him see her. It's this very tense kind of dialog where he really just wants to see the mother and the girl won't let him see her. And you can never tell whether he's part of this kind of crazy, like intensive religion that she's joined and he wants to bring her back into the fold. And the daughter's protecting her from a cult basically. Or whether the mother is truly processed by a demon and he has come. And he's the good guy. And he wants to exorcise her demon and the daughter is

keeping her prisoner upstairs because she's feeding off of the demon. (Haley laughs.)

Morrow: (Very excited.) I want to read that draft! I never knew that draft existed and I want to read it.

Haley: (Laughing throughout.) You never! You never know! You never know the truth of that dialog!

Morrow: Kay do you still have that draft?

Haley: I think so. Yes, yes, yes.

Morrow: Can you send that to me?

Haley: Yes, I will.

Morrow: I would love to read that.

Haley: Ah yes. And interestingly it was my favorite scene in the whole draft and I eventually got rid of it, because it did not fit into—It was a killing your baby kind of thing.

Morrow: Oooo that makes me nervous about the mama girl scene!

Haley: I'll never get rid of the mama girl scene. Don't worry. (Laughs.) No that's there. It's the best scene in the play. That and my pool scene in *Neighborhood 3*. Best scenes ever.

Yeadon: I love the pool scene.

Haley: Yeah the pool scene and the mama girl scene are probably my

best—the best—the top.

Yeadon: Do you mean "Living Room?[57]" The before—

Haley: No, mama girl in the desert

Morrow: In *FROGGY*.

Haley: In *FROGGY*.

Yeadon: Oh *FROGGY*! Right. Got ya, yeah. Yeah!

Haley: And the pool scene in *Neighborhood 3*. Like top—my top scenes

ever. You just pull them from the play.

Morrow: I do think that Verilynn[58] nailed that. I felt like she did that very

well.

Haley: What's interest—I felt like she nailed it in the rehearsal but in the

reading she just started—

Morrow: It was a little off.

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[57] "Living Room" is the third scene in *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*. It is the only scene between two women: Tyler's mother and his ex-girlfriend.

[58] Morrow is referring to the actress who read the "Celia" or "Woman 4" roles in that week's workshopping of *FROGGY*.

Haley:　　She didn't keep up with the pace.

Morrow:　Oh yeah—the pace.

Haley:　　You actually have to be dry about it.

Morrow:　Yeah. Yeah. I know.

Haley:　　You can't—you can't put the color on it in the—she'd be like

　　　　　　(Broadly.) "I don't want to attract cougars!" You know, but you

　　　　　　can't, you just got to be (dryly), "because we're receptacles for his

　　　　　　intention." What?!?

Morrow:　Yeah. She did do that.

Haley:　　You have to let the audience do all the comedic beats. And you

　　　　　　have to be like (dryly), "I don't want to *attrack* cougars." It's got

　　　　　　to just be so straight and so dry. And she got—I think she got

　　　　　　emboldened by rehearsal and she was just like…

Morrow:　Yeah. Yeah.

Haley:　　"I'm going to get the laughs out of this." And then they went away.

Yeadon:　It was a little cartoony.

Haley:　　Yeah. Yeah.

Morrow:　That's a hard line. "I don't want to attract cougar—cougars." For

some reason, like that line is really hard. "attract cougars."

Cougars is hard to...

Haley: It's not even attract, it's "attrack."

Morrow: Attrack.

Haley: I don't wanna attrack cougars.

Morrow: Attrack. Attrack. Yeah.

Haley: I don't wanna attrack cougars.

Morrow: Attrack cougars. Bit of a tongue twister.

Yeadon: Ok, any other games other than *World of Warcraft* with *Neighborhood*? Any of the horror genre games?

Haley: I didn't actively play, but I looked into like *Silent Hill*. I was playing some video games at the time—or I borrowed a console from Dan LaFranc and uh I'm trying to remember...I think I played a little *Silent Hill*. I can't remember what else I played.

Yeadon: Ok.

Haley: It was more...it was more movie based.

Morrow: I do have to go probably pretty soon. I do have a bunch of emails waiting for me in at my hotel. You can come back and hang out

with me, but I just have to do a little bit of work. There's a few

things that I notice in my phone that I have to address.

Haley: Yeah, I totally understand.

Morrow: So how much longer do you think this will take?

Yeadon: Well, I can run through your questions very quickly.

Morrow: Ok, yeah.

Haley: I feel like would we be able to continue via *Skype*? Because…

Morrow: I'm also feeling a little exhausted from the week.

Haley: The week has been exhausting

Yeadon: Right.

So for the record Matt, What is your role within the *FROGGY* team

and how did you come to be involved?

Morrow: I'm the director on *FROGGY* and I came to be involved because I

work-shopped a play that Jen wrote called *Neighborhood 3:*

Requisition of Doom. And we met during that process. And after

that workshop we kept up via email. And uh Jen sent me her play

FROGGY and I love it. And I kept keeping up with her, kept

pinging her with emails about wanting to develop it because I felt

such kinship with it.

Haley: Uh huh.

Morrow: And then we applied to Sundance together. That happened?

Haley: We went to Sundance in 2011, spring 2011

Morrow: 2011. Yeah, yeah, yeah but we had talked about it a lot and then….

Haley: Weren't we at P73 in 2010?

Morrow: Oh right! We did that first! (Applauds). So Page 73 offered Jen a workshop of *FROGGY* and Jen asked if I would like to help her develop it at Page 73—this week long workshop at Yale. And. But I did and we hit it off and it was wonderful. It's a wonderful first introduction to working together.

Yeadon: And what excites you most about *FROGGY*?

Morrow: The visual style of *FROGGY*. I think what excites me most about Jen as a playwright in general—which is also what excites me about *FROGGY*—is that I feel as a director that I am needed in the storytelling of it. I feel like Jen sets up these wonderfully theatrical scenarios that have such dramatic potential and she is a brave soul because she relies on her collaborators—her designers

219

and her director to sort of finish it—to take it to uh the final uh realization in a theatre. You know like for instance *Neighborhood 3* has no stage directions.

When I first read *FROGGY* it was a puzzle of play that was really hard to read. But you know as a director I really had to sift through these images and um and narration and bits and pieces of dialog to sort of find a narrative—that I know Jen knew was there all along, but was not necessarily apparent. You know I—What attracts me to Jen's work is she's just extremely brave—extremely brave in the form, because she is constantly pushing the form. She constantly wants to experiment with the form. And that she is brave in that she says, "Here I'm passing the baton off to you, what do you have to do with this? How can you—you know— turn this into something? Or how can you?" You know—

Haley: Realize it.

Morrow: Realize it in some way. You know. And I feel like emotionally her work is so resonant. Like I feel like the characters are always extremely vivid and recognizable. And the narrative is always sort of something that you can recognize from within your own life—even if you can't really pinpoint it from your own personal history. There is something in it that resonates with everyone.

There's an eternal truth that she just sort of taps into—she sort of

punches a straw into and siphons out some truth and uh—and

then she says, "HERE!" to a director, "Go! Run! Play!" And that

really excites me, because it makes me feel uh needed as a

director. I don't feel that I'm necessarily at the service of but I'm

very much a partner in—but then again, I also feel that I'm very

much at the service of her talent, because the ability to sort of

pinpoint and puncture into, you know, the—some core truths that

she is able to puncture into takes some real insight and talent.

Does that make sense?

Yeadon: It does.

Morrow: Does it? Does that make sense? Ok good. Ok.

Yeadon: So you mentioned that the mother and daughter scene in *FROGGY*

and is your favorite. Why is that your favorite?

Morrow: Because it scared me the most. When I first read *FROGGY* I was

just terrified of that scene. I was like holy fuck I'm so scared of

the—because it's two women, and you know I grew up—I

understand women—I think—being a gay man—I was raised by a

very strong mother and—

Haley: And two sisters

Morrow: And two *older* sisters—I'm the youngest. So I very much connect with the female energy. That scene made me realize that I don't have any clue what women go through!

Haley: (Laughs heartily.)

Morrow: I have so little—I have so much to learn I can say about what women go through. (Laughs.) And so it terrified me. And again it's so honest. It was just such a raw honesty of this woman, like trying to like take care of her period in the middle of nowhere. And you don't get any more truthful than that. You know like— there's just such a—

Haley: And we never talk about that.

Morrow: Never talk about it. And you know there is all this talk in *FROGGY* about wounds, and here's this woman with this like wound that is just part of who she is—and that she can't deny—and that scared the fuck out of me. It felt bigger than me. At that point in a weird way…

Haley: (Laughing.) And the wild animals are circling, they smell the wound. And the wild animals are circling!

Morrow: Uh huh, and then at the end of it the—the—the impulse to destroy the hope you know when she tries to throw the baby in the fire—

the impulse to destroy the thing that can actually help us evolve or help us carry on in some hopeful way. Like it—it just terrified me. And it felt bigger than me and so I wanted that. (Both laugh.) I wanted to be a part of it, and I wanted to know more about it. You know. I wanted to learn.

Yeadon: I have one more question for you Matt. So any games that you play? You said you were a board-gamer, but any games?

Morrow: *Yahtzee*!

Haley: Yeah!

Morrow: *Yahtzee* is my game.

Haley: *Sorry*.

Morrow: *Yahtzee's* my game. Well I mean, growing up I did play *Yahtzee*. Growing up did play *Nintendo*. *Nintendo*—we had—I was a crazy *Nintendo* kid. And one game that I played when I was a child was the *Friday the 13th* game.

Haley: Oh I don't know that game—I don't know that game at all.

Morrow: You got to play Jason.

Haley: Really?!?

Morrow: Running around killing campers.

Haley: Really?!?

Morrow: It was awesome.

Yeadon: Yeah. Yeah.

Morrow: It was awesome. It was like one of the first like horror games.

Haley: (To Yeadon.) Did you play that one?

Yeadon: Yeah.

Morrow: So I love that game because I was also a horror movie fanatic.

When I was a child—I told this story to Jen and everyone earlier

this week, and you probably heard it before this week—but um,

but uh when I was six, my mother—who was also very into

horror movies for some reason let us watch—all of us kids—let us

watch *Friday the 13th*, the first one. And I think that it was when it

came on TV. It was just you know she sat us down and we were

going to watch a movie. It was movie night!

Haley: What was the—what was the impulse you think for your mom?

Morrow: I have no idea! It was just movie night. It was just like business

as usual. (Haley laughs.) There was no impulse. There was

nothing you know special about it. It was like, OK now, let's

watch this movie. And so I sat on my mother's lap and you know

in this old—this antique rocking chair—that I can remember. It

was just this beautiful rocking chair. And watch this entire movie.

And I was just in awe of it. You know, just like. The movie doesn't

hold up at all. But back then you know your attention span is a

little longer so you can stay with those moments of tension longer

up until these really gruesome kills. And there was, these really

gruesome kills that I didn't freak out about at all. I didn't freak

out, until the very end. And the very end is when Jason jumps out

of the lake and grabs the last woman—the last girl—the survivor.

And the killer in the first one is the mother, so she's been

vanquished—she's dead—but you've heard stories of Jason and

you don't really know too much about him. But he was sort of the

odd kid out, you sort of got that—and I was always the odd kid

out and um—I even knew that at that age—but when he jumped

out of the lake you realize that he was actually this deformed

child.

And that was terrifying to me, that he was just this physically this

other worldly B child. And that he was physically that way and

emotionally that way. It was just like I had this huge emotional

reaction. And I like shot up in my mother's lap and I was

screaming my head off. And I couldn't stop screaming. And my

mother literally had to slap me across the face to stop me from

screaming.

Haley: This was when you were six?

Morrow: I was six.

Haley: And this was the first *Friday the 13th*?

Morrow: This was the very first one. And from that moment on (Applauds)

game on! It was done. I was like "I'm in! I want it! I want these

horror stories."

Haley: Do you kind of credit your mom with your creative—is this a

moment where you like see your mom as the—as the—kind of

engine—or the one who started your creative—who tapped in—

was the first one to like for whatever reason showing you this

film tapped into

Morrow: Actually my dad was an artist—he was a visual artist and I would

draw all the time. So like creatively my dad was always

encouraging me. And my mother never really understood that.

She never—she never really got it. She came from a very lower

middle class family in uh urban St. Louis and…

Haley: I don't know if I knew that about your dad, but I guess doing the

detailing that I can see that.

Morrow: Yeah, so, no I mean I'm glad that she was a bad parent, and let me see that movie, so in that way I credit her. But she was an amazing—

Haley: (Laughs.) The importance of being a bad parent!

Morrow: An amazing mother. You know, I mean I survived it. You know it wasn't a bad thing for me to see. I don't think like—it actually set me up in a lot of ways to survive a lot of horrors of life. But—and also it did—it did.

Haley: That dude is just smokin' a doobie, walkin' down the street (Noticing man walking by).

Morrow: Got me—yeah I love L.A.—I love California!

It yeah, did get my juices flowing though—that it was a combination—my parents were the perfect combination of people—the perfect—they made some good people, me and my sisters. So yeah. There you have it.

Yeadon: Ok. Well I'm sure I will have other questions for you later.

Morrow: Yes, please feel free to be in touch. Do you have my email?

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