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Vignetwork: An Exquisite Corpse Network of Short Films

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VIGNETWORK

An Exquisite Corpse Network of Short Films

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Social Sciences

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

Vignetwork (www.Vignetwork.com) is the name for an online system of interconnected short films that comes from the combination of the terms vignette and network. By developing Vignetwork as an experiment in narrative structure, it is possible to analyze what a hypertext is and what it means as a tool, environment, and model for understanding the world. By comparing it to various other films, projects, and ideas, Vignetwork emerges as a parable for how individuals define themselves in a shared, crowded world.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The continuing boom in information technology and a growing world population of Internet users are not only expanding but also changing the roles that communication, networks, and media consumption play in our daily lives. Experimental forms of media should be reexamined for their applicability alongside rapid changes in the digital age. New windows to collaborative authorship and the hypertext environment of the Internet provide a vast and unruly field of possibilities – one that I would like to explore as both an artist and an experimenter. While multi-authored stories and collaborative fiction has already gained a foothold on the web, the idea of multi-authored video remains offline.

The idea of hypercinema on the Internet inspires me as both a way for video creators to be a part of a larger filmic structure as well as a way to explore the dynamics of narrative beyond its traditional linearity. Following these parallel inspirations, I will be an author, chiseling away my own vision of a hypernarrative, as well as a theorist, exploring how a larger branching film narrative with many authors would work and what it would look like. This discussion will include developing the practical, artistic, and

experimental parameters for this thesis project and address the various theoretical backgrounds and questions involved.

My thesis proposes to develop a prototype website based on the never-ending or infinite story websites where contributors add on their own chapters to existing stories, but with a cinematic twist. Instead of writing-based websites such as infinitestory.com, or 'wiki' type collaborations, Vignetwork will focus on the moving image. From the architectural term for a decorative carving of a small vine, a 'vignette' refers to a brief yet evocative story. With 'network' denoting a system of interconnectivity, Vignetwork combines these terms to represent an online network of cinematic vignettes.

Potential video submissions to the site would not be as miscellaneous as YouTube, but must begin where the last shot of a previous vignette left off. In this way, creators will be challenged to open their story with a shot that flows seamlessly from the final shot of the last story. This will connect each vignette together in the cinematic network that this thesis proposes.

The structure of the website will allow for multiple branching; two or more new vignettes can start from the same final scene of the vignette before them, but then branch off in different directions and follow divergent story lines. More about the structure of the Vignetwork, and how this design will be incorporated into the website-user interface will be discussed in the proposal section.

I will write and produce three short films to publish to the site to start the process. These three films will form a root and two branches. From them, additional vignettes will be able to spring off where the originals end. A maximum runtime of two minutes places

a stylistic preference on the 'short'. This focus on the short will be more user friendly in an interactive network; the short duration will place a priority on interconnectivity over content. Short films make for a more engaging navigation experience through the tree-structure than would a feature length building block. This flexibility in navigation places the focus on the hypertext aspect of the project, rather than allowing feature-length films in which the interconnectedness would be overshadowed. However, submissions that are too short (less than ten seconds) would also create a jarring experience, which shows the need for a minimum runtime of ten seconds. These minimum and maximum runtimes could be controlled through the functionality of the website.

This rule about vignette interconnectivity is the creative challenge and inspiration of the website. Any video-sharing site can accept random video uploads and organize them with tags and keywords. What makes Vignetwork an original and compelling project is the links between stories. The vignettes will spring off of each other and illuminate connections that viewers will not be able to predict. Each new addition answers another 'what-if' question. This unpredictability can reveal unconscious narratives and choices that reflect a larger consciousness of society. It also challenges the user to come up with ways to shoot his film so that it has the most addition-ready ending. Some fiercely independent artists may attempt to create a submission so specific that it cannot be easily built upon. But because of the endless ability to add new offshoots, these 'hijacked' narratives will only be one of many options. The ways that segments do or do not inspire other filmmakers to build off them shows one of the potentials this project has as a hypertext laboratory. Why do some additions become dead ends, while other segments

continue to grow and get lots of exposure? But the scope of this thesis is only to discuss these concepts and set up the root architecture of such a hypercinema.

Literature Review

The idea for video-sharing websites took off with the advent of *YouTube: Broadcast Yourself*. Co-creators Steve Chen and Chad Hurley got the inspiration from a combination of their own video-sharing difficulties and the website hotornot.com. When YouTube debuted, they quickly realized that they had unleashed a video free-for-all, with users contributing whatever content they wanted (Cloud). The website combines video playback with social networking, allowing users to rate, comment and link to similar videos. Videos are organized via tagging, an after-the-fact labeling system designed to increase user traffic and interest. The popularity of YouTube actually benefits the justification for my thesis project. The culture on the web is now nearly completely YouTube literate. What's more, not only has the Internet become familiarized with YouTube; YouTube has introduced many users to the Internet. The hard part of popularizing the uploading and sharing of user-created content to the web has already been accomplished. This initial foothold of video on the web has exploded into scores of film forums. A small survey I made of the video hosting and sharing field identified 47 different sites.

But just by uploading videos onto the web, users were already linking videos in a larger structure and extending media experiences onto a new media platform without fully understanding the implications. As I try to keep pace with the various illuminations and distortions of narrative that have arisen through development of educative tools, games, and networks, I will start by clarifying the important terms. The last thing I want to do is rush in where angels fear to tread.

Even the broad term ‘interactive’ has its niceties, for “...all interactivity is also an illusion because the rules established by the designers of the text necessarily limit the players’ options” (Kinder 4). Nothing short of Artificial Intelligence can make something interactive without first defining a limited number of predefined actions. This limited definition of interactivity doesn’t factor too heavily into how fun, engaging, or rewarding interactive media can be, but it is important to proceed grounded firmly in the limitations of our own technology.

There is also a second texture of interactivity which occurs at the interpretive, rather than responsive, level. In many films, “The viewer actively engages with the plot structure, searching her memories of previous narrative elements from current and previous viewings...Along the way she forms and rejects hypothesis and theories” (Bizzocchi 5). But this interpretive interaction has arguably been at work in every careful film-watcher’s mind, and it is certainly just as true in literature and novels. The uses of interactivity below primarily refer to the responsive forms of media; those which can respond to user interactions. Additionally, the interpretive aspect of textual interactivity is assumed as a starting point for many of my analytical approaches, as it is in

communications in general. Also, as I go on to address this issue of interactivity in my own project, the limitations of response necessarily depend on the model of authorship used.

The next term to disambiguate is ‘interactive narrative’. Defined broadly, “A narrative is interactive when the story contours to the user, based on his/her own personal preferences and input” (Brogan and Ventura 1). A familiar example of this is the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books created by Packard in the 70s. More digitally speaking, interactive narrative (which has also been called metalinear narrative) has been defined as “...a computer mediated interaction between users and audio-visual texts, that strives to offer the user an option to change at predetermined points the course of action...to other predetermined options, thus constructing a narrative trajectory” (Ben-Shaul 149). Interactive narratives have been widely used in computer gaming, education tools, art displays, and creative writing.

The next term that figures heavily into this project is ‘hypertext’ (and the larger family of hyper- modified concepts). While this term has been defined variously over the past few decades, it was originally coined by Ted Nelson in 1965, when he explained that a hypertext was “a body of written or pictorial material interconnected in such a complex way that it could not be conveniently presented or represented on paper” (Nelson). Sixteen years later, he offered up an update on the hypertext definition:

...nonsequential writing--text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways. (1981)

Nelson also coined the term ‘hyperfilm’, observing that “The hyperfilm — a browsable or vari-sequenced movie — is only one of the possible hypermedia that require our attention” (1965). The idea strays from the linear format in how parts of the text are linked. Rather than have bits of content connected in a linear chain or series, hypertext bits would connect in multiple directions and offer multiple paths to decode. This branching link structure consists of two main elements: links and nodes. Nodes are the destination, where content is stored, and links provide the navigation options between different nodes.

Interactive narratives could be hypertexts, but hypertexts are always interactive narratives. Yet another approach with still more nuances is to look at on-screen narratives through the spectrum of film and games. The gaming sector has pushed the narrative envelope to include some interactive features and problem-solving. Even within games there is a huge range of narrative interactivity. The most basic games offer little more than a pass/fail challenge and an increasing difficulty of levels. The narrative here is arguably linear, with variable interactivity between the junctures. More complex games might incorporate cinematic cut-scenes and a few diverging storylines, conveying the story forward for each new chapter. But if these storylines are interacted with correctly, they usually converge back to a single victorious end-game. This offers little-to-no flexibility in the trajectories of narrative arc.

In virtual reality, there is much more flexibility, especially in massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs). Users can choose what path to take, and which sub-plots to follow, in a interactive environment that models real-world interaction:

“What makes a difference for many players is the shared experience, the collaborative nature of most activities and, most importantly, the reward of being socialized into a community of gamers and acquiring a reputation within it” (Ducheneaut and Moore 1).

On the other end of this narrative spectrum is the traditional stronghold of linear narrative in film. This area should be immediately recognizable as a story where,

...one character, or maybe a few, are privileged with the most screen time. Questions asked by the text are almost always answered, usually answered "sensibly." The ending usually resolves the story's conflicts. There is usually only one main story, which progresses from beginning to end without serious detour. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, the filmmaking style does not draw attention to itself in classic Hollywood cinema. Camera movements, edits, and acting serve to push the story forward to an eventual resolution. (Balcom)

As far as interactive narrative is concerned then, a sizeable gulf exists between the narratives of games and those of film. But this area might be murky for a reason. An experiment called the *Oz Project* at Carnegie Mellon University attempted to create a virtual cinematic environment with believable interactive fictional characters, tied together with traditional cinematic editing patterns. Its attempt to suspend disbelief through environmental immersion was problematic, since “...cinematic engagement seems to be predicated on a cognitively constructivist viewer” (Ben-Shaul 152). This is opposed to a gaming experience, where “...playing a game is predominantly a configurative practice, not an interpretive one like film or literature” (Klevjer 13). This means that game-players decode a game by its configuration, using clues to begin the process of problem solving. This is true whether it is a flight simulator or Pac-Man. The fact that the game is artificial doesn’t detract from the gaming experience. In film however, the

viewer is being told of situations and events. There is not an inherent task built into the presentation; it is simply a story open for interpretation.

Viewers in the Oz Project were able to sense the artificiality of the environment they were immersed in, which is where the narrative failed as a cinematic experience, coming off more as an over-edited game. Films and games clearly do not mix easily. This is probably due to the categorical limitations on these polar opposites; films are not interactive in the gaming sense, and a virtual reality of unlimited choice has been traditionally considered a game experience (although actions recorded in a MMORPG and watched after the fact would be more filmic).

As an educative tool, interactive narratives have proven useful in deconstructing and contextualizing the building blocks of complex ideas, and also being accessible from a variety of approaches. In this way, "...hypervideos allow learners to build up enriched mental models using different representation modalities synchronously, and compose flexible knowledge structures according to their own individual needs" (Bromme and Stall 157). Personally, I like 'sandbox' to describe something as a flexible learning environment.

The task of deconstructing Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1991) provided an example of the possible educational use of an interactive, branching narrative, as Balcom asserts that "An interesting project would have a class determining new choices for Short Cuts' characters." Plotting the complex segments of the film in the form of a hypervideo "...would allow the audience to re-view *Short Cuts* on its own terms, to make choices where to go, what to see – to realize the "what if-ness" that *Short Cuts* evokes" (Balcom).

This what-if question is one of the central driving forces behind hypermedia, and will be very important in my discussion about the creative potential of Vignetwork.

What about the now commonplace dynamic of film interconnectivity on the web? Are these interactive narratives? No, because the networking of videos online is not done in a coherent way. Rather, the videos are organized more along the lines of a thesaurus; you look up a unit of content, and here are ten more similar to it. Video sharing websites currently link videos together based on similarity, a connection accomplished with a process called tagging. Tagging is the ability of “many users [to] add metadata in the form of keywords to shared content” (Golder and Huberman 1). Tagging, as opposed to a hierarchical taxonomy, is inclusive. Two videos can be linked together if a user thinks they are both ‘funny’, even if the content is otherwise completely different. In this way, a kitten jumping three feet after stepping on a piano on YouTube could be linked directly to a practical joke video in which a person jumps three feet when faced with a fake mouse.

This direct connection is not possible in the taxonomic organizing principle, in which content is defined by categories and sub categories of increasing specificity. Practical jokes would only link to other practical jokes, and kittens would only link to other kittens. By adding the process of tagging, this creates a new level of interconnectivity that allows users to browse through material based on any aspect of user-assigned metadata. This method works well for YouTube, with the overall philosophy seeming to be ‘anything goes’. The concept of tagging provides an example of interconnectivity in film, where a user links content together and computers increasingly anticipate user interest.

Other approaches to re-interpreting linear narrative have been discussed in narratology. Roland Barthes described an alternate process of textual analysis by which the text is cut up into contiguous units, and each is read and reread for its multiple meanings. This illustrates how a linear narrative can be reread so that:

...the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one.
(5)

This approach to decoding a text shows how a linear narrative can be reread in alternative ways. But what about incorporating these multiple levels of meaning into the structure of the medium itself?

One answer to this question lies in the concept of the hypertext. Nelson's comment on the difficulty of achieving hypertexts on paper illustrates some dependency of this concept on computing. But let's use the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books again as an example. The pages of content are read consecutively until the reader arrives at a significant decision-making point. The page lists the different choices, and the corresponding page numbers indicate where the reader should turn to in order to read how his choice plays out. These quanta of content and decision-making junctures are effectively the nodes and links of a hypertext, where "The underlying structure of these stories is a tree-shaped diagram, on which each branch is kept separate from the others" (Ryan 20).

However, a hypertext in this medium is limited in several ways: the number of choices offered is correlated exponentially with the number of pages needed in the book

to support them with content. This relationship between nodes and links can be expressed mathematically as $f(x)=n^x$, where x is the number of times you reach the end of a node and have a choice, and n is the number of choices available at each node. This type of hypertext is also limited to a unidirectional tree-structure, which branches in a one-way fashion, and the user cannot travel back the way they came. In this way, it can be seen that a hypertext with ten decisions and three choices possible at each decision would create a system of 3^{10} nodes, or over 59,000. This number could be reduced by consolidating similar nodes together within the same level, which would be experienced as getting to the same place by two or more different ways. The same calculation of complexity would apply to a hyperfilm.

While a contiguous narrative-focused linking is not yet in the mainstream, there have been some notable developments. Balcom's analysis of *Short Cuts* as a hypertext offers several insights into the first steps film might take toward interactivity, without losing the engagement of the viewer. The film's 22 characters, relentless cuts to new situations and scenes, and the often open-ended state of the stories create a viewing experience that is easily different with each viewing. There are simply too many details to keep track of. The viewer is able to piece together their own narrative from the different elements on screen they choose to pick up on. Balcom argues that the film would be highly illuminating in hypertext form, rather than standard linear film (although it does surpass three hours).

Hypertext provides a way to visualize narrative. Where a film plays out in time, hypertext can draw it out in space, revealing the connections in the text. While the notion of "story" itself asks to be read in narrative terms,

hypertext deconstructs this notion and explodes it, giving rise to multiple authors, readers becoming writers / creators of the text. (Balcom)

I think it is the ‘readers becoming writers’ aspect that has the potential to make hypermedia work. By adding a creative and participatory dimension, users can be engaged with the processes of answering the ‘what-ifs’ of a narrative in their own way.

The term ‘database narrative’ has also been used to describe films that have complex nonlinear narratives, but the term grew out of a larger discourse between its component parts. Lev Manovich suggested that cultural expression has traditionally preferred the linear narrative (the novel and cinema) “...in the modern age, the computer introduces its correlate: database” (“Database as a Genre” 176). The use of database grew out of the development of computing. By creating variables with increasing complexity and computing power, strides in computers required an ever expanding investment in the database organizational principle of information. Basically a database is a large pool of data organized into categories. The ability for a computer to compute relies on its ability to retrieve data from this system in different combinations. Manovich identified database and narrative as separate organizational patterns, but not without highlighting a few illuminating hybrids: “Dziga Vertov can be thought of as a major database filmmaker of the twentieth century. *Man with a Movie Camera* is perhaps the most important example of database imagination in modern media art” (“Language of New Media” xv).

Cultural theorist Marsha Kinder’s work has also been influential in exploring and clarifying the sometimes self-contradicting idea of database narrative:

This term refers to narratives whose structure exposes the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories and are crucial to language: the selection of particular narrative elements (characters, images,

sounds, events, and settings) from a series of categories or databases, and the combination of these chosen elements to generate specific tales. (Kinder)

This idea, then, looks at the creation of narratives from a database starting point. It is by selecting elements from a database that the variables are set, and their combinations add up to form the narrative pathway. Database narratives can be thought of as stories which absorb more than just one combination of story components. In this way, *Man with a Movie Camera* shows a huge number of combinations. Rather than connecting a single line through a field of dots, database narratives encompass several dots and allow for multiple juxtapositions and meaning-generating patterns.

A more recent film that has been classified as a database narrative is Tom Twyker's *Run, Lola, Run* (1998). In Lola's three alternate narrative arcs, viewers are engaged to "...search the database of this film, in order to use the commonalities and the differences to make sense of the film" (Bizzocchi 5). But even from Vertov's montages to Twyker's alternate outcomes, we are still talking about movies in linear filmic space and interpretive interactivity.

How, then, to actually create a hyperfilm, which has both a database and a navigation engine which the user can actively pilot different narrative trajectories through? In *Database as a Genre of New Media*, Manovich describes this marriage of narrative and database outside of the linear filmic space of Vertov, Twyker and others:

The "user" of a narrative is traversing a database, following links between its records as established by the database's creator. An interactive narrative (which can also be called "hyper-narrative" in an analogy with hypertext) can then be understood as the sum of multiple trajectories through a database. (182)

If we use the adventure books as our model again, the film would come to an important juncture, and then based on the viewer input, one of several options would be chosen. The film would then take this new plot path, before coming to another juncture. But this type of interactivity would not be practical in the video cassette medium. It would be too cumbersome to tell the viewers to fast forward or rewind to a certain part of the tape to continue the story. A medium that does support this is already in widespread use, however, in the form of the Digital Video Disc or DVD. Offline distribution of movies are almost exclusively in DVD format now (or the similar Blue-Ray), and users are familiar with the ‘main menu’ feature. In DVD creation, the number of menus and video options is not limited to just one menu with the main feature and a few bonus features. A DVD could be authored to contain multiple menus and multiple sequences. Voila, the hyperfilm! But is this simple solution the best available?

Similar to database narratives are ‘network narratives’ or network plots, which involve “Tales of intersecting lives...the concept of criss-crossing character destinies” (Thompson and Bordwell “Film History” 581). Altman again provides an example, this time with the film *Nashville* (1975), which has over twenty characters, which arguably includes the audience itself, which is shown several times throughout the film as spectators of the songs and rallies. The network narrative became especially popular in Europe for its tendency to bring together a wide variety of characters, which often reflected relations in Europe. In *One Day in Europe* (2005), “several stories...are synchronized to a World Cup match” (“Film History” 518).

This shows the potential for the network narrative to tell stories that tie diverse perspectives, locations, and individuals together in a larger web of culture. This brings up an interesting approach to looking at Vignetwork; from an anthropological perspective. It could be seen as an ethnographic self-documentation, a participatory network narrative. This potential blur between film and game is interesting as an offline form of media. Whether interactive menus are taken as an intrusion of gameplay into the high art of film, or the cinematic glorification of a game, the concept is not without its own impracticalities. The production costs of a feature length hyperfilm would be many times that of a regular film, without a necessarily increased demand. The requirement of interaction with the menus also changes the cinematic experience. One cannot just flop on the couch and digest such a film. A hand must always be on the DVD remote, ready to choose the fate of the characters. A lot of movie viewers don't want that kind of control, and are more than content leaving such narrative choices in the hands of gifted storytellers.

Another problem is the audience. While a book necessarily has only one reader, a film could have upwards of many hundreds at a single viewing. It would be impossible to accommodate that many individual and disagreeing choices without some kind of polling system, and such a system would spoil much of the appeal of individual choice that the hypermedia form should provide. This actually was the case with Bob Bejan's *I'm Your Man* (1998), in which "the audience is asked to choose by a majority vote (through pressing a button) which course of action the film will take at a given point in the projection" (Ben-Shaul 150). While the novelty of this adaptation certainly would

entertain at first, the inconsistency between the individual and the majority decision would eventually erode viewer interest. With audiences being random samples of the population, large polled groups would tend to break down into similar majority and minority groups, and the alternate options would rarely get explored.

With the level of enjoyment peaking at single-user consumption, and production costs skyrocketing in order to film all the alternate outcomes, it isn't much of a mystery why hyperfilms haven't taken off. Occasionally films will have alternate endings (I'm reminded of Wayne and Garth's magical finger waving to transition between various endings of *Wayne's World*) which minimizes extra production and may generate additional consumer interest. But the cost-benefit ratio drops off steeply from there. This also illustrates a chilling aspect of hypermedia: the more flexibility in narrative and individual choices we have, the less of a shared, 'audience' experience is possible. I should state here that I am already making a distinction between hyperfilm and hypercinema, where the former is a self-contained film with multiple possible plot branches. A hypercinema, on the other hand, would mean a collection of hyperfilms, where multiple hyperfilms could be connected together.

An example of another type of hyperfilm is *Point of View - An Experiment in Linear Hypervideo*, by Guy Vardi and Roni Shaliv, in which four actors each have a camera on their heads. The viewer interacts with the film by choosing which camera to view the situation from. This mode was developed to preserve linear story-telling, however, because "the user's interaction affects the cinematic aspects of the movie, while not interfering with the development of the plot" (Vardi 132). This was developed as an

educational tool, such as teaching editing at a film school, and wouldn't engage the viewer in a media-consumption capacity.

While the practical applications of virtual reality and hypermedia were certainly helped along by the advent of computing, the idea has its roots in earlier times. One of them is "Borges' story *The Garden of Forking Paths*, often mentioned by hyper-narrative theorists as one of its foundational stories" (Ben-Shaul, "Hyper-Narrative Interactive Cinema" 30). The following passage from that story provides further insight into the subject:

In all fictions, each time a man meets diverse alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the work of the virtually impossible-to-disentangle Ts'ui Pen, the character chooses – simultaneously – all of them. He creates, thereby, 'several futures' several times, which themselves proliferate and fork. (125)

This describes hypermedia as it is authored, not as it is experienced. The author of a hypermedia text must write and edit each 'future' so that the user's experience can be made up of true choices, each with its own consequences. Only by decoding the hypertext several times, and each time making different choices, can a user live out each of those 'futures'.

One current argument is that a convergence of narrative and computing theories is not only possible, but already overdue in light of the digital media age and the ever-expanding Internet. George Landow cites that the literary theorists Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, alongside the computing theorists Theodore Nelson and Andries van Dam "...like many others who write on hypertext and literary theory, argue that we must

abandon conceptual systems founded on ideas of center, margin, hierarchy, and linearity and replace them by ones of multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks” (Landow 1).

Now that a few different concepts and applications of hypermedia have been examined, it is time to look at how such a system might work on the Internet. The Internet is a macrocosm of the hypertext, a hyperlibrary. Nodes, or websites, link together with other sites in one global web of information, and not just textual information, but video, audio, and diverse forms of interactivity as well. The Internet also provides a solution to the audience problem of hyperfilms, in that video accessed online can be watched by millions individually and at their own pace. Indeed, the Internet user is different than the couch-flopper referred to earlier; the online audience is already engaged by the computer as an interface. Already this foundation of web use in interactivity makes for a better platform than the hyperfilm on a DVD. However, it is with due caution that I note here that a film may be seen by millions of people online, but what has been lost is the shared mass experience, the ‘oohs’ and ‘aahs’, cheering, laughter, and gasps.

The popularity of YouTube and other online video sharing demonstrates that there is a demand for online video, and the one-on-one interface between the Internet and the user maximizes the individual experience while simultaneously allowing for great connectivity with other (nevertheless remote) users. With another advantage being the instantaneous and globalized distribution (compared to hard copy DVDs, for instance) this interface solution provides hypermedia much more fertile soil than was available when Nelson came up with the term in 1965.

A look at Ted Nelson's epic hypertext Project Xanadu (begun in 1960) brings up a few red flags to counter the Internet's seemingly ready-made harmony with hypermedia. The Xanadu project vision states that "We have fought for a world of deep electronic documents-- with side-by-side intercomparison and frictionless re-use of copyrighted material" (Nelson). Certainly the use of copyrighted music, but also the larger culture of derivative use that the Web facilitates has become an issue familiar to us all. It turns out that any sort of collaborative hypercinema, including the kind I am proposing, requires some ownership sacrifices. In order for users to be able to contribute content to the site, they would have to give over that specific use. It seems straightforward at first, but consider the inevitable case where a vignette is created and then built off of by others. That vignette is critical to the existence of the offshoots, and that creator will no longer be able to remove it or edit it. In a world where most of our networking applications allow us to take back what we say, Vignetwork would have a brutal memory.

One online licensing tool which I have considered using to clarify this area is Creative Commons. CC allows content creators to utilize "...free licenses and other legal tools to mark creative work with the freedom the creator wants it to carry, so others can share, remix, use commercially, or any combination thereof" (Creative Commons). The licenses range from commercial to non-commercial, deal with attribution (whether or not derivative works have to credit you), and under what conditions derivative works are allowed. For Vignetwork, I have identified the Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike license, which reads as follows:

This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under

the identical terms. Others can download and redistribute your work, but they can also translate, make remixes, and produce new stories based on your work. All new work based on yours will carry the same license, so any derivatives will also be non-commercial in nature. (Creative Commons)

Under this license, my original root additions to Vignetwork would be protected as non-commercial. Not only that, but all works which build off of it (which is essentially the entire site) would carry the same non-commercial license. It also implies that once a vignette has been published, I can distribute it on the site in perpetuity. Creative Commons founder Laurence Lessig argued for modified creative protections for the Internet by pointing out that “The rules that govern this space were written for the large companies that control this space; they make no sense when applied to the large number of new creators this space enables” (771). With the above license I would be trying to keep the large companies out, and the newly enabled creators within.

But if I did not want to take the copyright road, I could always take the Copyleft road. The Copyleft movement, also known as ‘read/write culture’, refers to the proponents of free and open use of intellectual property, providing licenses to authors of software, documents, music, and art that allow their works to be used with legal impunity. It essentially allows what the original intent of copyright laws forbade, thus the reversed ‘c’ in a full circle as their emblem. In the words of David Stallman, the first Copyleft license author, “Copyleft is a general method for making a program (or other work) free, and requiring all modified and extended versions of the program to be free as well.” His Copyleft license is very similar to the ‘share-alike’ license of Creative Commons, in that all derivative work is required to be free and cannot be commercialized. The above

consideration of content ownership is focused primarily on giving up rights and allowing free derivative use.

However, I would like to counter the idea of an authorless commons with the idea that the structure of Vignetwork has yet to be shaped. Its connections and architecture is completely dependent on outside users contributing to it. In this way, users have a unique ability to ‘leave their mark’, in a way that no one else could try to steal. Once a vignette is built onto the structure, it cannot be erased. That permanence instills a sense of ownership. Even though the author relinquishes control to the larger project, she still has that segment of territory forever in her name. I think it is analogous to the adopt-a-highway program, only in Vignetwork, you get to choose not only how nice your stretch of highway is, but where it goes.

In addition to the ‘read/write society’, this movement that encourages derivative works has taken on the name of “remix culture”. Lev Manovich defines remix as a post-modern process engaged in “...the remixing of previous cultural contents and forms within a given media or cultural form, most visible today in music, architecture, and fashion” (“Language of New Media”, Korean Translation, iv). He also argues that remix (and post-modernism) is not necessarily a new process, but one that has occurred throughout cultural history;

Ancient Rome remixed Ancient Greece; Renaissance remixed antiquity; nineteenth century European architecture remixed many historical periods including the Renaissance; and today graphic and fashion designers remix together numerous historical and local cultural forms, from Japanese Manga to traditional Indian clothing. (“Remixability and Modularity” 1)

This interpretation begins to depart from the Copyleft and Creative Commons philosophy of derivative works, in that individual profit is an option. For instance, the music artist Girl Talk has formed his career around remixing different genres of music (usually rock 'n roll and hip-hop) into new creations, a process which he has successfully defended under the transformative protection of the fair use doctrine. In Vignetwork, I use footage of TVs playing audio and video from Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* (1956) and *Vertigo* (1958) as a linking element between different scenes. This is copyrighted material is owned by Universal Pictures. Under the licensing territory I would use for Vignetwork, derivative works of this copyrighted material would not be able to be profited from. In addition, I want Vignetwork to be a repository of information somewhere near the public domain, more akin to a library or archive than a commercial project. Just as copyrighted material can be checked out of a library, certainly small fragments of it can be shown as a part of a larger story.

But there is also the legal impact of outsourcing videos to other host sites to consider. The current copyright infringement policies of sites like YouTube and Vimeo will apply to all footage uploaded to them, including footage incorporated as a part of Vignetwork. In this way, Vignetwork itself is vulnerable to "take-down" orders, since under Safe Harbor legislation, "The search engine [like YouTube] is protected if they immediately remove the part of the video/audio that is infringing on copyright," (Silver). Therefore, in a worst-case scenario, a vignette might be ordered to be removed from Internet publication. This poses a problem if other vignettes are dependent on that offending segment.

Because of this possibility, I believe the strongest case for protecting this use is the educational provision of the fair use doctrine. Since this site was developed via a masters thesis, and especially if future audience and users are college students completing video course assignments or research, the project could be integrated into existing resources through DU. If, for instance, the vignettes are hosted by DU CourseMedia, and the copyrighted material is already stored within the same resource, the educational use of the material would then be extended to Vignetwork. If it turns out that copyright infringement is going to be an issue, there are further steps needed to associate and integrate this project into the DU system, whether it is in DU CourseMedia, or as a project under Penrose. The goal is to provide users a free viewing experience, where they can also contribute and share, but not profit from the works generated there.

This project's limitation to short films, or vignettes, is based on the premise that longer forms of film would burden the flexibility of a film network. I have seen the law of diminishing returns firsthand with my own undergraduate documentary on YouTube. The video is about twenty minutes long, which required me to chop it in half when I was uploading it in 2007. Since then, the first half has accrued 1,907 views. The second half? 746. This is not an exact experiment tailored specifically for my current project, but I believe it is an adequate demonstration that in ten minutes I lost over half of my audience. Who knows how many of the remaining 746 even stuck through till the very end?

Shorter films mean more connections per runtime of footage. More connections mean a more dynamic and engaging structure. This preference for the short form brings up the subject of storytelling in general, because different narrative models are suited for

some forms more than others. Take, for example, the classic three act structure. *Syd Field's Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* codified for the entire film industry the most traditional three-act structure as follows: the set up, the confrontation, and the resolution. This structure is not automatically compatible with the short-form project:

The long-form act-length proportion is 1:2:1 (thirty minutes, Act I; sixty minutes, Act II; thirty minutes, Act III). In a short film of fifteen to thirty minutes, it is doubtful that this proportion would hold. The catalytic event that would begin the action of the film, which could be viewed as the beginning of Act II, must come much more quickly than a quarter of the way into the film. (Cooper 6)

The three act structure for a short is recommended by Cowgill, although shorter films must be necessarily simpler; “If a film runs under three minutes like *405*, you must set up the problem quickly, develop the conflict and then hit your pay-off climax with no time to waste,” (65). Contributors to Vignetwork also retain the option to create longer form narratives by building consecutive vignettes, but the clicking required to continue each segment doesn't make this project the optimum viewing venue. By limiting the runtime, I am placing a stylistic preference on having choices, cliff-hangers, obstacles or other incident devices occur at a maximum of two-minute intervals. With plot points occurring regularly throughout a good script, I don't foresee this being a heavy-handed limitation, but only experience will tell.

Another traditional framework for storytelling follows archetypes as popularized by Joseph Campbell and Vladimir Propp: “the quest of the hero across a land filled with many dangers to defeat evil forces and conquer a desirable object” (Ryan). In Campbell's own words, “The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a

magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation--initiation--return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth” (Campbell 23). The monomyth, a term borrowed from James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, refers to a common pattern in stories from many different cultures. As with the traditional three-act convention, however, short films face the challenge of telling their story without fully developing these archetypes or monomyths. The instinct of the storyteller to adhere to these conventions even in the short form is “Probably the biggest hurdle to overcome...feeling that you are obligated to retain as much as possible of the structure and dialogue of the story. This is a normal reaction, but one that will not result in the best adaptation” (Irving and Rea, 18).

Indeed, one guidebook offers as its first tip in script analysis “...that if your thinking about script structure includes ideas such as which character is “hero,” “mentor,” “enemy,” etc., for the purpose of this script analysis I need to ask you to let go of such categories and think of each character as a human being in a situation” (Weston, 165). I would hypothesize that in a hypercinema, while these archetypes may not be easily developed in individual vignettes, they could be developed over several episodes, and the collective diversity of narratives would contain many important monomyths as well.

The challenge of short film storytelling has not been met with any set formula or right or wrong answer. The challenges remain straightforward, and the solutions vary based on the dynamics of the script, length of runtime, and the creativity of production. As Sundance programmer Mike Plante puts it:

A short film that’s an hour long faces an aesthetic challenge as well. It has to introduce characters and sustain plot in a different way than a feature.

If it sets up too much, it becomes a failed feature. If it doesn't do enough, it's simply too long a short.

One genre of film that is limited almost exclusively to the short format is the montage and experimental style, where creativity is unleashed and cinema conventions and narrative structure may well go out the window. While the structure of Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947) has identifiable elements of both the three-act structure and Campbell's archetypes, the piece is conveyed in a dreamlike way, focusing on emotional and symbolic depth. On the other hand, Andy Warhol's *Blowjob* (1963, 35 minutes) and Larry Gottheim's *Fog Line* (1970, 10 minutes) have the monolithic structure of just one long take. These attempt to represent abstract concepts and relate open-ended meaning while abandoning conventional structures of narrative. While it is debatable whether the same concepts could be accomplished in two minutes instead of ten or 35, what is certain is that experimental films will have no trouble fitting into the current project. The possibility of hijacking a branch by going from a strong narrative to a completely experimental trip through psychedelia is always there. But the term hijack might be too strong here, since other contributors, including the original narrative author, will always be able to offer alternate choices to the experimental ones.

One experimental method called 'exquisite corpse' (from the French *cadaver exquis*) directly relates to the creative challenge of starting one work with the ending of another. Invented during the rise of Surrealism at the end of World War I, this playful exercise involves the first writer writing a sentence, then folding it so that the next artist can only see the last words but not the whole, who then writes his own addition, and the process is repeated for the final writer. The result is an amalgam, a sort of intellectual

MadLibs. The practice got its name from one of the earliest outcomes: *Le eginni exquis boira le vin nouveau* (The exquisite corpse will drink the young wine). Other examples include: “The dormitory of friable little girls puts the odious box right” and “The Senegal oyster will eat the tricolor bread” (Music Synthesizer).

The game was considered more than an idle exercise, with Surrealist poet and art historian Nicolas Calas describing it as “the unconscious reality in the personality of the group,” and Max Ernst referring to it as “mental contagion,” (Music Synthesizer). By approaching collaborative narration in this way, it can begin to be understood that multiple authorship allows for unconscious choices in the narrative process to be made conscious on a group level. Instead of collaborating together, the authors collaborate in the dark, unaware of the conscious choices their colleagues are making. The result is a combination of those choices into a single form that illuminates the identity of those authors at the same time that it connects them.

When exquisite corpse was adapted for other mediums, such as drawing and painting, the exercise took on additional creative value. An artist would draw the first third of a picture, and the second and third artists, building only off of the connecting points of the segment preceding them, would make their own additions. A sort of mythological creature with triply miss-matched elements was often the result.

It can also result in any kind of abstract, landscape, or collage-type painting, since the format of the piece is largely controlled by the first contributing artist. One example of this is called the Digital Exquisite Corpse Project, which is introduced with:

Three artists who’ve never met; the Internet; and the digital version they created of a surrealist game called “Exquisite Corpse”. Each artist

contributed, via email attachment, one third of each completed work. But here's the catch: An artist was only allowed to see the bottom ¼ inch of what had been created by the artist before him. (YouTube, "The Digital Exquisite Corpse Project")

In the YouTube video presentation, eighteen paintings are shown segment by segment, which gives the viewer an idea of the artist's different styles, their personal take on the mood of the piece, and their interpretation of the shared information. The process, which has also been called 'exquisite cadaver,' 'rotating corpse,' or simply 'consequences' can also be based on a rule or formula, rather than hints of the previous contribution. This rule-based approach has been the focus of several experimental film projects, examples of which can be found on YouTube, such as the project submitted with the following introduction:

This challenge sponsored by the Northwest Film Forum, Seattle WA. 18 Filmmakers submitted shorts prompted by a word or description for the beginning [sic] and ending. All shorts were screened together to form one semi-cohesive piece. (YouTube, "Exquisite Corpse Film Challenge")

This challenge, with its aim to form one larger 'semi-cohesive' piece, demonstrates an application of the exquisite corpse method to film that most resembles the current proposal. Instead of a single screening of shorts, one after the other, however, the shorts linked together in Vignetwork will be navigable by the hypertextual architecture of links and nodes, with the possibility for multiple 'consequences' at each juncture.

Turning to the question of how, or if at all, ideas of hyperfilm have been classified into the film industry, the high-grossing cinema website Box Office Mojo's list of over two hundred genres offers a good place to look. Its range of genres, from 3D to Zombies, offer several designations worth noting for their approach or similarity to hyperfilm

concepts, or what Thompson and Bordwell call “puzzle films” (“Film Art” 88). The “Comedy-What If?” genre (also called ‘magical comedy’) represents 38 high-grossing films where the story is driven by fantastic modifications in a realistic setting, such as *Stranger than Fiction* (2006), where Will Farrel’s character can hear a narrator describing his life and must face the fact that this author controls his fate. Most of these films answer the what-if question with a single answer, such as ‘what if a regular guy had the power of God?’ (*Bruce Almighty*, 2003), or ‘what if a mother and daughter switched bodies?’ (*Freaky Friday*, 1977, 2003).

A few films do offer multiple answers to what-if questions within their narratives. In *Bedazzled* (2000), Brendan Fraser’s character sells his soul to the Devil for the ability to wish for anything he wants, the consequences of which play out in a series of alternate realities. Similar to *Groundhog Day* (1993), Fraser’s character learns from each of the alternate realities the Devil grants him. This ability for characters to learn over different versions of reality departs from my interpretation of a hyperfilm, where characters make must make choices and do not necessarily experience all outcomes one after the other.

Another relevant genre is “mindbender”, a category which includes other puzzle films like *Memento* (2001), in which the story events happen in reverse order using the protagonists short-term amnesia as a storytelling device. Similar to this is *Donnie Darko* (2001), where the protagonist experiences a brief ‘loose end’ reality in which he must sacrifice himself in order to tie up and restore linearity to the universe.

Under “time travel”, many feature films have dealt with the consequences of characters traveling through time and creating alternate future outcomes. Often centering

around small yet crucial changes, films like *Back to the Future* (1985), the *Butterfly Effect* (2004), and the *Star Trek* and *Terminator* series address the consequential alternate versions of reality created by time travel. Yet the narratives are still played out on screen in a linear storytelling fashion. Time may fork or loop back on itself, but the audience follows the characters through the course of events as they experience them. In this way, a single linear story is played out, which usually resolves the offshoots in space-time and the world continues turning as usual by the resolution. Bordwell and Thompson attribute the interest in these films, many of which have grossed huge box office sales, in the following way:

These films appeal to the way we think in ordinary life. We sometimes speculate about how our lives would change if a single event had been different. We easily understand the sort of game that these films present, and we're willing to play it. (88)

However, most of the plot lines described above cannot necessarily be expressed in a true hyper narrative format. In time-traveler stories, each segment of the story is dependent on the character choices made prior to it. From the point of view of the time travelers, only one series of choices is described, and thus “Within these futures, the cause-effect chain remains linear, so that we can piece it together” (Bordwell and Thompson, 88). The consequences of the alternate realities in *Back to the Future* and *Star Trek: First Contact* are visited briefly, but they are not stand alone parts of the story that go on to unfold independently. The protagonists’ efforts make sure that a more preferable outcome is achieved, and the other, darker outcomes are conclusively prevented. This could be represented by an unfinished hyperfilm, in which only one series of choices is fleshed out. Other what-if and puzzle films such as *Bedazzled* and *Groundhog Day*

contain the linear element of the character being conscious of the different realities. These films play with ideas of alternate realities, forking of space time, and puzzling storytelling devices, but the character's linear awareness and the chain of cause and effect makes them beholden to the traditional one-way narrative structure.

A few films can, however, be better expressed in a hyper narrative format, with fully developed choices and no cross-over awareness of the characters. Three examples, which will be discussed further in Chapter 4, are *Run, Lola, Run* (1998), *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), and *Sliding Doors* (1998). In all three, the characters experience different chains of events with independent awareness. The characters are not conscious of all depictions of reality by the end. These films wander away from the intact, beginning-to-end, chains of cause and effect that the great majority of films use. However, the further from linear storytelling that filmmakers stray, the greater the threat that the audience's experience will lack a sense of closure. By moving away from the feature film format and into the more interactive environment of the Internet, the danger of new interfaces confusing or overwhelming the viewer also arises.

The final source that I would like to review is a masters thesis entitled *Lost Cause: An Interactive Movie Project* (2008). Kristen Johnson sets forth in her abstract that the project "...supports an immersive interactive story experience through its correlated design of an interface, narrative content, and narrative structure" (Johnson, iii). Her methodology is interesting because she implemented several case studies, one of which actuated David Balcom's desire to see *Short Cuts* made interactive. Based on these user studies, Johnson determined that an interface with multiple screens was the modus

operandi for her project: “The interface of Lost Cause has one master screen in the center and three thumbnail screens below...these three screens play simultaneously and a viewer can navigate between any one of the storylines at any time” (72).

Due to my project’s scope as a collaborative hypercinema, I do not plan to use a multi-screen interface. It would be a massive undertaking to create an interface where various video slots could be filled by different users and then coordinated to play simultaneously. I am also personally skeptical of the quality of the experience of having multiple screens play at once and the idea that this goal of immersion is essential to an interactive experience. Ben-Shaul has much to say about these techniques, contending that “...particularly the use of split or multi-screens, of parallelism or simultaneity, and of interactivity, easily translates into a perception of decenteredness and closureless incoherence,” (“Can Narrative Films go Interactive?” 155).

Informed with these clarifications of terminology, form, and previous projects in interactive narratives, I will begin to layout specifics for designing and implementing Vignetwork.

CHAPTER TWO

Proposal

The version of the exquisite corpse method that I intend to apply to *Vignetwork* is one that is rule-based-- namely that creators must create a seamless cut or transition from the final shot of the content they choose build off from. Whether or not the creator has seen the entirety of the previous vignette is not a discrimination that the site will require. Using the hypertextual tree structure, the first root film will begin and end, and from its ending shot, I will create two offshoot vignettes as opposing branches of the story. From the ends of those, any number of a third tier of vignettes can be created and so forth. A user could even create a third choice in addition to the two I will have already completed.

Navigation of the website will be centered around a single viewing screen embedded in the webspace. The screen itself will be a video player powered by Vimeo (vimeo.com). The screen will travel with the user, playing the content at the current node or offering the choice of which film or path to take next. The number of branches from any one previous branch is infinite. The mode or style of short film is left completely up to the creators, but the maximum runtime of two minutes and minimum of 10 seconds will

be controlled in the functionality of the site. This will provide for an increased level of linking per content. With more choices per minutes spent watching films, the site will become more complex at a faster rate than if the first films were half an hour long. It would be far less interesting to have to sit through even a fifteen minute film that the user is not necessarily interested in. Yet a user would still be able to create a longer visual experience by building consecutive pieces, with the next segment being one of the choices at the end of the previous segment. This allows for the most amount of flexibility, focusing on the short-form while potentially allowing even feature-length productions (albeit in the form of 60 consecutive segments).

The amount of input needed to navigate between segments can be reduced to a single click. A small icon will represent the choice, accompanied by the title. Further criteria, such as author, runtime, and other metadata required during publication may also be displayed in the lower margin. The user will simply click on which icon or film to view next, and that film will play until it is over and a new branch of choices will appear. There will be an option to go back to the previous node for freer navigation of this complex arrangement. Another idea is to include a 'mini-map', or small diagram plotting where in the 'Vignetwork' the user currently is. Films will be represented as colored nodes, and the choices by forking lines. A problem arises in the event that one film has a huge number of branch choices. The user will be able to scroll through the film choices one by one, but several sorting tools would be useful in informing the choice. The user could sort the choices by runtime, style, mood, and other metadata provided by the author at the submission stage. Another challenge will be how to incorporate the Exquisite

Corpse rule into the video uploading and downloading process. A user may simply have to begin his submission with a cut or transition that works in conjunction with the final shot of the preceding film.

By the end of this project, I propose to have set up the website for Vignetwork, and to have published at least three short films to the site: one root film and two branching films to choose from. This is the minimum required to demonstrate the navigability of the tree structure. This prototype will have the capacity to accept submissions, but it will be limited to contributors working with me directly to link to their content. This is because I do not have the web-building skills to author my own video uploading process. Any participants would have to upload their submissions to a video hosting site such as Vimeo, and then ask me to link to their video from the desired point in Vignetwork. This is another interesting aspect of the proposed site: while Vimeo is my host of choice, other users could use YouTube or any of the hundreds of hosts now available. With each video host comes their own flavor of content restrictions.

The issue of content restrictions and censorship in Vignetwork has actually been greatly simplified by this use of outside video sharing sites as hosts for the submitted vignettes. Since users are required to upload their content to the Internet using an outside host, they are free to choose the site or method with the preferable amount of restrictions. However, as the site 'moderator', I also have censorship control over submitted content. Until a self-contained, standardized uploading and submission process is developed within the website, which is beyond the scope of this project, I will necessarily wield control over what does and does not make it onto the site. This control may seem

overbroad, especially for a project that claims to be near the public domain and encouraging of derivative works.

However, I think users (if there ever are any) will find me a benevolent dictator and an avid supporter of freedom of speech and expression. In cases of obscenity, I will observe the same standard that U.S. law has applied to the matter, namely that: “obscene content has no First Amendment protection. If material appears to the prurient interest, is patently offensive, and has no serious social value, the government may ban the material” (Middleton and Lee, 415). As long as this project is in the early experimental stages, with few submissions, this standard should inform my decision as to whether content should be censored or outright rejected. If a time comes when interest in the site necessitates the development of an uploading and submission process, this position should be written down in a user agreement as a part of their application for membership.

In creating this resource, I am exploring the grey area between cinematic narratives and interactive narratives, using the medium (the Internet) best suited for hypertextual consumption and creation. Vignetwork will push the traditionally linear narrative of cinema out of its comfort zone and into a branching narrative structure. This environment will challenge filmmakers to create content that builds off of a larger structure. How filmmakers respond to this challenge-- whether they design for easier adaptability of the films or rebel against the parameters by creating very specific ending shots-- is slightly beyond the scope of this thesis. I can hypothesize that films ending with shots that are difficult to work with will not encourage offshoots, while films that approach the issue creatively will speed the way to new segments. But I do not expect to confirm either due

to promotional, administrative, and time constraints. But the emphasis on creativity and interconnectivity and de-emphasis on the ‘anything goes’ home movie will be hardwired into the site’s architecture.

In addition to site I am proposing, I have had to consider the audience that this project is proposing to target. From a very basic look at the project, it is easy to infer that my audience will naturally split into two groups: the viewer-participants and the viewers-only. This echoes the audience make up of other video sharing sites, and indeed the entirety of the Internet itself. For YouTube, based on the many millions of hits that certain videos have cultivated, the better part of users probably do not contribute or participate but simply consume videos. This greater portion probably explains the phenomenon known as ‘going viral’, in which a single video gets a huge amount of views. According to ComScore, in July of 2008 alone, there were 5 billion US views on YouTube.

While the number of YouTube views certainly does outnumber the amount of videos, this is not to say that video uploads remain the territory of an elite. In January of 2008 there were 70 million videos on YouTube, and in March there were 78 million, which equates to approximately 150 to 200 thousand video uploads per day, (Wesch). While it is certain that YouTube uploaders account for many of the YouTube views, even if all the uploaders in the first month of 2008 watched 50 videos each, they would only account for 225 million views, still a fraction of the above number of views in July of 2008. This demonstrates that while submitting content is very popular, the number of views far outstrips it.

As I consider the above grouping for my audience, which seems to suggest that participants are outnumbered by viewers-only by at least ten-to-one, I must also take into account that I do not expect to attract the same sample of the population that YouTube does. In fact, for Vignetwork I envision much more a niche audience, something categorically along the lines of a website called PopTent. PopTent provides a place for companies to post contests to create TV commercials that are open for anyone with the resources to compete in. Top brands, from Old Spice to Yoplait, go to PopTent to post commercial-spot assignments, in which video-creators compete to create the best commercial. The winning submission gets a cash prize of up to 50 thousand dollars and a national commercial spot on TV. This allows companies to avoid the steep costs of producing their own commercials or hiring a production company, and also allows budding filmmakers to gain experience and accolades in the real world.

The audience of Vignetwork would be similar to PopTent in that it would be primarily targeting the video-creator niche. Beginning filmmakers could use Vignetwork as another venue to display their work. However, I don't envision realistically achieving the user traffic that PopTent has, since Vignetwork doesn't offer cash prizes (not even 500 dollars for best demo reel). Vignetwork only offers the potential for a large hypernarrative structure that other video sharing sites don't have. I did not design Vignetwork with a business model that would rapidly connect supply with demand, but rather as an experiment in narrative and hypertext.

My expectation here is that if there is any audience that actually eventually uses the site, the first wave would be people similar to myself; researchers and students in media.

A possible second wave could be film students, who could be referred by a professor to the site as a production 'sandbox' to gain more experience in. Or a class in video production could utilize the site as an assignment, giving students the task of adding their own contributions somewhere within the hyper structure.

Even in my DMS class we began the course by conducting a survey of new media and net art and design. Many of the websites were quite old, some being examples of early hypertexts and other web-pioneering projects in the mid nineties. If nothing else, Vignetwork could be included as a more recent example of hypertext. I believe this educational audience to be a more realistic expectation for a Vignetwork audience. If such an educational investment were worked out with the site, the project would become an a much more interesting experiment with more variables than the bare-bones framework that I intend to finish before I graduate.

Scripts

Basically the plot of the scripts is as follows. Somewhere in South America is an old hotel that somehow has bound up in its architecture a link between two parallel universes. The two universes are nearly mirror reflections of each other, except for very subtle differences. As it turns out, the same individuals exist on both sides, and they may be exactly the same, except for one or two minor details. In the case of influential figures, such as famous painters or authors, the two mirrored lives might produce exactly the same

masterpieces except for one or two works, which, for whatever unexplained wrinkle in the fabric of these parallel universes, do not exist on the other side. For a long time the connection between the two universes goes unnoticed, until an enterprising individual makes the discovery and learns how to navigate from side to side. Seeing dollar signs where one side has a resource that the other lacks, a secret organization slowly arose to take control of the traffic of items between the worlds.

But for every attempt to force control over a volatile environment there is an opposite attempt to disrupt and rebel. An opposing faction that stands for free and open traffic between the two sides has begun working to undermine the organization. This is the setting when the first script begins (Script 1). One of the hotel workers stumbles upon a lost short story by a locally famous author and shows it to a publisher. In the short story, the author is met by a stranger who delivers a novel which he claims the author wrote, but in a parallel life. Convinced after being read its entirety, the author composes one final short story describing this strange chance before dying a few days later. The stranger who gave the author the book belongs to the underground group that is trying to free up traffic between the sides.

In 2b, we see the operations of the organization in its black market trade (a forged Van Gogh painting) and the fallout from the leaked document. The agent of the controlling organization is ordered to patch things up. The same actor who plays the stranger in Script 1 plays the forgery artist in Script 2b. That is because Carlos' double on the other side is the leader of the underground faction. This twist is not revealed however, which serves to show the unfinished structure of the hypertext. A lot of story remains to

be told, and not just by me, but by any contributors. Script 2a follows another character, a journalist who is unwittingly dragged into the mix when she is given a specific room key by the bored teenage receptionist.

Script 1

Novela Paralelo

By

Scott Calhoun

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The misted glass door opens and ALEJANDRO TENEDOR, mid-fifties, wearing a leather bomber jacket, enters an office cluttered with books and files. A large pile of manuscripts and papers teeters precariously on the top of an old tv set which is showing the end of Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* dubbed in Spanish. TREVOR ROSS, mid-forties, looks up from behind the desk.

ALEJANDRO

Con permiso?

TREVOR

Pasa.

ALEJANDRO

I've got a manuscript.

TREVOR

Oh, English then.

Trevor gestures around the room as if to relay the obvious.

TREVOR

Sorry, but I'm a bit swamped.

ALEJANDRO

It's not mine. I found it. I believe it is the last short story written by Alberto Imola.

TREVOR

...*The Chess Match*, 1974.

ALEJANDRO

No. The title is *Novela Paralelo*, 1975.

TREVOR

'Parallel Novel'? Imola died in early '75. He was half-blind

and paralyzed by heart disease,
holed up in some hotel. He
didn't write after Chess Match.

ALEJANDRO

On the contrary, it is with this
last story that he finally found
peace.

TREVOR

Alright. What's it about?

ALEJANDRO

Señor Imola refers to his
deteriorating vision and helpless
state in the first lines, when he
is visited in his hotel room by a
stranger offering him a novel.

CROSS FADE TO INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

IMOLA is seated in his wheelchair opposite of a blurry
figure. Alejandro's voiceover describes the evolving scene.

ALEJANDRO

(V.O.)

He cannot make out his face, but
looks at the book, which the man
says Imola himself wrote. Imola
denies this, saying he could
never write a novel; it has been
the fruitless struggle of his whole
life. But the stranger begins to
read. Imola recounts how he slowly
realizes that he is the author, but
it is an Alberto Imola from an
alternate universe. Not just any
universe, but the only one in all
the infinite parallel universes
where Imola was able to write a
novel. The stranger reads through
the night until it is done, and

then disappears, leaving the book behind. Imola is overcome with joy at this revelation. He can at last be at peace, knowing that he had escaped the stigma of being just a short story writer, even if it was only in a parallel life. Then, this last short story, 'The Parallel Novel', ends. He died a few days later.

TREVOR

Certainly sounds Imolian. Who did you say you were again? Just another Imola enthusiast?

ALEJANDRO

I work at the Hotel Paradiso, downtown. We're renovating old rooms.

SLOW ZOOM into the tv set, where the intro to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* is playing.

END

Script 2a

Room 211

By

Scott Calhoun

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

SLOW ZOOM out from the opening titles of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, played on a tv screen at the reception desk of a hotel lobby. A loud hammering and drilling can be heard somewhere nearby, drowning out the film. LARA MEYERS, 31, hefts her luggage over to the reception counter. A brochure reads "Bienvenido a Hotel Paradiso / Welcome to Hotel Paradise." The RECEPTIONIST nods to her in a friendly manner.

LARA

What is that sound?

RECEPTIONIST

Ah, Señora, sorry for the inconvenience. It is renovations.

LARA

...More like Hotel Inferno.

RECEPTIONIST

Sorry?

LARA

I said I'm supposed to meet someone, I'm staying in Justin Ferroe's suite? He's a colleague of mine.

RECEPTIONIST

Ah, si si si. Señor Ferroe is at the bar. Here is your key. Suite 209. Please enjoy your stay.

Lara takes the key and turns around searchingly, then carries her bag to the bar in the next room. She finds JUSTIN FERROE, a young-looking professional reading an old book at the bar.

LARA

Well, I'm here.

JUSTIN

Hey, Lara! How was your flight?

LARA

Bumpy. And now it sounds like they're tearing this place apart. I just want some peace and quiet. What's that? Swiss Family Robinson?

JUSTIN

No. Just some book that was in my room. Did you get a key?

LARA

Yeah, 209. See you in the morning.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

The elevator doors open and Lara steps out, re-adjusting her grip on her bag. As she does, she gazes down the long and empty hallway. She walks down a ways, passing the doors 200 through 209. She puts her key in, but the knob doesn't turn. At a loss, she checks the key. The number on the key reads '211'. She lets out a huff of frustration, walks down to the next door, Room 211. There is a sign on the door that says 'CERRADO TEMPORALMENTE'. She sticks in the key and opens the door anyway. She immediately steps into not a room, but a hallway, parallel and slightly different from the one behind her. She is stunned, staring up the hall in disbelief. The carpets, wall color and doors look different. She looks back through the door at the hall she had entered from. It is exactly as she left it.

LARA

What the-?

UNKNOWN

(V.O.)

Are you alright, Miss?

The speaker is in the strange, new, parallel hallway. Lara instinctively crosses through and closes the door behind her, trying to hide the first hallway. The door clicks shut. TREVOR is standing on the far side of the hall with ALEJANDRO, who is going through a set of keys.

LARA

Oh, just- nothing. Sorry.

She turns back to her door but it is locked. Her key doesn't work. Alejandro steps forward to help, and examines her key.

ALEJANDRO

Please, let me help you with that.
Looks like you have the wrong room.

Alejandro points to the room number, which on this side reads 209.

ALEJANDRO

211 is just down there.

Confused and embarrassed, Lara walks down to door 211. With apprehension, she tries her key. The door opens, revealing a plain room. She drops her bag and walks slowly to the window, looking out at the city. Somewhere nearby, a violin is being played.

END

Script 2b

The Copy

by

Scott Calhoun

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

SLOW ZOOM out from the opening titles of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, played on a television set in a hotel room. Carlos Juarrez sits on a stool before two easels. The one on the left holds an expressionist painting, lit up by a lamp and rigged with a large swiveling magnifying glass. On the other easel, Carlos carefully paints the finishing touches on a magnificent forgery. There is a KNOCK at the door. Carlos gets up, reaching into his breast pocket as he approaches the door. A faint CLICK suggests that his hand has just cocked a handgun.

CARLOS

¿Quién es?

UNKNOWN

It's me, Carlos.

Carlos peers through the peephole, then opens the door. BERNARD FLAVIAN, a large man in his forties, dressed in suit and tie, walks into the room. Carlos locks and chains the door behind him.

BERNARD

Ah, good. You're finished.

CARLOS

No. Almost. This art takes time, Bernard.

Bernard chuckles to himself as he sits on a table by the window. He takes out a bundle of letters from his pocket and puts them on the table.

BERNARD

Michelangelo might have said the same thing about the Sistine Chapel, and no one would know the difference.

(tapping the letters)

The letters.

CARLOS

An expert could still see it is
a copy.

BERNARD

Carlos, where this copy is
going, there are no experts.
You follow me?

Carlos is back to his painstaking touch-ups.

BERNARD

You know the saying; the last
surviving copy is the original?
The buyers of this painting
live in a place where the
original doesn't exist. This
will be the original.

Carlos sighs resignedly, then turns to Bernard.

CARLOS

I still don't understand. How
does it work? Where in the
hotel do you cross over? How
do you keep from ending up in
the wrong place? I want to
see it. Just a glimpse.

BERNARD

Impossible. And you know what
will happen if you try to take
matters into your own hands.
Things have gotten messy before,
especially during these damn
renovations.

Bernard's cell phone chirps discretely, and he turns away to

answer it. Carlos crosses his arms and stares at the paintings.

BERNARD

(conversing over the phone)
Yes. It's in hand. Okay..
What? There has? How? Of-
Of course. Understood.

Bernard ends the call.

CARLOS

Something's happened.

BERNARD

There's been a breach. Some
hotel worker's running around
with a sensitive document.
Information's been leaked.
We gotta patch it up. Come on.

CARLOS puts down his paintbrush and palette and follows Bernard out the door. They shut it, and a few moments later the lights in the room flicker on and off.

END

CHAPTER THREE

Textual Analysis

The idea for Vignetwork, and the subsequent content written for it, arose from the ashes of two previous thesis ideas. The first was a creativity-focused project inspired by Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), in which I wanted to create my own surrealist narrative short that used confusing and often contradicting combinations of classic storytelling conventions. I found the diversity of narrative possibilities and parallels in *Marienbad* to be intriguing; here was a narrative that moved away from the linear concept of cause and effect toward a playing field with a more abstract, perhaps unconscious causality. It distorted the notions of chronological time and the logic of three-dimensional space, looking very much like a text scrambled by Barthes' method of multiple entry and exit points.

This initial seed for a thesis idea was to create a cinematic text that took this unconventional style to the next level. I wanted to write and produce a film that was embedded with iterative meaning. In other words, the viewer would experience the same text differently each time he watched it. The challenge of this would be embedding these

threads of multiple and/or iterative meanings within a single text that wouldn't unravel in a single viewing, but would slowly reveal itself to the re-viewer with each successive viewing. This idea bogged down when it came to figuring out a way to accomplish meaningful differences between different viewings.

My second idea shelved this amorphous, right-brained idea for a more concrete project; a thesis focusing on creating volunteer recruitment videos for non-profit organizations. This focus was completely due to my independent study documenting the Bike MS fundraising event for the Colorado Chapter of the National MS Society. The video I made showed volunteers in action along with interviews about their experiences. The objective was to show potential volunteers how rewarding the experience was, and to show existing volunteers that their hard work was appreciated. The video itself was considered a form of volunteering, since I was donating my time and special skills to helping the non-profit. In return, I would gain experience and a new audience as a filmmaker as the Society used the video in its many recruitment and promotional events. The motivation behind this project was mainly due to practicality; I had already completed all of my field work and needed only to concentrate on the research, proposal, and report portions.

However, I soon found myself swinging away from this public relations and activism topic back to a more creative idea. When it came down to the research and literature review stages, I needed a background that I was more invested in, not just with my mind, but also heart and soul. I thought that when I came up with a third idea, an online network of vignettes, I had discovered a compromise between the two extremes of

practicality and creativity. It would be the hypertext structure in the online medium that would satisfy the practical and theoretical requirements for a scholarly topic of discussion, and the content that would be open to a multitude of artistic forms, in which I could take part. It would not be until the final stages that I would discover how much back toward *Last Year at Marienbad* that I had come.

This film is a text that defies straightforward analysis due to its unusual structure, themes, and alternate narratives. Returning to make an in-depth analysis of *Marienbad* now, I have the chance to compare and contrast it in the context of my current project. I will review the complex ideas and themes in *Marienbad* to better understand the film and its possible deeper meanings and meta-narratives. This review will then, in turn, propel me to analyze the experimental structure Vignetwork. Are the complex narratives in *Marienbad* possible to reproduce in a Vignetwork-like environment? Is one format better suited to tell these convoluted stories better than the other? In this analysis I will show why I consider *Marienbad* a ‘corrupted’ database narrative in its treatment of the theme of memory. I will also use my analysis of *Marienbad* as a stepping stone to analyzing a similarly complex text; a hypertext.

The ‘text’ is for the hermeneutical researcher what the ‘field’ is for the anthropologist, and just as ethnographers have begun to question and unpack what the use of the term ‘field’ implies, so should textual researchers be aware of the assumptions surrounding the term ‘text’. If an author designs a text, a textual analysis is supposed to reverse engineer that design to find out about the author and the cultural and historical context he is in. The analysis identifies the story’s style and themes, semiotic patterns and

semantic systems, and from these develops cultural and historical interpretations that reflect back on the text-creator. However, several problems arise from this methodology when approaching a film like *Last Year at Marienbad*, a surreal and haunting French film made in 1961 but taking place in the early Thirties. Furthermore, as *Marienbad's* complexity gives analysts and critics pause, I will use the opportunity to try to shed light on an informed and explorative approach to a hypertextual analysis.

Marienbad does not so much abandon classic film and storytelling conventions as it suggests them, only to later confuse them. This pattern of suggestion and semi-contradiction is identifiable throughout many aspects of the film, from reality to the visual flow of time. It encourages a state of suspended confusion and disorientation by building up logical expectations only to reverse or half-deliver on them. This narrative 'leading on' keeps the viewer guessing and wondering. There is just enough that is recognizable and indicative to disguise this film as one that has an answer, a purpose proportional to its conventions. Yet by the end, there is no revelation, no discovery, no explanation-- in terms of the conventional narrative, the film remains perplexingly half-told.

This bears a similarity to constructing a hypertext; unlike a feature film or narrative short that have built-in expectations for beginning, middle, and end, a hypertext is potentially infinite. The three scripts I have written create the root narratives for a potentially larger structure; the limit, conclusions, and consequences of which remain a matter of conjecture. For *Marienbad*, this uncertainty was intentional, as director Alain Resnais sums up his film in the following way:

‘In an international palace a stranger meets a young woman and tells her the love story they lived the previous year. The woman denies this, the man confirms it and persists. Who is right?’ (Wilson 70)

The two sentences and the question literally sum up the entire narrative of the film. As with Vignetwork, the main story is told, and then two alternate narratives are played out. Which one is right? Can this unfinished hypertext be interpreted using conventional textual analysis? “We interpret texts in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them” (McKee 1), but what happens when a single text allows different interpretations, or versions, of reality to coexist? The analytical challenges of *Marienbad*’s competing versions of reality can help in analyzing a hypertext, which necessarily is made up of coexisting versions of reality.

By suspending the resolution of audience expectations indefinitely, this film, and Vignetwork, exposes the decoder and audience assumption that in a text or hypertext there is a complete narrative meaning to decode. A text is not like a joke; without a punch line a joke ceases to be a joke; it is incomplete. But a joke without a punch line is still a text, and *Last Year at Marienbad* illustrates how a complete text may carry an incomplete narrative meaning, yet still be a text. Similarly, the assumption that a hypertext must have an end also must be reconsidered. A hypertext may have many middles, and many endings, and analytical assumptions about hyper story structure must adapt to this. Defining the text and interpreting its meaning and arc relies very much on the observer’s navigation and experience through the hypertext, as well as the overall structure of the hypertext itself. For many people, the hypertext experience is over when they reach the

end of their particular course through it. For others, a wider experience of most or all of the possible choices is necessary to reach the 'end'.

For *Marienbad*, The collaboration of director Alain Resnais with writer Alain Robbe-Grillet is, itself, an implication of the complexity of the product. The writer's penchant for the enigmatic is evident from "...the proliferation of game structures...[which] identifies this writer as a notable example of artifex ludens," or game creator (Morissette 159). Robbe-Grillet's use of games in *Last Year at Marienbad* is evident in the recurring instances of the game known as 'Nim'. The game is played in the film by laying out four rows of toothpicks, with seven in the bottom row, and two less in each higher row, so that the number of toothpicks in each row counting upward is seven, five, three, and one. Two players play against each other, taking away any number of toothpicks per turn, so long as they are all from a single row. In this way, a player can remove one toothpick, or an entire row of toothpicks, or any number in between, but only from a single row. The player to make the last move loses. In the film, the tall, gaunt character who is never named in the film but is known in the script as 'M' declares that he can lose at this game, but always wins. Several games are played against him, but he follows through on his claim.

This generates much interest from the other guests at the grand hotel, who offer up a plethora of theories about how the game is played and won, such as 'the player to go first always loses,' or 'always take an odd number of sticks.' As the suggestions pile on, some begin to make use of very complex mathematical terms, which sound just advanced enough to be plausible. But the trick to the game is never declared or demonstrated.

Perhaps a very quick audience member might be able to recognize the correct theory when he hears it, but in terms of storytelling, the key to the game is never recognized. M always wins, and though the others theorize all they might, the secret is never revealed. Similarly, several games end when the opponent of M can see that he will lose in a few moves. The outcome already determined, the result of the game is a foregone conclusion, but is never actually seen through.

The elements of theorizing and foregone conclusions point to a meta-narrative; the text is complete, but the logical meaning is never delivered. The joke is told, but the punch line never comes. This uncertainty is “...crucial to understanding the film’s effect and is sustained as motif in the image of the game which is played several times over in the film, but never explained or resolved” (Wilson 71). Here, the meta-narrative is that life is full of experiences that are never fully explained.

It is also full of possibilities that we, as observers of the world around us, do not actively lock down. Like the processes of database and narrative, we do not seek out full disclosure of the database in our daily lives; instead we seek out a single path. Other experiences and events occur constantly around the world, but we remain largely unconscious of them. Logically, only one outcome is possible, but it is impossible for an individual to gather all the information necessary to know exactly what is going on in everyone’s life in every part of the world.

Interestingly, we are generally comfortable with this pluralistic state of reality beyond our immediate surroundings. Like Schrödinger’s Box, the world just beyond the edge of sight might be understood to exist in a sort of quantum or unconscious state, that

is, until we investigate it. This undefined state of reality is compatible with the structure of a hypertext; the coexisting possibilities of which allow for an individual to have complete freedom in defining their own particular reality, despite the contradicting realities observed by others.

Last Year at Marienbad further illustrates this idea with the competing experiences of the different characters. The woman 'A' and the man and narrator, 'X', are playing a similar game of possibilities with their past relationship. X, who through his narration seems to be the main character of the film, claims that he and A had met a year ago, and they had sworn to run away together. A denies this, having (or feigning) no recollection of knowing or meeting X. The two go back and forth, narrowing the possibilities down (like a game of Nim) until it seems that a final decision or confrontation is set up. But the film doesn't explicitly finish what it begins. The characters keep their own experiences, alluding to them in several cases, but the film ends without reconciling their memories into one logical past. If X has finally convinced A of their love and they are preparing to run away together, the movie's end might be like the foregone conclusions in the games of Nim. But A could also be preparing for a confrontation with X or even with M.

When we leave the characters it is unclear what any of them are thinking or planning. This leaves the question mark of the film intact and unanswered by the end. The structure itself becomes a question, like Resnais' summary. The audience's theories about what is going on in the film abound like that of the hotel guests fascinated by Nim.

A review of director Alain Resnais' style offers additional insight into the perplexing rhythms and sequences of the film. The films of Resnais "...deal very rarely

with the director's personal memories, yet Resnais has been considered perhaps the most important French film director to treat questions of memory and forgetting" (Wilson 1). He is perhaps most famous for his stunningly innovative Holocaust documentary *Night and Fog* (1955), in which, "...meditative color footage of ruined concentration camps" are contrasted with "...shocking archival black-and-white footage of the activities and atrocities that took place there" (Barsam 262). The juxtaposition with the footage of the functioning camp serves as an evocative reminder of the past to the ruined camp.

In *Marienbad*, Resnais serves up a collage of present and remembered scenes, with the main being X's motivation to remind A of their past meeting. X describes their past meetings with complex detail, recalling where they were, and how they had entire conversations, for instance, about a pair of statues. But rather than reaffirm the past as in the case of *Night and Fog*, Resnais here seems to be confusing past events. The statues in question appear in different places during different memories, first beside the balcony overlooking the main alignment of the grounds, then by the reflecting pool, then back again. X cannot remember exactly at which grand hotel they were, Fredericksburg or Marienbad, or still others. Nor do we ever learn exactly where the couple is currently (Marienbad was last year!), and the whole film, even in the present, begins to become as hazy and fallible as X's memories. It is as if the present has become riddled by phenomena usually restricted to memory; none of the main character's names are ever mentioned, similar to a memory of long ago when the names have faded from the faces. This style of database narrative is very evocative as it is a metaphor for our own imperfect memory databases. Even the order of sequences taking place in the 'present' are edited in

a ambiguous way, with the same dialogue being reiterated in different locations, like a troublesome reminiscence that defies location, but had to have happened somewhere. The characters are searching through the database of memory to try to find the one truth, but the database has been corrupted. Whole scenes begin or end frozen in time, with scores of people standing motionless, like a memory or a snapshot.

Other scenes of X's memory also take on conundrums that real memories are prey to, for instance when X remembers coming to A's bedchamber. In one version, she is dressed in an extravagant gown of white plumes, which might represent those memories which cross over into the fanciful. Similarly, "A's room significantly becomes more furnished, as if the seducer/director were literally adding strategic details" (Stam 35). In another version, X rushes in (or rather, the camera does) and A screams, before X insists (in the present) that that wasn't how it happened; it was not in violence. This intense version might be indicative of less of a memory and more of the mind playing tricks on itself, inserting horrors in the past where there were none. Or could it be the repressed truth seeping out during an unguarded moment?

This play of facts and fictions that plague human memory make Resnais' *Marienbad* a deeper discourse between the real and the imagined than the disagreement of X and A on the surface. These aspects of memory are inclusive, like the contradicting realities possible in a hypertext; in *Marienbad* "...the viewer remains uncertain whether images we see represent actual events, remembered events, or indeed fantasized events" (Wilson 13). As X grapples with his own distorted memory, so is the audience drawn into the confusion of what exactly might or mightn't have occurred (or is occurring).

This narrative disagreement in *Marienbad* makes the film a structural puzzler if we continue to treat it only as a linear text. However, one could easily see the events of the film represented in the form of a hypertext. X's memories provide narrative roots that lead up to X's experience, while A's memories could be represented in a parallel set of narrative roots. Events that have several versions could be plotted as branching out from each other and then returning to a common node where the narrative moves on. The open ending, where it is unclear whose version of reality will dominate what happens after the curtain falls, can be looked at as an unfinished hypertext. The audience is free to map out their own interpretations of what course reality will take.

Marienbad might have been more straightforward and less mystifying had Resnais not also opted to use other techniques, such as repetition, optical illusions, and disorienting cinematography to confuse and mesmerize. The repetitions in *Marienbad* become apparent within the first minutes and shots of the film, which opens with upward-titled tracking shots of the grand hotel's ornate ceilings, capitals, and mirrored walls. A disembodied voice accompanies the tracking shots, repeating some lines several times and setting a rhythm which, together with the visuals, "...gives the impression of proliferating repetitions; everything is a reflection, a repetition, a return..." (Wilson 12).

In other scenes the sense of time and space are cast into doubt, for instance when the camera leaves characters behind as it moves in a single shot through the maze of the grand hotel, only to find them again in a completely new place. In this way, "The corridors of the hotel become "time" rendered spatially" (Van Wert 52). This particular technique raised the issue of the reflexivity of the text; in order for this shot to have been filmed, the

actors would have had to scramble through the set in order to reach the next location before the camera arrived there. This calling of attention to the film's form might be more obvious to me as a film student, as I am more aware of the production process. But to the untrained eye, the shot is disorienting by setting up time and space in one way, and ending it in another. One side of the equation does not equal the other. The time that must have passed is not consistent with the space that was traveled.

In another part of the hotel, a certain wall is painted with a view out of a portico, which reveals further porticos and a seemingly infinite checkered-tile floor. This optical illusion is shot in two ways: the first shows two gentlemen playing chess at a table, with the painting of the infinite architectural regression beyond them. The framing of this scene aids the illusion by matching the real perspective with the painted perspective. The chess board also resonates with the painted checkered flooring beyond, and the juxtaposition of the game and its surroundings makes good graphic aesthetic sense. One could imagine playing chess by a portico overlooking such a vista-- it would be less aesthetically pleasing to simply play chess by a solid wall. The second appearance of this painted wall shows the characters passing by, and it is quite plain that it is merely a flat painting. The real perspective no longer matches the foreshortened, painted one, and the lack of a chessboard makes the checkered tiles of the painting look out of place.

The inclusion of these 'portico' scenes in the film can be interpreted in a number of ways. Since what first appeared straightforward and aesthetically pleasing is revealed to be fake, it is possible to decode from this that what you see isn't necessarily the truth, even if it makes sense. By inferring the opposite, the lack of sense could be all that is true

of a situation, which certainly seems to parallel the idea of a whole text with an incomplete meaning. Or the optical illusion could indirectly suggest that other straightforward facets of the film are, in fact, misleading. The location of the statues by the reflecting pool could be an illusion of memory. Similar to this is the famous scene of the rectilinear gardens where the few people cast long, dramatic shadows, while the isometric shrubberies do not. This scene showing noon and late day at the same time also encodes a parallel to the contradictory nature of the film; the text is the garden scene, complete with two suggestions of time of day. Which is right? The text is complete, but the meaning is open ended. This scene would actually lose its significance if it was represented as a hypertext. The view of the gardens would simply branch off to the two different times of day: the gardens at noon, or the gardens at dusk. Both could be visited in a hypertext, and both coexist, but not in the same space that *Marienbad* displays. It is the fusion of the two contradicting times together that gives the shot its visualization of contradiction, like a dream of a hypertext, a metaphor of a space with multiple realities.

...by posing spatial and temporal impossibilities--single images incorporating different times of the day, characters who disappear (during a continuous shot) only to reappear in improbable places, statues that jump in inexplicable quantum leaps around the filmic space--*Marienbad* triggers mutually contradictory "reality effects" in the mind of the bewildered spectator. (Stam 35)

The intentional erosion of the idea of a one-true-reality here serves to heighten the audience's awareness of their own faculties. This creates a tension between what the film shows and what the audience attempts to discern the film is showing. Is the viewer missing something? The surreal *mise en scene* of *Marienbad*, with its illusions,

repetitions, and reflections, gives no hint to explicit meaning. The viewer, seeing meaning no where, infers that it must be somewhere, hiding perhaps behind elegant decorations, in the scene of a certain hallway that repeats several times, or perhaps broken into pieces and disguised in each scene. This sense of a visual riddle and a spatial/temporal labyrinth is the source of tension between the story and the audience-- and cause of confusion when the narrative vanishes, unresolved, as surreally as it began. After all, a joke without a punch line becomes something of a riddle.

Might a similar tension be created in Vignetwork in the sense that the viewer's sense of reality is undercut by the various alternate narratives? Another example of this tension can be observed in Tom Twyker's *Run, Lola, Run* (1998), in which the main characters undergo three similar experiences that all begin from the same single starting point. Students of film criticism often have described the plot structure as helical, with the story returning back to where it left off, yet being later in linear filmic space. As a text, the spiral form works, since the film's story still has a beginning, middle, and end, with one route between them. Is the linear text a better vehicle for this complex structure when it comes to the tension surrounding the viewer's acceptance or denial of the film's suggested reality?

I would argue that a hypertext structure actually lessens this tension compared to the linear text structure. When viewers are given a choice of which reality to experience, and the multiple versioning is incorporated into the structure of the site, the onus is taken off of the story and placed on the larger hypertext itself. Viewers take on the responsibility of making their own choices through the narrative. The alternate or contradictory

consequences they experience can be processed more naturally, because this is how individuals experience everyday life. Individuals make free decisions and experience alternate consequences at the same time. Conversely, *Marienbad* and *Run, Lola, Run*, try to fit a similar multitude of contradictory experiences into the linear format. As such, they make good examples of how non-linear narratives become flattened and squashed into the traditional film form, coming out like Picasso's cubist paintings. However, there is the surreal expression in these abstracted narratives that might be lost when plotted out into a hypertext, as the garden with the two simultaneous times of day example showed.

Another example of a film with a complex nonlinear narrative is *Head* (1968), the surreal jukebox musical starring The Monkees, directed by Bob Rafelson and co-wrote by Jack Nicholson and Bob Rafelson. The film doesn't have an overall plot but is rather a series of vignettes and music videos which, among other things, poke fun at the Monkees' manufactured image and imitation of the Beatles and their film *A Hard Day's Night* (1964). One scene in particular refers to the episodic structure of the film, in which a black screen slowly fills up with twenty television screens each showing a thumbnail of one of the upcoming vignettes, while the band chants "You say we're manufactured. To that we all agree. So make your choice and we'll rejoice in never being free!" Buxton identified the film's peculiar narrative technique as being modeled after a remote control, so that "...when viewed within the framing device of remote control television channel switching, the narrative logic of the film becomes clearer." It is through this channel switching that viewers are able to pass "... into the diverse universes available throughout the electronic spectrum" (Buxton 31).

The channel-switching approach to the multiple versioning of reality is similar, but not identical, to the branching segments in *Vignetwork*. It works particularly well for *Head*, in harmony with the recurring theme that the band is stuck inside a black box (i.e. the TV set), although I must admit that I missed this analogy on the first viewing. The film could be imagined as twenty independent vignettes in which viewers could ‘make their choice’ about which one to watch. The band eventually returns to the same scene that started the film, suggesting a cyclical structure similar to *Run, Lola, Run*. However, the channels each show different genres and locations, which, while often logically strained, are at least narratives that fit into a larger whole. Lola faces the same narrative three times, and each one is slightly different, and not at all compatible in a larger whole. *Head* goes one step further by using its particular narrative mechanism as a metaphor for the band’s existential struggle, a politically reflexive aspect that draws attention to the calculated and manufactured representations of culture in television media.

A hyper narrative film that is more conventional as a feature film is Peter Howitt’s *Sliding Doors* (1998). This film belongs to the hyper side of the ‘what-if’ category of films in that it presents a basic fluke, whether Gwyneth Paltrow’s character Helen either does or doesn’t make it through a commuter train’s closing doors. From that basic yes or no question comes two possible outcomes. The two versions of reality are shown interlaced with each other, with visual details about Helen’s character (such as a haircut or a Band-aid) giving the audience context clues about which version is which. Similar to *Lola*, the Helen of one version is not aware of her experiences in the other version. In fact, at one point she laments “If only I had just caught that bloody train, it’d never have

happened” but never fully understands just what would have happened. Towards the end of the missed-train storyline, Helen does experience flashing visions of her alter-self. I think this isn’t the same sort of awareness that is at work in *Groundhog Day* and *Bedazzled*, because the two storylines are still independent of each other. The fact that brief visions of an alternate reality are true only adds to the mysterious balance of chance, free will, and fate. I find this style of awareness cross-contamination to be intriguing. Perhaps the visions, dreams, and notions that we sometimes experience in real life are static from parallel universes that coexist on the quantum level. *Sliding Doors* skillfully juggles two storylines and the audience benefits from the details and twists that occur where they overlap or differ. The fact that the film only has two storylines helps its presentation as a feature film and results in a less confusing compilation than *Marienbad*, or *Lola*.

I use a similar technique in my scripts with the different implications of the inciting incident in 2a and 2b; the existence of a copy of Imola’s book in the wrong universe. Similar to *Sliding Doors*, I begin with a single set up storyline, and then branch off in two parallel universes. In one version, the book is read by an unwitting hotel guest, the consequences of which remain unknown. In the other, the agents of the organization are notified of the breach caused by the book and prepare to try and solve the problem. Each twist relies primarily on the parent storyline about Imola’s book, but the twist is amplified when the two storylines are compared.

In *Marienbad*, Robert Stam points out a politically reflexive metaphor that the plot contains about films in general. Stam contends that:

...the film's tale of seduction, on one level, allegorizes the relationship between film and spectator in the conventional fiction film. X tries to persuade A that something happened, elsewhere, a year before. Like a film director, he orchestrates details intended to convince, (35).

This observation calls attention to the relationship between people and institutions, in this case, the way audiences experience films. Vignetwork, can be seen to have an innate political reflexivity in its structure itself, since it uses an unconventional structure of media, from its viewing aspect to its mode of production. Its viewing aspect allows for an expansion from the linear cause and effect narrative, and its participatory nature adds another dynamic element of ownership and individual expression. Viewers can choose among different visual media experiences and create their own addition to the mix, as I have done with the three scripts above. While the *modus operandi* of Vignetwork does not support a channel-switching narrative structure, neither does the linear filmic space in which *Head* was told. A hypertext such as Vignetwork could arguably provide a better format for getting the deeper messages and complexities of *Head* across to viewers. At the same time that Vignetwork challenges linear and single-author conventions, it must be said that it also confirms and is completely dependent on the Internet and its emerging social structure. So while it is the rebellious teenager of cinema, it is also another tool of the new dot-com structure.

A theory in which *Marienbad* explores concepts beyond regular filmic space was articulated by my colleague Mariel Rodriguez-McGill, basically that X and A represent “something more than their characters.” She advanced the idea that X represents the imagination, and A represents factual memory. In this way, the imagination, which can

be endlessly creative, gains dominance by filling in the gaps in memories. Memories lose dominance because they can only deteriorate from the original. In this way, fantasy wins out over reality. It is not much of a stretch to view the common claim that history is written by the victors. Reality, facts, and the true nature of events are lost when idealism and fantasy conspire to reconstruct them. This is an astute reading of a possible meta-narrative for the film, one which provides a convincing answer to the question in Resnais' enigmatic plot summary. X's perceived role as the main character thus takes on new meaning, since the audience identifies with his struggle against the mystery of A and M. Without realizing it, has the audience sympathized with their own fantasy's battles against reality? Resnais could be calling attention to this battle in all of us, making us more aware of it.

If we look at Vignetwork in the same way, we can begin to understand why the hypertext structure might have some appeal. By moving reality's losing battle with fantasy out of the area of memory and into the future, then the Vignetwork site can be seen as a theater for playing out those 'what if' dramas. Why have one reality when you can experience many, or write your own? The subtext underlying the entire concept of the hypertext then becomes clear: somewhere in the infinite possibilities of the collaborative hypertext is the idea of a perfect narrative, or route, through the structure. In a game or choose-your-own-adventure novel, there is usually one way which is the fastest, most efficient, or highest-scoring route of all the alternatives. By creating an open-ended collaborative hypertext, Vignetwork contains the possibility for artists to design their personal fantasy, their interpretation of the perfect route from beginning to

end. The scripts above represent my attempt to begin what would be the ideal narrative for me, my addition to the creative element of this thesis concept.

From the database narrative standpoint, Vignetwork has another unique position. Based on the way the site is set up to grow and branch off, the narratives will precede the database. By creating a number of vignettes and branching storylines, the larger database of story elements will grow. This runs counter to Manovich and Kinder's ideas of database narratives, in which users construct stories out of archived building blocks. Arguably, those building blocks which construct the stories in Vignetwork are already archived in the archetypal and cultural databases of our minds. But the fact remains that Vignetwork could one day be home to a new database of its own, one that does not belong to any one of us, but is collaborative.

In writing and producing the three vignettes, I used a more straightforward storytelling scheme than *Marienbad*, *Head*, or *Run, Lola, Run*. I used conventional techniques, tried to keep time and space consistent (excepting where the actual story content involves crossing between parallel universes) and developed the story following a model of synthesis rather than confusing logic. I address the meta-narratives of fantasy and personalization of reality in the structure of the medium, and not layered within the *mise en scene* itself. Though I owe the spark of inspiration to *Last Year at Marienbad*, I did not want my contribution to Vignetwork to follow down the same path where "No one has succeeded in explaining Alain Robbe-Grillet's prismatic script" and, "Resnais insisted that it had no meaning" (Lee 130).

This is not to say that another contributor could take a more ‘Marienbadian’ route within Vignetwork. While I wasn’t totally aware of it at the time, the theme that I eventually identified as the most interesting in *Marienbad* is the fallible nature of memory. Rather than tell a story, Resnais’ film comes off as an individual’s memory made filmic. The flashbacks, the moods, the slightly altered repetitions, the confusion of what time of day it was when a certain view was seen, all make this film seem like a particularly troubling memory to someone who does not have the answer themselves. As a corrupted database narrative, the characters struggle to recreate their past narrative with fragments and illusions. They do not remember if A ended up with X or M, nor whether it was *Marienbad* or Fredericksburg, nor if the statues were here or there. They have narrowed down the possibilities as much as possible, but questions still remain, and amid those circular questions the imagination begins to run amok. Like Nim, where M always wins, events always happened in a certain, exact way. We have just forgotten, like the key to winning Nim, exactly how.

Turning back to the Vignetwork scripts I have written, the narratives do not make overt use of the possible alternate versions of reality. The scripts each introduce new characters and new locations, and the events of scripts 2a and 2b are not mutually exclusive. Rather than rewrite a script slightly differently for the different branches, as in the case of *Run, Lola, Run*, I wanted to jump between different stories to advance the larger plot. This is similar to how *Head* used channel switching to jump from vignette to vignette to advance a larger theme.

The three scripts I wrote make up the basic beginning of the narrative tree structure. Both 2a and 2b are dependent on Script 1. Writing them has been useful as a creative exercise using the limitations and considerations I discussed in the proposal. Having completed them, I have come to several conclusions about creating content for Vignetwork. The first is that it was difficult to create two branching scripts (scripts 2a and 2b) that did not build off of each other. In *Run, Lola, Run*, the audience learns more and more about the characters and what events are going to happen as they interact with the same environment in three different ways. In what at first seems a chance encounter with a car, we later learn that it was a business associate picking up Lola's father who is leaving the family. Lola isn't able to learn from her multiple 'runs' like the audience can; she can only start over from scratch.

Compare this with the film *Groundhog Day*, (1993), in which Bill Murray's character is not only able to learn from his *déjà vu* experience of the same day over and over, but is actually able to memorize it backwards and forwards. *Groundhog Day* thus flows much better as a linear narrative due to Phil Connor's being conscious of the continuous loop over linear time. In my treatment of the hypertext structure, characters are not able to learn from alternate versions of reality. The characters in my scripts know only what has happened in the series of scripts that have lead up to 'now'. The audience, however, is still free to navigate to each alternate version of events, and can learn more about the situation, similar to *Run, Lola, Run*.

This limitation in which I try not to cross-contaminate character knowledge from one version to its alternate, yet allow subtle details to leak across was a steep writing

challenge. The branches each had to be independent and structurally coherent from the standpoint of the root vignette. Additional details could be woven into the narrative that may increase meaning and interconnectivity across parallel branches, but viewers should not have to watch both branches in order to basically understand one of them. Each branch needed to be able to stand alone on its own, without relying on sibling branches. However, it is with the shared details, marked similarities, and purposeful contrasts that a fuller meaning can be derived from viewing the alternates. For instance, the novel given to Imola in Script 1 reappears in Script 2a as the chance reading material of Justin Ferroe. Script 2b mentions the document, referring to the short story about the novel. When I finished 2a and began 2b, I had to avoid the impulse to write ‘what happens next’ from the standpoint of 2a. I had to return to where I had left off at 1, and write what happens next from that node.

In this approach I’ve chosen, each choice represents a different ‘next’. It is similar to the branching of different species from a common ancestors. A zebra and a horse may retain similarities, but a zebra does not contain within it the experience of what it is like to be a horse. In writing 2b, it was fun to incorporate some details from 2a that added to the intrigue, but I was careful that these details wouldn’t violate my own evolutionary reading of the hypertext’s narrative flow.

The biggest reconsideration I have had to address is the length of these vignettes. In each script I technically went over the self-imposed two page/minute limit for the hypertext structure (the scripts are about 2.5 pages long). It was very difficult to pack a compelling story into such a short period of time, and this experience has certainly given

me pause to reconsider the runtime limit, perhaps extending it to as much as five minutes. When it came down to it, I felt that it was more important to err on the side of having enough time to tell an important story in a single chunk, rather than be forced to split it up at some arbitrarily imposed limit. While I realize that a five minute limit is still a limit, I think this larger chunk of time will allow a lot more freedom for my hypothetical outside contributors while retaining the focus on the vignette pacing of the site. While it is possible to delimit these parameters in such a way as to create a very experimental experience and shift focus away from compelling narrative, I have chosen to make Vignetwork as open as possible to accommodating either and any style.

A third insight that I have discovered is that narrative can be interconnected from vignette to vignette in completely different and separate ways than just the ‘exquisite corpse’ method. In my scripts, I used a common element in each of the stories-- television sets showing a Hitchcock marathon-- to transition from one vignette to the next. But this visual cue that physically linked the two texts turned out to have little influence on the narrative itself. It was simply the case that the televisions in each of the three settings happened to be turned to the same channel. A hypertext storyteller is able to use these transitions simply as a vehicle to arrive at the next part of a longer narrative, or could choose to completely abandon a hitherto consistent narrative for a new one. The narrative and plot does not depend on the seamless transition from one vignette to another.

As such, my use of the transitional devices allows for a lot of narrative elbow room. In one scenario, a character hears a violin playing. In the other, the lights flicker. In the

former case, I or anyone could come up with a million different situations which start with finishing the cause/effect equation that the violin or flickering lights set up. A man plays the violin in the street for coins as some new characters walk by (perhaps this is a romance instead of a mystery thriller), or perhaps an accident prone tourist has overloaded the circuits on his floor of the hotel and caused the lights to flicker on all the other floors (a comedy).

Furthermore, anyone could build off of the first vignette by zooming out of a TV set playing the opening credits of *Vertigo* and be in any location, which could lead to all sorts of open ended storylines. This is so, even though there is a complete lack of cause and effect at work in this transition. And despite all this artistic freedom, I was able to still accomplish the other extreme: the narrative is very closely knit and consistent. I was able to tie in elements from one story to the next beyond just the exquisite corpse transition, and I think this is a strength that the site supports that I was not previously aware of. My hypothetical contributors would be able to create their own rigorously structured narratives that easily survive from piece to piece, and yet not limit the options for still more contributors to derail the story in their own chosen direction.

The last element in Vignetwork that should be analyzed and clarified here is the use of material from Hitchcock's *Wrong Man* and *Vertigo*. As stated before, the use of this media serves at the outset a very basic function; it allows other contributors to zoom out of a TV at the same point in this scene from the popular and widely accessible film *Vertigo*. But additional connotations and consequences have arisen from this use. Why, specifically, did I use Hitchcock instead of something more innocuous, such as bars and

tone, or even static? Clearly many choices would have worked, so why did I make the one I did?

I chose to incorporate Hitchcock for a few different reasons: part homage, and part thematic grounding. Homage in film is nearly as old a practice as film itself, and in general homage can be traced back into ancient times. Much like Manovich's contention that Rome remixed Greece, Virgil's epic poem *Aeneid* could also be seen in many ways to be an homage to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Most artists are in some way influenced by the masters that precede them. Even a departure from past forms is seen as an acknowledgement of this, as "...many of the strongest poets were compelled by their anxiety about a predecessor's power to deviate sharply from his praxis" (Greenberg 119). An homage is the opposite reaction to such an influence, where a director makes a "...complimentary allusion in a film to another film or filmmaker" (Konigsberg 159). However, homage is a practice that can be abused, and certainly has its critics; "As the American century entered its last decade, novelty increasingly passed as originality, incoherence as style, plagiarism as homage, and cynicism as candor" (Georgakas 78). Kozlovic's five-way categorization of the different homages in his look at Cecil B. DeMille drum up the following types:

Namely: (a) the film clip as homage: intertextuality and DeMille, (b) the man as homage: Demille as subject, object and personal parallelism, (c) imitation as homage: copying DeMille as honoring, flattery, and status theft, (d) association as homage: capitalizing upon DeMille's currency, name and reputation, and (e) remodeling as homage: spin-offs, remakes and rivals of DeMille's films. (66)

This provides a good litmus test which I can apply to my use of Hitchcock, whatever my intentions might have been, which I will discuss in detail last. I can easily

discount (c) and (e) since I have not copied any specific story of Hitchcock's, and also (b) since Hitchcock himself is not the subject, object, or personal parallel in one of the characters. One could argue that I am trying to associate my project with Hitchcock's greatness as the master of suspense, and I would have to agree in a way. I am trying to associate my stories with Hitchcock in the same way that a certain homage "...is also the cinematic equivalent of selecting a textbook quote to illustrate a point in your work" (Kozlovic 66). Furthermore, I am clearly not aiming to 'capitalize' from this association, as this project is not a vehicle for me to profit from.

This leaves the first type of homage, that of intertextuality. Kozlovic provides the example of Spielberg's use of DeMille's *Ten Commandments* (1956) in his almost religious science fiction film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, (1977). DeMille's classic is embedded within a scene, where "Spielberg was too subtle to cut to a close-up of Charlton Heston, waving his staff in the wind, rather allowing the identity of the televised film to be buried in his own film's texture" (Brode 68). This, as Kozlovic sees it, creates a salutary homage that affirms that the Red Sea scene was a compelling and influential moment in cinema development and history.

My intentions in my homage to Hitchcock, a filmmaker whose works I admire, were to make reference and not to plagiarize. The clips serve a dual purpose, conveying the story forward and also grounding the tone and themes of the story in an existing genre, similar to using a textbook quote to ground a topic or argument in an established discussion. The established genre I am referring to here is of cinema mystery and suspense, where Hitchcock's imprint is indelible. I was banking on the fact that these

works are known the world over, and this point is emphasized by the audio dubbing in French and the Spanish subtitles seen in the *Wrong Man* clip of script 1. The scenes shown are embedded in the texture of my film, and Kozlovic's interpretation of Spielberg's intertextual homage resonated with my own feelings about how I've used *Wrong Man* and *Vertigo*. As I mentioned above, a much simpler and strings-free option could be used instead to convey the story forward, the easiest being footage that is not copyrighted. If the use became subject to a take-down order, I would not hesitate to comply, and I would not try to make a stand defending this use. I simply do not have the same resource for studio permissions that Spielberg does.

The site would support all contributions simultaneously, accommodating both sustained narratives, as well as new, unplanned narratives. Whether contributors follow my lead, take a more *Groundhog Day* route, or create a variety of surreal vignettes a la *Head*, the infrastructure of the hypertext is there to support each. The films I have discussed above have pushed the boundaries of what linear feature films are capable of, but Vignetwork is an opportunity to explore such narratives, often convoluted in the classic format, even further and with greater facility.

CHAPTER FOUR

Production Schedule

1. Description
2. Schedule
3. Shoot Schedule Detail
4. Casting
5. Props List
6. Locations
7. Budget
8. Script 1
9. Script 2a
10. Script 2b

1. Description

From the architectural term for a decorative carving of a small vine, a ‘vignette’ refers to a brief yet evocative story. With ‘network’ denoting a system of interconnectivity, Vignetwork combines these terms to represent an online network of cinematic vignettes, which are connected together using the ‘exquisite corpse’ method.

This production will create the first three additions to Vignetwork. Script 1 will serve as the root vignette from which all other vignettes are directly or indirectly connected. Scripts 2a and 2b represent the two resulting outcomes from the first choice following Script 1. The story takes place somewhere in Latin or South America, where a group of characters are discovering how a certain hotel has connections to a parallel universe.

2. Calendar Schedule

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
28 Send out casting requests	29	30	31	1 APRIL	2 Confirm casting decisions	3 Acquire props
4 Acquire props	5	6	7	8	9	10 Acquire props
11	12	13	14 Reserve equipment	15	16 Pick up equipment	17 Shoot 1: Script 1
18 Shoot 2: Script 2a	19 Return equipment	20	21	22	23	24
25	26 Return equipment	27	28 Reserve equipment	28	30 Shoot 3: Script 1	1 MAY
2 Shoot 4: Script 2b	3 Return equipment	4 Editing	5 Editing	6 Editing	7 Editing	8
9 Editing	10 Finish editing	11	12 Upload to website	13 Work out web issues	14 Work out web issues if needed	15 Target completion date.

3. Shoot Schedule Detail

- i. Shoot 1 - April 17th (Script 1)
 Location: Carriage House Apartments.
 Required cast: Matt Lieber, Rod Buxton
 Required props: typewriter, book, spectacles

- ii. Shoot 2 - April 18th (Script 2a)
 Location: Tabor House and Carriage House Apartments
 Required cast: Joe Brown, Sage Porter, Danielle English
 Required props: book, suitcase, key #211, TV set

- iii. Shoot 3 - #2 April 30th (Script 1)

Location: Rod's Office, Mass Comm. Building
Required cast: Kevin Maloney, Jonathan Armstead
Required props: TV set #1, DVD *The Wrong Man*, DVD *Vertigo*, Books and Files, Manuscript

iv. Shoot 4 - May 2nd (Script 2b)

Location: Carriage House Apartments
Required cast: Matt Lieber, Still Kallil
Required props: original and fake painting mock-ups, swing lamp, magnifying glass, paint brushes, palette, wad of mail, cell phone, TV set #3

4. Casting

Trevor:	Kevin Maloney
Alejandro:	Jonathan Armstead Chris Henning
Alberto Imola:	Rodney Buxton
Blurry Figure:	Matt Lieber
Lara:	Sage Porter
Justin Ferroe:	Joe Brown
Receptionist:	Danielle English
Carlos:	Matt Lieber
Bernard:	Swann Christopher Still Kallil

5. Props List

TV Set #1
TV Set #2
TV Set #3
Manuscript
Typewriter
Book
Suitcase
Cell Phone
Wad of Mail
Paint brushes
Palette
Key #211
Spectacles
Painting mock ups

Swing Lamp
DVDs Vertigo and Wrong Man

6. Locations

Carriage House Apartments, common area (April 17th)
Tabor House Apartments, common area Carriage House Apartments, Room 101,
hallway (April 18th)
Rod's Office (April 30th)
Carriage House Apartments, Room 101 (May 2nd)

7. Budget

Props: \$100
Refreshment for cast/crew: \$50

TOTAL: \$150

Production Analysis

Planning for production of my three vignettes was no easy task. Even with the ample reserves of actor contact information made available through my narrative film class, clearing shoots with everyone's schedule, making sure equipment checkouts were practical, and dealing with last minute changes made this a very challenging feat of organization and execution. For the most part I stayed on schedule, although whole shoot dates were changed and rearranged to accommodate the talent. Kevin Maloney's schedule in particular was a challenge, because at first he couldn't make the shoot on the weekend of the 17th due to a photo assignment. When I rescheduled for the weekend of

the 23rd, his photo assignment was then also delayed to that weekend. Finally I was able to pin down the shoot on the weekend of the 30th.

I tried to strike a professional relationship with my talent from the get-go by sending out email requests, which were followed by a copy of the production book (above), the scripts, and a call sheet for that actor's specific shoot. Overall, the production book was a great resource for me because I was able to keep track of the whos, whats, and wheres of the operation. I highlighted props that I still needed in bold, struck through actors names when they at first accepted, then for some reason bowed out of the role. I constantly referred to the production calendar throughout the shoot scheduling process. The shoot dates were very flexible. I also referred to the production book when I created the call sheets.

For my props I found the swing lamp and Imola's spectacles at the Goodwill store for relatively cheap. The easel and magnifying glass used in Script 2b were not so cheap however. Even with a 40% off coupon at Michael's, I spent around 70 dollars for these items. For the TV sets, I was able to use existing TVs either in our department or in Carriage House Apartments where I live. I already owned the typewriter (garage sale last summer), a leather-bound book for Imola's 'novel', a set of paintbrushes, and the suitcase. I checked out DVDs of Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* and *Vertigo* at the DU Library, and I was done with them by the time they were due to return. For the wad of mail, I began setting aside bits of mail in the early weeks of April in hopes that I would eventually collect enough to capture the effect. This inconsistent habit resulted in a less-than convincing wad, but I was able to fatten it up with empty envelopes in the middle. For the

painting mock-ups, I used two posters of Van Gogh's *Café Terrace*, one of which I own and the other Matt Lieber owned. Lieber's copy had no title or extra border areas, so it served as the painted forgery, while my poster served as the poster copy which a forger might actually use. The Key 211 prop proved impossible to acquire, so I improvised with a leather keychain of the Aztec calendar and attached it to my own apartment key. This displaced the significance from the number of Room 211, but created a new significance on the enigmatic Aztec design.

For the manuscript I used a couple of pieces of paper that I had printed out with an excerpt from another creative project, which I then took out in front of the MCOM building and rubbed in the gravel and dirt to give it an aged look. I skipped out on buying a palette for Carlos' paints and simply used a blank piece of paper which I squirted basic acrylic colors onto and then mixed them in shades that somewhat matched the paintings. Still Kalil used his own personal cell phone for the scene which required a cell phone prop. For most of the props I was able to use existing items I owned or acquire them for little to no cost. However, I think the high expenses of the easel and magnifying glass props (in conjunction with the swing lamp) made for a great looking set, which got the talent excited about the scene. I would recommend going the extra mile to use convincing and quality props, because not only do they give a set a certain look of reality and genuine character, but they also can inspire your actors to really get into character in order to match the convincing setting. Both Matt and Still were impressed by my set up for the 2b shoot, and I think the vibrancy and dynamic elements of the props also made the footage that much more interesting and great to watch.

For the production I shot in 1080i 60i, although for some shots of the TV screens I switched to 30p in order to decrease the heavy screen lines created by these older TV sets. I believe this is due to the 30 progressive being closer to 29.97 frames per second than 60 interlaced. I used a single lavalier and taped it in strategic hiding places, as well as a Rycote mic for a different sample of the dialogue as well as ambient noise. My coverage method was to shoot standard master scene shooting, filming different angles and shot sizes but not so much that my actors got sick of it.

I began the actual production phase with the scene from Script 1 showing the author Imola being visited by a stranger. I used a high key light to accentuate the entrance of the stranger (Matt Lieber) through the door, which gave the scene a *film noir* look that became a standard I tried to keep consistent throughout the production phase. This was an Omni, and for Imola (Rod Buxton) I used a single Tota as a backlight that only reflected off of the wall in front of him and suggested that he lived much of his life in the shadows. Halfway through that shoot, my continuous height readjustments of the tripod resulted in one set up for an Imola POV in which the camera was very tilted or canted. Instead of fixing this, I shot the scene, which happened to show Matt entering and appearing very out of focus due to Imola's degrading vision. The result was much more intense and dramatic than I had planned, and I began to experiment more and more with these canted angles and strange perspectives as the shoot wore on. While the *film noir* style was an important choice that I continued to use throughout the other shoots, I reserved this canted angle style for this particular part of Script 1 in which the mise en scene flashes back to a faraway memory of Alberto Imola's.

I didn't cut anything out of the script, but there are some shots I regret not shooting at the time. I wish I had gotten a close up of the typewriter typing the title 'Novela Paralelo', as well as a shot of Matt flipping through the pages for a montage effect. I also should have shot Matt reading the book with the pages flipped to the middle, and then to the end, so that I could cross fade back and forth between Imola and the stranger and indicate a passage of time as he read through the book. I also wish I had removed a light cord out of a shot where Matt's character exits.

The second shoot location was at the apartment building across from mine, known as Tabor House. A friend of a friend lived there and invited me in when I had inquired about scouting locations. The common room on the first floor of Tabor House had a distinct look of luxury to it that I thought would match the ground floor and lobby of the 'Hotel Paradiso'. I used the existing lighting for this scene which was a combination of natural light from a window, as well as a table lamp and a chandelier. The management at Tabor House was very nice and accommodating and the shoot with Joe and Sage (the characters Justin and Lara) went quickly and smoothly. Then Sage and I returned to finish the shoot at Carriage House for the hallway and door-opening shots. For the hallway scene I used a dolly borrowed from Will Gardener, which was made up of two pvc pipes about twelve feet long, and a particle board fitted with skate wheels that traveled smoothly up and down the track. This part of the shoot was also quickly completed, owing partly to the fact that I had staged a practice shoot with Danielle English at this location about a month before.

Some changes I made to this vignette from the script were a few deletions and simplifications of scenes. I cut out Lara from the reception desk scene and simply recorded her audio for it, filming the receptionist (Danielle) interacting with a person slightly off screen. I also simplified the sequence in which Lara finds out that she was given the wrong key, and simply went with the Aztec keychain and a straightforward approach to opening her room door.

The third shoot took place in Professor Buxton's office, a location which all film students should use at some point simply for the experience of it. I brought three boxes of extra books to pepper the shelves and desk with to make sure that the office exuded the desired 'swamped' look. I used only one low angle omni light to light the scene with a yellow glow, but the natural light from the closed-blinds window balanced it out with a higher angle light blue. It gives the office a dim atmosphere yet it still retains sharp definition and almost a 'campfire story' type effect on the actors which was inadvertent at first, but I liked the effect as it was certainly relevant to the content.

One major near-disaster for this shoot took place that morning when I learned that Jonathan Armstead, playing Alejandro, had missed his plane and was stuck in Dallas. I literally scrambled for a replacement, coming up with Chris Henning who was so helpful and great to work with in such a last minute crisis. I actually think Chris' part turned out far better than expected, considering the situation. Some elements that I cut out of the script were related to some difficulties of pronouncing certain English words with a Spanish accent, such as 'parallel' and 'deteriorating'. A scene which I simply wasn't able to shoot was Alejandro's lines at the very end. Chris was busy with giving visitors to the

department a tour of the building and campus. While this made for a challenge in the editing bay, I was happy to accept Chris' conditional help in lieu of the alternative, which was having no Alejandro character at all.

The final shoot is the one that I am most proud of, both in execution, set design, and results. For starters, I lit the entire scene with only one light in addition to the existing lights in the guest room at Carriage House. The light I used was the angle-poise swing lamp (think Pixar) with a 100 watt bulb which I was able to attach to the table using a c-clamp that came with the adjustable magnifying glass. When the characters were looking at the paintings off screen, I aimed the swing lamp at them, the low angle of which cast long shadows up the far wall. When the paintings were in the shot, I was able to aim the lamp in such a way that the paintings were lit, but if the actors leaned in, their face lit up from underneath, creating more of that *film noir*/campfire story type effect.

This was particularly dramatic in the case of Still Kalil, who has a very distinctive, serious face. The long shadows on the walls accentuate the drama of the scene, and the 100 watt light on the posters of Van Gogh's *Café Terrace* really made the colors pop, but didn't create too much of a glare. Forgoing over the extra money for the nice magnifying glass again paid off as I was able to get several shots of Matt looking through it on either side, distorting his eye and face from one angle and the painting from another angle. The resulting footage was very distinctive and visually interesting.

This scene was shot according to the script except for one minor change, which was Bernard's line about the Sistine Chapel. The line was changed from "Michelangelo might have said the same thing about the Sistine Chapel, and no one would know the

difference,” to “Michelangelo could have spent an extra day on the Sistine Chapel, and no one would know the difference.” This change arose through discussing the script with the actors and helping them to better understand what I was trying to get at with their lines. It was really great to work with Still Kalil, who really took his character seriously and wanted to fully understand his motivations and mannerisms. We discussed the plot and Bernard’s place in it the day before, and I understand that Matt and Still also discussed the scene and their exchange prior to the shoot. Matt and Still were very patient and willing to brainstorm about any additional shots or angles and I don’t think I regret not getting anything.

The post-production part of these vignettes posed its own set of challenges and issues. One major problem has been the difference between the length of Alejandro’s monologue and the length of the visualization of the short story involving Imola and the Stranger. I shot Matt and Rod’s scene at a very specific pace, a bit on the slow, surreal side. However, the way it is voiced over, a lot of things happen in a single sentence. For instance, the line in the script reads: “Señor Imola refers to his deteriorating vision and helpless state in the first lines, when he is visited in his hotel room by a stranger offering him a novel.” This line takes about six or seven seconds to say. The corresponding action on screen begins with Imola feeling his typewriter, and then sitting back in his chair, establishing the setting in the hotel room. Then the door opens and the shadow of a man in a hat spills into the room. Imola looks up and puts on his spectacles. From Imola’s POV we see the blurry figure walk up, reach into his coat, and then pull out a leather-bound book. This takes about twice as much time to relay visually than the length

of the narration. All told, the scene takes about a minute and fifteen seconds to get through, while my recording of Chris reading Alejandro's voiceover lasts about 40 seconds. My attempts to cut up the voice over and spread it out over the footage to match the action have so far made the voiceover sound stilted and jarring. However, when I added in audio of the intro of *Vertigo* into the background, this stop-and-start monologue is less offensive.

Another editing challenge was to edit around my lack of footage of Alejandro's very last lines, after the flashback to Imola's short story is finished. The solution was to use the surreal feel of the film to cut to a pan away from the conversation between Alejandro and Trevor that settles on the TV screen, which ushers in the transition to either of the other two vignettes. The final words of their conversation play in the background as the narrative gets distracted and begins to drift away to the next time and place.

I've had extra practice for one special effect scene in which I splice two shots of the same hallway together in order to make it look like the character Lara is in between two identical different hallways. Half of her is in the hallway on the left, a black divider in the middle suggests the mysterious space between the two hallways, and the other half of her sticks out into the hallway on the right. I was able to practice this composite shot with Danielle and learned a few important tips.

In order to give the suggestion that the part of the actress on the left was connected to the parts of the actress on the right, I had to coach her to move in a very formulaic way, with the same starts, stops, and pauses. This way her left side matches her right side and the illusion is more convincing. The symmetry of the perspective of the hallway was also

important to maintain, since my first run-through resulted in two parallel hallways that were slightly cock-eyed, since my vanishing point for them wasn't symmetrical. I also tried to set up the camera at the correct corresponding angles in order to better capture this effect, and I think the overall result accomplishes this.

With the 2b script, my coverage was such that I had very little trouble putting the scene together, with plenty of viable ways to tell the story. The version I used for the final cut made the most use of shadows and dynamic lighting on the paintings and on the characters' intense expressions.

With the exporting and distribution stage of post-production, I have both good and bad things to say about using the Internet as the medium for the final product. First of all, I think the advantages outweigh the drawbacks; distribution on the Internet makes your content automatically available anywhere one can access the web. You simply need to find a way to promote the web address to reach your audience. As noted in my proposal, the number of video sharing sites gives filmmakers a huge menu of video host options. I chose Vimeo due to its low amount of limitations and smooth presentation. These video sharing sites usually provide a source code which allows the user to embed their video in their own site. This is what I have done for my website at www.vignetwork.com. The video player is distinctively Vimeo, with the Vimeo brand prominent during the loading screen, and the same video controls as the players at Vimeo.com have.

Now that all three vignettes have been uploaded, I have learned additional drawbacks to using Vimeo. The site uses square pixels, which (I didn't know you could have different shaped pixels) automatically conform to the 4:3 aspect ratio. Unfortunately

this resulted in the horizontal squishing of my beautiful 16:9 Quicktime exports. In order to rectify this I will have to follow the Vimeo export guidelines very carefully, using an exact compression rate.

Another area I have not yet explained is the process of creating a website destination for this hypertext project. I was able to accomplish this through a Digital Media Studies class and via resources available to me as a DU student. Every undergraduate and grad student has their own personal 'my site' space hosted by the DU server. A few quick emails allowed me to access my own server space, but this was just one-third of the battle. I still would have to buy a domain name so that the web address would be more professional, rather than `mysite.du.edu/~dcalhou2`. For this I would recommend GoDaddy.com, a site where you can easily search for domain names, see whether that domain is available (not already in use by someone else), and how much it would cost to buy.

The most popular domain names end in ".com", and likewise these are the most expensive. Cheaper options use the same identifier but end in domains such as .net, .org, .biz etc. Still, my search for 'vignetwork' revealed that the dot-com was available and for the affordable price of \$8.99 a year. This being less than a dollar a month for a web address that would directly support my thesis project, I didn't have to consider long before I bought it. GoDaddy allows you to customize your web address and select different preferences and settings, and I chose the option to have my web address mirror the content of another address. In this way, I was able to upload my content to my DU `mysite` address, which was then mirrored to my `vignetwork.com` address.

The final and most difficult task is to create the framework and design for the website, get it to work the way you want it to, and then successfully upload it to the Internet. I used a combination of programs in the Adobe Creative Suite: PhotoShop for the original creation of graphics and manipulation of images, FireWorks for image slicing, link creating, and mouse-over layering, and DreamWeaver for the final conversion into an HTML file and final preparations. Moving the content from one program to the next was a grueling process. The fun part was implementing my creative concept. I used imagery of an unraveling film reel, which had various branches of film springing off into a tree-like structure. I accomplished this by taking stock images of film reel from image searches online and bringing them together in PhotoShop to create the desired image. Once done, I imported the image into FireWorks to begin building the framework that would allow the content to function as a website. Along the bottom of the page I created hyperlinks which would navigate to different sub-pages, such as 'contact', 'about', 'news', etc.

I used a function called 'slicing' to compartmentalize different areas of the page. Slices, which are necessarily rectilinear, cut the content into individual image files which the html code identifies, and these image files have to be stored with the final html file. I used slicing to create a 'mouse-over' function. The user moves the mouse over a certain branch of the 'film-tree', and the branch changes color to show that you can click on it. I also managed to have a word appear that tells the user what clicking on that branch means, such as 'launch viewer' or 'scott calhoun' (which shows my professional artist's statement). I used my classmates in my Digital Media Studies class as a focus group and

found that they liked this design on a black background instead of a white one, and that they didn't like the film branches turning into hot-neon colors. I got a much better response when I desaturated the entire graphic in PhotoShop and then changed the mouse-over color to a sepia tone. This chance to flesh out the look, tone, and architecture of my website with feedback from DMS students was very helpful and gives the site a confident and aesthetic presentation.

For the actual viewer itself, I chose to embed the Vimeo player in the middle of the screen, using a simplified design of the branching film reel to keep the design consistent. On either side of the player are two text areas that 'NEXT A' and 'NEXT B'. This system was the best I could come up with for a practical choice designation, because it theoretically supports 26 branches. However, I'm not sure how so many choices could be represented visually in the interface, short of creating a scrollable list. When the end of a vignette is reached and there are no more to view, the user can use the links at the bottom of the screen to return to the first vignette, or to the homepage, among other options. Or the user can hit the back button.

Once I had uploaded my edited vignettes into Vimeo, I copied the embed code into my FireWorks file, exported that to DreamWeaver as the final version of that page, and then uploaded that to the DU mysite server. Theoretically, I should then be able to access the content anywhere you can get online. I am making this process sound much more simple than it actually is, however. For every straightforward seeming step, there are a dozen tedious and very frustrating minute details that make the final result unacceptable. A lot of times I wasn't able to isolate what exactly was causing certain parts of the page to

misalign with other parts. In one case, my link for the sub-page ‘thesis’ looked more like ‘the sis’ because the two different sections weren’t lined up properly. They were aligned to a pixel in my Adobe programs, but somehow they wouldn’t load online correctly. It took a lot of trial and error to minimize these imperfections so that they wouldn’t be noticeable, and to this day I don’t understand why they happen.

I have also been informed by code-savvy faculty that my particular workflow from PhotoShop to FireWorks to DreamWeaver is very popular among people who come from creative backgrounds. Those who have coding skills argue that FireWorks creates very messy code that is difficult to work with, and that if you want to change your website you basically have to start from scratch each time. However, whenever I wanted to learn something that would help me get closer to their level, I was always directed to watching online tutorials which cost money to watch (more than twenty dollars a month to subscribe!). In my opinion, learning beyond the basics of CSS, HTML, or other programming languages is not worth the trouble unless you really enjoy it. For everyone else, I would recommend using the programs above. You will still spend hours and hours trying to debug your project, but at least you won’t have to slog through trying to learn programming languages.

CONCLUSION

Coming to the home stretch of my thesis project, I look back and see that while I have come a long way and done so much since I had my first thesis idea, one could still argue that I have more or less fulfilled that original notion of creating a text that can be experienced differently each time you view it. Vignetwork was developed on a different track and with a clearer plan, but the end product isn't so different than the project originally inspired by *Last Year at Marienbad*.

Of all my audience assumptions, I am enthusiastic about my target audience being future film students, especially those here at DU. I will arrange for my website to continue to exist in the web space after I graduate. I would like to work out a connection with one of the film faculty so that my project can serve the following functions: a) be an example of a masters thesis project in video production, b) provide a production laboratory for students to be able to contribute content to and participate in the growth of the project, and c) provide a hypertext sandbox, which other students interested in interactive video could field their ideas and/or study how the structure is growing.

Theoretically, if many filmmakers contributed to Vignetwork, the hypertext structure could be viewed many times with a different experience each time. The key that

allowed me to follow my interests through with this project was the conceptual leap from encoding multiple meanings into a single text to encoding multiple versions of reality into a hypertext. The staging of this project on the Internet provided another new plateau that I could explore, and the limitless potential to upload any content allowed me to express my own ideal narrative as a storyteller and artist.

From a production standpoint, I feel that I am finished with this project. I might some day return to the story of a hotel at the crossroads between parallel universes, but I do not plan on producing further vignettes for Vignetwork. Yet I also feel that this first iteration of the project has yet to reach its full potential. There are many possibilities for development as a film program resource which I have discussed above in my audience expectations.

As for the next probable version of the site, I can already identify the steps I would take to make this a more practical and accessible tool. Any website beyond the prototype should be built by a professional, so I would need to hire a web designer to create a fully-functioning website, complete with frameworks for uploading, registering membership, and feedback. I would need to have my own video sharing engine created, and no longer rely on outside hosts such as Vimeo. With that would come a standard of content restrictions that would be a condition of the user agreement. One possibility of regulating content would be crowd-sourcing, where users of the site would be able to flag videos as obscene and the addition would be brought under review. This method is currently used by Craigslist and many of the video hosting sites. Either the creative commons license identified above would be adapted into the user agreement, or a more conservative

copyright agreement would need to be used to head off legal issues, although the site would only be liable if take-down orders were ignored. Finally, there would need to be a section, perhaps a mandatory tutorial during the sign-up phase, that explains how the site works.

A good question regarding the hypertext is ‘What do we gain by using it instead of the traditional form?’ In short, ‘Why?’ I argue that hypertext, with its multiple coexisting realities, acts as a cosmology, or a way to explain our universe. The hypertext can also be read as a parable for how we define ourselves as individuals based on our different experiences in a shared and crowded world.

Not only can two people experience the same text two different ways, but an individual can experience many texts that others haven’t, and our own particular path through the world of decoding texts has influence on who we are. A lot of importance is placed on the overlap, the commons, where people can agree on facts and define the world in terms which everyone can understand. This is useful for a lot of obvious and practical reasons; red means stop, green means go. Or imagine if everyone decided to make their own maps of the world without relying on anyone else’s help. Each map would probably end up looking like the classic maps of antiquity, with the most accuracy occurring at a local center and more ‘terra incognita’ at the extremes. Yet at the same time, one universal ‘Google’ map no longer tells about you as an individual. At least with your own definition of the world, you are expressing who you are and what/where your experience is. We can all rest assured that today we can easily access a detailed map of the Svalbard archipelago, but how meaningful is that information when most of us will

never use it? A map of our own experiences would be much more meaningful as an expression of who each one of us is as an individual.

When we overlap our experiences and agree on what is real, we limit ourselves, simplifying and adapting to one particular perspective. In much of daily life we agree that there is this standard reality apart from ourselves that is the same for you as it is for me. But I can make a counter argument and say that two people might be in the same place, but be no where near each other in experience. Two people could go to the same party and then each tell their version of what happened to a mutual friend, and that friend could easily believe that they were at two different parties. These alternate experiences that are possible within reality help explain how we are different. We are all a part of the same larger structure, but we move through it in different ways. This is analogous to the hypertext structure: a large system of interconnected links and nodes. A hypertext cosmology undermines the importance of defining the one true reality. Instead, an individual defines her own reality by her choices and the path she takes. This individual path gives her powerful personal meaning, but she can also get meaning from the paths of others and her place relative to the larger structure.

Dealing specifically with storytelling, why should we all agree on a story being told a certain way? Our experiences of film texts like *Casablanca* overlap, and with a little study we can all agree on exactly what takes place in that story. What Vignetwork does is allow individuals to navigate not only a series of texts in their own way, but also add on to it and define their own ideal narrative. These narrative pathways that give the viewer choice and creative control are more meaningful on a personal level than one strict map of

the world, or one strict definition of a story, such as *Casablanca*. One could argue that *Casablanca* is the most meaningful to Michael Curtiz, and that each person has to create her own separate text to get that level of satisfaction. But by linking them within the hypertext, we enter into a parable of the larger world, a system of different experiences with occasional intersections. What if Rick got on the plane with Ilsa instead of her husband? This choice not only gives insight into who we are, but where we are within the universe.

Our lives are filled with choice. Every day we make choices that define who we are. Sometimes these choices are predefined by others; do you go through this door or that? Architects have predefined these. Left or right at the intersection? --city planners. Do you take this class or that one? --professors, departments, universities. Sometimes, when we challenge ourselves to be creative, we can create our own choice. These choices, when we blaze a new trail and experience complete freedom in the course of our own lives, are often the most challenging and rewarding choices available. Vignetwork attends to the same philosophy. You can choose between existing versions of reality, or you can make your own. You can experience the different paths through the known world, or you can explore and add on to it in your own way. You can make the world better than how you found it.

Since the scope of this project has been only to set up the basic architecture and narrative seed of a much bigger idea, there are naturally lots of unanswered questions which could be followed up in the future. Does the interface provide a simple, cinematic experience which engages the viewer and promotes deep attention? Are the binary

navigation buttons satisfactory, or will a new button scheme need to be implemented in order to accommodate more than two choices? If any vignettes are added in the future, how do they build off the existing structure? What style of narrative do they use? Were they still cramped by the longer five minute run time? How was the exquisite corpse concept handled?

In a hypertext cosmology, the world is an unknown field of possibilities. Different versions of reality are all possible simultaneously. Your own ideal narrative beckons for you to give voice to it. Narratives told by others offer their own wisdom and insight into life. But what lies just around the corner will remain a mystery until you choose to explore it. And by injecting choice into text, we arrive at the hypertext.

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