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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the genre of interactive narratives. In this work I bring to life the experience of viewer driven narrative exploration. The work develops a way in which a narrative can be more whole, more experiential and more accurate. The animation includes a fictional account of a historical event told in multi-accessible levels observing each of the participant's points of view.

This thesis is about designing a new kind of storytelling and about observations shared through multiple perspectives. The work is intended to tell a story from the point of view of its actual participants and then allow switches and cross comparisons between those characters.

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INTRODUCTION

When I began telling most people my thesis topic I encountered two common responses time and again. First: “What is an *interactive narrative* anyway?” And second, “What made you pick *that* topic?” The first question I’ll address in great detail throughout the whole of this document. I hope to express my understanding of the topic as well as the contributions of contemporary experts within this field of study. The answer to the first question isn’t as easily pinpointed as the answer to the second.

I actually remember the exact minute at which I decided upon my area of study, but I’d rather first relate a story that I think had influence on the matter before I gave this topic consideration.

In 2001, I purchased my first DVD player. I realize I was a little late in getting into this technology, but I hadn’t yet seen or understood its advantages. The first movie I rented and watched with the player was *Men of Honor*, starring Cuba Gooding Jr., Robert DeNiro, and Charlize Theron. The movie was a little better

than O.K. By that I mean it was a nice story about deep-sea naval divers and some good acting helped it along...I remember enjoying it.

After the movie was finished, the techno weenie inside of me took over and I had to get my first taste of "special features." As I scrolled through the menu, I came to a section that was labeled "alternate endings." I couldn't resist; I needed to see other possible conclusions to this story: It was that same feeling a child has while opening a present on Christmas Eve. In the moment that it took for the other possible endings to load on screen, I was almost giddy with anticipation; I couldn't pull the 'paper' off of my present quickly enough. In the original story, as seen in theatres and on the main DVD track, DeNiro's character dies, and the origin or cause of his death remains untold. Most viewers probably assumed it was due to poor health caused by hard living and previous military injuries. However, in the first alternate ending his death is explained in great detail through adding the scene in which he dies to the end of the movie. It's revealed that DeNiro dies by jumping off of a roadway bridge to save a drowning child. It's not the jump that kills him; an embolism in his brain ruptures because of the depth he has to dive to in order to save the drowning victim. The embolism *is* the result of a previous military injury, and he was aware of the potential danger it posed if he ever dove again. Suddenly, I realized that his character died a hero, but more than that, the story had actually changed. My interaction with the DVD had resulted in a change, or more precisely, an addition to the story.

The second alternate ending added another scene while still excluding the previous alternate ending scene. So with this second alternate ending, (actually the third ending), we still don't know the cause of DeNiro's death, but we learn of Gooding's character coming to peace with DeNiro at his funeral. He lays a sentimental piece of military memorabilia into DeNiro's casket, symbolizing a "thank you" and a resolution to the conflict between the two of them. This time I realized that there really had been a change in the narrative. By deciding which alternate ending to watch, I was actually changing the story. Of course, the change wasn't *dramatically* altering the story, but the process seemed exhilarating. It was only after reflecting back on this situation that I realized its significant influence on me. Why couldn't DeNiro have lived in one of my choices, or why couldn't there have been a few more action scenes in the middle? I didn't know it yet, but I was already in the very early stages of exploring my thesis topic.

Later that year I began my graduate studies at the University of Cincinnati. Into the second quarter of my first year of studies, I took a seminar class on digital design. On the last day of the quarter that we met for class, one of the discussions raised for debate within the group centered on the validity of nonlinear, interactive narratives. The conversation actually became quite heated. Within a few seconds of discussion, our opinions had divided us into two passionate camps. The consensus of the first group was that once the narrator loses control of his/her narration, that narrator is no longer telling a story. Their argument stated that for the narrative to be valid and meaningful, it had to be told only as intended

in one single linear form. The second group (the group that I subscribed to) held the argument that if events were revealed it had to be a story. The sequence was inconsequential; the audience would formulate an interpretation of their own, based on whatever content they received. We were actually excited by the empowering of the viewer. We felt that it was good that a story could change or be different for different people.

At that moment, I remember thinking that this *truly is interactivity*, in the actual sense of the word. All at once, I was trying to draw connections between this new genre and how it would or could advance because of trends in technology under current developments. I remember thinking this is how a DVD *should* work. This is how the Internet and interactive TV *should* tell a story. And yes, this was the moment in which I discovered my thesis topic. It seemed very exciting that a group of students were so quickly passionate about this concept. Maybe I was just lucky in the class of young eager minds that surrounded me, but I really think that there is much more to the idea than just that. It's not to say that I believed an interactive narrative to be superior to a linear narrative, but it did seem like a new and much more interesting way in which to tell a story. I like the idea of the audience not having total control, however, I also loved the process of discovery and revelation that interactivity allows.

In the digitally designed portion of this thesis I've created a genre that will suit my interests. I wanted to create work that stimulates the viewer/participant to

question traditional narrative styles (i.e. film) and to demand more. The work is about multiple perspectives and all that different points of view can add to a story. It is intended to capitalize on DVD and Web technologies, bringing about a true sense of interaction with the story. The project is about experiencing different accounts of the seemingly same event. In this written work I address these topics through research, formulation of theories, and practical arguments, citing examples as well as my opinion. I've also created a multimedia piece within this genre to serve as an experience that provides another level of understanding of the engaging nature of a truly nonlinear, interactive storyline. In the next section, the introduction to this work, I explain my plan of approach.

CHAPTER ONE

An Analysis of Interactive and Nonlinear Narratives

First, and simply put: What is an interactive narrative? What is a nonlinear narrative? These two questions alone provoke as much controversy as they create inquiries. I try to take an analytical approach; first examining the words and their context, and then I move into some expert opinions on the matter. Most importantly, I try to establish a working definition or understanding that *I* am comfortable with. It's this understanding that I'll refer to and carry throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Also, I hope to look at and argue in favor of some of the advantages of a nonlinear interactive narrative format as opposed to a linear one. It is within this area that I hope to dispel the myth that nonlinear narratives lack validity or substance.

Well, first things first. What is an interactive narrative? It's not really a simple question. I think it's important that we first look at the words individually; at least starting with a simple approach. Webster's Universal College Dictionary gives the following definition for the word *interactive*: 1. *acting upon one another*. 2. *(of a*

computer or program) characterized by or allowing immediate two-way communication between a source of information and a user, who can initiate or respond to queries. I'll look at some key words and thoughts that need to be examined within these definitions.

With the first definition of “acting upon one another,” it seems that Webster is referring to a conversation between two or more thoughtful beings. I really like the notion of one person basing his/her reaction on the actions of another person. Thinking of this within my digital work has allowed me to create an element of human interaction within the piece. It made me realize that for the piece to be truly effective it had to breathe. Not in the literal sense of taking air in and out, but it had to express human-like characteristics that give the viewer a feeling of mutual interaction.

The second definition more directly relates to my thesis study. What I like most about this definition is the phrase: “immediate two-way communication.” The idea is still expressed that two entities are interacting with one another; yet, it's suggested that because that interaction is somehow technology driven “(of a computer or program),” it must be “immediate,” involving instantaneous interaction, like a calculator solving your mathematical equation, or a word processor beeping after a misspelled word is typed. Is this immediacy an expected standard of digital interaction? Either way, it's extremely interesting. The definition goes on to say that this communication is “between a source of

information and a user.” This seems contradictory to the previous definition. Where is the human element? Where is the mutualism? Well, this expands our understanding of the word. Although it would be nice for all interactions to be human in nature, it’s not necessary. Interaction can be an experience of information transferring from source to user. The interaction can be one taking something away from the other. The transfer of information can take place just by one source giving resources and another absorbing them. And finally the phrase: “initiate or respond to queries.” This is the core of interaction. There needs to be questions that are asked during the process, and someone has to respond to those questions. It’s this idea that I tend to lean on in the creation of true interactivity within my digital piece. The viewer has to be asked questions by the story he/she is watching for it to be truly interactive.

Interestingly enough, Webster’s also has a definition for the term “interactive fiction.” It says: *1. an adventure or mystery story, in the form of a video game or book, in which the player or reader is given choices as to how the storyline is to develop.* (A bit crude, but much more concise than I’ll ever be.)

Next I’ll look at the term *narrative*. Webster’s describes a narrative as: *A story or account of events, experiences, or the like, whether true or fictitious.* What I think is most important to reflect upon in this definition is the story as an “account of events” or “experiences.” I’ve always subscribed to the notion that a story is most intriguing when its viewer/reader commiserates with it. If its descriptions

somehow relate the humanistic nature of experiences, then we can understand it better; even sympathize with it more. As Webster says, it doesn't matter if the events are fact or fiction; we need to "feel" the plotline as it's revealed to us.

So then let's combine the groups of thought these words embody to form a term describing an interactive narrative. An interactive narrative is: A story or account of events, where both the story and viewer interact upon one another, initiating immediate two-way communication, while transferring information and responding to one another's inquiries. What this suggests is that there isn't one simply predestined chosen path. It takes two to make an interactive narrative, and just as much responsibility lies with the author as with the viewer.

This leads into my next thought: Aren't interactive and nonlinear narratives the same thing? No. They are not. A nonlinear narrative suggest a story which *does not follow a predetermined route or path* in the way in which it recounts the events that have occurred. The reader/viewer can proceed in many different directions based on their choices; however it lacks something inherent to an interactive narrative. The story is not required to react with its audience. The human factor, that element that we determined in the previous definitions to be most crucial in actual interactivity isn't required. For this reason I see a nonlinear narrative as information being consumed, as opposed to an experience taking place. Yes, the outcome does change with each visitation to the story; however, a nonlinear narrative may just lack that extra "oomph" that keeps people interested.

Nevertheless, as a not so distant cousin of the interactive narrative genre, I think it's extremely important to examine it thoroughly with research and examples. A great amount of information is still there to be gained as far as human interaction and reaction.

J. Yellowlees Douglass, who has written and studied extensively in the field of interactive and nonlinear narratives, wrote a book entitled: *The End of Books—Or Books Without End: Reading Interactive Narratives*. In this work he gives what he believes to be his definition of an interactive narrative: ¹“...consider interactive texts to be those that contain episodes in the form of chunked text and a range of action accompanying a single decision...” He goes on to say, “Unlike the pages of a book, however, these episodes are joined together by links, which may be available to readers as choices for navigating through the narrative...” With this definition, I think Douglass touches on some key points that are lacking if our definition is derived only from our dictionary research.

The idea that interactive narratives “contain episodes in the form of chunked text” seems to examine the genre in a way that adds more understanding of a possible structure or model for this entity. It's the concept of seeing a narrative or story as simply a bunch of “chunks” or pieces, and the way in which we as the viewer/reader connect these chunks determines the type and level of our

¹ Douglass, J. Yellowlees. *The End of Books—Or Books without End: Reading Interactive Narratives*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000.

interactivity. There is definitely something to be appreciated in the enhancements that Douglass's definition brings to the subject. Our dictionary definition, although accurate, tends to overlook subtleties like: how these connections are made, and how they are made available to the viewer/reader. These areas pose for me some of my most difficult problems and questions within the digital piece. How should these interactive sections work? How much interaction should there be? How many possible outcomes are feasible without the project getting too large to handle? These are not easy questions, however, I have been able to reach a level of comfortable resolution for most of them through researching examples.

Later in the book Douglass goes on to describe what he believes to be some crucial elements to make-up an interactive narrative. He calls them the things "that print does not—or cannot do." These items may seem somewhat obvious, however, he warns they are often overlooked in many failed attempts to create an interactive narrative. Later in this thesis I plan to more carefully elaborate on some of these ideas, but for the purposes of determining our definition, I think it would be good to look at them as a list for now. The following list is Douglass' assertions and some of them I have chosen to include in my own understanding of the genre. Some I have not included due to disagreement.

1. Interactive narratives have no singular, definitive beginnings and endings.

2. Readers of interactive narratives can proceed only on the basis of choices they make.
3. Interactive narrative segments exist in a network of interconnections mapped in virtual, three-dimensional space.
4. Interactive narratives have many orders in which they can be read coherently.
5. The language in interactive narratives appears less determinate than the language present in print pages.

For my own definition I believe I like a combination of most of these ideas, however, I feel what's most important to me, yet most lacking in all is the human element. There needs to be at least the illusion of relationship interaction, or mutual human condition interaction. Perhaps this could most easily be achieved through the natural tendency of readers to enhance whatever they are reading with a great amount of their own imagination and assumptions on the subject matter. How many times have you been reading a novel or short story and without the character's physical description yet revealed to you, you form an image in your head of what this person looks like. Or you relate someone you know of, or are familiar with, to this character without really knowing much at all about the character. Perhaps through provoking and stimulating this natural response, an

interactive narrative could better address that necessity for a human level of interaction. It would be different for everyone, but extremely personalized for each person. That word “personal”, I believe should also lie at the heart of this definition.

Think of the great advantages this medium inherently brings. Every time you visit the work, an additional different outcome is possible limited only by the total possible number of outcomes. The audience member can gain many more insights into the depths of the narrative and characters through accessing higher or lower amounts of information. As compared to traditional linear storytelling, I believe interactive narratives remove the restrictions of ordinary linear progression, and transform the narrative into an enhanced storytelling experience.

In the next chapter I look at some examples of interactive narratives from the past and present and try to gauge their validity/success. In the next chapter I also discuss some theories of the genre.

CHAPTER TWO

Viewer/Audience Interactions and Reactions

In this chapter I examine some examples of nonlinear and interactive narratives while trying to measure their shortcomings or successes. Later, in Chapter Three, I use these examples as influential learning experiences in my own multimedia piece.

Part of the reason I was drawn to working on this project, was that I sensed a shift occurring in what was starting to be accepted, (as far as variety of narrative), in mainstream media. Over the past nine years, I've started to notice the emergence of cinema questioning traditional narrative techniques, and in some cases, even been embraced by the public. I believe this shift started with Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*². This was a film that aggressively manipulated the time and sequence of events that occurred throughout its plotline. Tarantino starts the movie with a character, Vincent Vega, who is actually already dead chronologically in the movie's timeline. As the film progresses, we see this character get shot and die and then a few scenes later he's back in the mix of things as if nothing has

² *Pulp Fiction*. Written and Directed by Quentin Tarantino. film, 1994.

happened. The more one watches the film, the clearer the unfolding of its sequence of events. The idea of Tarantino playing with timing and order is what makes this film such an interesting piece to mainstream entertainment at the time.

Another groundbreaking film that came along after *Pulp Fiction* is Christopher Nolan's *Memento*³. In this film, Nolan completely slices apart the timing of the film. Nolan contrives events entirely out of chronological order to reference the short-term memory of the film's main character. At some points, the effect is even agonizing to watch. But again, it's different—much different.

Both of these films received astounding critical as well as public acclaim. It seemed America was ready for a change in the tradition. I started to search for examples seizing that change in the realm of interactivity.

One such example comes from the School of Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon University. The example is referred to as the *Oz Project*⁴. In this work, some students are working to develop technologies that will aid artists in the creation of what they call “high quality interactive drama.” In essence they are working to build an artificial intelligence system that will create believable scenarios as a viewer/participant navigates through the narrative. They are concerned with making the products of this experiment a highly interactive

³ *Memento*. Written by Christopher Nolan. Directed by Christopher Nolan. DVD, 2000.

⁴ <http://www-2.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs.cmu.edu/project/oz/web/oz.html>

drama; meaning that the outcomes of the interactors choices are completely fresh and unpredictable with each visit. They have decided not to limit the narrative choices if at all possible. The work is both textual and animation based.

Although quite intriguing, this example differs from what I hope to achieve. In the dramatic event that I've chosen, the facts of the story occurred nearly eighty years ago. I focus specifically on a concentrated period of time that happened historically. The story that I'm looking at is completed and its events can be referenced. It's not some much an invention, of drama as it is a more in depth examination.

Another interesting example sprouts from the world of academia as well. A project called: *Kids Room, An Interactive Narrative Playspace*, surfaced from research conducted by the Interactive Cinema Group at the MIT Media Laboratory⁵. This environment was developed as a "fully-automated, interactive narrative playspace for children." For this work students converted a child's bedroom into a multimedia epicenter. Ordinary object within the room were integrated into the narrative. The space was wired with three video cameras and six computers, all tracking and reacting to the movements of the children. The ways in which the children behaved within the room affected the outcome of their narrative.

⁵ <http://www-white.media.mit.edu/vismod/demos/kidsroom/kidsroom.html>

What I find most fascinating about this approach was the intense level of participation the children most probably experienced. Instead of watching a story unfold or making choices on a screen, their actions in the playspace decided the story for them. They may have even been unaware that they were making choices.

This work also differs from the goals that I hope to accomplish; however I envy its immersion of participant/interactor. I also enjoy the amount of success achieved in the realm of plausibility, as these projects audiences are all children. The notion of a room coming to life, seems much more believable at a youthful age. This work is important in that it is highly successful in hiding the evidence of how the user is interacting with the story. The researchers also believe that “the Kidsroom was the first multi-person, fully-automated interactive, narrative playspace ever constructed.

In her book *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, Janet Murray offers a very interesting analysis of the experience of an audience becoming a participatory author during the telling of a story. Many of those who have debated the process of interactive narratives would argue that the interactor *is* the author. Murray disagrees:

This is a misleading assertion. There is a distinction between playing a creative role within an authored environment and having authorship of the environment itself. Certainly interactors can create aspects of digital stories in all these formats...but interactors can only act within the possibilities that have been established by the writing.⁶

⁶ Murray, Janet H. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York: The Free Press, 1997. (Page 152)

Think for a minute that your mother and your brother (assuming you have a brother) both went to see a movie together. That same day you were sick, had a prior engagement, whatever the case—you were unable to see the movie with them. As you return home later that day you ask your mother first what the movie was about. Later you encounter your brother and ask him what the movie was about. Are these two synopses going to be extremely similar? You may get the same cast of characters from both parties, but the events will unfold quite differently in the two separate accounts.

The way in which someone tells a story matters! Everyone views and understands life differently. Imagine the impact that factors like local color, life experiences, age, wisdom, and vocabulary can have on the “authorship” of a story. For that matter, think how fields of study like design, and information architecture, or exposure to literature can have an effect on the final result. By offering the possibility of interactivity, the author is simply adding another layer to the depth of the tale. The medium has changed, not the message. I know Marshall McLuhan, *the medium is the message*, but the message is still there. There really is something to the idea that different people tell stories differently. Don’t worry, I come back to it shortly!

Ms. Murray has taught the genre of interactive narratives at both MIT and the Georgia Institute of Technology for over ten years. Although her classes are

primarily taught referencing the genre of highly technically scripted computer environments, some of the basic principles she covers can be examined theoretically. She examines ideas like navigation, character development, and complexity; and her students are required to create various miniature interactive narrative projects addressing these issues. One such assignment requires the audience to complete a given task, (e.g., imagine you are a rat, now go find some cheese). This technique of interaction is what most would consider game play or game interaction. You are assigned a mission and must complete that task through a role-playing, investigational process. This type of example answers many of the critical objections raised by interactive narrative skeptics. Many who criticize the genre claim that by removing the suspension of disbelief and the absolute control of revealing events, that a story can no longer be interesting. The audience can no longer be engrossed in the same way that they are when watching cinema for example. The best way to keep people's interest is to make sure that they forget they're watching a movie.

Game play counteracts the usual effect caused by that separation of medium and participant. You have to interact to keep the flow of the plot continuing. You, as the viewer, are the story. I enjoy this style, but I think it differs from what I hope to accomplish with the medium. It lacks the academic approach I'm after, that questions narrative, as it exists today.

Take for example, games like *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*⁷ and *Fatal Frame*⁸. In both of these games, you participate as the main character of a story. The story changes for each player because each player may or may not make similar choices in his or her quests. Regardless, it's quite obvious that as this character, you (the player) are making choices. The choices are expected and therefore taken for granted as part of the game process. I am trying to tap into a different type of experience. My hope is that with this work, audience members will begin to question sitting idly by as a story unfolds before them. I want them to start to demand more of movies and the Web. With games it's understood that in order to continue a story one must participate. With traditional narratives that is not always the case. The work that I am examining and creating with this project is asking the viewer/participant to demand more of a story, seek further information, and ask more questions. I think it would be difficult for gaming to present this scenario. Many more people enjoy a great story than do a great video game. Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I enjoy gaming just as much as anyone; however, I would love for this piece to stimulate education or enlightenment in a way that reaches the broadest of mindsets.

Another example I was introduced to recently can be found in the television series *Boomtown*⁹. It took a while for me to warm-up to this show, for reasons outside of its narrative style (i.e., acting, writing, etc...). The premise of the show reveals

⁷ *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. Created by Dan Houser. Rockstar Games. Videogame. 2002

⁸ *Fatal Frame*. Created by Tomonobu Itagaki. Tecmo Games. Videogame. 2001

⁹ *Boomtown*. Written by Graham Yost. Directed by John Avnet. CBS television series, 2002.

events or crimes from the different participants' points of view. What a great concept! So the idea is that as a murder is being committed you could see what the cops are thinking, what the murderer is thinking, the victim and the rescue worker as well, all during the show. The concept is really strong; however, I feel it falls short in a few key areas of interactivity. And as we all know, TV isn't really interactive *yet*.

First, the show merely changes your vantage point. Very rarely does it actually let the viewer enter the perspectives and understandings of each different character. Moving the camera around is not enough. I believe the style of the telling of the events needs to change. As I stated earlier, different people perceive the ways in which events unfold differently, and a truly interactive narrative would reflect that. Remember our definition: "...both the narrative and the viewer need to interact upon one another..." The viewer is not a part of the story if his/her understanding does not truly coincide with that of the protagonist.

Second, and simply because of the nature of the TV, the viewer has very little control over the telling of the story—controls like: "Which character's vantage point am I observing now?" or "Can I switch between the different narrative styles at my own discretion, not just as the linear TV program allows?" A truly interactive/non-linear narrative needs to relinquish some of the story telling control to the viewer. As frightening as it sounds, I believe it to actually enrich the story telling experience. Remember, as Ms. Murray stated earlier; "...interactions

can only happen within the possibilities established by the writing.”

Boomtown was on to something in their premise; however, the product could never actually be considered a truly non-linear/interactive story. We’ve already established that its interactivity is non-existent, and I feel a better term to describe the series would be “multi-linear” as opposed to “non-linear.” *Boomtown* is still only telling the story in a single linear fashion. That line has many branches, but they all still converge at the same linear ending—they have to! In reality, as it stands now, television is a linear narrative. We are able to switch between channels; but if we wish to follow one single narrative, we are not participants in the telling of the story. In our own day-to-day language we address this very same concept. How many times have you heard an audience described as “captivated” by a story. This literally means they were imprisoned by the narrative style. In this sense a story can be perceived as restrictive in its nature. Good or bad, restriction limits the narration by drastically omitting information. As well as limiting the narration, it automatically forces one to “pick sides” among the protagonists. Multiple motivations are quite often neglected in linear narratives.

These shortcomings are what I hope to address in the investigation of my thesis. How does the story change once the viewer is no longer captive? How much more can be achieved in the area of understanding or commiserating with character motivations, when the switching between different protagonists’ points of view is controlled by the viewer? These are some of the “interactive” and “non-linear”

issues that this thesis addresses. I also spent some time reviewing writing and storyboarding as well as filmmaking. I was influenced by the works of a range of people that spanned from Akira Kurosawa to Joel and Ethan Coen. In the next chapter I explain my accompanying digital project and my aspirations for its accomplishments.

CHAPTER THREE

Explanation of the Multimedia Project

This section explains the multimedia project I've created in the form of an interactive narrative animation. That work is meant to serve as proof of my thesis in conjunction with this written document. The animation piece was completed in Macromedia Flash, and also used Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator in process. Flash was chosen because of its ability to combine animation with interactivity and its ability to conform to the parameters of the World Wide Web.

The interactive animation portion of this thesis can be viewed via the World Wide Web at <http://www.tobiasbrauer.com/thesis.html>.

This multimedia piece, through a fictional account of true historical events, is set as a narrative taking place on September 25, 1927. The story details an event involving the murder of Imogene Remus at the hands of her husband George Remus. Also participating in the narrative is Frank Dodge, an FBI agent having an affair with Imogene. For those of you who are not familiar with the story of the Remus family, here is a brief synopsis:

George immigrated to Chicago, Illinois as a very young child with his family. In America, he was trained as a lawyer and a pharmacist.¹⁰ For years, he worked as a criminal defense lawyer for renowned mobsters. It wasn't long before he grew jealous of the extravagant lifestyles of his clientele, and became one of them himself. As a middle-aged man, he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, and set-up a bootlegging enterprise that accumulated a fortune some believe to have totaled eighty million dollars. It's rumored that his wife Imogene, had an affair with a F.B.I. Agent by the name of Frank Dodge, (known by his fellow officers simply as "Dodge") who was investigating Remus. In a very public incident, Remus was involved in an automobile chase where he eventually caught-up to his wife, ran her car off of the road, and shot her dead. Remus served as his own lawyer and was acquitted of all charges based on temporary insanity.

The work that I have created for this piece looks at the time leading-up to the car chase and Imogene's eventual death. My version of the narrative includes embellishments to heighten the drama, and should not be interpreted as fact. The story is "based" on actual events.

In order to adhere to the genre of interactive narratives that I have established, the events unfold through the separate points of view of the story's main characters (George, Imogene and Dodge.) For this to take place, the story had to be written

¹⁰ Bernard J. Brauer, Price Hill Historical Society, interview by author

three times— once for each of the characters. Each of these separate writings I refer to as layers. See Fig.01.

STRUCTURE OF LAYERED NARRATIVE

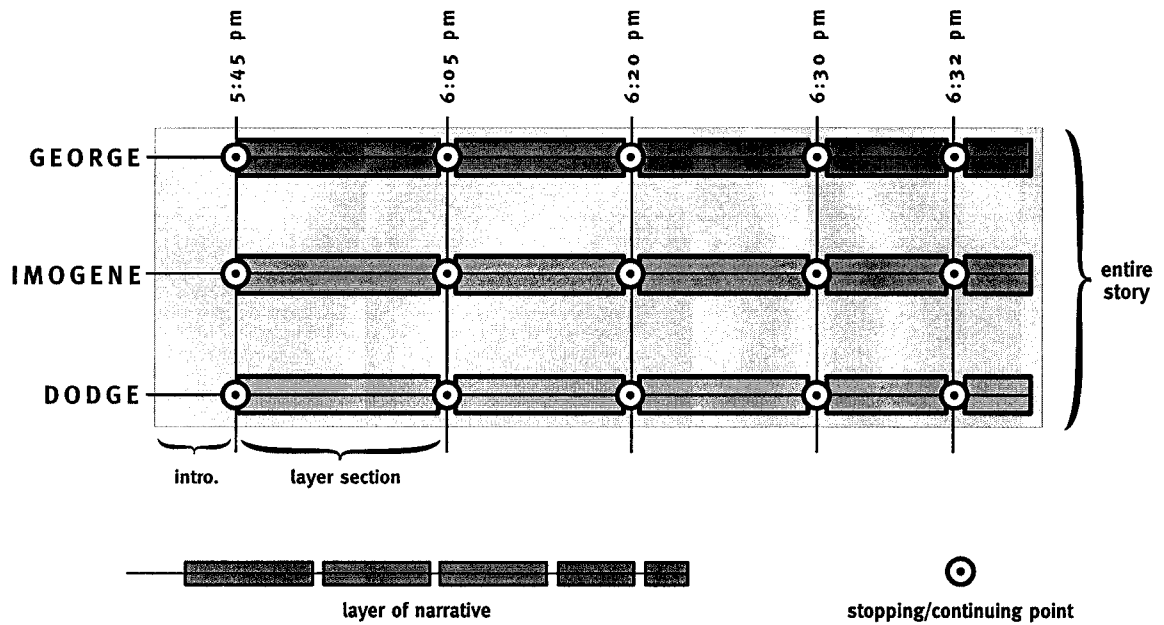


Fig.01 Chart of Layered Narrative Structure

As an audience member or viewer of this animation you will see the story told through animation that represents the view and experiences of each of the protagonists. For example, if you follow the story of George, you will be looking through the eyes of a man who kills his wife. On the other hand, if you choose the story of Imogene, you will experience the perspective of finding yourself murdered by your husband. The reasoning for more than one layer in the story is to allow the story to be told completely, as it truly happened, from all perspectives. The story occurs on a timeline that all three layers adhere to. As the narrative progresses there are established stopping points, allowing the viewer to switch between layers within the story. For example, one could begin enjoying the story through the eyes of George and when one reaches one of the stopping points, one could switch perspectives and continue the story through the eyes of either Imogene or Dodge. See Fig.02.

STRUCTURE OF LAYERED INTERACTIVE NARRATIVE

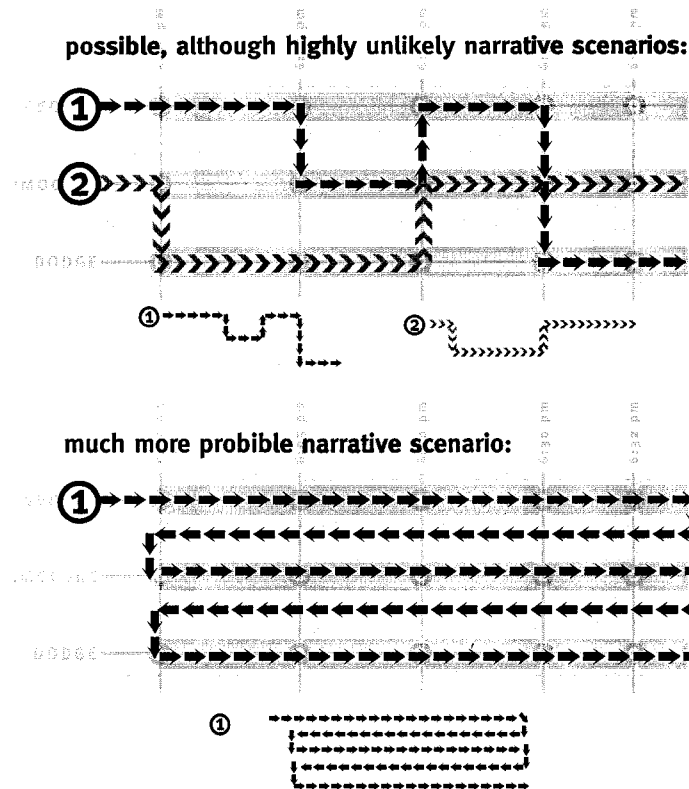
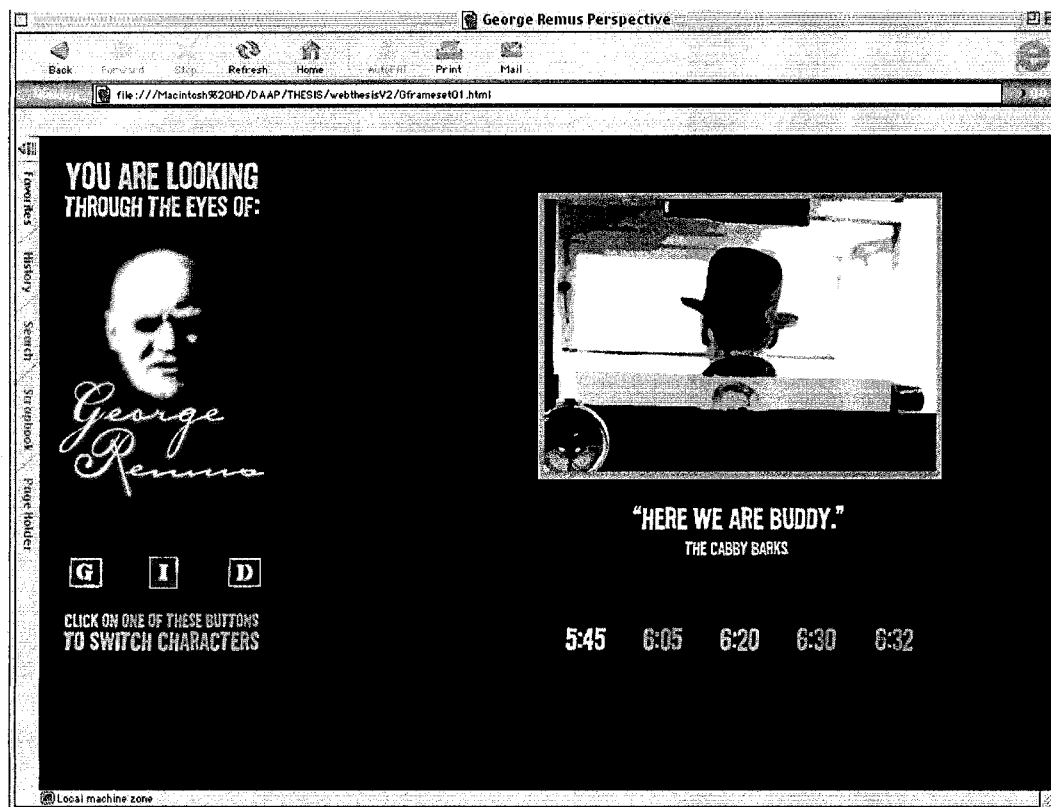


Fig.02 Chart of Interactive Layered Narrative Structure

Each time that you reach a stopping point, there are no restrictions as to which character you can choose to “be” next. The only restriction involves the constant adherence to the timeline. Obviously, each time the viewer revisits the story and chooses a different path, a different outcome is possible. This is essentially the crux of the thesis that I am putting forth: That by telling the story in this manner, it becomes more complete. The experience is multi-dimensional and differs through the interaction of the viewer. Giving control to the audience allows the story to be user-driven, therefore enhancing the experience of the narrative.

The following page contains a figure explaining the anatomy of the project’s interface. It details the navigation as well as the animation.

Fig.03 Anatomy of Multimedia Project's Interface



Area explaining which character's perspective you are currently watching and buttons to switch to another character.

Area showing animation and dialogue, as well as a time line that doubles as another form of navigation.

What follows next are the original narratives I've written for each of the character's experiences as the story unfolds through his/her eyes. These three layers were first written, then storyboarded, and finally the accompanying animation was produced. After each of the narrative sections I've included some frame-grabs, shown as examples of that perspective in the animation. The animation may not strictly adhere to the content of the writing for the purpose of time constraint.

The George Remus Perspective

5:45pm

The opening scene consists of two guards escorting George Remus from his cell to a release area. We see a long prison hallway with strong shadows, and the characters are in silhouette. George walks with his head hung low. He is a tired, older, and slightly heavy-set man.

George is being released from Federal prison. He has just served 24 consecutive months on charges of tax evasion. Tax evasion was the least of his crimes.

“Good for nuthin’ lawyers. They’d love to see me rot in here!” thinks George, “I probably could have done better myself.”

Those same guards escort George to a room where he will be issued his belongings. The room is all concrete and slightly larger than a broom closet. As he enters, directly across from him is what looks like a bank teller window carved from the concrete. It has both bars and thick glass with a metal drawer below for passing things back and forth.

One of the guards announces to the man behind the window:

“Prisoner Remus, George. Inmate number 072001.”

“Just a moment.” The clerk replies.

George is escorted to a painted line on the floor and instructed by the guards not to go past it. After returning, the man from behind the window passes a clipboard with a pen on a chain through the drawer. A guard grabs it and hands it to George to sign.

“Sign here.” The guard mumbles.

George signs the paper and returns it to the guard, and it’s passed back through the drawer. After 10 or so seconds the guard passes through George’s possessions: a suit, shoes, hat, watch, about \$60 and a pack of Lucky brand cigarettes with a genuine gold cigarette lighter. George collects his belongings and is released. He changes clothes in the public bathroom and hails a taxi just outside.

It’s a short taxi ride home, but long enough to spend some time reflecting on things. He begins to think of his wife, Imogene. He wonders if she’ll be happy to see him. The last few years have been pretty rocky, and prison hasn’t helped anything. He has thought about trying to patch things up, but there was too much resentment there. They were too different from one another. It was as if she liked having him in jail.

“Here we are, buddy,” the cabby barks, rousing George from his daydream state.

“Keep it,” he says as he hands the cabby a \$10 bill.

George starts walking up the steps toward his house.

6:05pm

As George walks up the steps, he begins to notice some things—some things that leave him in total disbelief. What has happened to his home? At one time this mansion was the finest in Cincinnati if not the Midwest. All of the golden ornamental architectural adornments that used to cover its façade were now chipped away as if “mined” from the surface. The steps are in terrible disrepair and crumbling. The landscaping has all been neglected for what looks like ten years and thick tufts of weeds are present instead.

“What happen to this place?” George wonders. “What has Imogene been doing?”

After retrieving the hidden key from under the planter box, he enters the mansion. If the outside of the house could be referred to as neglected, then the inside seemed abused! All of his priceless collections or art, furniture and fixtures are gone! The house is almost entirely vacant. The Monet, the piano,

everything—gone. Aside from a few dusty end tables with some scattered papers the place seems almost unoccupied.

“Genie?” yelled George. “Are you home?”

There was no response.

George began walking through the house trying to assess the losses and find his wife. It seemed every room that he enters is emptier than the last. As he enters the parlor, he notices a small table just inside the door that is covered with handwritten receipts. The receipts appeared to be from some sort of makeshift auction. They are the receipts for the selling of all of his possessions. Every single one has Imogene’s signature.

Now George becomes truly angry.

“How could she sell all of our things?” he says aloud to himself.

George grabs a handful of the receipts and heads upstairs to look for his wife.

“Ohh Genie?” he yells in a terribly sarcastic voice. “Where are you? And, where are all of our things?”

He was close enough to the bedroom now that he could hear some fabric rustling around inside, behind its closed door. As he was just about to enter the room he noticed another table in the hall. It, too, had some papers on it. As he walks by the table, one word stood out at the top of one of the papers like a slap in the face—"DIVORCE." He isn't really surprised to see it, but it only infuriates him further.

Quickly, he thrusts open the bedroom door.

"You bitch!" He screams. "You want a divorce?"

There in the bedroom was Imogene Remus frantically packing her clothes into an already overstuffed suitcase.

"You had to see this coming, George. We haven't been getting along for quite some time now," she remarks.

As she says this, she begins to pack more quickly.

"And what about our things? You sold everything. What have you done with the money?" he asks.

“The money is mine George. You owe it to me for all of the terrible things you put me through. I should have left you a long time ago,” she replies.

“Oh, isn’t this a pretty picture! While the cat is away the mice will play. I didn’t see you complaining about what I put you through when we were having the Governor for dinner, or when you would buy a new dress everyday or a new buggy every week. Did I? No. Not by a long shot. I want the money and I want to know what in the hell has been going on around here for the past two years!” George was beginning to lose it now.

“I’m through with you George Remus. Dodge and I are moving to Florida. He understands me,” she scoffs. “The next time you see me will be at our divorce hearing!”

His mind started racing. There was only one man he knew by that name. Frank Dodge was the Federal agent who put him behind bars. He suddenly remembers the unusual glances between the two of them during the trial. Was she the informant? Who did she think she *was*, talking and acting like this? Something inside of George just snapped. He becomes so angry that he wants to kill her. He wants to shut her snobby little mouth forever. George begins walking toward a closet at the opposite end of the room from Imogene. Up in a loose section of the trim molding he had hidden a pistol. He reaches into the closet, grabs the gun and points it Imogene.

“‘Til death do us part, huh, Genie?” He mumbles at her under his breath.

She finally looks up from packing her suitcase and sees him pointing the gun directly at her.

“George, no...wait!”

Imogene begins to run.

6:20pm

George reaches for her and misses as she takes-off out of the room. He feels a part of her blouse tail slip through his thumb and forefinger. George immediately turns and follows her out of the room and down the stairs. It sounds like large gallops of thunder as the two of them race down the grand staircase. Imogene was now screaming frantically.

“Leave me alone!” She cries. “Help!!!”

Imogene runs for the door, leaps down the steps and sprints out into the yard toward the garage. George is following but runs nowhere near as quickly as her.

By the time he gets to the front door he can see her running into the garage. He runs after her still aiming the gun at her and screaming loudly.

“Dodge! Frank Dodge?” he yells gruffly. “You turned me in, didn’t ya’?”

Before he could tell what was happening, Imogene came busting out of the garage door in her car at what seemed like 60mph. The wooden garage doors splinter into a million pieces, and for a split second George can see the desperation in Imogene’s eyes as she is barreling toward him. He dives out of her path just in time. After nearly killing him, she swerves into the yard, skids out in the grass and speeds out the driveway. Covered in dirt and wooden splinters, George races up, gets into another car and begins following her.

The chase is on. George speeds after her, going much faster than the car he is driving is meant to handle. After about a minute he has completely caught up with the back of her car. He can see her shaking her head frantically screaming. His foot never stops pushing down on the accelerator. Their bumpers bang together over and over again causing sparks and sideswipes. How could she have done this to him? Hadn’t he given her everything she ever wanted?

The chase is starting to become quite treacherous. The two cars have entered a part of town know as Eden Park. It is a large park and forestry area with thin winding streets. Many of the turns change directions at over 180 degrees to

compensate for the natural and scenic surroundings. George has no idea why she led him here, but he is tired of chasing her.

6:30pm

With one large thrust of both the steering wheel and the gas pedal, he catches the back corner of her car and forces it off the road into a ditch. They are now in a grassy section near an extremely ornate gazebo near Mirror Lake. George watches as her car jumps the curb and bounces into the ditch. He can see her head banging against the steering wheel and her body slump over across the seat. He stops his car, grabs his pistol and goes out to confront her.

“You ungrateful bitch! It’s never enough for you is it? I gave you everything you wanted, and you and your *boyfriend* sent me to prison!” George is so enraged now that as he speaks foamy spit comes flying from his mouth like a rabid dog.

As he approaches her, she slings the passenger side door open and crawls out. She is severely injured and disoriented. She staggers to her feet and stands there limping, almost slumped over. Her forehead has a large bleeding gash and the blood is rolling down her face and into her eyes and mouth. She pleads with him.

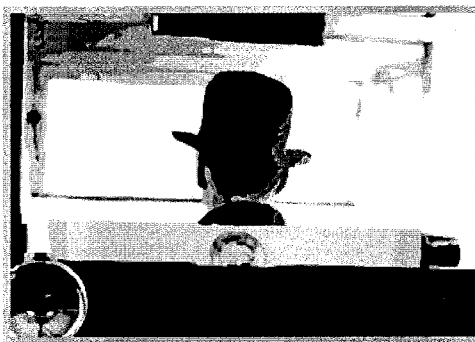
“George! Wait...NO!”

6:32pm

But it's too late. He is already right in front of her, standing there with his pistol drawn. He pulls the trigger twice. CRACK CRACK. Both shots fired at point blank range hit her square in the chest. He can see the holes in her chest and the blood now completely covering the front of her body. She falls to the ground.

He simply stands there stunned, still holding the weapon at arm's length. A small tuft of thin smoke rises from the end of the barrel.

The George Remus Perspective Frame-Grabs



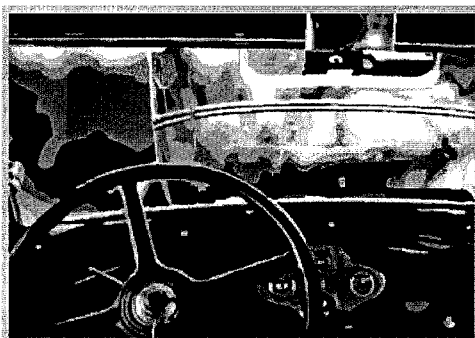
"HERE WE ARE BUDDY."

THE CABBY BARKS, ROUSING GEORGE FROM HIS DAYDREAM STATE.



"TILL DEATH DO US PART, GENIE."

HE MUMBLES AT HER UNDER HIS BREATH.



HE CHASES HER THROUGH SOME WINDING STREETS
AND EVENTUALLY KNOCKS HER CAR
OFF OF THE ROAD.

The Imogene Remus Perspective

5:45pm

The opening scene has Imogene Remus at home in a very luxurious mansion. She is a small thin woman who hides her age well. She seems both calculated and worried in her movements. All of the mansion's possessions have been sold at auction. She has sold everything as hurriedly as possible. Over the past two years, Imogene's husband George has been in prison and she has been trying to get as much money out of their assets as possible before she leaves him.

For the past three years, Imogene has been having an affair with an FBI agent by the name of Frank Dodge. Dodge was everything that George wasn't. He was a real person who cared about doing something right with his life. And more than that, money hadn't given him a God complex, as in the case of George. She met Dodge in a rather inauspicious way; he was the Federal agent investigating her husband for racketeering, bootlegging and mafia affiliations. It turns out that all they were able to prosecute him on were charges of tax evasion. That was thanks to Imogene in fact; as she turned informant on her husband, revealing numerous, damaging accounting records. It couldn't have been too much of a stretch to investigate George. (A German immigrant educated as a pharmacist and lawyer

makes nearly eighty million dollars during the Great Depression—you do the math.)

After selling everything she could think of and keeping bundles of money over the years, Imogene calculated that she has maybe 3 to 3 and a half million hidden away. It is in a place where George would never find it. In just a few short weeks she is going to begin a new life. She has made plans with Dodge to elope to Florida, once her divorce is finalized. She had a lawyer draw up the papers and now all she has to do is convince George to sign them. She knows it won't be easy, but she also knows that both of them still agree upon one thing: That neither one of them loved one another anymore.

Imogene has been packing what was left of her belongings for the last few hours. She wants to have everything ready to go so that she can make a clean break from George. She doesn't know how he will react. She has seen him at his worst and she definitely doesn't want to be at the receiving end of that. She thinks it best to keep the discussion logical. To mention how they have been drifting apart, how they were two different people, and so on...

Just then the phone rings.

"Imogene Remus?" The voice on the other end asks.

“Yes” She replies.

“My name is Fritz Meyer. I work with Dodge, and he told me to call and warn you when George Remus gets out. Well, they just released him about ten or fifteen minutes ago.” He continues: “Sorry I didn’t call sooner, this is the first I could get to a phone.”

6:05pm

Before she can thank him and finish the conversation Imogene can hear the front door opening and closing. He is already home! She panics. She drops the receiver, without even hanging up and runs up to bedroom to finish packing. She has to collect her thoughts. How is she going to tell him? What will she say?

In the distant background she can hear his muffled voice calling her.

“Genie?” he is yelling. “Are you home?”

She really starts to panic, but she knows that she has to keep her cool if she is going to get those papers signed. As she continues to pack, she realizes just how suspicious the place must look to him. Everything is gone or sold, and it is so empty that he can probably hear his voice echoing through the halls. She can tell

by his voice that he is much closer now than before, maybe even just outside the door. She can hear him quite clearly now.

“Genie? Where are you? Where are all of our things?” He says.

Suddenly the door bursts open and there he is. He looks much older than before he left. It has only been two years, but from the looks of him it could have been ten. She can see he is holding both the divorce papers and some auction receipts. This is not the way she had hoped this conversation would start. She can see he is sweating, angry and out of breath.

“You bitch!” he screams at her. “You want a divorce?”

She drops her head down and begins packing much faster. He is very frightening and she knows all too well what he is capable of. She knows she needs to be firm but levelheaded with him.

“You had to see this coming, George. We haven’t been getting along for quite some time now,” she says as calmly as she can.

“And what about our things? You sold everything. What have you done with the money?” He was really yelling at her now.

What is she going to say? He may already even know what is happening. He is a very intelligent man and this isn't a difficult situation to sum-up. Without thinking she says:

"The money is mine George. You owe it to me for all of the terrible things you put me through. I should have left you a long time ago."

This infuriates George. He begins ranting and raving about all of the things she has bought, all the parties, yeah, yeah—she has heard this argument before. He is so overbearing. He is always mean to her, and she decides it is time to end it, and make things clear for him. He isn't going to push her around anymore. She has Dodge to watch over her now. She doesn't have to take this from him anymore.

"I'm through with you George Remus. Dodge and I are moving to Florida. He understands me." she scoffs. "The next time you see me will be at our divorce hearing!"

She knew he won't like hearing that, but she doesn't care. She wants all of this to be over. She hates him, this house and everything her life has become. She just wants to escape all of it. She keeps her head down and continues to pack. Whether he signs those papers or not, she is leaving. She can hear him stomping across the room away from her. What is he doing? After a couple of seconds of the sounds

of boards shifting and the clicks of a metal object force her to look up at him. He is holding a pistol aimed right at her head. He looks completely insane with anger.

“George, no...wait!” she pleads with him.

Is this how she is going to die? He starts mumbling something at her under his breath, and she decides to run for it. As she runs toward the door, he lunges after her but misses. She takes-off, running down the stairs.

She can hear him running behind her and yelling something about Dodge, but there is no way she is going to look back.

6:20pm

“Has he lost his mind? What’s happening?” she thinks as she runs. She doesn’t know where to go or what to do. She decides to run to the garage, get in a car and find Dodge.

Everything is going terribly. “Would he really kill me?” she wonders as she turns the key.

She doesn’t plan on sticking around to find out. Once the engine roars from the start of the ignition, she slams on the gas and breaks through the wooden garage

door. Boom! What a sound! It felt so liberating to break that door. It felt like she was punching George in the face. The instant she gains her bearings from crashing through the door, she can see him on the lawn walking toward her. She knows she has to stop him before he kills her. So, she decides to try and run him over. She misses. At the last second he dives out of the way! She regains control of the car and takes-off out the driveway.

She knows he is going to follow her, but it doesn't matter. She is going to get Dodge, and he will put George right back in prison where he belongs. She knows exactly where Dodge will be. He was working tonight. During his night shifts they would meet for dinner at about this time in Eden Park. During the fall they had many romantic evenings sitting in the gazebo or on the shore of the lake enjoying the cool autumn breezes.

BANG! There he is alright. BANG BANG! He is ramming his car right into the back of hers.

"Stop it!" she screams. "Stop it you madman!!!"

She can see him in her rearview mirror. He has truly lost his mind! He is bearing his teeth madly and shaking his head back and forth in fury.

BANG!

BANG!

“Please be there Dodge!” She says aloud.

6:30pm

They are now approaching the turn where the gazebo was located. She is really hoping he will be there waiting for her. Just suddenly, she feels a tremendous impact from behind and everything goes black.

After a few seconds she comes to.

“What happened?” She thinks. “Where am I?”

Something is wrong with her head. She can feel a giant cut on her forehead and can barely see because of the blood in her eyes. Her head is killing her and she can feel blood in both her ears and mouth. She looks around and notices she is in a car and tries to stagger out of the vehicle.

“I must have been in an accident.” She thinks, as she tumbles out of the passenger side of the vehicle.

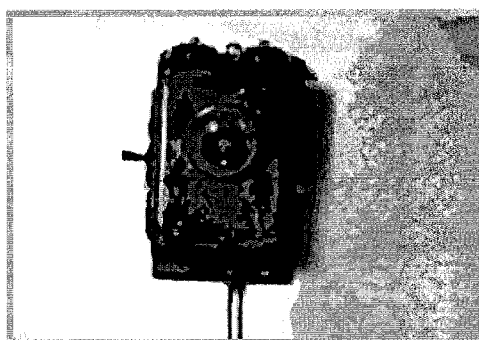
6:32pm

As she rises to her feet, she looks up and sees a man standing there. It is her husband, George. He is holding a pistol aimed directly at her. She pleads with him:

“George! Wait...NO!”

Suddenly she sees two quick flashes from the pistol and feels a warm strong punch in her chest. The force knocks her to the ground. She knows she has just been shot. Everything starts to grow dark and move slowly. She feels very cold and starts gasping for air. She dies a few seconds later.

The Imogene Remus Perspective Frame-Grabs



"IMOGENE REMUS?"



**SHE CAN SEE GEORGE AND SHE TRIES TO
HIT HIM; BUT MISSES.**



"GEORGE! WAIT... NO!"

The Frank Dodge Perspective

5:45pm

The opening scene takes place in a police station. We see Frank Dodge, an FBI agent working at his desk. Dodge is an attractive, well-groomed everyman. His features are very commonplace and non-identifiable. This type of look seems to work well for a Federal agent. Medium build, medium height, etc. Frank has been an FBI agent for about 11 years now and there's no one on the force sharper than him. If the Bureau has a tough case, Frank is the one they called on. His professional life is completely in check; his personal life however, is a different story.

About four years prior he was assigned to investigate the dealings of a Mr. George Remus. Remus was an immigrant who migrated originally from Germany to Chicago in his youth. He studied both law and pharmacy. Remus gained a share of attention from the local mafia in Chicago in part thanks to his excellent legal defense skills. It didn't take long before Remus stopped hanging around with the thieves and became one of them. Dodge knew all of this; in fact there weren't many people who didn't. But Remus was a tough case. Dodge knew Remus was the worst kind of criminal – an intelligent one.

Dodge knew that Remus took up residence in his town, Cincinnati, because of its geographical assets. Cincinnati is located along the Ohio River, in the southwest corner of Ohio. Remus knew that with its close proximity to the bourbon distilleries in Kentucky and the numerous ports along the Ohio, Cincinnati was the perfect town for a bootlegger in the thick of prohibition. Remus had a knack for finding certain legal loopholes that could justify his "medicinal" alcohol business. Dodge had been on to him for more than a year now and was dying to bring him in.

Dodge knew that Remus was way too smart to mess up. He needed a different angle. He needed to get to someone on the inside. And that's when he approached Imogene Remus, George's wife. At first she was hesitant to cooperate, but eventually she caved in to Frank's charm.

Their relationship started as strictly business, but after the long hours of interrogation the two grew closer. Frank wondered what she saw in Remus, a career criminal. He thought that maybe by taking George down he could rescue her. As time progressed he found himself falling in love with her. Who could resist her? She had spent time as a jazz lounge singer, but she had the face of a Hollywood actress.

Another officer walks by the desk where Frank is discussing a case.

"I hear Remus gets out today." The officer says.

6:05pm

"Is it the 25th already?" Dodge wondered. He knew that if Remus found out about him and Imogene that it was not going to be pretty. Imagine learning that the cop that put you in jail is now shacking up with your wife. People tend to get "hard feelings" about that sort of thing.

Dodge decides to call the prison and see if they have released him yet. He has a friend named Fritz who works as a guard there who could give him the scoop. Dodge didn't want word getting around that he was associated with Imogene. He thought it might seem an unprofessional choice.

Dodge picks up the receiver:

"Hey Janet, gimme county jailhouse, will ya'?" he says.

"Sure, hon," a small tin voice replies through the phone.

"County," answers the jailhouse operator.

"Ring me up Fritz Meyer please," Dodge speaks.

After about two or three minutes a voice gets on the line. "Meyer here," he says.

"Hey Fritz, it's Dodge. Listen, did Remus get out yet?" Frank asks.

"Oh yeah, they let him go about fifteen or twenty minutes ago. I called Genie like you asked me to. Weird thing though..." Meyer responds.

"What?" Dodge asks.

"Well she seemed in a hurry to get off the phone with me. I don't even think she hung it up," Fritz says.

Dodge's instincts kick in immediately. Is she in trouble? Has Remus already found out? He just needs to calm down and check things out. He thanks Fritz for the information and decides he will just drive by the Remus estate to see if everything looked o.k.

6:20pm

Dodge leaves the station house and starts the drive to check on Imogene. He wonders if she was really going to ask Remus for the divorce today. That was not going to be a pleasant conversation.

After about ten minutes he arrives at their estate. He decides to park across the road and down a bit and then walk up to the property remaining less conspicuous. As he approaches their driveway he can see from the road that their front door is wide open. Quickly he jumps behind some bushes thinking someone is just coming or going through the door. He peeks up from the bushes, sees that the coast is clear and decides to take a closer look. As he enters further into the property he notices the garage door. He runs inside with his gun drawn looking for Imogene.

“Genie?” He calls. “Genie, are you O.K.?”

There’s no response. Quickly he searches the house and determines that no one is there. He knows something must have happened. Why was the garage door destroyed? He decides to run back to his car and try to find her.

6:30pm

As he approaches his car, he can hear the dispatcher squawking on the radio.

“High speed automobile pursuit,” the voice says. “Traveling west on Eden Park Drive”

“Genie!” He thinks.

He starts his car and drives as fast as he can toward Eden Park. It has to be her.

All of the sudden he remembers he was going to meet her there for diner. That’s why the garage door was broken – he was chasing her!

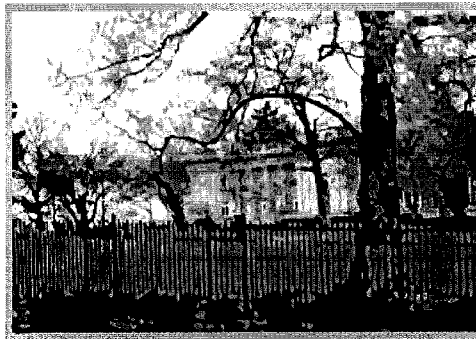
He drives as fast as his car will go. Sliding off the road back and forth with sirens blaring. He knows that if the report is already out on the radio, that it won’t be long before the chase ends. He tears up the entranceway into Eden Park and looks around frantically for their cars.

6:32pm

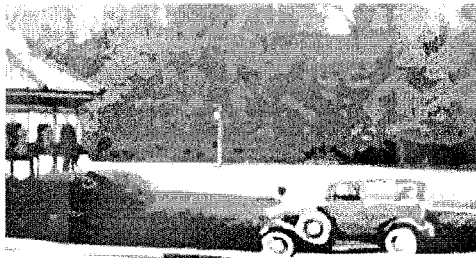
He drives over to the gazebo where he and Imogene were supposed to meet that evening. It becomes evident quite quickly that he is too late. As he approaches the scene, he can see one car wrecked in the grass and the other parked and still running on the road. From the distance he can see Remus standing next to the wrecked car holding a pistol at arm’s length. At Remus’ feet he sees Genie lying face down in the grass. She isn’t moving.

“Freeze Remus! Hold it right there and lower your weapon!” He yells while running toward him with gun drawn.

The Frank Dodge Perspective Frame Grabs



**AS HE APPROACHES THEIR DRIVEWAY,
HE NOTICES TIRE TRACKS RUNNING THROUGH
THE YARD AND A BROKEN GARAGE DOOR.**



**WHEN HE GETS TO THE PARK, HE CAN SEE GENIE'S
CAR WRECKED AND REMUS PARKED BEHIND HER.**



**"FREEZE REMUS! HOLD IT RIGHT THERE
AND LOWER YOUR WEAPON!"**

As you've probably noticed in each of these layered narratives, the story changes slightly from each perspective. Each narrative was intentionally written in a way to make the audience relate to, or commiserate with each of those individual protagonists. On the other hand, the characters not being "seen-through" are near emotionless and much more one-dimensional. The emotional reactions of ancillary characters are based on assumptions made by the primary character.

CHAPTER FOUR

Possible Future Scenarios for Interactive Narratives

As is well known, technologies, especially in the field of entertainment and infotainment, are changing now and will continue to change far into the future. The scope of these changes would be far too vast to address within this work. However, I would like to address some examples and trends I've noticed as they pertain to the project as I've created it.

As I began working on this project, one of the first thoughts that entered my mind was this style, this technique of narrative storytelling, is in some regard the future. The more exposure we gain in our lives, the more it seems our expectations of the design experience change. Of course, varying fundamental rules will always prevail, as far as, say form, style or content are concerned. However, it's impossible to deny that the medium is ever changing. Subsequently, it's not a difficult assumption to conclude that a culture's expectations will advance with that change. Try to imagine audience reactions if the original *Godzilla* were released in theatres today with the exact same effects as originally presented. More is expected than this film can offer today's audience.

ITV, Enhanced Television, Interactive Digital Television, and Enhanced Broadcasting – all of these terms refer to one thing that is rapidly approaching American television, and already implemented in the Asian and European television markets – Interactive TV. *Itvdictionary.com* describes Interactive TV:

...TV with interactive content and enhancements. Interactive Television provides richer entertainment, interaction and more information pertaining to the shows, props and people involved in its creation. In a sense, it combines traditional TV viewing with the interactivity enjoyed by those communicating through a network, such as the Internet.¹¹

Currently, Interactive TV offers features like: Answering trivia questions in real time during a TV show, Interactive Game Shows, and even “Internet” -similar features like electronic banking and email. These features are a beginning, the beginning of a future that’s much different from the way in which we currently understand and watch TV. As the remote control for our television becomes more and more powerful, so too will our expectations of the programs shown on these television sets. With this future in mind, I’ve tried to consider how a change such as this could affect the genre of interactive narratives. Some of the greatest obstacles I’ve encountered in the production of this piece are: First, trying to find the most highly accessible as well as feature-rich interactive medium to present the work.

¹¹ [http:// www.itvdictionary.com](http://www.itvdictionary.com)

And second, creating an interest in the work that can account for repeat and enthralled viewers. I believe that both of these issues could be successfully addressed in the future with the advent of Interactive TV. I'm certain there will come a time when the television and the computer merge into one medium, as evidenced simply by the demands being put on our current Internet model exceeding its capabilities, and television still quite far from reaching its potential. The two will become extremely interdependent upon one another. I also believe that after a period of cultural exposure to the medium of Interactive TV and interactive narratives, society's tolerance for and interest in the format will change.

Another great hop/assumption that I take part in is that the entity we refer to as "virtual reality" will improve dramatically. One such case that brings about my optimism is the *Kids Room, An Interactive Narrative Playspace*. Its creative solution to the notion of virtual environment, leaves behind the uncomfortable "techy" nature of current models (i.e., VR helmets.) My hope is that as technologies improve, so too will the total immersion effect improve. I believe that someday, in the not too distant future, virtual reality environments will become much more realistic. This enhanced realism could do wonders in bridging the gap of interactivity that is currently lacking through narrative models. Imagine a world that is already completely digital, observing you as much as you are observing it. The reaction of machine and possibilities of events unfolding hold future scenarios that are quite stunning in the realm of narrative interaction.

CONCLUSION

I've created this work as a way to provoke thought and stimulate questions in one's perception of a narrative. I believe I've offered those who are interested in questioning the structure of storytelling design an alternative way to express a story. The genre of interactive narratives explored within this thesis designs a story in a way that is more complete, multi-leveled and driven by audience interaction. It's about designing a new narrative experience.

It is also about tapping into and discovering the true nature of interactivity. It examines a historical event (Remus murder) in a way that references future possibilities. It shows a viewer that telling a story from multiple perspectives can cause that story to change. It also shows a layered narrative much richer in content than the surface reveals. By enabling interaction with the viewer this work rewards the viewer with additional facts, motivations, and insights.

I've examined examples of similar study within the field, looked at the medium, as it exists today, and projected possible future scenarios. In this work I've

created what I believe to be my own version of the genre. My hope is that this work will serve as a catalyst for change in all forms of storytelling design.

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