IMMERSION AND CONTEMPLATION: MERGING MODELS OF KNOWLEDGE IN NEW MEDIA NARRATIVES

By

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With the growing influence of technology and popular culture on contemporary literary works, the prevalence of multi- and intermedia works, and the increased availability of technology in the classroom, deriving a rhetoric that cooperatively embraces intellectual rigor and popular sensationalism is crucial for traditional institutions if they are to maintain relevance with their changing audience. The now established debate between these seeming opposites is exemplified by Georg Lukács and Bertolt Brecht’s divergent opinions on the relevance and content of popular aesthetics. For Lukács, understanding how the revolutionary infiltrates popular culture is accomplished through scrutiny and analysis. However, Bertolt Brecht posits that the worker is in fact open to experimentation, welcoming innovative ways to represent their social situations. The divisions of this debate have been, I propose, resolved by new media practices that borrow conventions across various media and discourses. As a consequence of the mass media explosion of the late 20th century, the divide between these two fields of inquiry and production has decreased, bringing to the fore the need to address both models of immersion and contemplation.

This study builds on Lev Manovich’s project of outlining a language of new media by examining a diverse set of collage and montage practices that already exist in popular culture and
literary works. The first chapter examines the music video work of Björk Guðmundsdóttir and Michel Gondry. Using Björk as a marker of potential, I parse three crucial characteristics of new media aesthetics: desire, collaboration, and appropriation. Chapter two discusses appropriation in conjunction with William Burroughs’ use of the cut-up and Robert Rauschenberg’s combines and silkscreens. Chapter three addresses collaboration in conjunction with Virginia Woolf’s novel, *The Waves*, as not only an early exploration of digital subjectivity as multiple and monadic but also as an intrinsically multimodal composition. Examining several digital literature and art pieces, the fourth chapter claims writing in the digital environment is a practice of collecting affective potential and reading becomes an act of browsing and remixing. The fifth chapter posits aesthetic judgment as the action *par excellence* of the new media subject who recognizes aesthetics and design as a crucial political and ethical foundation of the construction of public space and educational development.
CHAPTER 1
DETERMINING A NEW RHETORIC

I truly and in my heart feel that I’m doing music for the everyday person. I could have so easily gone and become a composer and done some avant-garde music in some corner for the chosen eleven and a half person [sic]. But I never wanted to do that. I think my role is more to be some sort of a communicator between all sort of different worlds.

--Björk Guðmundsdóttir

Realism Meets Avant-Garde: A Popular Aesthetics

As we cross into the twenty first century, hybrid media works that borrow conventions from various disciplines, such as literature’s appropriation of collage from the modern visual arts, and popular genres which actively incorporate avant-garde techniques, such as the music video, have brought us to the tail end of a long debate between Realism and the avant-garde. This debate has not continued to resurface because it is unresolved. The prolific use and experimentation of avant-garde techniques by professional artists, writers, filmmakers, musicians, and particularly, the layperson and his or her increasingly powerful and affordable computer, have shown the potential and acceptance of working with Realist and avant-garde methods and styles. We continue to return to this oppositional debate because we have yet to appropriate and determine a rhetoric that fully addresses working with elements of Realism and the avant-garde in popular culture; that is, to view each – and their collations – as more than a style but, in fact, as a method of thinking and working in the late age of print and the emergent age of digital media. Before I put my cart ahead of the horse, we will return to this original debate and its subsequent need for a new rhetoric of the twenty first century.

This debate between the relevance of Realism and the avant-garde in popular culture is clearly highlighted in *Aesthetics and Politics*. These collected essays and letters especially address the concerns associated with determining a popular aesthetic that relates and develops the people’s traditions, language, and ways of expression. On one hand, Georg Lukács argues in
his essay “Realism in the Balance”, that modern movements such as Surrealism and Naturalism are overly emotional and phenomenological at the cost of Realism’s goal of discovering underlying essence through relating experience to social forces. For Lukács, understanding how the revolutionary infiltrates popular culture “can only be accomplished by hard work, by abandoning and transcending the limits of immediacy, by scrutinizing all subjective experiences and measuring them against social reality” (Lukács 37). His method of Realism relies on first discovering social relationships intellectually and only then giving them artistic shape. He finds the collage methods of the avant-garde to be a flippant way to appropriate fragments of a cultural heritage without being responsible to the community that upholds that heritage. Needless to say, he also believes that avant-garde works are inaccessible to the public whose concerns lie with real life, not convoluted distortions (57).

While Lukács estranged the avant-garde from the public and their traditions, Bertolt Brecht posits, in his essay “Against Georg Lukács” that workers are in fact open to experimentation and ready to teach and learn from the artist, welcoming innovative ways to represent their social situations. For Brecht, this is where true Realism resides. Realism is not a representational style or optical illusion but a social, political, and philosophical vision of a community and its changing circumstances (Brecht 82). He argues that Lukács’ desire to maintain a dated narrative, loyalty to individualism, and the privileged role of the artist or writer is impractical and unrepresentative of the real lives of the community. Instead, Brecht’s aesthetic steers away from discipline as a method to define the essence of a modern community, and shows play and pleasure as a process of knowing and experimentation and as an important element in understanding the subject’s place in the social whole (83). Brecht’s methods
encourage the public to openly communicate with the artist, breaking the boundary between the
art world and a community ostracized from it.

Fredric Jameson closes *Aesthetics and Politics* with the idea that perhaps Realism and the
avant-garde’s goal of estrangement can be used to keep one another in check and thus avoid
letting either Realism or the avant-garde become a dominant style within popular culture.
Jameson’s argument suggests that the key to navigating through high capitalism, a consumerist
culture, the present media bombardment, and grass-root art, music, and literary production is
toggling between seemingly oppositional modes of Realism and avant-garde. This would allow
for renewed perceptions of art and social conditions, helping us avoid automatism and blindly
appropriating style into habits.

Enacting this collaboration of models is an uphill battle for those who choose to combat
the boundaries between popular culture and the dominant modes, whether Realist or avant-garde,
of established institutions or genres. As a glaring example of this active battle, we will take
experimentation in popular music as emblematic of the efforts to blend Realism and the avant-
garde to create a popular aesthetic that is neither separate from nor incorporated into established
genres of music or its key institutions such as the university, the studio, or the recording
company. As Susan McClary points out, the university has entrenched its music departments in
avant-garde and art music that largely fail to address popular music and its social implications
(67). Similarly, recording companies have invested heavily in creating celebrities who sing or
play generic music that depends heavily on the guitar or the drum machine and dominant lyrics
(Firth 101). While there are many musical figures that we could use to illustrate the developing
relationship between popular music and avant-garde experimentation in music, I choose to
address the work of Yoko Ono, Laurie Anderson, and Björk Guðmundsdóttir because of their
distinct approaches to addressing popular music and their methods of uniting avant-garde experimentation and the form of the popular song while sharing the common goal of making the popular and the experimental collaborative rather than oppositional.

While Yoko Ono is often cited as an innovator for those interested in blending high and low culture and as an inspiration to later pop musicians, her own work has often been critiqued as shallow and idealistic. She began her career as a performance and mixed media artist deeply entrenched in the New York art scene of the 1950s, taking part in the happenings hosted all over the city and collaborating with John Cage. Her career in popular music began with her early experiments with Beatle John Lennon. Perhaps Ono’s fatal flaw in her attempt to marry the avant-garde with popular music was her view of popular music as a tool to reach the masses more than as a legitimate form in and of itself. As Jon Wiener points out, popular music allows for a larger audience but its commodity nature often dumbs down the music and the listener. On the other hand, the avant-garde can combat this stupidity with imagination but is too often only addressed to the art world (Wiener 3). Ono tried to resolve this conundrum by making the public the audience for avant-garde imagination, assuming that the public would be able to follow along. In using popular music as a platform to deliver her and Lennon’s utopian ideals to the masses, Ono’s work is often characterized as condescending and removed from the targeted audience. Even those who managed to lay down the notion that it was Ono who broke up the beloved Beatles often had trouble relating her high pitched screaming mixed over rock guitar. While Björk sees her role as a communicator between different worlds, Ono takes this role one step further saying “The job of an artist is not to destroy but to change the value of things, and by doing that, artists can change the world into a Utopia where there is total freedom for everybody. That can be achieved only when there is total communication in the world. Total communication
equals peace. That is our aim. That is what artists can do for the world!” *(Yes Yoko Ono 293).*

Perhaps this utopian rhetoric is more common in the art world where there is a higher tolerance for theory over practice but as a popular musician, Ono’s viewpoint separates her from her public rather than serves as a mechanism to relate to them.

Ono’s work became an inspiration for the punk and new wave movements that arose in New York in the 1970s and 80s. At the tail end of the new wave movement, one of the major and significant performance artists and musical figures to arise was Laurie Anderson. The punk and new wave movements attempted to open the boundaries between disciplines since they believed that each individual discipline had already established that the division between high and low culture was eroding. As Bernard Gendron points out in *Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*, the new wave scene blended the nightclub and its music with the art gallery, in which The Ramones and Andy Warhol could mingle. While Anderson was excited by the supposed decomposition of the art gallery, she was not satisfied with the sterility and exclusivity that the gallery still exuded. Specifically, Anderson wanted the divide between the artist and the audience to fade and hence preferred live performances to taped ones and chose to speak her lyrics rather than sing them, as singing implies a superior ability that separates the singer from the listener. Instead of forcing the avant-garde into a popular platform (like Ono), Anderson refused to fully participate in either the mainstream art scene or popular music. While she left the gallery and criticized the art world for privileging the avant-garde and demeaning popular culture as garbage (Garr 242), she was also offered a record deal after her surprise hit single “O, Superman”. Anderson did not aim to have a career in popular music and as a performance and visual artist, her music was often quickly composed as a soundtrack for her performances. While she reluctantly accepted the seven album record deal with Warner, her art and accompanying music has attempted to maintain its grass-
root quality and political motivation. As Ono linked her work in popular music to utopian ideals of freedom, Anderson saw her work in popular music and the potential of popular music in general to be “the creation of that aggressive alternative to the mainstream and to the creation of a new American left that can champion free speech, lobby effectively in Washington, protect the rights of gay people, blacks, and women, and stand up for diversity in American culture” (Garr 357). Viewing popular music as a tool to empower the public to take an active role in its society is a noble aim but that vision often leaves the craft behind creating musically interesting songs along the byways, privileging, once more the idea over its manifestation in performance or recording. In all fairness to Anderson, she saw herself first and foremost as a storyteller and a performer, not a musician. For all her humble desires to remain connected to her audience, as an artist, her work was often seen as art that simply needed to be turned on (Brech 216): as a popular musician, her songs diverged so far from the verse and chorus form of the pop song that her work was hard for Warner to market, greatly limiting her popular audience.

Ono, Anderson, and Björk all actively cross boundaries between the avant-garde and popular music; each has been critiqued for being impossible to label as a visual artist, performance artist, musician, composer, storyteller, actress, or singer. What then brought Björk a more widespread acceptance and acknowledgement by both mainstream pop culture and intellectual and high avant-garde circles? Perhaps the principle reason for her commercial and musical success lies in the fact that she is interested in pop music itself and structures her songs according to its general verse and chorus format. While she is by no means, a clichéd pop musician, she does not politics over the music itself. She does say that modern pop music has betrayed the public by being stagnant and often irrelevant to our everyday lives (Pytlik 69). She sees the need, desire, benefit, and potential of pop music despite her classical training and refuses
to dismiss “pure” pop bands such as ABBA as inconsequential (Pytlik 7). Though a participant in
the early punk scene in Iceland, she found pure revolution and political diatribes to be an
unsatisfying way to express herself and impact the music scene. As a messenger of and for an
explicitly depoliticied popular audience, Björk is not interested in highlighting utopian idealism,
political activism, pure avant-garde art music, or the stagnant pop conventions she deplores but
wants to use emotional expression in music as the force binding an individual, a relationship, and
a community. She observes: “What’s great about pop music is that it very immediately can bring
you to an emotional location that is very easily understood by most people just with the first few
seconds. When people were asking me what sort of music I did, I did actually sort of refer it to
some sort of a modern folk music” (Inside Björk). Performing folk within the framework of
electronic music, she addresses the new mediation of our daily life, which has become
inseparable from sound and visual technologies that define our senses and subject position at the
turn of the twenty-first century. Yet another reason for Björk’s success in blending pop and
avant-garde music is that she consciously decided when launching her solo career to view herself
as a musician and not a poet, performer, or actress. After leaving her pop group The Sugarcubes,
which she formed with other artists from her punk entourage, she decided that she needed to
pursue work with other musicians who were interested in similar musical experiments rather than
with the writers, poets, and visual artists with whom she was then associating, no matter how
interesting or inspiring it was (Inside Björk). By concentrating only on the discipline of music,
she allows herself to explore the possibilities of blending the genres and conventions of pop,
electronic, and experimental music.

While Ono largely took issue with established norms of high art and pop music genres
and Anderson with galleries and record companies as institutions, Björk elected not to simply
turn pop against the avant-garde or retreat from the established institutions, as a punk ideology requires. Alex Ross has argued that the reason she is able to blend the traditional with the experimental, the acoustic with the electric, successfully is because she does not reject tradition but hints at traditional music in her own work (55). To address a popular aesthetic one must allow an institution or established tradition to collaborate and be altered by experiments and infelicities of the public. Rather than succumb to or ignore the other, traditions and experiments can be folded into each other. This is a very difficult equilibrium to adhere to but perhaps by turning to Björk as one example of a potential method to build upon, we can find an example in which Realism and the avant-garde may form an authentic relationship, in which Realism does not control avant-garde experiments and where avant-garde’s artifice does not overpower Realism; or in the context of experimental pop music, where formulaic pop does not control experiments in music or where musical invention does not overpower the pop goal of making a beautiful song.

**The Source: Instinct and Emotion**

In determining this method of connecting Realism with the avant-garde at which Björk’s music and music videos hints, let us begin our inquiry where she begins her creative process, with emotion and instinct. While my aim is not to offer a biography of her present musical career, allow me to digress a moment so as to contextualize the importance of her method. When Björk began her solo career, she first approached Graham Massey from the British electronic group 808 State with demo tapes of the songs that would later comprise her first original solo album, *Debut* (Pytlik 53). She wanted to collaborate with Massey to bring her brass band versions of her songs to electronic music. He has described her demos as earthy, rootsy and almost folksy and has observed that she wanted to bring something very organic, human, and soulful to electronic music (*Inside Björk*). Massey and all Björk’s subsequent musical
collaborators have been astounded by her instincts in the recording studio and how she will typically suggest revisions to the music with expressly visual and sensual adjectives, such as asking for a segment to sound more “pink and fluffy” (Pytlik 76).

Her peculiar idiom when working with and describing music are largely reactions to her educational experiences of being taught what music should be and how it should be treated. Björk did attend a music school until the age of fifteen before quitting, having rejected classical music and its overly analytical tenor. She observes having resented constantly having to dissect music, arguing that the atmosphere and emotion of music is not open to explanation and beyond that, questioning why an explanation was at all desirable (Pytlik 78). In this vein, she shares that her approach to composing the soundtrack for *Dancer in the Dark* was far from analytical. Björk says: “I read the script and my immediate reaction was very emotional […] So I would start writing the songs from a very emotional point of view. More like a form of love for Selma rather than anything else. For me to react in an intellectual way …. I couldn’t even though I tried, it’s not what I’m about” (Pytlik 138). Key in the method of her music is not a calculated response but an emotional connection. Similarly, Mark Stent, the sound engineer for her 2004 album *Medulla*, points out that this purely vocal album is not about creating sonically challenging music but about the affective and physical expression of bodily noises and the act of singing itself (*The Inner or Deep Part of an Animal or Plant Structure*).

This emphasis on the emotion does not equate to compositional chaos. Björk is careful not to describe her music as free play and is adamant about degree of discipline in sampling and mixing, as well as creating new sounds for her albums. Evelyn McDonnell explains that Björk does not work from a formula or drop sounds into prescribed locations, but instead starts a project with a target and allows all her games and play to take shape while approaching that
target (63). For instance, the target of *Medulla* was to create a completely vocal album that returns to the primitive body and its sounds. The target of *Vespertine* was to use household sounds that are small and quiet to describe how Björk deals with the interior of her own body. Not only does she work with an overall target, but she also is very strict about musical structure, saying “When it comes to chord and song structure, I’m like—lethal’s not the right word—I’m very, very disciplined…. I’ve had people say they think I’m free-forming through the whole album, and I’m definitely not” (McDonnell 64).

In her manner of explaining her own methods of creating music, we can see that she tries to balance the “hard work” (Lukács 37) of Lukács’ model of Realism as calculated determination of essence with the “principle of play” (Bloch 205) of Brecht’s idea of avant-garde and Realism as an open communication between the artist and everyday life. Björk’s method does not work from controlled order or complete chaos but of each coming together to relate and build onto the other. For instance, in creating *Medulla*, which was planned to be completely vocal, she did bend the target a bit when her instincts strongly supported a revision, such as her use of Brazilian drums in “Mouth’s Cradle”. The target then becomes a strong touch point not an all powerful and hard principle of action. Equally, while the raw material for *Medulla* was often bizarre and drawn from varied sources, from Greek bell groups, to human beat boxes, tongue clicking, to string ensembles, the fierce variety of the individual sounds do not overpower the form of the singer-led pop song and its dominant lyrics and verse and chorus format. The play does not spiral into disarray or random parataxis.

In addition to her use of a target, strong musical structure, and collaborative and experimental play, each of Björk’s albums has a lead character that tells the story of the album. These characters reflect her perceived position in life at the time she is working on that album.
These characters change from the shy newcomer of *Debut*, to the industrially immersed naturalist of *Post* and then to the confrontational warrior of *Homogenic* and the introvert in *Vespertine* (*Inside Björk*). Björk also explains that each track has minor characters that play out implications of the lead character and that each track itself is often a small portion of a long story. Her use of narrative is significant and compelling in music because it abstracted beyond the personal. In fact the song itself often provides an atmosphere that is open to the listener to insert their relevant experiences since Björk’s personal details and motives behind the stories are not always self-evident. As the “modern folk” musician she labels herself, Björk use of a strong narrative beneath sampled electronic music brings the best of community based activities to art music typically cloistered in the university. In addition to her reliance on explicit story narratives, her songs also draw on myth narratives, such as the Icelandic myth of the cat and the farmer in “Triumph of a Heart” and Björk’s own myth of Isobel. The Isobel myth is one with a lesson for humanity, a lesson that takes us to the very root of Björk’s work in her music, music videos, performances, and overall comportment. The myth extends into a trilogy of songs and accompanying videos that include “Human Behaviour”, “Isobel”, and “Bachelorette”.

The story has become a well-known facet of her portfolio, and it merits reviewing here as not only a lesson but as a pointer that indicates a key kernel of our potential method of bridging Realism and the avant-garde, of discipline and play. To paraphrase the story from her retelling in *Inside Björk*, Isobel is a girl born in the forest that grows up to find herself in the city where she clashes with civilized people. She isolates herself in the country again, hence the name “Isobel”, and trains moths to fly back and forth in front of the people of the world who rely too heavily on logic in order to shake them loose from it. Isobel’s primary message is to embrace instinct. The lyrics of “Human Behaviour” illustrate Björk’s views that humans are not by nature logical
beings, but are steeped in emotion, instinct, and immediate response rather than controlled and calm calculation:

There’s definitely definitely definitely no logic / to human behaviour / but yet so yet so irresistible. / And there’s no map to human behaviour. / They’re terribly terribly terribly moody (Guðmundsdóttir “Human Behaviour” 4-8)

As a primer to the entrance of Isobel in the trilogy, Björk paints the image of human logic as a veneer or façade by which we are estranged from a nature that we often aim to suppress or control. For instance, we suppress our bodily noises, try to control carnal desires to appear civilized, or we weed out the nonsense play and romping of childhood to become serious career minded adults.

The lyrics of “Isobel” are much more obscure but we still can determine the qualities that Isobel recognizes in herself. She compares herself to sparks of fire, to lust, and the unexpected eruptions of nature. We also can see that she responds to immediacy and functions from instinct from the line “when she does it she means to” (Guðmundsdóttir “Isobel” 13). Instinct itself is the basic behavioral response to stimuli and thus do not allow for the distance or the time needed to analyze a situation and calculate an elaborate, or subtle reaction: what we get instead is an intuitive reaction. Equally, the lyrics of the song do not come close to explaining the full story of the forest-girl, Isobel, much to the frustration of one of Björk’s interviewers, Mim Udovitch, who asks where the story is told since the lyrics themselves are more atmospheric than direct. When Udovitch asks if the story is clearer in the music videos, Björk becomes frustrated that telling a story is automatically equated to clearly illustrating intricate details rather than creating an atmosphere that recalls the tropes of a story. This atmosphere is more effective in allowing the listeners or viewers to respond more instinctually to verbal or visual cues rather than being spoon-fed a closed story with a well-defined cause and effect structure, characters, and
determinate locations. Overdetermining the story would drain the emotion as much as dissecting music ruins its immediacy.

The final part of the trilogy, “Bachelorette” moves beyond “Human Behaviour” and its general observation of human nature, and dreamlike descriptions of “Isobel”. In “Bachelorette” the first person “I” is the human functioning from instinct while the second person “you” is the person who leans away from instinct toward logic. The lyrics show the Isobel figure as a visceral, bodily form from the first two lines “I’m a fountain of blood / in the shape of a girl” (Guðmundsdóttir “Bachelorette” 1-2). She is fluid and dynamic rather than a solid or determined human with a clear sense of identity and shape. She wants to relate to other logically driven humans but they do not listen to her. She says “I’m a whisper in water / a secret for you to hear / you’re the one who grows distant / when I beckon you near” (18-21). She warns the logical humans “if you forget my name / you will go astray / like a killer whale trapped in a bay” (11-13). While from the lyrics alone we can piece together the idea of a lost or ignored message, without linking it to the previous two parts of the trilogy or Björk’s own explanation, we do not hear the story of instinct as a lesson for humankind. For this final portion of the trilogy, Björk explains that Isobel leaves the forest in order to return to the city to spread her message. Of course her message is misunderstood and overlooked and she retreats again to nature where she is happy (The Works of Michel Gondry).

Just as Björk is disturbed by the imaginative stagnation nature of popular music, the large rift between art music and popular music disturbs several critics of popular music, such as Kim Cascone or Susan McClary. While Björk is trying to bring a new method and product to the field of popular music, scholars in the humanities are equally trying to bridge their own traditionalism with our contemporary environment to find a new relevance and purpose, hence to define a new
rhetoric. Björk’s explanation of her method to approach musical composition emotionally rather than intellectually, the direct lesson of the Isobel trilogy to shake logic for more instinctual responses, and the implied lesson of obscurely hinting at the Isobel myth rather than overdetermining it, suggests our first trope towards a method of working, creating, and thinking in the new media environment of the twenty-first century, of a rhetoric that perhaps could be appropriated into the academic environment. The basis of all of Björk’s work is an emotion: her method of creating music relies on instinct as a key element. While she does keep instinct in check with her strict use of musical structures, it is the instinctual aspect that is perhaps more foreign to an academic environment, in which logic, clarity, and linearity are institutionally privileged. The stories and myths she creates with each song and each album are often unannounced in the music itself and is even unnecessary information for her public and their enjoyment of her work but she does share the entire story of each song with her collaborators who are an important part of her work. We will thus turn to practices of collaboration as our second major trope.

**The Process: Sharing the Creative Production of a Work**

When one examines any work that attempts to cross the borders of several genres or disciplines, the product itself often does not speak to the depth or significance of the piece. Just as the lyrics and videos from the Isobel trilogy do not reveal a fully established and defined story, Björk’s songs, videos, concerts, photographs, and public appearances do not openly acknowledge the importance of collaboration in the end product. If we are to follow Björk’s example of being a communicator across different registers of creative art, we will have to pay more attention to process and credit a collaborative model of working.

Björk very often releases “making of” videos and has opened herself to several interviews over the years, sharing elements of the process of creating her albums, music videos,
tracks, photographs, and films. She has worked with fashion designers to collaborate on album covers, with hundreds of musicians, vocalists, and sound engineers, and directors for both music videos and feature films. Though she has always collaborated with other artists and musicians, by the time she began working on *Medulla* in the early 2000s, she admitted that she had gone as far as she could alone and wanted to open her work up to other musicians and collaborators in order to see where contributions and concepts of others could take her (Guðmundsdóttir *Inner or Deep*). As the music became less about a product and more about allowing a process to unfold, she discovered that much of what she wanted to accomplish was impossible without a community of collaborators. Sir Elton John, a great admirer of Björk, went as far as to say that she is not just a musician but a complete artist when you take into consideration her video work in particular: “She’s like a living artist. She’s not just music; she’s like a visual artist. There’s art in everything she does” (*Inside Björk*). Björk takes great care to visually represent her work in a way that is true to the tenets of her music and is open and involved in the collaborative process of shooting and conceptualizing her music videos. Of the many directors that she has worked with, she and Michel Gondry have collaborated most often, producing seven music videos together including all three videos for the Isobel trilogy.

Björk’s first music video, “Human Behaviour”, has been cited as perhaps one of the best music videos ever made (Reiss 7). This is all the more significant considering that Björk was still rather new to pop music videos despite her experiences with *The Sugarcubes* and that Michel Gondry himself had only recently begun shooting music videos for bands other than his own group, *Oui Oui*. When they met to discuss the concept of “Human Behaviour”, Gondry and Björk shared ideas, engaging in long discussions on where their associations took them. In their initial conversations Gondry mentions the children’s story “The Hedgehog in the Fog” by Yuri
Norstein (*I've been 5*) in which the hedgehog is afraid of everything in the forest. They decide to use animals acting as humans and Björk acting like animals to show how much more bizarre human behavior is than that of animals who work from pure instinct. In the final product, Björk and a person dressed as a bear walk together through the forest and split up with each acting both animal-like and human-like. For instance, the bear kills and drags the hunter away and Björk jumps up and down, waving her arms to mimic a moth around a light bulb. When he did submit a proposal for the “Human Behaviour” video and Björk accepted it, Gondry was actually concerned that Björk had wasted all her money. He was convinced that no one would understand such a surreal video with such an elaborate back-story. While many music videos now depend on pastiche and thus assume a certain cultural capital on the part of their audience (Beebe 321) in the case of “Human Behaviour” being familiar with Norstein’s story or the concepts and goals of Surrealism are not required in order to understand or enjoy the story that is told visually – though this knowledge may be supplemental to the appreciation of the video.

If we skip to “Bachelorette” we notice similar themes regarding the relationship between nature and human civilization manifested in the city. In his own documentary of his work Gondry mentions that in conceptualizing “Bachelorette” he recalled his own childhood home at the border between the city and the forest. He was unsure whether or not the earth was made of concrete with a thin layer of dirt under the forest or if the earth was made of dirt with a thin layer of concrete under the city (*The Work of Director Michel Gondry*). His curiosity about the nature of the earth would serve well in generating a visual story as compelling as the myth that Björk had concocted as the manifestation of natural instinct itself. After Isobel retreats from the city to her cabin in the forest, she feels compelled to return to society to confront “civilized” people with her love. In order to depict that, Gondry wanted to take the most extreme behaviour he
could imagine for Björk: a typical romance story. The “Bachelorette” video is very much about a human inclination and even instinct towards storytelling. For instance, the video begins in black and white with a scene of Björk at her cabin, linking the beginning of the video to the style and location of “Isobel” also shot in black and white. (The “Isobel” music video had also been edited and filmed to look vintage, and shot in Isobel’s forest home and the forest itself.) This continuation builds onto previous tellings of Isobel’s myth, producing a kind of music video epic.

The central conceit of the video is of a book that writes itself, disclosing the destiny that the Isobel figure simultaneously fulfills. The initial story in the book that the Isobel figure finds is raw, uncensored, dug up from the earth itself, a direct manifestation of instinct, but when the Isobel figure goes to the city the message is corrupted as it recedes farther and farther from its initial and natural form. When she arrives in the city and her published book is made into a play, it seems to be just another way to represent the story that appears in the book. However, as the play continues we see the immediacy of the story slip away as a second and third production of the play are generated until the initial audience at the theatre is looking at a stage on a stage on a stage. What we see in their collaboration for the “Bachelorette” video is much like a remix of the underlying story. Björk provides Gondry with the portion of the Isobel myth that “Bachelorette” addresses. Her story for “Bachelorette” recounts Isobel’s attempt to return to the city to share her message of instinct which the city dwellers disregard. Gondry takes this story and does not enslave himself to the narrative by simply illustrating the story. Many music video directors explain that their videos are their own version of the songs since filmmakers are not musicians but visual storytellers (Hanson 50). They feel compelled to insert their own narratives that relate, complement, or offer tangents to the stories offered by the song. Gondry has done just that,
depicting the idea of spreading a message that is misunderstood or ignored as a typical romance that falls apart.

We can even draw this line of romantic storytelling outside of the Isobel myth and into the lives of Gondry and Björk who were both deeply affected by romantic failures in their pasts (The Work of Director Michel Gondry, Inside Björk). The relevance of this is not the disclosure of intimate information, but a condition of the collaboration, which happens through association whether it is on an individual level of associating a devastating personal experience with one’s own creative production, or on a group level with other individuals’ creations and personal experiences. When Gondry is trying to explain the beginning of the creative process in defining what he believes is inspiration, he says: “I decided that an idea is just when two things click together. It’s when you just have one thought and you make it work with another thought. You see an object and it makes you think of another one and those two objects together is an idea” (The Work of Director Michel Gondry). If we hold to this concept, then any act of creation, any thought process, requires an association or bringing together of at least two things. For an individual, concepts or thoughts must come together in such a way as to produce an idea that is communicable to others, which in turn become material for more associative links across a small group or community.

Another lesson we can draw from the dynamics of the Gondry - Björk collaboration is that it was fairly equal. Gondry observes that for “Human Behaviour” Björk generated perhaps 60% of the ideas for the film, rather than the usual dictating of assignments that often gets called collaborative work. Perhaps another significant reason for their success is their trust in their own instincts and memories as well as in one another. Gondry notes that when they do work together they do not have to explain much to one another, since they are already working on
complementary interests that are associated with ease. While they are both interested in the roots of identity (*I’ve been twelve forever 5*), Björk’s accentuates instinct and Gondry is more invested in nostalgia. While their interests combine in fruitful ways, Björk has also said that working with Gondry can be limiting as well, since he invests perhaps too heavily in nostalgia which she feels can only take a person so far creatively (*The Works of Director Michel Gondry*). With that said, the concept of collaboration that we can draw from their work together and their own separate opinions is that it is based first on an equal, shared process of making associative links. Where those links are particularly fruitful is where interests complement one another without eliminating conflict between each other.

Gondry seems to take these ideas, and his films and videos not associated with Björk, to create his own system of generating community-based creative production. His “*Be Kind Rewind* Protocol” can serve as a controlled example of the potential collaboration has in community building, encouraging creative behaviour, and decreased reliance on the formulaic practices of the entertainment industry. He developed this protocol after combining two distinct experiences, that of directing *Dave Chappelle’s Block Party* and the film *Be Kind Rewind*. Taking the sense of community that he found in the rapport between Chappelle and his entourage and the idea of makeshift film making from the storyline of *Be Kind Rewind*, Gondry develops a simple framework and space for amateur creative production with a communal dynamic. While the first iteration of his protocol was set up at the Deitch Projects art gallery, it aimed to create a sense of community by creating a controlled environment where a group of people could collaborate on conceptualizing, filming, and viewing their own original film. Gondry carefully explained that the protocol had nothing to do with the film industry and producing a professional product, saying, “this protocol is an activity, like an amusement park ride that doesn’t belong to a big
studio or a corporation, but the community. And here the group was the decision maker: that was the whole point of the idea” (Gondry You’ll Like This Film 60). The goal of the entire project then was to create a communal experience that was gratifying not because the film was particularly good but because the community worked together to create the film. The joy of watching their films came from reliving the process of making the film. In this respect, the aim is not to make a completed film object but to enact a collective collaborative experience that produces such an object as one of its outcomes.

While his protocol includes several provisions to maintain some control over group collaboration and to make practical the process of creating a film in two and a half hours, there are three important provisions that I would like to elaborate on here.

First, Gondry wanted to create a level playing field where all collaborators had a voice in the process. All decisions are to be made by popular vote and open brainstorming and everyone but the person filming has to appear in the film. Gondry was especially impressed with the groups that included both adults and children, in which children would actively collaborate with adults without being patronized or dismissed (Gondry You’ll Like This Film 5). The only major problem that arose in the goal of creating equal collaborative environments was when one of the members of a group was an overbearing teacher or leader with aspirations of becoming a professional artist or filmmaker. The strong ego did not allow for the open collaboration that the activity required and as far as Gondry was considered, ruined the experience of his protocol in action.

A second major goal of the protocol was to arrive at the Deitch Projects without a preconceived idea for a film. Gondry sent a few groups out of the gallery when they saw themselves as artists who were above the use of his apparently simplistic protocol or others that
had already decided to, for instance, film a version of *Bladerunner* (Gondry *You'll Like This Film* 60). Gondry excused them from the gallery on the grounds that their controlling behaviour and preconceived ideas were ruining the experience for the other collaborators who could not participate in the communal process of creation.

The third and final major conceit of the project was that limitations were required. In creating the protocol, Gondry included step-by-step instructions that needed to be followed with care in the prescribed order and within time limits to avoid stagnation and arguments within the group. While at first glance, the idea of imposing so many rules and regulated steps with checklists and forms seems counterintuitive to the creative process, Gondry argues that in fact it is quite the contrary. He states: “The creative process, at least the way I see it, is all about expansion and then compression, The expansion allows the flow of ideas to be unrestricted within fixed parameters. The compression is the selection of the ideas that will ultimately turn into a story” (Gondry *You’ll Like This Film* 56). In order to have a successful product in the end, some manifestation of the creative labor, there have to be limitations to compress the ideas into a form. Gondry argues that limitations can be liberating, since they lend a sense of direction. He uses asking a foreigner to say something in his or her native language as an example. Without a given direction, most people stare blankly searching for something to say and when they do speak it often turns out to be a banal phrase.

If we return to Björk and her vision of her role as a communicator, we cannot escape talking about collaboration. Communication requires both a sender that provides a message and a receiver that will interpret and respond to that message. That sender and receiver then collaborate on a meaning to that message whether they negotiate that meaning internally in their minds or externally with their community or peers. Every process is limited by its product and for Björk,
The product is an album of recorded music. It just happens to be that the forms of Björk’s music are powerful representations and manifestations of collaboration since they are heavily invested in remixing, sampling, and editing, all of which are activities requiring a pooling of other people’s talents and products.

The Product: Gathering Fragments and Cultivating Creative Sparks

While there have been many technological advancements in musical production and recording during the twentieth century, one of the first major breakthroughs that has forever altered the recording studio and recorded music is the invention of magnetic tape that allows for multitrack recording and dubbing (Firth 85). What made this significant was it transformed musical performance from being viewed as a whole event recorded in its entirety and true to a live music experience to a seemingly artificial collection of pieces of sounds and music arranged flawlessly with the assistance of a machine. The subject of the recording is no longer the musician and his or her authentic real time performance, but the technologies that can filter out any unwanted noise, combine the best individual takes, and edit out mistakes or infelicities that are inherent in a live performance. The development and widespread use of the synthesizer and sampler in the recording studio also push musical artists to evaluate what relationship their art will have with technology. Modern pop, rock, rap, and hip-hop music all draw attention to their increased dependence on recording and editing technologies: popular audiences now often expect the carefully edited and pristine sound of the recording studio to be reproduced at a performer’s live concert. For that reason, synthesizers and samplers often go on tour with musicians (Firth 104).

While Björk calls herself a modern folk musician, she works very closely with these forms of edited electronic music. Much of contemporary electronic music is deeply connected to tactile sensations despite the seeming contradiction between the two. If we think of electronic
and dance music itself, while almost purely composed of electronic instruments and noises played back by an audio system, they are made to inspire dancing in public spaces and allude to the sounds of human bodies in contact, particularly in very erotic ways (Sound Unbound 287). Björk’s album Medulla is an excellent example of this overlapping of the machinic and organic. While her work overall is engaged with problems of nature and instinct, she argues that working with electronic music is not a contradiction with her convictions since electricity itself is born of nature (Martin 168). The natural and the artificial, equated to the live performance and the recorded sound, do not have to be viewed as mutually exclusive. Recording artists need not hide their uses of technology in their music in order to claim authenticity, nor should they resort to becoming mere technicians who enslave their creativity to pre-determined functions of the machine they happen to be using. Instead, taking Medulla as an example, it is clear that the artist can incorporate distinct characteristics of technology and humans as equal elements of a finished work.

The goal of Medulla was to create an album entirely from the human voice and sounds that could be made from the human throat. When Björk was going through pre-recorded sounds and the sounds she received from people who responded to her open calls for contributions, she did not simply take the typical vocal sounds and remix them: instead, there were many paths that certain sounds took to arrive at the finished album. A number of the vocal sounds she farmed were inspired by electronic or instrumental sounds. There were instances where Björk took interest in a violin tune and found vocalists to mimic the sounds of the instrument. Equally, she did not want to resort to using a beat box for the rhythm sections of her songs, so she pursued human beat boxes, Rahzel and Dokaka, whose imitation of the drum machine were indistinguishable from the real thing. Other elements, such as the Intuit throat singing of Tagaq
were purely vocal sounds that she found interesting and divergent from common vocal, instrumental, or electronic sounds (Guðmundsdóttir *Inner or Deep*). Throat singing itself was originally a game to imitate sounds in nature however, adding another layer to music as a compilation. Still other sounds were traditionally vocal like Björk singing the lyrics and the Icelandic choir vocalizing behind her. During the editing process, she tried to avoid altering the vocal sounds to the point that they were no longer faintly recognizable as voices but instead recognized as clever copies of electronic sounds. On the other hand she admired many electronic and instrumental sounds that she tried to humanize by reproducing them with a human throat. What results from this process is an almost cyborg music, in which the conflict between human and machine is not resolved, as a consequence of neither completely humanizing machinic sounds nor reducing human sounds to mere input material for an electronic process.

By examining the recording of the music video for “Triumph of a Heart”, we can see the potential complexity of sampling such sounds in music. While the album track itself did also use the beat boxing and scatting of Dokaka and many various vocal and breathing sounds, when making the music video Björk and director Spike Jonze decided to record a portion of the music track for the video at the scene. While a few of the performers in the video were invited, the majority auditioned with their vocal noises. Björk selected participants whose noises seemed compatible with one another to improvise live at the bar where the video was shot (*Triumph of a Heart*). Not only does this vocal and electronic experimentation push to blur divisions between natural and machinic sounds but the blending of a pre-recorded version of “Triumph of a Heart” with an improvised scene in the video obscures the line between the real time performance and the arranged track. Such experimentation seems to take the impact of magnetic tape on musical performance full circle, where the technology no longer simply aims to mimic live performance,
but the live performance is also inspired and modeled after what recorded music can and cannot do.

Balancing the technological and the human is a maneuver that many musicians, both popular and classical, have tried to achieve. Perhaps the first aesthetically significant instance of electronic technology clashing with musical composition or production occurred with the Italian Futurists, who were taken aback by machinic and industrial sounds that continued to overpower their living space. While several musical and visual artists were intrigued by the Futurist artistic agenda, many were disappointed by the actual products of the movement. Edgar Varèse, the French composer, found Futurist music unsatisfying since it merely imitated technological sounds literally (Braun 10) rather than finding innovative ways to recontextualize the industrial sounds Futurists found so inspirational. Painter Pieter Mondrian had a similar opinion about the tepid use of technological sounds in Futurist music, observing: “Though they intended to make music more objective by making it more real, they basically stayed too close to nature. Their music lacked abstractness” (Bijsterveld 127). The content, in this case industrial sounds, cannot be viewed as an independent object to be dropped into place into a predefined context or as a mere tool by which to arrive at a conclusion. Such thinking and practice threatens turning the creative process into routinized forms and actions.

This simplification is exactly what Martin Heidegger fears will befall upon art should technological operations overpower processes of creation and creativity. While art and technology are both considered sites of unveiling for Heidegger, technology differs from art because it has a prescribed goal that orders the world to make it available for humans to use, again the concept of reducing all content as tools. Art on the other hand is an instance of presence that offers up a truth, that is the process of bringing a concept to the surface (Evens 64).
This model instead emphasizes the path necessary to become what it is, in its own way. A more concrete example of the difference between a tool model and a process model is demonstrated, again, in Björk’s Medulla. After harvesting the sounds for the album and heading to the studio to mix them, Björk wanted to avoid killing the momentum and transformative force of a song. In order to do that she tried to make her sound clips less tool-like and more directly experiential, by only allowing one day to mix a song. By limiting the time one could work with the material, the influences of self-doubt or continued editing were decreased. She also did not allow her sound engineer, Mark Stent, to hear any of the clips before coming to the studio on the day they would be editing a song. Since he did not have access to the sounds in advance, he could not study and analyze them but instead had to experience them as fresh and immediate (Guðmundsdóttir Inner or). Even if we go back to Björk’s process of harvesting the sounds, they were not treated fully as tools even though some were picked to mimic or fit with an existing idea for a track. Stent points out that when he got the clips they were not all controlled and recorded with the same tempo, key, or pitch, as they would have been if recorded in a studio. They kept their markers of the lived experience that is inherent in live performance.

As sampling has become commonplace in both popular and art music, the relationship between the musician and sound engineer as well as the responsibilities of both begin to overlap. Hans-Joachim Braun takes note of how sound engineers are becoming more and more responsible for contributing to aesthetic decisions in music (23) and David Toop points out that musicians increasingly stoop down to becoming technicians playing back recorded sound (Sound Unbound 141). Moreover, samplers, synthesizers, and now computers, make mixing music a feasible activity for a much wider audience. Opening the field of musical creation to the public at large undermines the long-standing perception of the artist, writer, or musician as a privileged
master of inspiration and spontaneous creation. Aden Evens argues that the musician can no longer be described as possessing an intuition that the everyman somehow lacks. Instead, the creative process is comprised from a string of sparks and intuitions that are then compiled after the moment of their emergence. While he does not trivialize the challenge of being successful in this view of creative endeavors, he does assert that, despite the difficulty of becoming immersed in inspiration, it is a possible state for nearly anyone to reach (148).

Privileging the artist as endowed with special abilities beyond the reach of the everyman only continues to subordinate the listener into a consumer rather than a producer or collaborator in the creative process. While undermining this privileging can be partly addressed by viewing the creative act as a process, as Gondry does in his Be Kind Rewind Protocol, if society really wants to resolve the divide between the producer and consumer it must address the attitudes and working methods of the various institutions that control the production of music, art, laws, and ideas. For Gondry and filmmaking, the large institutional obstacles are the major movie studios that monopolize contemporary film distribution. For the numerous musicians and DJs who work with sampling and mixing, copyright laws limit their music and often limit the availability of their work to a wide audience due to an unwillingness on the part of recording studios to risk a lawsuit for infringement. Many DJs and musicians with lesser financial means than Björk who sample a large number of other artists simply could not pay for the rights for hundreds of samples. Critics like Daphne Keller and Jonathan Lethem argue that copyright laws have become domineering and overpowering, limiting creative and inventive work and betraying the very purpose of copyright. Lethem argues that the primary goal of copyright is not to reward the creator but encourage progress in the arts and sciences, in fact to offer the product of the creative act as a gift to society (Sound Unbound 42). In contrast, the commercial goals of many of the
institutions that control the distribution of artistic products, such as music albums and films, depend on viewing that product as a consumer good rather than a gift to the community, and use copyright law to uphold this interpretation. If the general public continues to challenge these ideas by making their own videos, posting their own websites, and mixing their own music, traditional institutions will have to respond to and perhaps to collaborate with the public’s needs and demands in order to survive and remain relevant in the twenty-first century.

**Finding Our Footing: Bringing the Music Video to School**

If artists like Björk and Gondry are already bringing together Lukács’ emphasis on hard work and careful determination of the essence of popular aesthetics and Brecht’s call for active participation in play and experiment, why are we still harping on about the domineering control of artistic production by powerful institutions like the recording industry and major film studio? Apparently their efforts to master production and distribution do not completely deter creative endeavors that push beyond making commercially successful artistic products. Well, quite simply, the problem is that while the public increasingly participates in fan communities, remixing music and creating fan vids on their home computer, becoming active members of blogs, and collaborating with gamers across the world to defeat giant crabs in *Final Fantasy*, institutions that create and distribute such media continue to hold to the idea of their buyers as consumers and end-users rather than producers and potential collaborators. Henry Jenkins points out that the blurring of producer and consumer in a culture that increasingly converges various media and commercial venues to create cross-media storytelling, calls us to question what media literacy really is and whether a consumer that is only allowed to watch and not create or express medial experiences is really media literate (170). He argues that while institutional giants create conglomerates to inundate the public with opportunities to consume their product according to their guidelines determined by corporate interests, grass-root communities of production and
consumption are coming out of the woodwork via online forums and home-based, amateur films and music videos. Opening up the consumer product to a field in which the public can actually interact with, alter, or create works themselves is becoming more common as consumers’ – *prosumers* in Jenkins’s model – desire for recognition and collaboration pushes beyond watching alternate endings of blockbuster DVD releases. As Gondry is petitioning people to create their own entertainment and stop privileging major film studios and their products, and Björk is invested in bringing novelty and experimentation to popular music because popular music is where the public’s interest is most expressed, more and more people are following their lead turning medial, social, and educational experiences into one that is based on making and collaborating rather than consuming and analyzing.

While this significant compromise is continuing to develop within corporate institutions such as the record company or film studio at a slow and mildly responsive pace, academic environments and especially the university resist compromising existing models of teaching, evaluation, and marks of academic rigor. Watching students come to class with formulaic responses and often uninspired assigned work while they are busy outside the classroom choreographing performances or editing their own film on their laptops makes many educators painfully aware of how educational institutions are becoming increasingly irrelevant to students who are effectively discouraged from incorporating their creative intuitions in their academic work and thus unable to connect that work to some personal or social significance. While the overall objective of this study is to show how academic and especially literary works have often united experimentation and tradition and have actively crossed boundaries between disciplines from visual arts, film, and music without betraying its cornerstone in narrative and rhetoric, it also aims to draw out *a method of thinking through creative and collaborative models that*
actually produce media artifacts that the humanities regard as the mark and expression of humans and their communal existence. While the academic community is adept at encouraging Lukács’s model of careful and in depth study, it can no longer ignore nor does it benefit from ostracizing creative and artistic processes of making rather than finding knowledge.

The reasons I turn to Björk as a potential example on which the academy might model its teaching and production are threefold. First, the Björk and the music video genre are popular because the public sees personal and social relevance in their forms and message. While the academy should not see popular culture as a competitor for students’ attention, it should take note that cognitive skills that are increasingly in demand in our new media environment are not a threat to our institution but a call to reevaluate our contributions to collective knowledge. Literary scholars and rhetoricians have honed the skills of argumentation, explication, and analysis, but what communicative and community building skills can they offer to the student of the twenty-first century, armed with the personal computer, Internet, and camcorder? Second, music video specifically embodies how the twenty-first century subject interacts with a highly mediated culture. In defending music videos as an art representative of our present cultural situation, Steve Weiss and Neil Feineman state:

The complaints that videos favor short attention spans, value style over substance, and rely on montage rather than on traditional character development and narrative also say less about video than they do about the times. Videos may indeed embody these values, but you could say the same thing about almost everything on the screen and stage, or even about many books, newspapers, and magazines. Attention spans have gotten shorter and, more sensational. (23)

Instead of dismissing popular media and popular genres as shallow or fleeting or lacking in critical insight in comparison to academic models of thought, why not try to incorporate productive elements of popular cultural products into a contemporary rhetoric that will empower students in the academy to become active participants in a mediated society?
Finally, Björk’s work and the genre of music video itself has provided a space for experimentation within the mainstream by using the distribution power of established institutions and mass media while divorcing itself from becoming pure commodity enslaved by traditional musical or filmic tropes. While Lev Manovich does address the music video as a model and marker of new media aesthetics, he does recognize it as a medium with the potential to break from compiling as a tool and see it as a process, observing: “music videos often incorporate narratives within them but are not linear narratives from start to finish, they rely on film (or video) images but change them beyond the norms of traditional cinematic realism” (310). Similarly, other scholars and commentators of music video such as Matt Hanson and Carol Vernallis, point out that the music video is a liberating genre for directors who can experiment with narrative, aesthetic, visual, and auditory elements much more than with feature films and commercials that are more closely controlled and connected to strong corporate interests.

In turning to the examples of Björk and experimental pop music and Michel Gondry and music video, we have found three major tropes responsible for the popularity and social significance of their work: (1) the source of the creative act rises up from instinct and emotion rather than intellect, (2) the process of the creative act is collaborative and based in a relationship with the community, and (3) the product of the creative act is an assemblage of existing elements, reworked into new and provocative combinations. That product is first and foremost a gift to society. The following three chapters will address each trope individually in reverse order. In trying to incorporate these elements into the academy and particularly literary studies, we have to be careful not to let these three tropes become merely a model for producing a form, or of a style to lay over our existing framework or – a cookie-cutter worksheet that will oversimplify the joining of analysis and experience. To avoid Heidegger’s fear of art falling
victim to our modern use of technology as a means of production alone, as well as Björk’s concern for the artistic stagnation of popular musical practice and the exclusivity of avant-garde composition, we have to remember that what we are trying to encourage is a rhetoric that is available to, understandable by, and feasibly practiced by the public at large, in a way that is relevant to their personal and social situations, and reliant on an experience of community.

If we turn to the first explosion of modern experimentation with mass media, the historic avant-garde, we find that their solution for this was the process of collage and montage. While this process has been adopted, and as David Banash argues, inspired by commercial interests and largely absorbed into new media aesthetics, its impact and continued relevance attest to the growing acceptance of seeing a finished product as not only a compilation of assembled elements, but itself a readymade available for further reappropriation. If we can view collage as a means rather than an end, let us then look back on the potential of collage particularly in literature where is must face its supposed opposite, narrative.
CHAPTER 2
THE PROTEAN PRODUCT

I find it nearly impossible free ice to write about jeepaxle my work. The concept I plantatarium struggle to deal with ketchup is opposed to the logical continuity lift tab inherent in language horses and communication. My fascination with images open 24 hrs. is based on the complex interlocking of disparate visual facts heated pool that have no respect for grammar.

--Robert Rauschenberg

Without a doubt, collage has become a crucial element, if not the cornerstone, of many a creative endeavor of the twentieth century. Belaboring this point would digress from our goal of mapping a rhetoric for the twenty-first century, as would be a historical treatment of the rise and various uses and adaptations of collage in visual, textual, and aural media. However, there are two characteristics of collage, its relational organization and its assumption of meaning lying in action or process, which should be accentuated here before we can move beyond treating it as an aesthetic style.

Because collage has been used by the visual arts, cinema, music, and literary arts, its intentions and specific methods can vary greatly in different conditions of use. Under this large umbrella one could find Jean Arp’s random arrangement of torn papers as well as George Braque’s first use of wood grain wallpaper to represent a table. Beside these now canonized works one may also include Björk’s album Medulla and perhaps even the magnetic poetry set lying dormant on your refrigerator. Let us be clear about the minimum requirements of a collage and its basic character before we venture too far into specifics. While its precise definition is still debated, at its core, collage requires a juxtaposition of heterogeneous objects. Collage orders these heterogeneous objects through association, relation, or even pure chance but it does not order these objects in a logical, syntactical, or causal way as does representational art or traditional narrative. With that being said, collage privileges the act of gathering and combining elements rather than ordering those elements.
This process of combination rejects the notion of a united, finished, and complete object since anything can be remixed upon disassembly without end. Collage is in fact a nominalization in French and hence cannot escape its verb form, “coller”. Collage carries with it the implication of an action first and is only thereafter reduced to a bastard form of an object. Viewing collage in this way, as an action, rather than an object, is basic to its practices. Many of the early avant-garde movements including Dadaism, Surrealism, and Futurism, saw much of their collage work as primers or games to invigorate their creative potential and escape effect of authorial intention or reified self-expression. In this case, collage is an activity to encourage creativity more than it is a definitive product. After discussing the curious overlapping of the machine and the human voice in Björk’s album Medulla, the phenomenon of sampling in popular music, and the resulting conflict of interest between the recording artist and copyright law, here we shall expand on these contemporary concepts by turning to their precursors and the original conflict between the urge to gather (collage) and the urge to order (narrative).

Medulla is only one of a number of examples of collage and narrative melding into one another but its engagement with avant-garde and popular forms is what makes it exemplary. Lev Manovich outlines a very concise theory of the relationship between the supposed oppositions between gathering and ordering in his Language of New Media, arguing that a key characteristic of new media is its database logic. He takes time to establish the oppositional relationship between the database and the narrative as organizing structures only to conclude that even those new media objects that appear in a narrative structure are at their core, databases. For new media objects, narratives are only sets of linked elements that are ultimately stored in the database, emphasizing the fragmentary over the unitary. Again, this is the situation of new media. However, databases are useless if their structure is only random since they collect specific
information and hence have some sort of aim or theme that determines selection into the database. For Manovich, the emphasis on either narrative or database will alternate, depending on the social and cultural environment of an era. He describes the syntagm as a linear combination of signs resulting in a narrative and the paradigm as a set of related elements resulting in a database or collage. The syntagm and paradigm are linked to one another as the subject and ground of an image are interrelated. Should you take Steve Weisstein’s *Goblet Illusion*, viewing the image as one goblet or two head profiles is a question of privileging either the subject or the ground as the first encounter. Manovich along with several others, notice the same act of teetering between narrative and database.

This chapter will take these basic concepts of collage and their relation to narrative to examine the shifting emphasis in literature from narrative to collage by probing the working methods of William Burroughs’ cut-up. Alongside this discussion of Burroughs’ work of the late 1950s and the 1960s we will also collide with the work of Robert Rauschenberg. As models of narrative and collage overlap and various media borrow from one another, discussing one medium in isolation becomes increasingly difficult as well as inapplicable, both of these figures provide a compelling example of the potential for their variations of collage to become activities that empower the everyman to realize the full potential of the new media subject. Why this new media subject arose, how the new media subject acts, and whom the new media subject is will unfold as we look deeper at Burroughs and Rauschenberg who sat on the artistic fulcrum between narrative and collage.

**Why The Cut-up Method?**

While in many cases William Burroughs’s reputation may precede any discussion of his *oeuvre*, his work is no less influential. Though Barry Miles comments in 1993 that Burroughs has had more of an impact on popular culture than literature, this is becoming less the case as the
consequence of the increased interest in electronic literature, experimental novels such as Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* and *Only Revolutions*, or Christian Bök’s *Eunoia*. Regardless, it is hard to escape the effect that Burroughs has had, especially on music and music videos. Many punk musicians regard Burroughs as their artistic godfather and adopted dissonance as a way to replicate the effects of cut-up in their music (Caveney 137). Even Laurie Anderson took up Burroughs’s tenant that “language is a virus” and used the notion in her lyrics of *United States*. His cut-up method also inspired the work of director Gus Van Sant, Rolling Stone Mick Jagger, and artist Tom Phillips (Murphy *Wising Up the Marks* 140, 203). Of particular interest is the impact Burroughs’s methods have had on sampling in hip-hop, punk, techno, DJ led dance, and rap music as well as an aesthetic that provides the backbone for the genre of music video. Timothy Murphy and David Schneider cite Burroughs’s experiments with tape recorders, especially his methods of inching and drop in, as early maneuvers that evolved into scratching and sampling (147). Beyond recording practices of popular and experimental music, Burroughs’s literary and video work has also been marked as the antecedent of music video. Murphy argues that Burroughs’s collaboration with Anthony Balch in particular, paved the road for “the entire MTV video aesthetic of rapid, narratively discontinuous cuts synchronized to an apparently unrelated soundtrack” (215). Though Murphy does point out that many vocal and performance artists are unfamiliar with Burroughs’s work, from a critical standpoint, it is hard to deny a particular tradition in musical, video, and literary experimentation that springs from the work of earlier pioneers, including Burroughs.

That such a number and variety of people were inspired by Burroughs’s cut-up is a testament to its success despite the fact that many critics and Burroughs himself recognized important limits to the method and its reception. Mike Kelley writes his own cut-up critique of
the works inspired by Burroughs as a way to highlight the relative conservatism in popular music today compared to Burroughs’s radical intentions for the cut-up. Kelley’s cut-up also argues that the institutional and academic adopts of the method is but an underhanded ways to neutralize the revolutionary potential of cut-up (23). On the other hand, Schneiderman posits that viewing the cut-up as still effectively resistant is a trite academic perspective that ignores “mass culture’s ability to absorb innovation” (147-8). As his career continued, Burroughs progressively used cut-up in a less prominent way as the spread of amateur cut-up projects quickly exemplified its limits and difficulties of skillfully implementing its methods and aims. How then can we view cut-up as a type of collage that is supposed to be the tool of the everyman to assist navigation through an increasingly dense media environment?

First and foremost, we have to remember – and this is worth repeating – that collage, like its extension in cut-up, is not an object, a complete product but a process or method. In this mode we can look at cut-up as a way for the new media subject to unfold knowledge not by searching for already complete models – that is, copying the style of Burroughs’s cut-up – but by making new knowledge through adopting the **attitude** of the cut-up process in order to discover our own adaptations or methods. When the artist Brion Gysin, a life-long collaborator of Burroughs, revealed his accidental discovery of cut-up newspapers, Burroughs excitedly tells Allen Ginsberg that he has found a new way to write. He describes the cut-up as a game whose goal is to make the player lose what he or she has and avoid being stuck with “someone else’s rusty load of continuity” (Harris *William Burroughs* 8). Burroughs later found that the cut-up was a useful way to think about organizing the massive amounts of writing he had compiled over several years. Cut-up enacted mechanically the spatial juxtaposition that he used in *Naked Lunch* to submit chronology and identity to a position that compromised its integrity. Burroughs goes as
far as to posit that the goal of cut-up is to break down Aristotelian categorical thinking that entrenches humans in either/or constructions of thought. He saw this decisive perspective as severely limiting to human knowledge especially since he believed that the interests of art and science were increasingly overlapped in modern fiction. With science more interested in creativity and the arts in scientific methods, categorical thinking only inhibits progress in truly interdisciplinary work (Burroughs *The Third Mind* 5-7).

**Nullifying Aristotle: Disengaging Control**

Burroughs adopted cut-up in order to undermine a powerful nemesis, the artistic status quo. In general Burroughs saw himself as a writer of addiction. His concept of addiction did not simply include drug addiction but extended to a metaphor for a power that can control and discipline the subject to such a degree that the subject no longer senses his or her own consciousness or is able to feel. Such alienated subjects become blind followers that do not question the image of reality that those in power forward as truth (Burroughs “My Purpose” 266). He believed that one of the most powerful tools for controlling human thought is language, since its penchant for logical and syntactical order conditions subjects to certain configurations of words or representations – hence his insistence on language’s viral character. As their environment becomes more predictable, so too the subjects become predictable if not automatic.

The cut-up functions as one method to chip away at the problem of control in human society. For Burroughs, the forces at work in society, the upheld conventions, morals, or codes of conduct, discipline subjects and manipulate their awareness. This manipulation is not limited to advertising and marketing, which are perhaps less of a concern for Burroughs, but the very cognitive abilities of humans, by convincing them that dominant interpretations of reality are singular and true (Punday “Word Dust” 44-5). In that case, upholding the status quo dooms the subject to a life of repetition, a kind of lip-syncing of the dominant view of reality. Burroughs
calls these dominant views pre-recordings to highlight that thoughts such as “homosexuality is unnatural”, “hierarchy results in order”, or “copyright is to protect the author’s private property” are only viewpoints that we have been conditioned to uphold as self-evidently true. Beyond the nature of pre-recordings to limit independent thought and escape social conditioning, Burroughs sees the very nature of language as distracting and confusing. He states in his essay “Technology of Writing” that since words are abstract and often not attached to a material or physical referent, their meaning is constantly changing and always debatable. For Burroughs, debating abstractions like the nature of fascism is an inhibitor of genuine productive and creative activity. He goes as far as to say, “All arguments stem from confusion, and all arguments are a waste of time unless your purpose is to cause confusion and waste time” (Burroughs The Adding 35). It is this abstract and intangible nature of language that Burroughs cites as the reason that communication is overly complex. Burroughs explains that the root of this problem is Aristotelian either/or thinking whose concern lies in correctness and proper categorization to order reality. Instead Burroughs states that these categorical divisions, like that between intellectual and emotional processes, are nonsense since these processes are simultaneous. He points out that such divisions between intellect and instinct do not exist in our nervous system or in the visible universe, showing any such division as an arbitrary approximation of function that has little to do with realism on a biological or physical level (Burroughs, Conversations 150). A solution to this problem would not advocate, for instance, instinct over intellect, but would leave this either/or model of thought behind. In fact it is not a solution since it does not advocate solving or neutralizing a problem but maintaining a conflict and dynamism. In this case, Burroughs replaces the “or” for “and” dodging accuracy for accumulation (Odier 200). Burroughs posits the cut-up
as a potential method that does not solve but opens a conflict to its surroundings and narrative convention.

But if the cut-up is intended to undermine conventional narrative as the accepted method of representing reality, what is the fate of narrative itself? Burroughs’s cut-up is not a revolutionary usurping of narrative convention but a method to accentuate its constraints and extend narrative by creating a web of reading and writing that is not confined by simple causality and unity (Burroughs *The Third Mind* 6). Throughout his interviews and own writings on cut-up as a method or tool for the writer, he never discounts or calls for the destruction of narrative. His work is not purely reactionary to tradition or celebratory of technology, but aims to maintain awareness of the manipulable nature of representation and reality that has both the ability to subjugate or liberate depending on the intents of its user. Burroughs in no way demonizes narrative; he argues that there is no replacing narrative since a reader wants a story (Burroughs *Conversations* 123). Readers are not willing to read pure experimental writing since the written word as a medium centralizes a linear trajectory that explicates the human experience through time and space. Without narrative, the reader finds no point in reading. This is no surprise since a media experience, like a lived experience, comes with clear expectations and if you diverge from those expectations; the original intention must still be recognizable if you expect your reader to follow along. For instance, if we return to Björk’s *Medulla*, her experiments with bodily noises does not overpower the intentions or recognizable qualities of popular music. In the tracks of *Medulla* we hear both the human voice and the technological manipulations as interwoven into an aggregate in which bodily sounds and electronic or instrumental noises are not separable. The organic and technological simultaneously show the limits and overlaps of their character in this musical album. Burroughs’s cut-up similarly positions itself next to, within, and around
narrative, since pure cut-up loses its influence if it has no counterpoint. When revisiting the novels of the Nova Trilogy, Burroughs tried to balance the scale by including more clear narrative content, which the cut-up could be seen in relation to. Homogeneity, whether it teeters on the side of narration or experimentation, attention to illusion or to material structure, is equally static.

Updating the written form is an agenda that many 20th century innovators took under their wing. It was not just Burroughs that argued that writing needed to catch up with the visual arts in order to offer alternate means of representing an increasingly technological and mediated culture. Bauhaus artist László Moholy, and his student Josef Albers posit that the printed book is inconsistent with the modern need to read almost instantaneously and its archaic desire to maintain grammatical structures like complete sentences as a necessity make it less and less applicable to urban life in the 20th century. Moholy went as far as to say that even philosophical texts will be printed like American magazines in the near future (Schwartz 408). The printed book, and particularly the novel, perpetuate a certain idea of identity as a determinable and unified result of a subject’s ordered experiences. This is why Burroughs does not call his books novels since none of his books entertain the idea of causality and finitude but fold into one another to the point that critics argue that the books of the Nova Trilogy are in fact only one book divided or reiterated into three physically separated texts (Lydenberg 52). In a similar vein, Walter Benjamin chooses Sergei Tretiakov as an exemplary writer for his time. Though he is a journalist and propagandists, Benjamin sees Tretiakov’s position and work as an implication that writers and literary critics “should rethink our notion of literary forms or genres in line with the given techniques of our current situation, so that we may arrive at the forms of expression to which literary energies should be applied today” (Benjamin “The Author as Producer” 86).
Updating and expanding narrative is closer to Burroughs’ intention with cut-up. He argues that cut-up more realistically represents the lived experience of the 20th century by enacting the machinic and chaotic overflow of undifferentiated information that an ordered narrative disciplines into a clear progression of scenes in logical and causal relationships (Burroughs Conversations 93).

**Redefining Power: Non-Power and Forcework**

With that said, we cannot approach the cut-up method from the perspective of classical rhetoric, with its either/or thinking and desire to categorize and determine phenomena. We must adopt another model of power relations and functions. As with cut-up, there is no need to start from scratch to locate such a model as many scholars have already charted observations as to the nature of power in relation to technology and commodity. Because cut-up arises from avant-garde collage, we will take Krzysztof Ziarek’s book, *The Force of Art* and its model of non-power as a fair description of how creative activities aligned with the aspirations of the historical avant-garde resist succumbing to methods of control by avoiding production as the underlying motivator of technology. For Ziarek, art is not powerful or powerless because it works outside of the economy of power and domination. Art after aesthetics cannot be seen as purely an object because it actually functions as a force field with dynamic and transformative potential to rework existing relations within the social, political, economic, and cultural. As an alternative to domination and production, art after aesthetics practices *aphesis* in order to transform. Aphesis is a letting go that neither denies nor complies with power. For Ziarek, the force of art lies in its power to transform and is careful to state that art is not an escape from the real world but that art “instantiates the ‘same’ (and the only) world ‘otherwise’” (42). The increasing challenge for art in modernity, he argues, is the task of differentiating itself from technology and commodity, of not being disciplined by order and control. While art and technology both unfold and reveal,
technology does so in order to discipline forces into usable tools of the socio-political goals of a dominant party or perspective. Art’s force must be both technic and poeitic and thus cannot be purely about domination or order. Technology, on the other hand, tries to regularize and equalize difference to facilitate production. For art, technology must necessarily be more than a pure and reductive technoscience. As art must move beyond production to escape technoscience, it must also transcend the idea of the object to evade pure commodity.

Art does this by refusing to function in the way that society prescribes for it. Ziarek posits Marcel Duchamp’s readymades as useful examples of non-commodity art because they simultaneously show aesthetic qualities while divorcing the object from its function. By avoiding the disciplinary function of technology and commodity, art moves away from a model of production towards one of transformation. The major difference between these models is the actions they encourage. While the model of production encourages the use of technology to create consumable commodities that forward a logic of perpetual increase, of continuing along an established and determined trajectory as on a conveyor belt, the model of transformation encourages the viewing of technology and commodity as intertwined and opened in their relationship to one another. Technology does not create commodity in a causal relationship but technology and commodity feed off of one another through a process of becoming. This model of transformation operates upon a logic of enhancement, augmenting the potential of technology and commodity ad infinitum.

Ziarek cites Frantz Fanon’s idea of l’homme actionel. This homme actionel is defined by a tension of an opening that does not resolve itself, essentially a constant questioning rather than a production of answers that allows one to invent oneself. This homme actionel is not interested in the model of production but of transformation, of enhancing and augmenting an idea of self by
opening himself to his experiences and interactions, exposing the essentially vulnerable and unstable nature of selfhood. With the attitude of generally open experimentation, divisions between genres and disciplines only limit the potential of enhancement and encourage production. In a similar way, Robert Rauschenberg chose to experiment with live performance and dance as a part of, not a diversion from, of his artistic oeuvre. In his discussion of the significance of Rauschenberg’s performance work, Branden Joseph mentions the centrality of Antoine Artaud’s argument for the convergence of art and life. For Artaud, art cannot reiterate and repeat definitions but must mobilize force as life does. If we continue to reiterate and repeat over and again Artaud says that we will “remain mere recording devices” (Joseph 257).

Curiously, Burroughs articulates the same criticism of the American middle class, calling them walking tape recorders, more dead than alive (Conversations 35).

*L’homme actionel* is not just an inquisitive subject but figures as an alternative to outright revolt. Ziarek calls attention to *l’homme actionel* as a way for political struggle to actually depart from models of production. For instance, usurping the present party or individual in control of a group only to be replaced by another party or individual will result in change but maintains the same economy of power. Proliferating the figure of *l’homme actionel* enacts a more radical change than simply replacing one’s leader by redefining the required actions of the subject from compliance to questioning. Similarly, the work of Rauschenberg is not apolitical because it refuses to address the politics of John F. Kennedy or the space race between the Soviet Union and the United States. Instead, his work is resistant by “opening the processes of perception and interpretation to other voices and points of view” (Joseph 67). Instead of explicitly criticizing American policies during the Cold War, Rauschenberg’s work is more interested in highlighting the human relationships behind dogmatic political loggerheads. Burroughs also states that
overemphasizing political objectives in one’s art will limit creative potential turning the writer or artist into a polemicist. Burroughs sees politics as a dead end, yet another futile argument that entrenches people in confusion (Odier 56). We cannot rely on technology to save humans from this confusion. As Burroughs points out, these technologies are controlled by the intentions of those in power. Technology is not the problem or the solution but instead we have to turn to redefining intentions of its uses, steering it away from disciplining the subject and proliferating the model of power and its support of increase over enhancement. In fact, Rauschenberg saw technology as the new nature and asserted that human interactions with machines would define the modern era. Rather than escaping or recoiling from technology, he argued that humans would have to take up an active and responsible involvement with the technological world (Mattison 125). He feared that humans were withdrawing from such an involvement since they were more comfortable divorcing any representation from their own feelings and viewing them as representations, as fixed images of someone else’s life and emotions (Joseph 251). Similarly, Burroughs points out that the success of a bestseller depends on the general public embracing the text. In order to create such an acceptable text, the writer could not scare, puzzle, or subject the reader to unpleasant experiences (*The Adding Machine* 22), essentially avoid putting readers in a position that challenges or confronts their understanding of reality. With the motives and rational for the necessity of change established for the narrative as a model of control and the resulting new media subject, we then must move on to how this can actually be accomplished.

**How Does Cut-up Enact Non-Power?**

As collage is an action rather than a product, so too is the cut-up. Though Burroughs was adamant about forwarding the cut-up as something for people to do rather than theorize, enacting cut-up and maintaining its intentions is more complex than merely cutting a page of text in half twice and rearranging the four pieces. For cut-up to work outside a model of production towards
one of enhancement, it is clear that the goal of cut-up is not to have everyone copy Burroughs’s methods slavishly. This is merely a simplistic jab at positing cut-up as a revolution, of replacing leadership rather than becoming *l’homme actionel*. While Burroughs urges his readers, including Allen Ginsberg, to just do cut-up rather than talk about it, I would like to bring a bit of nuance to his imperative. At the very core of Burroughs’s plea is the idea of learning or experiencing through the act of doing rather than sitting on the sidelines observing the product itself. With that in mind, I have found that emphasizing Burroughs’s primary literary works or the criticisms of his writing are not of central interest in charting the new media subject, though they are important insights. Instead viewing the creative process in action of both Burroughs and Rauschenberg shows others the attitude required to make knowledge outside of the model of production, of bringing the new media subject to the role of *l’homme actionel*.

Burroughs posits that the function of any creative endeavor is to make people aware of what they already know but don’t think they know (Burroughs “An Interview” 12). If we are not supposed to adopt the cut-up as a style but rather as a method to call attention to what we don’t know that we know, we are not just encouraging inquisitiveness but an active and critical manipulation of all available resources which the new media subject can obtain. The aim of this process of collection and manipulation is to expose reality as a construction and media as tools to empower the new media subject in contributing rather than simply consuming representations of reality, that is, estranging and thus exposing spectacle as dissimilar to reality. This aim resonates with the objectives of Duchamp’s bachelor machine. With Burroughs and Rauschenberg’s interest in indirect critique when approaching politics, it is no surprise that their work is often described as or aligned with the concept of the bachelor machine.
Critical and historical discussions of Duchamp’s idea of the bachelor machine are rather complex and too specific to his oeuvre but for our purposes, we will concentrate on the bachelor machine as a mechanism, like collage, that the new media subject uses to encourage creative activity and critical thought in order to harvest a non-Aristotelian attitude towards knowledge making. Jean-François Lyotard provides an excellent description of how a bachelor machine functions in his book, *Duchamp’s TRANS/formers*. To begin, the bachelor machine combats the urge to unify, determine, and catalogue by positing itself as a machine that is incomprehensible and nonfunctional. Lyotard mentions that Duchamp created several drawings of the machine represented in *Large Glass* but the technical drawings are void of practical mechanical concerns such as how to input material in the machine, how various machines are configured to work together, and how products are transported. The bachelor machine, in effect, cannot be built or realized. Similarly, we notice that Burroughs’s cut-up works shift scenes rapidly and excise many temporal markers so that a chronological interpretation of the narrative tidbits we get is impossible. By cutting out such markers as “by now” or “meanwhile” the reader loses sense of the sentence and takes note of the severe dependence he or she has on language in order to map reality (Lyndenberg 66). We cannot order events but are constantly jarred by a series of scenes and characters whose motives, objectives, and contexts are unstable.

In Burroughs’s fiction, this instability is necessary in order to avoid the global crisis of nova, the complete destruction of the earth caused by constant petty conflict between incompatible people. The duty of the nova police is to ensure that nova does not happen by avoiding both petty conflict and its resolution in order to pay attention to their surroundings and situation. In *The Ticket that Exploded*, the District Supervisor explains to Mr. Lee, a new recruit to the nova police, “You will receive your instructions in many ways. From books, street signs,
films, in some cases from agents who purport to be and may actually be members of the organization. There is no certainty. Those who need certainty are of no interest to this department” (Burroughs *The Ticket* 10). In the place of clarity and accuracy, the nova police must work with intuitions and observations from their environment, just as Duchamp’s drawing of his bachelor machine does not make clear how the bachelor transports his products to the bride and why that product is chocolate milk. This instability does not mean incomprehensibility. Burroughs observes often that his writing is not about nonsense or attempting to evade meaning but to bring writing to the limits of narrative.

In this context, the bachelor machine becomes the modus operandi of the new media subject whose aim is to enact a system of non-power that Ziarek outlines. In fact, Lyotard even argues that art does not exist as an object but only as transformations or redistributions of power. For Lyotard art as transformer enacts a way of seeing that has a machinic quality, calling attention to Duchamp’s argument that we are interested in the machinic and mechanical because the nonsense of pure logic shows the vulnerability of human feeling (Lyotard 13). In the end, the point of Duchamp’s work appears to lie in creating machines that are unresolved, disorienting, and mirrorish.

Bachelor machines are not meant to solve a problem or unify an explanation but to maintain an and/or relationship that holds onto mystery. In order to create something that is mirrorish, one must escape the dependence of a binary relationship by hinging another dimension to spectacle, revealing its construction. For instance, an object and its reflection in a mirror still exist as a dependent binary; they are pure spectacle. If a second mirror is introduced as a hinge to reflect the actions of the first mirror and the object, you add a dimension to the scene and create a dissimilar occurrence (Lyotard 53). Both Burroughs and Rauschenberg create machines that
avoid a solution in order to posit multiple possibilities. Burroughs forwards the idea of the writing machine, essentially a beginners editing studio comprised of a typewriter and scissors, that demands a plurality of readings, writings, and functions. With the cut-up as its process, the writing machine no longer has a single use, making the typewriter not only a business machine for typing memos and reports but also an entryway to breaking such a corporate model of production by dismembering and rearranging meaning, amplifying human techniques and interactions with their machines. Branden Joseph describes Rauschenberg’s *Mud Muse* as a bachelor machine that the artist meant to place within corporate culture to expose industry’s wastefulness. *Mud Muse* consists of a large vat of driller’s mud that is supposed to bubble in response to sounds of the environment but the audio equipment does not work. Instead the viewer encounters the remnants of a machine, a vat of mud and a computer tower that produce nothing. By working with Teledyne Corporation on this project, Rauschenberg’s bachelor machine contributes to the critique of the corporation as wasteful, irresponsible, and nonproductive by funding Rauschenberg’s massive inoperable machine. By using a computer, Rauschenberg also exposed technology as not only something to learn from but something to experience, to encounter with the senses (Joseph 277).

Just as Duchamp’s machines are not meant to solve problems, they equally do not aim at interpreting a situation. Duchamp fears mimesis, simulation, and repetition since the dissimilarity he seeks is created by chance and a suspended state of explanation (Lyotard 84). In order to maintain the and/or relationship and the mystery of the mirrorish we have to play with description rather than confront it and observe instruction rather than determine it (Lyotard 122-23) just as Burroughs and Rauschenberg avoid falling into polemics by creating bachelor machines with their creative endeavors rather than directly addressing the political. As the
bachelor machine creates mirrorish situations through a tripartite, Burroughs forwards a similar configuration that results when two subjectivities work together forming a third subjectivity, the third mind. The third element of the bachelor machine exposes the spectacle behind the binary while the *third mind* works to eliminate authorial intent and expression along with the divisions between the subject and their surroundings, or between disciplines (Burroughs *The Third Mind*).

For Lyotard, Duchamp, Burroughs, and Rauschenberg, creating effective forceworks depends on the creation of a hinge, an additional dimension that exposes spectacle and releases the illusion of control over dimension, unity and explanation. For Burroughs in particular, cut-up, like collage and montage before it, is a very explicit way to show that a representation is first a compilation that is not given but crafted by a director, artist, writer, fascist leader, or American President. By using the cut-up to expose reality as construction, Burroughs tries to show his readers that they can be active participants in crafting their own reality. The root of this call to action lies in Burroughs’s disappointment with the passive complacency of the middle class and their unwillingness to be challenged or terrorized. Lyotard argues for the need to create hinges between the unknown and the known, the question and the answer, in order to give mystery and mysticism a place (Lyotard 198-9). Burroughs and Rauschenberg effectively create such hinges through two major rhetorical moves, revealing media and genres as tangible constructions and folding in their own environment into their works.

**Making Media Tangible**

The initial interest of both Burroughs and Gysin in their early experiments with cut-up was the tangibility that cutting words from their context, author, and signifying function lent to the writer. Instead of being enslaved into reproducing meaning in semantic and syntactical ways, the cut-up allowed for chance, depersonalization, and experimentation that other arts, like visual art or music, did not have to struggle with as much, being unburdened by the expectations of
language. Cut-up is not meant to serve as a replacement but a revelation of the illusionistic goals of media such as the 19th century novel or the blockbuster film. The goal of such disruptions is to draw attention to the constructed nature of pre-recordings, of the sense of reality that we are conditioned to conform ourselves (Miles, Barry 181). Similar rhetorical moves are common throughout art history in artists’s efforts to draw attention to the fact that paintings are not real but crafted illusions that address in some way the conditions of their reception. The anamorphic skull of Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* shows the clever play of dimensions necessary for illusionistic painting to defy the dominant perspective and representation of space. René Magritte’s *La trahison des images*’s visual pun of painting a realistic representation of a smoking pipe on a white background and including the phrase “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” highlights that the pipe is only paint and not in fact a pipe. While Holbein and Magritte centralize such breaks in visual illusions, Burroughs cracks conventions of narrative by breaking from chronology, causality, and a unified protagonist. Cut-up as disruption becomes a method to eliminate automatic responses and draw attention to the potential of manipulation to alter perspectives on reality as well as expose the pre-recording as only one in an infinite number of assemblages that could represent a person’s lived experience, his or her medial reality. By usurping conventional narrative, Burroughs’s cut-up liberates the reader from expectation and predictability.

The trick to all of these methods of estrangement or disruption, be it a sign of the *memento mori*, a wry pun on visual-verbal distinction, or cut-up, is that they cannot be separated from the illusion they undermine. While they appear to be contradictory they are in fact collaborative, working against one another to reveal their own nature, as the old adage “women, can’t live with them and can’t live without them”. Perhaps in a less patronizing way, cut-up cannot live with or without narrative and vice versa. For Burroughs, if cut-up lived alone it would be like any other
experimental writing project taken to the extreme – irrelevant. Burroughs thus does not align himself with Tristan Tzara because the Dadaist artist, like many of his colleagues, divorced themselves completely from the art world and centered their art on pure nonsense rather than reinvesting their experimentalism into the models and institutions that uphold convention, such as the art gallery or museum. For Burroughs, purely experimental writing, such as *Finnegan’s Wake*, exhausts itself by venturing too far and thus excludes other available options for estrangement (Harris “Cut-Up Closure” 257). Should conventional illusionist narrative live alone it risks falling into spectacle which in turn can easily conceal injustices. Daniel Punday, for example, takes Disneyland as an example of this extreme multi-media illusionism to justify the significance of Burroughs’s cut-up. By creating a seamless environment that collapses television, film, and its physical location into a total phenomenon, Disneyland discourages any challenges to its constructed nature and encourages its visitors to feel completely transported. The average visitor rarely notices cracks in this Disneyland phenomenon such as being invited backstage to see the broken bobsleds and teacups, overhearing the employee in little France talk about her one night stand, witnessing a suicide (“Man Commits Suicide”), or watching the Disneyland hotel employees protest in character costumes against benefit reductions in paid sick days and health coverage (“Peter Pan”).

Many have commented on the collaborative relationship between methods of illusion and methods of estrangement. As we saw in the case of Manovich’s opposition of narrative and database, Angela Ndalianis similarly argues that Baroque concepts of massive, spectacular, and complex structures independent of narrative alternate with Classicism’s emphasis on narrative, order, and categorical thinking. In the same vein, Leo Steinberg posits the works of the Masters of Illusion and the Modernists are simply a variation of iteration rather than complete opposites.
For Steinberg, the difference between the Master of Illusion and the Modernist is not whether each accentuates illusionism or the surface of the canvas, but in which of these elements is perceived first, as both are present at all times (Steinberg 13). Even Lettrist Isidore Isou forwards a model of alternating aesthetic motives in the *amplique* and *ciselant* stages of art where the first is concerned with compiling more and more complex stories and the second in examining or reflecting on the process and goals of art (Vicas 384-5). Whichever model one chooses to narrow in on, the general message of all of these cases is extraordinarily similar: find a – perhaps incongruent – balance between elements that appear to be opposites to take full advantage of all human capabilities by allowing the differences to converse with one another rather than resolve or argue.

While the cut-up does generate evidence that medial conventions of reality are constructions and representations, another consequence of implementing this method is discovering the materiality of language itself, the building blocks of these constructions of reality. The cut-up seems revolutionary to Burroughs because it brings writing closer to painting by making the medium of the writer more tangible and haptic. By cutting up a text, its syntax, linearity, and meaning are compromised and we see the word as not simply a vessel of meaning but a concrete physical manifestation. For Burroughs, the word is an image typed onto a page and the ability to move that word freely allows the word to be seen as more than one piece of a linear puzzle. The word in cut-up can move and blend with other words regardless of its placement in a certain sentence, chapter, book, language, and so forth just as paint could intermingle with any other paint on a canvas. Breaking the automatic response that Burroughs credits to the middle class reader and consumer involves, as Gladys Fabre argues, “introducing disorder, the unpredictable, or an arbitrary mathematical order, with a view to disrupting the
reflexive system and calling forth the new or, in other words, to disrupting the mechanisms of power” (Brion Gysin 174). It is in these disruptions that relationships are revealed. By cutting into a variety of texts, Burroughs literally disrupts the line of the written text, the cornerstone of its meaning making in the field of print, to show its potential to work towards goals outside of semantics and linearity towards social commentary and association.

Instead of being a definitive product, the cut-up is a pointer, indicating that reality and its control of humans is a creation whose tools are available to everyone. Burroughs says exactly this in Nova Express, telling the reader that the nova mob’s mistake in trying to control and destroy humanity is that they use machines that the nova police could then reappropriate to undermine those goals. Burroughs directly address his audience in The Ticket that Exploded regarding the potential applications of tape recorders that people can use in their own lives to avoid arguments, to communicate, and to take control of their own image and the message mass media should send out to the public (213). He urges his readers to continue to cut-up the pre-recordings we assume to be reality until they make no sense as well as decide on our own tapes that we want to play (217). This idea of taking back control of media messages and activism in the social and personal realms does not sound that divergent from Michel Gondry’s film studio he built in the Deitch Project gallery to encourage the public to make their own films rather than rely on Hollywood to tell them stories. This is how the genuinely inventive new media subject breaks down the methods of representation that already exist to undermine the control Burroughs fears as inherent in language and dangerously hidden by many uses of technology. How then do we stop breaking down elements and begin building our new media subject and its product that is not a product but a process or method?
Folding in Media and Your Immediate Environment

With divisions between media and genre becoming less and less distinguishable in a context of proliferating information made available by mass media and improvements in communication technology, the new media subject is increasingly bombarded by more indistinct matter. This state of bombardment and the resulting distraction is the position from which the new media subject will have to build connections and associations between apparently disparate objects and phenomena in order to redefine a sense of self and social order applicable to the 21st century. László Moholy and Walter Benjamin both argued that the urban environment would change practices of the written word because that environment overflowed with information that could not all be reined in with a narrative or a recognizable plot. The urban environment forces the writer into a state of constant distraction, of shifting focuses of attention (Schwartz 409). Rauschenberg encouraged this distraction as a motivator for his creative activities. By filling his studio with assistants and leaving the television on at all times, Rauschenberg created a web of distraction, an environment that his artworks could build upon. For instance, while creating his Score XXIV (Off Kilter Keys) he overheard his assistants talking about a wedding and sharing photographs of the event while he was flipping through his own archive of photographs. Listening to the conversation of the wedding coincided with his discovery of a photograph of a cement garden statue reproduction of Botticelli’s Birth of Venus. This serendipitous coincidence of representations of love causes Rauschenberg to think about love, deciding to use the image of a cheap reproduction of Botticelli’s work as a marker of popular culture’s energy to quote existing representations (Mattison 20). Such casual conversations that pepper his environment provide him a direction in his decision-making. By relying on these environmental elements, Rauschenberg’s art is construed as a way to capture the surface, or life, the immediate moment rather than a calculated ordering that a modern urban state of distraction counters. Avoiding
categorization, order, and conclusions, Rauschenberg’s art encourages a space of openness without preconceptions. He says of his work, “I make a situation have as many possibilities as I can and things grow out of it. I’m after total involvement which includes all those things. I want to positively be a distraction, and remind people that there isn’t really anything that should be avoided” (Mattison 29).

Rauschenberg accentuates the importance of leaving oneself open to the environment without imposing preset filters, expectations, or goals on artistic practice. One way of ensuring this free absorption of the environment is to privilege the immediate moment. When creating his early combines, he did not look for elements that would represent the street but what was actually there, collecting items from the gutter and taking note of the building structures as they appeared and the advertisements that were in the windows (Mattison 46-7). The combine was not an arrangement of signs but an encounter, a unique reception of a place and time for both the artist and the later viewer (Joseph 162-3). Meaning then does not come from a stable representation but from an arrangement of ungraspable or unstable markers of a moment that passes and changes. The viewer is confronted with an encounter that is sensed rather than recognized (Joseph 209). Concentrating on the moment and the physical artifacts of that snippet of time was a way for Rauschenberg to avoid the traps of nostalgia and sentiment that would result from trying to mimic the mood or atmosphere of a moment. Even working in his studio, he avoided contemplating his art and worked very quickly. When a piece was finished it was immediately shipped to New York since they had already fallen into the past, a finished moment of time that Rauschenberg found to be an obstacle in his artistic interest of the “here and now” (Mattison 10).
Burroughs shared an interest in recording a moment, an encounter, which showed the subject as reconstructed through its surroundings (Fineberg 85). He confessed that overheard conversation was more influential to his work than any books he read (Miles, Barry 155). The scrapbook and journal projects he practiced were ways to document his surroundings and their convergences with his own thoughts. For instance, in *The Third Mind*, he describes keeping a multi-column journal while traveling in a train. He would then document the things he saw, things he was reading, and things he was thinking into each column, exemplifying real life occurrence as cut-ups that the mind smoothes into an event. In that case, cut-up shows what is already happening in the mind, that being, an association between our world and our consciousness (Lydenberg 46). Burroughs posits these scrapbook and journal projects as exercises to teach one to think in associative blocks rather than linear hierarchical ordering that plot implies (Burroughs *The Third Mind* 2). Rather than receiving a narrative about traveling by train or walking down a city street, we are confronted by a series of encounters, moments of potential associations between the environment and the new media subject as well as between different elements of the encounter itself. This method of building meaning not through plot but through accidentally and tangentially associated encounters serves as a rather accurate description of the quick editing typical of the music video. If we return briefly to Björk’s music video for “Human Behaviour”, the meaning of the video is not coalesced by a linear narrative. Instead we encounter several citations to other stories. After seeing Björk in the log cabin with a spoon and bowl (of porridge?) against the bear that circles the home, we cannot help but align her to Goldilocks, the naïve little girl that invades the domestic space of wild animals. Later in the clip we see Björk in an astronaut’s suit with antennae on her helmet, with the silhouette of an insect and its antennae immediately following. When Björk the astronaut plummets back to earth
her helmet heats up becoming a light bulb that a moth flutters around and Björk later joins. By building up these many associations, the viewers understand the video and the song as a critique of the human as closer to an animal than it prefers to believe. Citing the myth of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” adds a sense of primal innocence by bringing the viewer to a childlike experience of learning a lesson through a series of sensual encounters, from hot to cold porridge, hard to soft beds.

Viewing the encounter as sensual and as a challenging potential of associations with the new media subject’s thoughts, we see the element of immediacy as potentially alarming or dangerous since it encourages exposure and nondifferentiation from the environment. In 1958 Burroughs wrote to Ginsberg of his disappointment in his own writing, saying “I am completely dissatisfied with all the work I have done in writing and with the whole medium. Unless I can reach a point where my writing has the danger and immediate urgency of bull-fighting it is nowhere, and I must look for another way” (Burroughs, The Letters of 398). A certain vulnerability to the environment is characteristic of the subject position figured in Björk’s music videos, Rauschenberg’s combines and use of television, and Burroughs’s cut-up forward. The subject’s interaction with the environment as an encounter rather than an ordering forces the subject to be challenged and take up a position regarding the process of meaning making rather than consuming a narrative. The cut-up challenges the narrative text by making the text turn into images as blocks of associative meaning that blur the distinction between the subject’s thoughts and surroundings. Burroughs finds such a subject position liberating and formalizes it with the manifesto he writes with Gysin, “Les Voleurs”. This brief manifesto posits that writers, like painters, can steal anything they see, anything around them citing the retellings of Romeo and Juliette as an example of how writing, like art, has always been a process of appropriating what
earlier artists and writers have offered up like street vendors selling peanuts (Burroughs *The Adding Machine* 19-21). Here we find the original intent of copyright, of encouraging progress in the arts and sciences, of offering one’s creations as a gift to society.

What brings Björk, Burroughs, and Rauschenberg to the fore of embodying creative practices of the new media subject is their role as multi-media artists that bring critical thought to the illusionist desires of popular forms and culture. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Björk marries the pop song form with musical experimentation. Burroughs brings popular forms like science fiction, pornography, and the detective novel to his avant-garde, collage-inspired method of cut-up. He insists there are links between writing and other media and refuses to undermine the characteristics of popular forms, and use them as only vague inspiration as in modernist writing. Similarly, Rauschenberg’s silk screens take up the aesthetics of television without forwarding pure spectacle, which he saw as simply one manifestation of the use of television. With television as a mainstay of contemporary culture, Rauschenberg could not imagine excising it from his art but did not want to show it as seamless illusion but rather disrupts consumption of television by showing the difference between such elements as the television signal and a definable physical location. By working both across media, high and low culture, established tradition and experimentation, these figures mark the new media subject that results from the information overload and its resulting distraction. These subjects are increasingly aware of reality’s construction and their potential to participate in that process of forwarding their own representations through an encounter, an experience rather than consuming a product whose process of creation has been obscured or concealed. As Daniel Punday asserts, Burroughs’s career exemplifies a new paradigm of creative activity that is involved with shaping the subject’s interaction with mass media (Punday “Word Dust” 33). No longer the bourgeois
consumer of art as a decorative marker of success and a definable sense of self, the new media subject grapples with art as forcework, as a potential transformation of social, political, and personal relations resulting from the subject’s increased awareness of reality as construction and the intertwined relationship between the subject and his or her mediated environment.

Who Is the New Media Subject?

Turning to a definition of the new media subject appears as a deceptively simple move. The short answer is that the new media subject compiles an identity through encountering and accumulating artifacts from his or her environment in a way that both takes advantage of mass media and popular culture, while not divorcing itself from critical thought and active participation in constructing, rather than consuming, reality. But of course enacting such a subject position is much easier described than performed. This is no surprise as any adolescent is aware that his or her identity is inextricably connected to mass media, consumer products, and the ideologies that these support. Even, the UK pop sensation, Lily Allen’s newly pressed single can tell us that. She sarcastically and succinctly notes:

"I want loads of clothes and fuckloads of diamonds / I heard people die while they’re trying to find them / […] But it doesn’t matter ‘cause I’m packing plastic / And that’s what makes my life so fucking fantastic / And I am a weapon of massive consumption / And it’s not my fault it’s how I’m programmed to function / […] I don’t know what’s right and what’s real anymore / And I don’t know how I’m meant to feel anymore / And when do you think it will all become clear / ‘Cause I’m being taken over by the fear" (Allen 3-4, 15-18, 21-24)

While I would not suggest championing Lily Allen – which many Britons view as the newest version of a Spice Girl – as a beacon of critical thought or artistic innovation, the mere observation of an aimless, dependent, and thoughtless consumer as a marker of 21st century malaise infiltrating to even the most generic of pop music suggests the acute need to recognize the new media subject. Such a recognition would allow us to begin finding ways to enact the new media subject’s potential to reinvent social order, of being a transformative force, the inquisitive
and active participant that Burroughs imagines instead of a mindless consumer waiting for clarity and meaning to come to a subject who exists as a slave of programmed function. Todd Tietchen points out that Burroughs encourages subjects to recognize that they are constructed by consumerist ideologies but rather than hide or revolt against the entire system of production and mass media, the subject should use these same channels to interrogate and reanimate their remixed identity and shifting social, political, and economic order (110). We have already accomplished the first stage of recognizing identity and reality as constructed but negotiating a reanimation of the new media subject is the road we have yet to cross. Essentially the new media subject’s approach to such a reanimation is to combine popular culture and critical thought in such a way that they inform one another rather than eradicate the other; the aim is to foster procedural collaboration rather than contradiction. Should we lean too far towards popular culture, we do not break from consumerist ideologies and perhaps only point to them as Lily Allen’s single, “The Fear” has done. Likewise, if we rely too heavily on critical thought and theory we risk ostracizing ourselves in an academic ivory tower that will not seem applicable to the experience of the everyman and the bombardment of information, media, consumer goods, and technological determinism that constitutes daily life.

Burroughs’s cut-up method is only one example of a bachelor machine used to empower the new media subject and it should be viewed as an analogy for behaviour rather than a model to copy into a style. As an analogy, we have recognized in cut-up as Burroughs’s way to exposing power structures that discipline the public into accepting the prerecording as reality proper. The cut-up reveals this control by highlighting conventions and traditions as only one option to approach and use a social artifact. In his case he challenges the traditional narrative of the novel genre as Björk does the conventional pop album. The new media subject, the veritable
homme actionel, in building its bachelor machines that expose technicity and commodity as tools for reality construction rather than methods to domesticate creative activity, enacts this balance between illusion and estrangement, popular and critical, intimate and public, random and ordered.

The hinge of the bachelor machine does not undermine spectacle and mimesis but exposes it as a process in action. Creating the hinge of the bachelor machine itself entails a process of continual refraction rather than producing an end product. Just as Duchamp’s bachelor machine could not actually be built from his drawings, the bachelor machines that the new media subject compiles to expose reality as construction, is not a concrete object but a set of processes that balance chance and order. Burroughs often complained that in critiquing cut-up, many were surprised that his writing could be the result of a random process. He adamantly asserted that despite the fact that the results were unexpected, he still selected what should be cut up, created the cut-up as a program that writing must pass through, and chose phrases from the results fitting them into a narrative that the reader could relate to without sharing Burroughs’s personal experiences, history, or thoughts. Rauschenberg also defended his combines as not purely random but defined by “themes, ideas, interests, and procedures” (Mattison 42). Though the origins of Burroughs or Rauschenberg’s work may have been in a spark of intuitive or affective magic, that feeling of eureka in a bizarre juxtaposition of words or a fleeting association of love and a garden statue resulting from the active engagement of a random process like cut-up or eavesdropping, these pieces of immediate encounter of random outcomes are edited and arranged to be applicable to other such encounter in the future. The process of editing, of choosing the presence and arrangement of elements is where the new media subject interjects its construction
of identity. Instead of making raw data, the new media subject samples that data becoming what Sherry Mayo calls an “editor or mediation rather than a producer of cultural objects” (111).

This process of arranging and editing encounters demonstrates the new media subject’s position as one that is beyond personal expression, beyond pure phenomenology. Rauschenberg proposes that the aim of his art is to form a response to “constantly changing external events,” rather than exploring the depths of his personality (Mattison 10). While he may use a personal incident to begin a work, he does not use that incident as a primer to express a personal history. Instead, Rauschenberg wants to provide information that his audience could relate to his viewers’ own personal experiences intensifying the sensual response. The entire objective of mediating and using media is to communicate and reconcile separate people. With an increasingly larger audience and a proliferating amount of information available to everyone, mediation is our state of being. It comes as no surprise that the new media subject’s goal is to build relationships with others working in and experiencing media rather than projecting an isolated figure of self-knowledge and individuality. The very technologies that support and create the media and genres of representation and communication become an intimate aspect of subject position for the new media subject who collects their own environment and orders them into bachelor machines that expose the boundaries of those media and genres. The search for such a remixed subject position then cannot exclude the technologies and machines that have become tightly enmeshed with the daily experiences of the new media subject. Burroughs argues that his cut-up is impossible without the typewriter, scissors, tape recorders, and film that can store and manipulate much more data than the conscious human brain. Björk’s music depends on multi-track editing, another phenomenon that cannot be accomplished without magnetic tape and a mixer at the bare minimum. An enmeshing of the arts and the sciences is beginning to take hold where, not only
the musical artist and the sound engineer are sharing roles of manipulating the technology and making creative decisions, so to do Burroughs and his computer science collaborator Ian Somerville balance their artistic and machinic contributions to the tape recorder experiments or digital poet Christian Bök and genetic engineer Stuart Kauffman, or even artist Bill Seaman and his collaborator physicist Otto Rössler. The new media subject as such an artist-scientist is not disciplined by technology as is the scientist or enslaved to inspiration, as is the artist, but negotiates a process of becoming by allowing technology and intuition to collaborate. This is why Björk does not see creating techno music as countering her interest in instinct and nature or why Burroughs does not view the cut-up as a threat to authorial integrity or the use of commercial culture to undermine its own values (Burroughs Conversations 223).

While Björk and Burroughs are successful in their efforts, their methods are not difficult for others to experiment with, nor cost prohibitive. One could try the cut-up with a pair of scissors and a page of text, just as one could create a sampled music track with a couple of tape recorders. Equally, while knowledge of critical theory would augment understanding of experimentation in the arts and sciences, one does not have to be familiar with Gilles Deleuze or Arnold Schönberg to sample music or know about T.S. Eliot or Dadaism to enact a cut-up. Characteristic of our mediated environment already introduce us to the basic principles of collage and sampling. Becoming familiar with critical theory only expands these horizons by giving the subject another tool in which to approach their process of collecting elements from their media environment and mediated experiences, giving the collecting a certain trajectory (Miller 564). The salient point is that by making bachelor machines, like sampled music or cut-up, cheap and easy to perform is that it becomes available to everyone who wishes to try his or her hand at the process. Burroughs adamantly posits his cut-up as an experiment for anyone to do
right now rather than simply think or theorize about urging the publisher of *The Third Mind* to encourage potential consumers of the book to try cut-up themselves since they would not understand it as a method with potential unless they actually did it rather than just read about it (Harris “Cutting Up Politics” 182). Brion Gysin’s cut-up text “Minutes to Go” urges everyone to become active manipulators, proposing they should “be your own agent / until we deliver / the machine / in commercially reasonable quantities […] the writing machine is / for everybody / do it yourself / until the machine comes / here is the system / according to us” (Burroughs *The Third Mind* 41). Gysin posits the cut-up as such a bachelor machine that the people can use until they create their own but calling the masses to act on their own after being disciplined into complacent media consumers, is proving difficult. Burroughs saw the purpose of conventional narrative as a way to spare the reader the arduous task of thinking about where they are in space and time, of keeping them complacent as they follow a prescribed ordering. Manipulating textual linearity was a way to show people that they were not bound to automatic responses and detached viewing, but could be actively involved in decision making procedures of art and language (Enns 113). Given some effort and initiative, the public does not have to settle with the limited options offered to them.

Burroughs’s cut-up offers people a way to discover as many alternatives to the prerecording as possible to free the subject from control. Similarly, Robert Mattison aligns Rauschenberg’s studio practices, particularly his need for distraction in the workplace and extreme organization of his materials, as a space that encourages lateral rather than vertical thinking. Psychologist Edward de Bono describes lateral thinking as a method to generate as many possible approaches in contrast to vertical thinking that selects and eliminates approaches by choosing the “right” method (Mattison 30). While vertical thinking will often discipline new
material to fit existing forms, perpetuating established social order or literary and artistic genres, lateral thinking overcomes these limits by revealing multiple options, often inspired by obscure details or random information from a distracted state of mind, thus disrupting unity. Rather than executing an ordered step-by-step procedure forwarded by vertical thinking like reading a cookbook recipe or completing a chemistry lab assignment, the lateral thinker places him or herself in the situation proper and waits for links to suggest themselves (Mattison 32). Instead of the pen and lined paper of the unified adult writer, disciplined into a linear order, Burroughs and Rauschenberg return us to scissors, paste, and crayons coloring elephants purple because the option is available, and eating the marshmallow bunny tail instead of gluing it to a pink paper bunny because … we can.

If we have not been or can put aside our extreme disciplining, the prerecording telling us that elephants are gray and we are not supposed to eat even fake bunny tails, then we allow ourselves to assemble from any given option and look for more options rather than narrowing in on what we have been taught is correct. Claire, the incorrigible kindergartener that stomped on my sacred sense of order and ate many a fake bunny’s marshmallow tail while doing so, has retroactively taught me the lesson that Burroughs and Rauschenberg tried to show the American public as well: the given order is only one possible remix of the available options. Even if it was time to practice writing the letter P, Claire would be playing with the K’NEX because she knew they were there. I recall pulling her aside and asking her to practice her P’s anyways and remember her saying “P is for pink” taking up a pink crayon to write three well formed P’s on the paper. She knew the rule was to use a pencil for writing but she also knew very well that a crayon would do just fine. Passing the paper to me as though it was child’s play to write a letter, she ran out the door to recess. Being thirteen and volunteering my summer break to help in the
kindergarten classroom, I thought I would be assisting these budding students in achieving success in the classroom, of learning how to do things right. Instead, the bratty little blond haired Claire reminded me that choosing is what empowers me and makes my experience in a larger social whole unique. She made me aware again, of course many years after the fact, that when I’m coloring an elephant, the purple crayon is still there and there is no reason for me to have eyes only for the gray one.

Challenging boundaries of fictional narrative by introducing cut-up, a procedure stemming from collage of the visual arts, and including material from several media, be they novels, scientific journals, popular song lyrics, or private conversations, make Burroughs’s work truly multimedia, an embodiment of lateral thinking that can result in purple elephants. Pressing the limits of a genre or medium and their conventions calls its audience to not only take up a position in regards to the process of representation but it also brings to light the social order those genres and media support. For instance, Dick Higgins observes that modern theatre is far from modern by largely maintaining the proscenium theatre as a frame for its work. The proscenium clearly marks a severe division between the actors and the viewers, where the viewers are subordinated and passively consume the actions of the actors. Higgins argues that this antiquated structure was relevant to the lord and serf model of social relations but does not speak to a modern audience that is more socially and imaginatively mobile (Higgins “Intermedia” 50). Any multi- or intermedia artist must continue to evolve his or her work with various media conventions in order to maintain relevancy. A multi- or intermedia artist cannot stay in one place for long before he or she becomes a “movement artist” clinging to a dogma or a style without an innovative ideology long beyond its potential to fulfill Burroughs’s definition of art, to make people aware of what they don’t know they know. Deviating from the lord/serf relationship that strict
allegiance to a single genre encourages, Burroughs and Rauschenberg are charting a different correspondence between the social whole and the individual in the new media subject. These subjects, like 20th century multi- and inter-media work, are not unified, autonomous expressions of self. Instead their position and identity is reliant on collaboration and communication, on relationships instead of singularity.

Though it may seem to be a digression from my argument, Andrea Immel’s study on 5 year old Frederick Lock’s 1791 scrapbook shows that unlike adult scrapbooks, which are generally motivated by a desire to communicate an individual sense of self by preserving artifacts of the self, children’s scrapbooks come from a basic urge to collect, building interests by collating available media as evidence, not of the self but of an activity. Frederick even titles his scrapbook “a very valuable collection of Frederick and Amelia’s portraits” positing it as a sales catalogue (Immel 74). Instead of using the lottery images to express himself as an individual, he uses them to create a series of scenes using this early visual medium as a tool to tell stories about himself, his sister, Amelia, and other classmates and their naughty behaviour. With a variety of options, one is not forced into predictable behavior. Frederick Lock could choose from any number of printed images but did not let his selection limit the story he wanted to tell such as using a print of a monkey in riding clothes dancing with a cat to represent himself and his friend (Immel 77).

Perhaps Burroughs serves as a reminder of the very beginnings of power negotiations that the incorrigible (and intelligent) child will test all representatives of control, be it a parent, teacher, of classroom volunteer. Alongside its effect of challenging control, Burroughs’s cut-up exemplifies succinctly practices of the new media subject as those of collaboration and community rather than definitive self-knowledge. Viewing Burroughs as a literary disc jockey
(Caveney 18) not only posits him as an exemplary figure to illustrate the new media subject as a collector of fragments and sparks of creativity, but also brings us to our second trope of our new media environment, collaboration as the mode of creative process.
CHAPTER 3
THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to
what; making a scheme come right; making a character come together. From this I
reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that
behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we--I mean all human beings--are
connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the
work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we
call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and
emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing
itself. And I see this when I have a shock.

--Virginia Woolf

When the product we encounter in the 20th and 21st century is a collage, cut-up text,
sampled song, or a re-mix, it becomes clear that this is not a stable or singular object, the
creation of an autonomous and self-aware individual, but is at best a marker of a continual
process that involves the author(s) and all their encounters with other works, people, and
environments. If our product is no longer a reflection of an individual self, process can no longer
be thought of as a divine calling to produce from inner being. To sample, re-mix, or cut-up one
needs a prolific amount of material that must be harvested from multiple sites. This gathering not
only requires but shines brightest with a collaborative model of making texts and multi-linear
organization. Collaborative models of making and working are a major challenge in almost any
group setting and institution from the classroom, to the boardroom, to the family dining room.

Individual success has been engrained in our system of thought as the true mark of worth:
paintings are sold because they are the product of a singular author and marked by their
signature: co-authored books hold less weight when applying for tenure: raises are awarded
according to individual performance reports. There are most assuredly many mountains that must
be crossed before truly collaborative environments thrive in the corporate and academic
communities largely because collaboration challenges our existing measures of value and
eradicates boundaries that we have upheld as important markers of territory and thus authority.
Boris Groys identifies two major steps that artists must take to abandon isolation for participation and collaboration which are equally applicable to the non-artist. The first step is to overcome boundaries between media and genres, allowing for fellowships across disciplines and a significant widening of the audience and co-collaborator pool. Secondly, Groys suggests that artistic talents should not be used to highlight themes and positions that belong to the artist, but instead, the artist must recognize and be responsible to the audience and their desires (21-2). These steps seem to be exactly what is needed to alleviate the frustrations that Dick Higgins expresses of modern theatre as discussed in the previous chapter. Depending on established dramatic forms and dividing the play from the audience by maintaining the proscenium that essentially denies participation, are guilty of both upholding genre and medium as well as neglecting the needs and experiences of the modern audience whose mobile and fragmented lives are less applicable to a singularly and linearly scripted interpretation of lived experience.

Woolf often called her novel a “play-poem” because it borrows conventions from several genres to create a level of density that overpowers the ordered control of a linear narrative. Beverly Schlack points out that Woolf manages to borrow imagery and symbolism from poetry, character from the novel, and soliloquy from drama (101). Several scholars have also taken note of Woolf’s interest in musical structures as organizational or thematic elements to bring to The Waves while others take up her interest in astronomy and modern physics as philosophical worldviews she could prescribe to. Woolf’s novel becomes more than a precursor to intermediary work and postmodernist thought that would explode after the Second World War. Her general thoughts on the interrelated nature of all fields of study, the limits placed on any system of thought that divides subjective from objective, and an identity and reality that is in fact contingent on subjective, lived experience (Westling 855-6), show her to be a key figure in
charting our current digital environment and the new media subject. By creating six characters that weave in and out of one another with internal monologues turned dialogues, Woolf shows the interdependence and permeability of community and individual, internal and external, past and present, and music and narrative. With so many stylistic and thematic elements at play and each becoming less distinguishable from its counterpart, Woolf overpowers the novel form, which, in fact, was a primary aim of *The Waves*. Placing her writing between prose and poetry, she says that she would avoid narrative conventions that often force writers into including superfluous information to progress linearly while also sidestepping poetry proper that simplifies by leaving so much material out of the poem (Warner 25). Instead she writes in her diary entry dated November 28, 1928 “The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes” (Warner 24).

In Woolf’s *The Waves*, we find a clear preference for intermediary work as a way of expanding the format, presentation, and composition of the modern novel, a desire for the work to ring true to the human experience and lend credit to collaborators’ role in the process of composition, an unleashing of the imagination to overcome established boundaries, and a saturation and density of material that surpasses the control narrative can yield over a smaller archive of information. All of these major contributing elements are also key characteristics apparent in baroque work and its resurgence in the neo-baroque especially as it concerns cinema; a spectacular and popular medium that, like theatre, has historically been a collective effort and invested in exploiting the newest technology to mimic reality. Gregg Lambert describes the Baroque as a movement whose traits include:

[1] an experience of temporality marked by the themes of novelty, variety and multiplicity [2] a loss of distinct perception of the central figure or action [3] the
physical participation of the spectator in the presentation of the artwork through an emotional feeling of dizziness or swooning (literally, of being overpowered by the spectacle) [4] finally, a heightened sense of enthusiasm, delight or marvel. (23)

These generalized qualities highlight seriality and varied repetition over the linear narrative, a shifting and unstable subject, immersion and showmanship in crafting a work, and an emotional rather than logical motive to both create and consume. Unpacking these traits exposes a thought process unlike rational logic but very appropriate to the mediated environment the new media subject faces and works with. The prolific use of extended allegories and varied repetitions of a trait stems from an overabundance of material. Angela Ndalianis employs the repeated use of the figure of Apollo in the gardens of Versailles as an example of an extended allegory of kingship. Because the gardens are so extensive, many varied repetitions in the form of carvings and statues need to be dispersed throughout the space in order to solidify the comparison between Apollo and Louis XIV. Concentrating on a repeated trait rather than a narrative trajectory lends itself to blurring boundaries between media. Being able to represent Apollo through a marble statue, stone carving in a fountain, or a painting only allows the trait to spread more widely. Baroque systems in fact “tend to invade space in every direction, to perforate it to become as one with all its possibilities” as Angela Ndalianis argues (25). Woolf ran into trouble when drafting her biography on Roger Fry for a similar reason. The abundance of information overpowered the linear narrative form, warranting a different structural backbone. She tried to organize it as a musical piece saying “there was such a mass of detail that the only way I could hold it together was by abstracting it into themes” (Jacobs 252-3).

This abundance of space and information overwhelm the subject or author to a point where he or she becomes vulnerable to any confrontation with material objects. Kresimir Purgar best explains this phenomenon in his book, *The Neo-Baroque Subject*. He argues that the observer can become the subject of a painting by taking up the role of a mediator between the inside and
outside of a scene. The painting is not just consumed by the viewer but alters the viewer through a confrontation. For instance, Purgar examines Lovro Artuković’s 2004 painting *Little Red Riding Hood (evil?)* arguing that the viewer is confronted by the gaze of Little Red Riding Hood, for whom the audience feels responsible. She is depicted alone on a canvas but the viewer can see that on another canvas out of her line of vision, the wolf lies in wait. The viewer becomes folded into the message of impending doom, disempowerment, and responsibility for others.

Similarly, Lambert looks to Caravaggio’s *The Conversion of St. Paul* and notes that the support or center of the painting is not present on the canvas but rests on “the position of the spectator – the affective surface produced in the emotional perception” (27). The idea of the observer as mediator that fills the blank between the subject and object or interior and exterior, places that spectator as the interpreter of a scene’s possibilities rather than a consumer of one set scene. Omar Calabrese takes the act of interpretation as the basis of all critical activity. He argues that interpretation restores freedom and independence in the subject who builds a point of view towards his or her world through these interpretations.

The Baroque returns as the Neo-Baroque at this time for many reasons which scholars like Omar Calabrese and Angela Ndalianis explicate in much more detail. However, besides the rise of intermediary work and a growing archive of information the new media subject has to pull from, the increasingly powerful role of popular culture is one major commonality. Ndalianis mentions that the Baroque was marked by a quick rise in the number of public theatres, which were previously reserved for private shows for the aristocracy. The popularity of the theatre warranted that theatre pieces continue to play for months (49). Increased repetition and seriality in popular forms engross the viewer in multiple interpretations of a story that our subjective experiences weave into a web of interconnecting elements (61). This only expanded with the
Neo-Baroque, which unlike the Baroque that maintained the barriers dividing high art and popular culture, witnessed the convergence of the two to the point that critics like Manovich are confident in their assertions that there is little difference between the avant-garde and popular culture at large. Umberto Eco holds a similar view when he praises Calabrese’s *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, crediting the author of being aware that university students today cannot read Plato outside the context of their enculturation in popular forms and phenomena. Eco equally signals that even the guardians of the gate, the professors, are not immune to the charms of popular and commercial culture but are enamored as any other. In fact, the Baroque and Neo-Baroque revel in spectacle and do not contend to be anything other than a sensational pleasure like a blockbuster special effects film celebrating the triumphs of technology over reality (Ndalianis 171). In such cases it is an emotional or sensational response that is solicited, not a rational or logical one.

Woolf’s conclusion that massive amounts of information require a repetitive thematic organization, align with the Baroque style that resulted from an excess of media expressions. But why specifically should we take Woolf and *The Waves* as an exemplary creative project to explain the collaborative process and the new media subject as counter to a self-aware individual? First, Woolf sees great potential in intermediary work and the crossing of habitual dividing lines that such work requires. While she was not a musician or a psychologist, she was not afraid to borrow elements of their work even in the most stylistic or seemingly superficial ways if they benefited the form of the novel as she imagined it. Second, she was equally skilled at including very personal scenes from her life into *The Waves* without slipping into a purely personal narrative that has less affective potential to a wide audience. Though she tired of chronology and detailed narrative that became the marker of the novel as a genre, she argued for
the need of a form to discipline expression so as to avoid the overtly personal (Schultz 6-7). In this recognition of the difference between the personal and the persona, we find the most important element of *The Waves* to this study, that being Woolf’s understanding of the subject as a process, a part that contributes to a whole but never is whole on its own. Woolf presents the six friends in *The Waves*, Bernard, Neville, Louis, Rhoda, Jinny, and Susan, as separate people – she names them and gives them specific and individual imagery and qualities. However, the reader clearly understands that each character’s identity is closely tied to what he or she sees and does, how the characters interact with the one another, and what they say and think of their friends. Each character must collaborate with the others to find their own identity, and an identity that is increasingly understood to be contingent, shifting, and unrepresentable in any single story. It is this interdependence of the part and the whole, of viewing each individual part as an interpretation of the whole and the whole as the compliance and temporary convergence of the parts, that anticipates the tension the new media subject harbors. How one contributes to the whole and selects information from that whole to compile a sense of identity is the heart of the struggle between individualism and collaboration, between the personal and the persona. The characters of *The Waves* show us that we are neither personal nor persona, not the subject or the object of a painting, not a part or a whole, but the mediator and interpreter that inhabits the inbetween space, the corner where Red meets the wolf and the dark recesses of Caravaggio’s *The Conversion of St. Paul*. By examining the characters of *The Waves* we see how the new media subject’s identity is invested in collaborative processes and is dependent on and vulnerable to other subjects.

**Alone: In the Beginning There Was Lack**

Of the many Neo-Baroque qualities Calabrese explicates, that of the approximate and inexpressible, is taken up again by Purgar as a primary motive for actions of the neo-baroque
subject. He summarizes Calabrese’s discussion of the approximate and inexpressible saying “a subject knows that there exists the remainder of a content or meaning which eludes description, but is unable to express it” (Purgar 20, 22). This constant lack of unity and stability is where passion is born from and, as a consequence, the subject is open to interpreting experiences while remaining vulnerable and conflicted (Purgar 22). This feeling of being pressed upon by this remainder shows the influence the other, the object supposedly external to the subject, has over that subject and his or her understanding of identity. Because the subject cannot make a unity of meaning, he or she cannot be seen as wholly separate from the objects he or she manipulates. Woolf exemplifies this blurring between a self and its other, between an interior sense of self and the exterior world, in the very format of *The Waves*. As each character speaks, the speeches are presented as interior monologues, as though – at least momentarily – there were a unified self that can recede from his or her surroundings and reflect on a scene without being impressed upon by others. However, the reader discovers with the first pages of the novel that the speeches are not pure interior monologues at all since characters seem to respond to what the others are saying and thinking and similar images appear in the thoughts of several different characters, such as a blue ring that unites the world and an interest in mirrors and reflective surfaces. Gabriele Schwab calls these exchanges “interior dialogues” because of their denial of a purely external or purely internal space for the subject who cannot directly speak to another character or him or herself but must skew each with the other at all times (83).

By making the reader’s only point of entry to the characters this interior dialogue, Woolf takes as given the idea of a vulnerable subject inherently defined as a part divided but dependent on what he or she is not. The severity of this type of identity construction is most clearly evident in the characters of Rhoda and Bernard. These characters form the two extremes of representing
the relationship between the interior and exterior, a self and an other. For Woolf’s literary practice in this context and the Baroque/Neo-Baroque there is no pure interior or exterior, subjective or objective, self or other but only the in-between space of the mediator and interpreter. Rhoda and Bernard struggle to find peace in their interactions with the world, other people, and themselves because they cannot find the in-between and instead see themselves as invested in only one side of the spectrum. Rhoda views herself as a pure interior and Bernard a pure exterior and thus they are unable to determine themselves as subjects enfolded in the objects, as a part that is separate but dependent on the whole, a part-whole. Their inability to collaborate, to successfully relate the subject and object, mark their failure to function in the social world.

Rhoda denies any interaction with the outside world and the people in it. One of her most powerful recurring images is her denial of a face and her fear of her own reflection. When she sees her face in a mirror she recognizes it as her own but quickly ducks behind Susan to hide that she is present in the world. Rhoda does not know how to interact with others and hence denies that she has a face to confront or present to the other. Any interaction requires the presence of at least two differentiated interlocutors but since Rhoda will not even draw the basic boundary of her own body or face as separate and present, she removes herself from any possibility of interacting with another person.

Because she cannot interact with others she passes her time daydreaming but those very dreams reveal her anguish and frustration with not being able to relate to and collaborate with other people. She hides in the school library and reads poetry, imagining herself gathering flowers and tying them together, of essentially ordering the world around her by creating a bouquet of the materials available to her. Despite all her feelings that she wishes to express
through her creations she finds that she has no one to share herself with. Any efforts she makes alone have no use or merit if she cannot find an audience, someone to receive her interpretation of her surroundings. She cries out:

To whom shall I give all that now flows through me, from my warm, my porous body? I will gather my flowers and present them – Oh! to whom? Sailors loiter on the parade, and amorous couples; the omnibuses rattle along the sea front to the town. I will give; I will enrich; I will return to the world this beauty. I will bind my flowers in one garland and advancing with my hand outstretched will present them – Oh! to whom? (57)

Her anguish comes from being unable to contribute to the world that she wants to enrich. Her use of loving couples and returning sailor is quite purposeful since a romantic relationship depends highly on trusting the other person to treat you well and compromising selfish desire for the better of the relationship. The very idea that a personal completeness relies on unity with the other is what Grady Smith calls the very risk of love (39) hence the wording of wedding vows such as “the two shall become one” or “I give myself to thee”.

Rhoda feels inherently divided from the world and the other characters take note of the separation – even while the characters are still in grammar school, she is disconnected from the others. During recess she stays in the classroom to finish her mathematics assignment. She does not understand any of the figures and says that they have no meaning. She is disabled by her lack of understanding a common language that punishes her twice. Rhoda is estranged from an answer that the mathematical symbols yield to all the other characters and she is physically separated from her friends that play just outside the window of the classroom. Her isolation from established fields of knowledge and lived experiences with the world around her leave her nothing tangible that she can manipulate, create, and share with others and thus assert her own desires and existence. Instead her severe individualism swallows her whole.
Bernard faces quite the opposite problem of being able to craft stories and insert himself in any circumstance and situation but never finding a personal relevance that brings meaning to him. When he and his five friends meet as mature adults at Hampton Court, Bernard cannot describe himself without folding in the experiences of his friends into his own identity. He says, “what I call ‘my life’, it is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am – Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs” (276). Shortly afterwards as Bernard tries to recount the story of his life to a stranger in a café, he takes this unity of identity a step further by marking his own body with the experiences of his friends rather than himself. He says with all conviction: “Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt” (289). While Rhoda eradicates her entire body in order to refuse all relations and collaboration in creating an identity for herself, Bernard takes all external experiences he can recall and pastes them onto his body as his own, mapping the events of the other as intimately his own. Unlike Rhoda, who is only of consequence when she is alone in her daydreams, Bernard needs all the others present in order to illuminate his own significance as the storyteller, the master craftsman of words, figures, and languages that ostracize Rhoda.

Despite all the stories that he spins, he does not find the meaning of the universe but instead discovers that the very stories he relied on to expose meaning assist in masking a singular meaning in favor of the multiple interpretations of reality that his unlimited amount of stories expose over time. In order to come to a sense of meaning, Bernard finds that he has to tap into an
emotional and personal aspect of what he observes in the external world. After he drops his book of phrases to be swept up with the garbage, he says:

What is the phrase for the moon? And the phrase for love? By what name are we to call death? I do not know. I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz. I need a howl; a cry. When the storm crosses the marsh and sweeps over me where I lie in the ditch unregarded I need no words. Nothing neat. (295)

He finally recognizes that the answer to the universe and to understanding his place in that universe is not to be found in objectivity, in a plot, a linear ordering or causal events but in emotion, the risk of confrontation or rejection, and dependence or attachment that comes with being in a relationship. Bernard realizes at the end of the novel that each story or description is a mark of the individual’s interpretation of the world around him or her rather than a purely objective or even subjective representation of the world as a whole.

Bernard and Rhoda might serve as the poster children for the very premise of this project. Rhoda exists purely in the present and has no way of linking the moment with a history, a social significance, or another subject. She is entirely immersed in a moment and cannot see beyond the emotional and sensational elements of that chink in time. Bernard is only constituted by careful twistings of language that attempt to bind everything together to produce an ultimate truth of the universe. While he is observant and often carried away by the crowd or chaos, he divorces his personal feelings and life experiences from his observations becoming purely contemplative. They each fail to come to terms with their environment because they cannot fully collaborate; an action that requires both converging with and differentiating from the whole.

With any sense of an integral and distinct self a mere illusion, we return to the need for collaboration with others not in order to rediscover or recreate a myth of self but to find commonality in our confrontations with the porosity of own boundaries that refuse singular
unity. What brings the separated individuals together to form a community is a common recognition of the inherent lack of identity proper to each. Even Virginia Woolf states that “I” is just a term used for a person with “no real being” (Lucenti 76). The idea of self gives way to a shifting “series of moving oppositions” as Lisa Lucenti recalls Nietzsche’s thoughts on the modern subject. She points out that Nietzsche believes that the subject is a spell of language masking that reality is not based on the subject but on a constant action. Along similar lines of thought, Nicholas Davey overturns Descartes’s self-aware subject by reshaping the interpretation of the use of the word “I”. For Davey, “I” does not symbolize the self-aware subject but the linguistic existence of the other from which “I” is differentiated (55). The “I” is not a singular point, a special unique snowflake of a person but a hinge, in that the “I” is a location stretched over the border between two entities, a door and a frame. In its function as hinge, the “I” allows an opening and interrelationship between the two rooms that are on each side of a limit. Without the “I” as hinge or border, movement cannot flow across separate and closed off rooms. “I” then is the very paradox of dividing something to make a unity. Each time a subject divides him or herself as an “I”, they only build another hinge to relate and connect themselves to the other.

Someone Else: “I’s” Be Fruitful and Multiply

Viewing the “I” as a function to create relationships rather than solidify a singular identity shows the basic human instinct to collaborate. This does not make it any easier for people to be comfortable sharing themselves with others. As Josephine O’Brien-Schaefer points out, human relations operate in a basic paradox of “the fear that this private life will be violated, and the desire to share it with others” (25). Woolf seems deeply interested in this divide of any human mind between the social or collective and the personal and so she plays up the human skill of thinking about oneself as a part of a crowd (immersed) or to separate oneself from the crowd in order to watch over others (contemplative) (Peach 157). Because the subject is posited against
the other and exists only as an ever-changing set of tensions and oppositions, collaboration is not just used out of economic or logistical necessity but is the very modis operandi of our human world. Viewing collaboration as a division of the workload, as a multiplication of singular authors undermines the true importance and potential of collaborating. Collaboration is “a dispersal of author/ity, rather than a simple doubling of it” as Jeffrey Masten argues (Hirschfeld 616).

Many Woolf scholars have noted that it is not only the style of writing that Woolf chooses in *The Waves* that contributes to a sense of strong collective identity, but the fact that Woolf used many of her personal experiences as keystones of various characters’ sets of imagery that leads us to read them as multiple interpretations of Woolf herself. In commenting on *The Waves*, Woolf states: “I did mean that in some vague way we are the same person, and not separate people. The six characters were supposed to be one….I come to feel more and more how difficult it is to collect oneself into one Virginia; even though the special Virginia in whose body I live for the moment is violently susceptible to all sorts of separate feeling” (Albini 58). What each character signifies of Woolf as a person and how accurate each representation is to her life is less important than the idea of a dispersal of identity across several persona and the complementary impulse to draw relationships between scattered parts to bring them back together again. Though Woolf incorporates intimate scenes from her life into *The Waves* the reader does not recognize those scenes as unique to Woolf’s life or in any way privileged over other wholly fictional portions of the novel. This is because the accuracy of an individual experience is not what is emphasized but rather the affective response shared across a group of subjects.
Looking specifically at Bernard, we see that the ability to gather and compile our experiences, surroundings, and traditions to express ourselves is particularly empowering. After enjoying themselves at Percival’s farewell dinner, all the characters wonder what awaits them in the chaos that is outside of their tight circle of friends. Neville sees happiness, Rhoda sees time passing, but Bernard states with confidence:

We have proved, sitting eating, sitting talking, that we can add to the treasury of moments. We are not slaves bound to suffer incessantly unrecorded petty blows on our bent backs. We are not sheep either, following a master. We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregations of past time. We too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road. (146)

They have all learned that from the pleasurable moments of sharing their life experiences can be a model for how they can join together any two occurrences they encounter in the world to create an interpretation or vision of their own shared world. It should come as no surprise that they learn such an important lesson from talking with friends since playing and entertainment has always been the first local of education. Children, much like adults, learn from playing because the pressure of being correct or concrete is lifted.

Apparently the most productive and enlightening atmospheres for interacting with others and building individual interpretations of the world is one that is not strictly or hierarchically ordered but one that allows for a degree of chaos. Evan Rosen describes this productive chaos as a place for unstructured exchange of ideas not one of total anarchy or disorganization (12). This unstructured organization mimics the space of play and allows for the spontaneous association and the unexpected to come and enrich the topic at hand. When faced with writing a letter to an imaginary girl that Bernard loves, he leaves himself room to play by not taking the task too seriously, even though he still finds the activity very important and is far from flippant about
writing a good love letter. Bernard begins the writing process with a little dress-up and role-playing. He states:

> Now, as a proof of my susceptibility to atmosphere, here, as I come into my room, and turn on the light, and see the sheet of paper, the table, my gown lying negligently over the back of the chair, I feel that I am that dashing yet reflective man, that bold and deleterious figure, who, lightly throwing off his cloak, seizes his pen and at once flings off the following letter to the girl with whom he is passionately in love. (79)

Though Bernard has attempted to write the letter several times and has been unable to finish, he believes that taking up a persona or character will motivate him to approach the project afresh. What is interesting is he does not create a persona from scratch (why would he since he is unable to create even a love letter from scratch?) but borrows Byron as a figure that he folds into himself. Bernard admits that he is using Byron to launch himself by picking up on Byron’s rhythm, giving him a running start at writing the awe-inspiring love letter Bernard imagines. He thinks to himself: “I am, in some ways, like Byron. Perhaps a sip of Byron will help to put me in the vein. Let me read a page. No; this is dull; this is scrappy. This is rather too formal. Now I am getting the hang of it. Now I am getting his beat into my brain” (79). Though he is able to begin a draft, he fears that he was not able to converge himself and Byron satisfactorily resulting in a letter that will seem a cheap rouse, a mediocre impersonation of the great Byron. He has not quite joined himself with Byron and abandons the draft for the time being.

Instead of laboring over Byron’s poetry or his own love letter, Bernard daydreams but is soon interrupted by Neville’s voice recounting his own vision of Percival under the willows alongside a river with several other attractive men. During this vision Neville seems to unwittingly take up the thread of Byron that Bernard introduces. Neville feels gripped by a familiar rhythm that rise up again because it has some inherent similarity with his daydream. He feels instantly inspired and takes himself to be a poet (82). Neville’s inspiration is an
unconscious surging of familiarity between the riverbank scene and some already existing image. Woolf takes the string of associations even farther by having Bernard enter into Neville’s scene. Upon Bernard’s entrance, Neville states: “Yet how painful to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have one's self adulterated, mixed up, become part of another. As he approaches I become not myself but Neville mixed with somebody – with whom? – with Bernard? Yes, it is Bernard, and it is to Bernard that I shall put the question, Who am I?” (83). Bernard only confirms this merging of their two separate identities and daydreams by claiming Neville’s moment of inspiration as equally his own. The willow tree that Neville sees above Percival’s head is what reminds Bernard of Byron even though no willow tree appears in Bernard’s daydream.

This inspiration takes Bernard off onto a series of thoughts and images of which he feels Byron, whom he imagines hovering over and judging his work, disapproves. Perhaps we can view this as tradition resisting or turning its nose down on renditions and remakes, a view that Neville would probably support given his negative opinion of Bernard’s willingness to borrow heavily from Byron rather than create from individual inspiration. It is Neville’s nearsightedness that leads to his failure to see that his own moment of inspiration was due to a strange familiarity with the scene, not that he found something new and unique to that moment. Bernard instead embraces the idea of identity being a collective project and any artistic creation to be necessarily a rendition of the material already filling the cultural and historical archive that human history has amassed over the millennia. He recognizes his multiplicity saying, “I am Bernard; I am Byron; I am this, that and the other. They [past literary figures] darken the air and enrich me, as of old, with their antics, their comments, and cloud the fine simplicity of my moment of emotion. For I am more selves than Neville thinks. We are not simple as our friends would have us to meet their needs” (89). Rather than revering the past and literary tradition as a sacred and
separate object, Bernard breathes life into the past by showing its continued relevance in how he thinks of himself and even writes. Bernard’s writing is not conceived to become a pure object divorced from the world but a remix of what he finds significant and convergent. He enacts his power over his environment not by disciplining and categorizing it but by affectively gathering what he associates himself with. Lev Manovich points out that the basic impulse to present oneself to the outside world is not much different. We assemble readily available objects when decorating our home or choosing an outfit (Manovich “Art After Web” 72). It is not unusual to use a template, traditions, or conventions and personalize it with the choices and changes we make. Musicians like Beethoven recover the Baroque fugue, Nouvelle Vague recovers Billy Idol, Francis Bacon recovers Diego Velázquez, and Pepsi recovers Plastic Bertrand. It is in the ongoing negotiation between tradition and identity, the collective and the individual, that allows people to continue questioning their position in history by showing the differences between their position and the past but not dividing their today from the collective’s yesterday. The shared thread of the “I” as hinge and part-whole can be that commonality only if it leans as much on individual interpretation as it does on the collective whole that it draws from.

Everyone Else: And the “I’s” Shall Become One

With individual identity being a careful remix of personal experience and one’s surroundings and traditions, how do we best proceed to use this model of collaboration and intersubjective dependence to make meaning of our world? Woolf’s characters find the answer to this question in Percival while they dine with him before he leaves for India. Percival is in one way a central character since the other six characters adore him and congregate around him. However, he is also a non-existent character since unlike Rhoda, Jinny, Susan, Neville, Louis, and Bernard, he never speaks but is only observed as a shared inspiration between all six friends. Despite his silence, Percival does impart a lesson to the six friends that they all recognize. Louis
translates the message rather clearly saying that Percival “makes us aware that these attempts to say, ‘I am this, I am that,’ which we make, coming together, like separated parts of one body and soul, are false” (137). Perhaps since Percival does not have his own voice and because of his role as a soldier is Her Majesty’s Army, he inspires in the others a sense of unity that transcends any differences each will try to champion as his or her individualism. Neville hammers home this point when he describes raging waters as more stable than any assertion of “I am this, I am that”. Louis does not leave us with such a precarious circumstance but goes on to say that beyond our difference lies “a chain whirling round, round, in a steel-blue circle beneath” (137). Though he does not explicate what this chain that binds all the “I’s” is, Jinny and Susan quickly follow with an interpretation. They each call this circle love and hate marking this chain as one of common emotion or instinct that betrays an attempt to divide one “I” from all others as unique. Bringing all these “I’s” together creates a community through common feeling but what kind of community does Woolf imagine for her characters?

Galia Benziman and Craig Gordon take up representations of community in Woolf’s writings and come to similar conclusions as to the quality of that community. Benziman argues that because the characters view themselves as unique “I’s” whose identities are determined by a shifting whole, the community that is created by their union is open, fragmented, and dissonant. Such a community maintains the differences between each “I” while gathering them by a base commonality unlike corporate or totalitarian communities that eradicate difference to enforce identity as purely a group function (69). Gordon also dissociates this corporate/totalitarian model from Woolf’s work since Woolf does not mark one character as central to which all others fall behind as Percival is clearly disempowered without a voice and Bernard, though the final long chapter is told in his voice alone, still recognizes his full dependence on the other characters to
Woolf’s sense of community is similar to Jean-Luc Nancy’s organic community which forms out of “sharing, diffusion, or impregnation” of one identity across the collective until each “I” sees him or herself as a part of a living and shifting community (35-6).

Woolf provides a powerful and recurring image to recreate and depict this organic community of the part-whole concept of being wholly a part and part of a whole simultaneously with the red carnation that appears when the characters gather together. The most enthusiastic carnation scene arises during Percival’s farewell dinner as the friends are settling into their conversation and winding down the talk on their shared memories of their past at school together. Bernard points out that despite all their different interpretations of the past and their very different lives in the present, they have all come together on that night for some reason. While he first attributes it to a common love for Percival, Bernard pushes that idea aside as too small a motive to gather together old friends. Instead he settles on the idea that what brought them all together was a common desire to create, saying:

We have come together (from the North, from the South, from Susan's farm, from Louis' house of business) to make one thing, not enduring—for what endures? – but seen by many eyes simultaneously. There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves – a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution. (127)

They have all congregated in order to harvest a common but individual vision of their world with the carnation as a small example of how that process of interpreting one object as infinitely many and many interpretations as one concretely one. The carnation serves as a concise and highly visual representation of any act of perception where depending on where at the table you sit the same flower will appear differently and from one point of view some portions of the flower will
be obscured and seeing that side of the flower will require some supplemental perspective provided by a separate viewer or time. To see the flower all at once you are required to both move around so you can see all the sides yourself and depend on others’ testimonies on the far side to “see” all of it at the same time. Quiet individual contemplation will provide only one view while moving around it and listening to other perspectives will allow for an infinite number of views.

Gilles Deleuze takes up this type of motion around a point in his *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* when he describes his idea of the objectile. Taking up a mathematical model, Deleuze explains that rather than look for *the one* straight tangent that will intersect a curve at its vertex, we should find the infinite number of curves that touch that vertex resulting in many curves touching many curves rather than one line touching one curve (18). This infinite curve on curve process creates an objectile, an object based on fluctuation and a continuous modulation over time (19). With an objectile there is not one correct answer or ultimate truth but neither is truth purely relative since there is still only one base curve just as there is only one carnation on the dinner table. Rather, variation, relativity, and modulation is the truth that appears to Deleuze, Woolf, the six friends, and the new media subject who all find interpretation and mediation, that in between space, to be the domain of lived experience.

When the six friends convene around yet another flower decades later, variation and modulation are directly referenced as the substance of that common flower. While the gathering of friends is far less convivial and weighted by the concerns and regrets of an older audience, the convergence of the different “I’s” is viewed as a triumph. Bernard mentions the carnation from Percival’s farewell dinner, identifying the new flower at Hampton Court as a continued variation on the long dead carnation of their past. Louis still sees the flower at Hampton Court as an
illumination against the undifferentiated surroundings and Jinny notes how painful and how long it took to create this six-sided flower from their own experiences. Bernard describes this flower of their mature adulthood saying, “Marriage, death, travel, friendship, town and country; children and all that; a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower. Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life. There. It is over. Gone out.” (229) All of the trials that each character has weathered alone come together in that flower uniting their varied perspectives and experiences into one common place and time, one gathering around their desire to be together.

When the perspectives are brought together they do not appear as pieces glued into a configuration but that each piece is intimately a part of the other. Once again we can turn to Deleuze to explain this sense of unity in separate identities in his definition of Gottfried Liebniz’s monad. The monad corresponds to the soul and the soul is the highest point of nature, the point of view that one particular person will take in understanding his or her universe (23). Each monad contains the multiplicity of all possible outcomes but retain one irreducible point of view making it both everything imaginable and one particular impression of everything all at once (23-5). Imagining the universe as a series of multiple interpretations of an archive of infinite information removes the idea of searching for the meaning of the universe outside the individual. Everything is already in each individual but configured at different ratios. The only meaning each person, each soul, each monad will have is filtered by its point of view that makes it a unique interpretation of its surroundings. What is enlightening about the flower in both dinner scenes is not its objective beauty or any individual interpretation of its existence but its role in reminding all the characters how intricate and separate each view of it is, while still being the pivot point that joins the seemingly disassociated lives of Jinny and Louis or of Susan and
Neville. Their understandings of themselves are purely interior where each character sees what he or she desires and interprets their individual and shared lives that way, Louis converting himself to a stalk, Jinny a dancing scarf, Susan her milk cows and doves. However, when they look inside themselves what they find is their relationship to the whole, to all other characters and their divergent perspectives on life. Here we are not far from Deleuze’s assertion that the subject does not work from a “divine understanding” but from “tiny perceptions as representative of the world in the finite self” (*The Fold* 89).

Yet, the monad is not a simple replacement for the self but a complete alteration in how the subject posits itself in the world. Each individual is not guided by one monad, one perspective but instead is composed of several monads that weave about, some are obscured by others at times as several clouds will pass over the sun on an overcast day. As Deleuze points out, perception is not an object but a vibration gathered by our senses (*The Fold* 95). This is why Liebniz says that we are not surprised when we run into another monad, or soul, since a portion of them is already a portion of us (107) just like the reader of *The Waves* or the viewer of *Sex and the City* will recognize him or herself in each character, even if one appears dominant from the point of view that the reader/viewer brings to interpret the world. Just as the vertex of the parabola was the point of infinite potential intersecting curves, the carnation shows each of the friends the possible remixes of experiences that they could have been and still have arrived at that same flower. The carnation thus does not represent any individual but is there to serve the needs of each character’s point of view by providing a meeting point where the divergent can converge around a common point of interest. As strange as it may sound, any social institution is responsible for being like that carnation, for providing a space for the divergent to roam, meet, separate, and return to one another. Just as Rosen argued that the corporate environment needs to
encourage spontaneous conversation and chance meetings to motivate collaboration, so too do other established institutions like the museum and the academy need to find bridges between their traditions and the needs of their audience, to become a space of potential not pre-established representations of a society. Gondry tried to create such a space at the Deitch Project gallery by providing a location for collaboration that was productive. While any number of films were possible considering the flexible sets available, Gondry’s protocol enforced a time-frame and certain basic rules to avoid both hierarchy and chaos since these terms are not in fact opposites.

We see a rising interest in community-based work over the 20th and 21st century especially of late with museums reaching out and depending on the community to lead heritage initiatives and social art groups like Oda Projesi, who find their artistic value in building a sense of community in neighborhoods through organized events and workshops (Bishop “The social” 180). Unlike other social art projects where one artist creates a plan and hires or recruits participants to execute the vision, the “artists” of the Oda Projesi collective create open-ended events that their collaborators can bring to many different places. This resonates with Gondry’s aims for his Deitch Project exhibit to create an experience and not professional quality films and Björk’s interests that her album Medulla should produce a feeling rather than a sonically complex and polished collection of songs. Elizabeth Crooke charts many museum initiatives in the UK, and Ireland in particular, that call on the community to not just come to the museum but become an intimate part of planning and launching exhibits that have personal and social relevance to the community at that time. Rather than being tomb of tradition and convention, the museums that Crooke examines desire to serve as catalysts for community development in a way that shows how traditions are relevant to present social conditions and how those social conditions mold the usage of existing traditions.
Even Woolf draws her carnation image into supporting this idea of a relevance that brings together a community. As we have seen, the characters meet for Percival’s dinner out of a desire to create something together, and Bernard borrows from Byron out of a common emotion both wish to draw on. The bee that flies around the scene of Neville, Louis, and Bernard’s graduation shows that another element that brings together a community is a shared experience. While Louis is reverent and thankful, Bernard distracted, and Neville annoyed and impatient with the pompous nature of the ceremony, each remark that their graduation is the beginning of an era that will disperse each from the other. Louis emphasizes that despite physical and temporal distance, he will remain close to Bernard, Neville, and Percival because, as he says, “we have forged certain links. Above all, we have inherited traditions” (58). Because their paths have crossed and in a particular shared social context, they cannot separate the others from themselves. As Bernard tries to gather the right words of farewell, he sees a bee moving from the flowers in Lady Hampton’s bouquet, distracting the young men with its casual flight while they feel solemn and serious about departing. The bee then lands on a carnation while Bernard notes that he may not see his friends again. While Bernard remains somber, the bee has already done the work of connecting the young men as it moves from place to place and they each following its movement. The bee’s path defines a gentle unity that is not forced or announced. This may be why the headmaster giving the graduation speech does not even notice the bee. He is busy determining the magnitude of the moment in a neatly composed utterance, the opposite of the bee’s nonchalant and impromptu journey within the scene.

The bee as a marker of an instinctual, unrefined, unity between the characters returns towards the end of the novel. Bernard compares himself to a bee that is brushed away from a sunflower. Just as the bee seeks the sweetness of the sunflower’s pollen, Bernard is collecting
phrases and waiting for them to be of use, for the true story to come to him. Just as the significant link between the young men was their shared experiences in school and not the headmaster’s prepared speech, so too are the snippets and phrases Bernard harvests more representative of his interpretation of the world than any complete story he can imagine. Even when something like a single red flower in a vase inspires a phrase, Bernard only sees a constant repetition with each of his friends’ faces reoccurring, detaching, and coming together again as if each were a musical instrument in a symphony creating consonance and dissonance (Woolf 256). He cannot complete a story and close reality because he sees in his world a series in place of a plot, a continuance rather than a conclusion. Because there is no end or resolution, Bernard cannot order the world as such. He equally cannot lay down his desire to come to a meaning considering how his life has revolved around an obsession to spin phrases. Instead he has to replicate the response of the Baroque viewer of any of the great ceiling paintings, that being, not to stand back and analyze the scene or fall into the perfectly dramatic perspectival space represented, but to realize something in that space (Ndalianis 209). For the Baroque viewer of the ceiling painting that realization comes from moving around until the perspective is exposed and the difference between the painting and the architecture becomes evident. For Bernard, the realization is that the phrases he spins are not what distinguish the real from the unreal but expose a field of potentials and relationships that lie in the perspective of each character. These perspectives meet to collaboratively imply the infinite interpretations of the world that are both collective and individual at once.

**Organizing Perspectives: Modulating the Trait**

Given Bernard’s conclusions about the role his storytelling has in his understanding of reality and the insignificance of phrases, what point is there is building up stories? If language does not provide a true representation of an individual, if “I am this, I am that” is unstable and
unreliable and conclusions are always out of reach, what becomes of the narrative and one of its strongest genres, the novel? Burroughs argued that the products of his writing could not be called novels since they were organized around the cut-up, chance, and collage effects thus sidestepping the conventions of narrative causality and temporality. Woolf’s The Waves also evades novel’s conventions but unlike Burroughs, she does not reject the label of novel completely and instead finds ways to update that label to better represent affective association as an organizing principle. While Burroughs infused narrative with a visual mechanism, collage, to support juxtaposition over causality as the new media subject’s experience of the world, Woolf turned to music as an organizational analogy for how that new media subject copes with an overabundance of information. Burroughs’s cut-up separates scenes and characters from chronology and spatial realism while Woolf’s borrowing of Baroque musical structures, which she encounters through Beethoven late string quartets, reinvigorates counterpoint and its most complex process, the fugue, to create a simultaneity that she finds impossible with the conventions of narrative or painting (Clements “Transforming” 162).

It is not that the 21st century has outlived the use of storytelling but that our methods of storytelling in the novel in particular, have outlived their relevance. Being bound to one form does not accurately represent the digital experience. Woolf’s use of music as inspiration for the structure of The Waves is itself associative rather than an accurate mimic of the form, seeing the divergent as analogous rather than exclusive. Though she notes several time in her diaries and letters music’s role in her writing, she combined so many structural devices in each piece that crediting any single inspiration for her work is impossible (Jacobs 248). She was not a trained musician and did not read or play music (Jacobs 232) so her borrowing from music was one of
looser interpretations of structural form and perhaps even more so an affective response to the feeling of the music that she wanted to recreate in her writing.

While Woolf was reproached on her treatment of narrative she adamantly protested any claim that her work was purely stream of consciousness saying in a 1926 diary entry that “There’s a good deal of shaping and composing in my books” (Warner 50). Though she disliked and avoided the “false arrangements” and superfluous information that the novel form often calls for, she equally objected to a work that was not disciplined into a form. She writes in her diary in September 1924 “I think writing must be formal. The art must be respected. This struck me reading some of my notes here. For, if one lets the mind run loose, it becomes egotistic: personal, which I detest” (Velica 11). This resonates with the idea of an in-between space between objective and subjective experience that comes with being a part-whole. Just because the text does not comply with strict chronology and conventional spatial transitions, dialogue, and character development does not mean that *The Waves* is a chaotic downpour of unrelated images. Instead Woolf sees her writing as organized by repetitions of a theme. Just as she stated that the massive amounts of information compiled to compose Roger Fry’s biography required her to abstract the information into themes, so too with *Between the Acts* does she posit that a novel must open by laying down the theme of the book that will restate and repeat that theme. She explicates a very similar compositional process for Fry’s biography saying “I did try to state them [the themes] in the first chapter, and then to bring in developments and variations, and then to make them all heard together and end by bringing back the first theme in the last chapter” (Jacobs 253). We see that Woolf does have a clear concept of organization in her writing but as she shows, there is more than one way to write a novel.
Many scholars have already identified the relationships of the characters as the central organizing structure of *The Waves*. Beatrice Monaco states that the characters create a textual rhythm that continually modulates to create multiple patterns (179) and Gray Kochhar-Lindgren says: “*The Waves* is not so much the story, a developed plot that verbally mimes action in the world, of six characters named Bernard, Louis, Neville, Jinny, Rhoda, and Susan– as it is the discursive enactment of a single poetic voice in six closely related keys” (58). These conclusions represent but a few of their kind. Keeping in mind that the motive for a thematic organization comes from an overwhelming amount of information to sort, it does not seem shocking to compare Woolf’s writing to a fugue, the very height of Baroque music, and her six characters to separate subjects and countersubjects of a fugue. Plenitude, or an overwhelming amount of material in music, arises from textural and rhythmic saturation largely accomplished through using several subjects or musical motifs and overlapping those subjects in contrapuntal combinations (Hatten 249-50). The aural density represented in *The Waves* is impressive since the reader not only listens to the interior dialogues of the characters but to all the sounds they hear such as birds, waves, stamping, clocks, and trains (Cuddy-Keane 88). Bernard even argues that characters and certain scenes should have music that accompany them to more directly communicate a mood or feeling, to basically provide a soundtrack to the novel (Woolf 250-1).

Clearly the environment portrayed in *The Waves* is one of density and quandary, though also linked and associative.

Counterpoint, which orders plenitude, is the combination and relation between two independent voices that are harmonically interrelated, meaning each voice is unique and divergent from others in the composition but when many voices are played at once their combination is harmonic rather than dissonant. Counterpoint, like its ultimate expression in the
fugue, is not a form, a product with a definitive set of moves, but is a process of composition whose outcomes are multiple and varied. The act of harmonically interrelating parts of a mass is essentially the motive of thematic or associative models of organization. Counterpoint has often been revisited as an organizational structure of great importance. Even Arnold Schöenberg saw counterpoint’s ability to infinitely recombine into a “many-sided presentation of an idea” its greatest virtue toward avoiding structures with one correct answer and predictable progressions (Peles 122). In fact, Schöenberg used counterpoint as a game for his students to find all possible solutions and then continue creating even more (Neff 128). This essentially entails taking a central idea that has been compressed into a theme and seeing how craftily it can be transposed, modulated, flipped, and reversed while weaving through several keys and interacting with other melodic lines (Neff 124-5). The ability of counterpoint and the fugue to order highly saturated and dense material could well have been what drew Beethoven to the fugue style in his late string quartets (Hatten 250) that were of such interest to Woolf. That Woolf imagines her writing as a presentation, development, variation, and convergence of themes attests to her recognition of fugal organization as an associative thematic model applicable to writing a novel that is counter to novelistic tradition.

As Woolf’s use of a musical metaphor for textual organization is more approximate than it is an accurate translation of musical theories of composition, a brief description of the major tropes of the fugue will be sufficient to outline a common general impulse towards theme-based organizational models. The fugue is the most complex compositional use of counterpoint and must include at least a subject. The subject is a short melodic line confined to one octave that can be easily recognized and has a distinctive rhythm. The subject is often accompanied by countersubjects, though rarely more than five. A countersubject, like a subject must be individual
and melodically interesting. The countersubject also must provide a rhythmic contrast to the subject to aid in distinguishing them but more importantly to add interest in their harmonic combination. If a fugue has no countersubjects, the subject is accompanied by counterpoint (Kennan 207). In well written fugues with more than one countersubject it sometimes becomes difficult to determine where the subject is re-introduced or when the subject ends and the countersubject begins. O’Brien-Schaefer makes a similar observation of the transitions between characters’ interior dialogues in The Waves. Because each character refers to him or herself in the first person singular and the transitions between characters are easily read over, as they are simply “said Bernard” or “said Jinny”, the reader often loses his or her place, converging one character’s interior dialogue with another’s (159). The interweaving of subjects within the plenitude exemplifies the complexity of the relationship between the subject and his or her surroundings.

In addition to transitions from subject to countersubject, or one countersubject to another (or subject to subject in The Waves) are transitions between musical keys effected by the use of an episode. Episodes in fugues are extraordinarily common because they allow the composer to show how craftily he or she can continue reintroducing the subject through key changes. An episode offers the listener a break from the dominant theme of the subject and operates by recycling portions of the subject, countersubject, counterpoint, and new material to modulate to a different key (Kennan 220). During an episode, the texture of the composition thins since modulating to a new key is emphasized over converging subject and countersubjects which only complicates that process (222). Woolf uses a similar structure to transition between different time periods in The Waves. Sandwiching each of the main chapters are brief descriptions of the passage of a day in a seaside scene, which she calls interludes. She repeatedly describes the sea,
sun, birds, garden, and a house. There are no people in these interludes; rather the reader watches the sun rising and setting and what effects that movement has on the world below. Each interlude sets the tone for the following chapter suggesting intensity with the sharpness of shadows and crisis with frantic bird songs and flight. With none of the characters present, the reader can focus on the tone that forms and the very passage of time through watching the movement of the sun, essentially modulating the characters to a different time and version of themselves. The reader can recognize a basic recycling of material between the chapters and interludes – with one example being the flower that sits next to a red-trimmed curtain on the windowsill of the seaside house. Woolf writes: “The real flower on the window-sill was attended by a phantom flower. Yet the phantom flower was part of the flower for when a bud broke free, the paler flower in the glass opened a bud too” (Woolf 75). Not only is the flower repeated but varied in the window, it also reappears at Percival’s dinner, the dinner at Hampton Court, and Neville, Louis, and Bernard’s graduation. Like the subject of a fugue, the flower is repeated in a modulated form over the length of the novel and like the episode, the flower as a theme is simplified but recycled from the chapters.

Even Woolf’s decision to end the novel with the short interlude “The waves broke on the shore” (297) points to the continued cycle, or process of making a coherent meaning through endless modulations of a theme. The cyclical theme she takes up in her interludes and her decision to depict the characters as intimately interconnected through shared emotions that form a ring deep beneath them, shows her interest in fugally inspired music and any such thematically ordered rather than chronologically or causally ordered text almost self-evident. Though repetition of a theme can become extraordinarily complex, Kathleen McCluskey points out that pattern through repetition is also very instinctual and basic to human tradition (123). More
importantly, repetition creates a strong sense of unity or community, drawing together what may otherwise be seen as a hodge-podge of material (125). In this idea of gathering to devise themes lies the basis of process in a continuing search and creation of a pattern, the basis of collaboration in a productive convergence between an identifiable individual voice and a commonality, be it emotional, cultural, motivational, or otherwise, and the basis of the new media subject as a part-whole in the individual articulation of the theme existing in a noticeably unique place and time simultaneous with its role as only one articulation of a pattern that orders a whole. As the new media subject articulates his or her variation on a perspective to take when viewing the world even metaphorically through a red carnation, he or she does so as a monad. In being composed of all possible experiences, the new media subject expresses him or herself as one interpretation of the dark and divided in-between space by electing a certain theme, a dominant monad, which will both individualize that subject but also link him or her to all other subjects whose monads are a remix built of the same base materials. As Deleuze points out, Liebniz provides such a philosophy of the world that begins with a figure or portrayal that becomes inscribed over a field or space, allowing for points of view to form expressions of that field. Peter Abbs argues that *The Waves* follows such a model by working from a character’s impulse that manifests itself into an image which repeats over the field of the novel to be received by the other characters and readers.

Woolf’s *The Waves* seems to anticipate Katie Mitchell’s 2006 play *Waves*, which remixes, or offers another modal perspective, of her 1931 novel. *Waves*, is an ever-changing process of creating a play in front of the audience, introducing and fragmenting various media. Rather than writing a concrete script, Mitchell incorporated her cast of eight in all steps of the play production process. After collaboratively creating a storyboard, all cast members learned to
use the video and sound equipment that would be incorporated as part of the composition (Sierz 54-6). For each performance of the play, the prop table was set on stage and a projection screen hung behind the table and actors. The actors alternate between manipulating props, filming, being filmed, and enacting and reading soliloquies. The actors rarely interact with one another directly but work separately to create a complete composition, showing both the action and the characters as more complex than dialogue and soliloquy, exterior and interior but a constructed web of various and dispersed actions. The play becomes a display of the complexities of interaction, communication, and identity within an unstable environment. One actor may be seated reading text into a microphone, another filming an actor eating in a café set, another creating sound effects of rain and thunder at the props table. The audience watches all of the shuffling on stage while viewing the real time footage the actors shot on the screen hung above that very stage. By including other media forms on the theatre stage and allowing the audience to witness the production live, Mitchell and her actors do stretch the limit of theatre in imaginative – in the way in which Woolf’s *The Waves* had already forecast in its use of interior dialogue and thematic organization inspired by fugal structures. Mitchell’s view that theatre’s true problem lies with a lack of imagination and a sense of insignificance the audience feels toward theatre (Sierz 59) is not far from Woolf’s own dissatisfaction with the novel’s conventional and increasingly confining form. Perhaps it is not a mistake that the Baroque itself was interested in the theatre and opera, that Woolf saw *The Waves* as partly a play, and that Mitchell adapts the book as a play/film. The theatre itself is wholly dependent on collaborations, in which authorial intention becomes dispersed across multiple interpretations from the playwright to the director to the actors to the set designer and so on and so forth. Woolf’s characters collaborate with one another to create identities and she places the novel form in collaboration with the poem, play,
and the fugue. Mitchell continues this trend by collaborating with her actors to create the play and by merging many media, analog and digital, to represent both Woolf’s novel and the 21st century audience who, no longer enslaved by the romantic illusion of individualism, are giving way to the blurring of boundaries between themselves and others as well as between media and genres.

The new media subject is predicated then on an interconnectedness that stems from varied repetition. We are engrossed in relationships and associations that challenge us not to analyze or answer but to spin more possible combinations, to push one more contrapuntal composition out of the same subject, imagine one more faceted side to a carnation, put on one more performance of *Waves* to continue yet build onto a theme. But what brings out the desire to collaborate, combine, and remix is first a common point. For the characters of *The Waves* that common point was a desire to collaborate and a feeling of connection through their shared emotions of love and hate, not too dissimilar from where we began with Björk’s interest in instinct and experiences of the purely physical human body. Let us then return to the beginning while getting closer to the end to see how thematic organization around a basic commonality, feeling or instinct finds a rebirth, as does literature, in the digital and electronic space.
CHAPTER 4
ITINERATE DESIRE AND DATA NARRATIVES

a scanner starts at the beginning / and moves ever so slowly / to the end of the scan / it may take 30 seconds or so / this is just what the Quick-Time VR / movies do but on a horizontal plane / you / join / the ends so you just turn centered / in an infinite image loop / onscreen / somebody will shoot all the backgrounds / somebody will shoot all the people / all the people on blue-screen / tribal mask zone / somebody will shoot all the clouds / you’re going to replace into the sky / historical mirror zone / numerical image zone / the compositor compostis it all / output to / whatever format you want / video DV film whatever

--Stephanie Strickland

The personal computer has perhaps been the most significant invention of the 20th century, altering our daily lives and cognitive patterns. Much more than a tool of convenience and an efficient machine ordering production, communication, air traffic, and money management, the computer introduces a new lifestyle metaphor that defines new media subjectivity. As with any major technological and social shift in human history, the advent of the digital age has met with its fair share of resistance and nostalgia for older practices and this is perhaps nowhere more true than in practices of narrative. The early digital storytelling of classic hypertext projects elicited both an idealization of the computer as a superior narrative machine and a fear of the extinction of the book as narrative’s medium. Retrospectively, several critics have affirmed that early hypertext projects were not as revolutionary or divergent from print narratives as the early champions of the new genre proposed. Vincent Casaregola argues that hypertext features, including what was previously celebrated as its key difference from print narrative, the hyperlink, are “merely the older qualities of print textuality amplified, accelerated, and animated to provide for a much more rapid and intensive experience of integration” (225). This may particularly be true of early hypertext works but as the field of digital storytelling has developed into hypermedia and the differences between digital literature and digital art becomes harder to
discern, we cannot deny that digital storytelling is not merely an amplified print narrative or a new literary genre but belongs to a model beyond literate thinking.

Similar apprehensions of shifting technologies and models of thought arose in the transition between orality and literacy, as is clearly evident in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. The fear that human memory would decline because speakers and poets would rely on written texts to remind them of their speech or story paints such a change in a negative light. Millennia later Jay David Bolter points out that “writing does not harm memory; rather it imposes a changing set of demands on memory” (Casaregola 219). While it is true that writing eclipses or replaces some skills honed by speaking, it also provides benefits that augment what was possible in oral practice alone. In *Phaedrus*, Plato argues that the written text is inferior because it is forever divided from its author and thus must stand on its own (Plato 81-2). The audience of the written text cannot access the author to question motive, intention, or meaning and must manage with the information provided on the page. While it may be true that with the written word the audience loses the performance and immediacy of the speech, the written word brought about benefits and features that do not replace those of orality. Bolter argues that literacy may have deemphasized performance but it did introduce linear hierarchical ordering within written material (*Writing Spaces* 105). With this in mind, judging postmodern narrative and digital writing as fragmented or chaotic assumes that we measure digital writing against the same criteria as print narratives before it (Bolter *Writing Spaces* 207). I am not making a judgment on quality but rather of kind. Digital texts that offer multiple choices to their viewers and use many media in their exposition are not superior to Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* or William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* nor do they compete with them. Rather, these digital texts emphasize the new abilities of a new technology and, potentially, a new audience. While the print book on the
whole creates an authoritative, single, linear narrative, digital storytelling explicitly invites user intervention, interaction, and subjective ordering through a reader’s personal desire or interest. While skimming and non-sequential reading is possible in the print narrative, it is not premised in its structure or assumptions. This become only more evident with late modern experiments in print literature such as Raymond Queneau’s *Cent mille millards de poèmes*, which emphasize generative computational models of composition and reading.

Digital writing is structurally different from literate or print writing due largely to its multiple possible configurations, multimodal nature, and dependence on code. Ryan calls upon Silvio Gaggi to make her point that such differences between print and digital writing bring about a “postmodern conception of the subject as a site of multiple, conflicting, and unstable identities” (*Narrative as Virtual* 37). The previous analysis of Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*, itself an experiment in narrative structure, already points to the deterioration of a subjectivity based on a definitive sense of self in an isolated expression of “I”. As Woolf’s character, Louis, argued, claims of “I am this. I am that” (Woolf 137) are merely shallow linguistic divisions that only emphasize one’s dependence on the other as necessarily intertwined and inseparable from approaching subjectivity in the 20th century. Hypertext theorists like Dirk Van Hulle directly attribute experimental narratives like Woolf’s as key to hypertextual storytelling’s approach to the depiction of time and space as well as the identity of the reader as itinerant traveler in the story space (Van Hulle 145). Furthermore, electronic poet and critic Loss Pequeño Glazier posits electronic poetry as a boundary between text and code which, because of the computer’s role in co-writing with the human, cannot claim an authoritative, individualized “I” of the Romantic, Realist, or Modernist writer. Writing and reading in the digital space of the computer is not individual but social by default (*Digital Poetics* 174-5). We see such speculation in *The Waves*
through the interrelated nature of the six friends who cannot describe themselves without referring to others and who experience unity through a subjective perspective of a shared object or memory such as the recurring red carnation.

With the continued technological advancements of the 20th and 21st centuries and the common experience of an altered sense of identity as networked relations, rather than affirmative selves, subsequent experiments in writing and narrative have shown a drive toward and increasingly imperative need of finding new ways to tell stories in a digital environment. While the advent of the digital is not inherently positive, it is assuredly a societal, technological, and increasingly global change that cannot be ignored. Such potential changes rely on the characteristics of new technologies. In examining what digital writing is, we must look to the characteristics of digital systems. Marie-Laure Ryan describes such digital systems as algorithm driven operations, interactive and reactive presentations, volatile and variable representations, multi sensorial, and networked based organizations (Avatars of Story 90). Several critiques of electronic literature credit early generative print literature projects and especially Burroughs’s cut-up as a pioneer of enfolding mechanical and computer technologies with practices of writing (Swiss 290). N. Katherine Hayles posits that by using the cut-up to break down syntax and linear narrative, Burroughs’s writing has helped to foster an interest in “networked and programmable media as the material basis for artistic innovation and creation” (Electronic Literature 20). His repeated assertions that cut-up was not machine writing but a collaboration between machinic abilities and human intellectual agility showed the computer and the human user as collaborators articulating the experience of living in a digital world. Just as we seem no longer to be able to entertain the fantasy of a defined sense of self, we increasingly move away from singular linear models of storytelling that are defined by clear beginnings and endings. The generative,
algorithmic, and network based nature of digital technologies transform narrative into a field of
potential storylines built anew with each reading, reader, and execution of the underlying code.

The very premise of this study, that of determining whether a popular aesthetic is reliant
upon an analytical or sensational model of experiencing both the creative arts, our social and
political involvement in the world, and our understanding of subjectivity, has essentially been
resolved in digital experiments. The analytical and sensational are not in opposites, as was earlier
imagined, but collaborators in how we experience the digital world, from seeing ourselves as
collaborators with our computers, to using data gloves to “touch” virtual objects, and converging
previously divided fields such as music and the novel or computer science and writing literature
to combine various cognitions and sensations each arouse.

The authors and artists examined in this study have all been accused of free forming and
ad-libbing their creations and each has flatly denied such accusations. Björk argues that her
music is severely disciplined in its composition. Burroughs protests criticisms that his work is
machine writing, observing instead that it is carefully and meticulously crafted, using several
pages of material to cut-up perhaps only a single phrase. Rauschenberg equally accredits his
compositions as not random juxtapositions but evidence of associated meanings springing from a
moment or experience. Similarly, Woolf contests the label of stream of consciousness, claiming
that her work is in fact highly structured, particularly in the case of *The Waves*, which brings
together the constraints of musical structure, poetic language, the novel genre, and dramatic
monologue resulting in a highly disciplined and stylistic example of literature in the transition
between literate and digital models of thought. Hayles posits that, just as literacy and the novel
form were responsible for defining the liberal humanist subject, so too does electronic literature
forward its own figure of a networked subject specific to the late age of print. She argues
“literature functions as a technology designed to change the cognitions of readers” (Electronic Literature 83). As Woolf’s and Burroughs’s experiments in literature (among those of countless others) have altered approaches to narrative compared to previous more literate rather than digital models, we notice a changing subjectivity which becomes only more evident with the increased use of the computer to create literature. The computer’s ability to converge the human and machine, the reader and the writer, as well as many media from audio, visual, pseudo haptic, and verbal models only solidify what previous print experiments in literature have been pointing toward since the late 19th century: the digital subject as storyteller is markedly different in crucial respects from the print-literate subject as storyteller.

**Digital Subject: Spectactor in a Digital Network Community**

Technology irrefutably alters the human experience and our present transition to a digital age has seen much analysis along these lines. Marshall McLuhan’s work serves as perhaps the quintessential example of the importance of technology and mass media to our changing subjectivity and social interactions particularly in light of an increasingly globalized audience. He writes, “When the planet was suddenly enveloped by a man-made artifact, Nature flipped into art form. The moment of Sputnik was the moment of creating Spaceship Earth and/or the global theatre. Shakespeare at the Globe had seen all the world as a stage, but with Sputnik, the world literally became a global theatre with no more audiences, only actors” (Guertin 244). Carolyn Guertin recalls this point to argue that the very act of immersion in global surveillance forces humans to face their role as actors who personally interpret their space. Artist and writer Mark Amerika continues along such lines, stating that with the constant surveillance made possible through the portable camera, satellite, and web-cam, we are reapproaching Walter Benjamin’s idea of the “aura.” However, this aura of the digital era is not an object but a networked identity that constantly changes as it is performed. Amerika states: “when the Floating Webcam Eye
captures you in its lens, you feel the need to ‘creatively exhibit’ yourself, to instantaneously de-mystify yourself, even though you know that this is really not you at all, can never be you, because it’s just not you. You are always someone else” (Amerika “Life Style” 219). Such images of the subject as an actor rather than a spectator lend themselves to a convergence of lived experience and representation that is often viewed as utopian and even escapist. As the seemingly failed goal of both the avant-garde and participatory art, the convergence of life and art appears to be a better guide than goal. Claire Bishop takes up the role of participatory art of the 1960s and its descendent, relational aesthetics, saying that their major goal was to empower the subject, bringing awareness to the active role each plays in shaping social and political reality (“Introduction” 12). We find that this empowerment to act does not specifically result in revolution, usurping capitalist powers, or demonizing consumerism.

Just as Ziarek argues that art is a function, a forcework rather than an object of contemplation, Bishop uses participatory art and relational aesthetics to address the idea of the spectator as not mindless consumer but as an active interpreter. Rather than going down a utopian road of labeling each person as equally authors, Bishop’s analysis rings true to the population’s lived experience with networked media. While each person can write his or her own blog, such an author is not taken as procedurally equivalent to more celebrated writers, such as Mark Danielewski and his print hypertext novels or Charles Dickens’s serial novels turned literary classics. Bishop draws on Jacques Rancière’s writings to validate the spectator as a crucial role to our social and political reality. Rancière writes, “Spectatorship is not the passivity that has to be turned into activity. It is our normal situation. We learn and teach, we act and know as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamt” (Bishop “Introduction” 16). In this light, the spectator is not the defunct actor or a person who
fails to participate. Instead, the spectator serves as an interpreter whose goal is not emancipation or revolution but that of inventing translations of social and political environments. Rancière’s politics of participation is not one of contestation but rather of appropriation, in which spectators borrow existing works and given situations in order to make use of such objects and ideas in ways that were not predicted by the original (Bishop “Introduction” 16). This model of participation is homologous to the concepts of the objectile and monad discussed in the previous chapter, in which each individual serves as a remix of all possible realities and does not offer an answer to a question (the tangent to a parabola) but potential relationship to a conundrum (one of many curves that intersects a parabola).

With the spectator validated and active participation no longer confined to revolt or contestation, the idea of playing a role ceases to be a necessarily passive or uncritical act. Ryan points out that within digital media we constantly subject ourselves to playing certain roles and following game or narrative rules as an active choice because we are driven by our desires to enjoy the experience of a story. Role playing is intriguing in particular because the experience is not exclusive to the digital world. We use role-playing in therapeutic settings to come to understand the position our co-workers or spouse may be in and children are similarly taught empathy by imagining that they are someone other than themselves. What has been labeled spectatorship, like game playing, is in fact a way to act through interpretation that consists of at least mental role-playing. Associating passivity with the spectator and activity with the actor seems a gross misnomer. Instead spectator and actor are interrelated as a spectactor, a term that avoids alliance with specifically active or passive models of participation. Getting away from the revolutionary individual that breaks all molds, we are able to see that there is political power in
spectactorship and role playing where the Thespians’ motto taken from Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man*, may very well be right: “Act well your part; there all the honor lies” (“Our Story”).

This, however, does not mean that we can ignore the influences of corporate or consumer culture and their motives and influences on social and political reality. While it may very well be true that late modern consumer culture has resulted in a more complacent population and corporate policy has indeed exploited natural and human resources beyond any ethical justification, their methods have clearly been effective in bringing them to global power. Rather than revolting against the entire socio-economic system and starting from scratch or returning to a (presumably less exploitative) barter system of village based local societies, we have to resist the urge to throw the baby out with the bathwater and find ways to appropriate corporate and consumerist tools to our advantage since they will not be leaving us anytime soon.

Craig Saper’s in-depth analysis of networked art takes the very idea of working from and with the current structures in place towards alternate, and in this case, artistic means. This appropriation attests to the very power to interpret and thus question how we as spectators want to forward or alter our realities. He mentions that networks of artists, be they Fluxus, Dada, or mail artists, define groups that do not work with the competitive and exploitative business ethic or established corporate networks. Rather, they accentuate the existence of other models of behavior that a conglomerate of various contributors joined by a shared perspective can have besides conquest and profit. Saper argues that such activities show that artists can counter big business and big government, not by refuting their methods but personalizing them, creating niches others can relate to. This idea of localized niches is so effective that big businesses use niche marketing particularly in regards to their online identities (24). Showing the spectator that he or she does in fact have options and is able to create and contribute to niches reveal that
subjugation may be optional (47). Society at large faces this model of spectactorship at an unprecedented level due to the fact that supposed amateurs create more and more literary, artistic, and even business projects. With the increasing number and variety of producers, we are forced to question existing models of power and judgment as limiting. Where before there existed clear dividing lines between professional and amateur, legitimate and illegitimate, serious and frivolous, we find ourselves in the limbo of anything goes. Spectactors are encouraged to play with the boundaries we see as increasingly questionable and mutable. Joline Blais and Jon Ippolito attribute such an act of play as the very role of art and the confines of one’s socio-political reality. They state:

[Art] encourages its audience to join in the play, ultimately freeing them of political and cultural dichotomies that pit right against wrong, left against right. Like children in a fenced-in playground who roam further toward the edges than in a fenceless one, the constraints of art liberate the spirit of play. And play is the creative energy with which humans make and remake the world. (135)

This invitation is to play not to observe play. Interpreting which boundaries the digital subject will recognize and how will be used in the subject’s games, shows the spectator as neither autonomous individual separate from society nor a flâneur, or detached observer. Aesthetics plays a crucial role in developing an ethics of the digital era since the process of play, interpretation, and judgment becomes the seat of participation in digital media projects such as art, literature, or currency exchange and online business.

Rita Raley makes a similar argument for participation within the global corporate culture, calling tactical media art projects “sociopolitical interventions” that do not usurp but critique the “global techno-military-economic world order” from within (27). She enlists curator and art critic Nicholas Bourriard who claims “the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing system” (Raley 27). In this argument, the onus is on the spectator to become a creative agent
within the corporate system not a representative for the people confronting the corporate collective (Raley 10). The latter would imply that there is a definitive place where individuals or groups of citizens can confront global collectives such as corporate business or global militancy. Tactical media artists work from the assumption that no such central location exists for power structures today but are instead dispersed across networks. Storming a government building no longer carries the same effect and street protests lose their sting; instead, conflict is accomplished through swarming networks that results in what is called cyber-, info-, or netwar (Raley 43). This increasingly networked quality of modern politics and economics encourage artists to take up new media as a tool for interacting with the world at large. Janez Strehovec argues that new media have brought “new forms, challenges, and aesthetics” to traditional art, revealing its formal and institutional constraints (100). Similarly, he points to new media and mobile text producers like cell phones as a revival of writing that offers “the possibility to abandon the stable place of textual articulations in cyberspace (for example the web page), and the possibility to start using the web media as a smooth, nomadic space for writing-as-crossing” (116).

**Human / Computer Penetration**

For any such networked activities to be feasible, the human user must embrace technology as neither oppressive nor threatening to embodiment but rather inherently a part of embodiment in the digital age. N. Katherine Hayles argues that we should not privilege technology or the body but turn to how they interact and alter one another. In this case, we cannot view technology as a tool that a human wields, but we must recognize that our technologies are “integral components of understanding what it means to be human in a computational era” (*Electronic Literature* 131). The relationship between technology and humans is a dynamic hetarchy in which street where we are capable of altering our technology just as our technology can alter our cognitive models, behaviors, and expressions. For Hayles,
using the computer to compose and the Internet to distribute literature has greatly altered what literature is and will become in the digital era. As electronic literature depends less and less on verbal and print narratives and more on executable code, we as readers and critics have to question what we consider to be literature (Hayles *Electronic Literature* 4). Perhaps the most significant realization we as readers and critics have reached with electronic literature is that a style, medium, and genre come with certain assumptions that qualify its use and limits. By maintaining the assumptions and qualities of other media like print books or oil paintings when approaching new media projects, we can easily miss what new media can offer as well as misjudge the effectiveness of new media’s potential in aesthetic and political realms (Hayles “Translating Media” 263). The very network capabilities of computers today, especially through the Internet, bring certain assumptions about how writers and artists should work with and create through that medium.

The idea of the network as a model for living and experiencing the world is far from foreign, having already infiltrated American political rhetoric, as Raley observes in our discussions of modern terrorism. She cites the first report on the 9/11 attacks in the United States, which describe the terrorist cells as “shadowy networks” that work with computers to penetrate the enemy rather than with tanks and missiles (77). As Saper notes, mail artists of the 1950s used the postal service as a network to distribute and collectively create art and literary pieces. What makes digital media and the computer significant is that the assumptions of working in a network are already built into the machine itself. When Burroughs was working with typewriters to do his cut-ups, the network of texts he used were analog thus not prefaced or prominent to the consumer of the cut-up without serious archival research. The network of text existed in Burroughs’s mind but with networked computers such connections are made visible as
the very structure of web-based writing. While oral cultures advanced performance and literate culture forwarded hierarchical ordering, our present experience in the digital era has brought the order developed with literacy into an openly accessible network rather than obscured in authorial intent and singular vision (Bolter *Writing Space* 106).

The act of reading and writing in the digital situation can no longer be about composing or determining an objective plot if we are to take full advantage of the characteristics of new media text objects. The very nature of the network computer moves writing beyond the confines of the codex, which Foucault argued could never find its borders. Though the book functions as a closed linear system with a front and back cover and sequential pages, it is always dependent upon a network of other texts with which it is denied immediate access because of the limits of the physical form of the book (Tapia 11). The network capabilities of new media bring the book beyond its limits as it updates the literate model of subjectivity from distinguishable individual self. By working with technology that assumes connections within a network, new media socializes the vision of the ostracized reader quietly consuming a novel in the tranquility of his or her armchair. As more writers, poets, and artists enlist digital technology as integral to their composition processes, we come to understand technology as a collaborator in our goals of expression and community building rather than as enemies and disturbers of the literary peace.

Judd Morrissey’s literary art piece *The Error Engine* is a clear example of critiquing the limits of print and potential of digital texts as well as how humans and machines collaborate to write meaningful expressions. Morrissey collaborates with digital artist Lori Talley and computer scientist Dr. Lutz Hamel, to create stories with a computer. The installation includes a lectern facing a projector screen and in front of a series of green metal bookshelves. Inside the hollowed out book pages lies a small touch sensitive screen. Participants can stand at the lectern and select
certain words on the screen with a stylus. The computer program creates the initial page of text and having users select words of their choosing from that page enacts alterations to the story. The computer program uses the selected word as a constraint it must acknowledge and respect when regenerating a story. The computer, though, is not programmed to increase the number of occurrences of the selected word but to make the new story more representative of the meaning of that selected word. Morrissey, Talley, and Hamel describe the system as one that works with semantic rather than syntactic constraints (Hamel 5). By working with the computer, users can both marvel at the ingenuity of modern programming but also interact with the computer as a co-writer not far from the practice Burroughs had imagined. By having the human contributor choose the constraints and the machine compose within that constraint, The Error Engine has almost turned the automatic writing games of the Surrealists on their head. Rather than using chance procedures to determine the parameters of games like “One Into Another” or “Exquisite Corpse” to enliven human creativity, Morrissey, Talley, and Hamel have posited that the computer has the cognitive abilities required for genuinely inventive writing. In this way our computer technologies and capabilities are not as foreign to humans agency as we may care to believe. The possibility of seeing the computer as a collaborator rather than a tool to be used by humans becomes increasingly plausible.

Art and literature’s appropriation of digital technology may seem to be a contest of keeping up with the Jones’s (or the techno-scientific in this case) but this development is not to satisfy the vanity, pride, or affluence of the arts and humanities. Art and literature take up digital technology in order to remain relevant to an altered culture. Blais and Ippolito compare art to an antibody, stating that as the antibody must function like the virus itself so must art function like technology in order to keep in step with art’s role in the social body: challenging the socio-
political whole to evolve (10-11). While the historical avant-garde’s aim to blur together art and life by specifically taking art out of the museum, into the street and to the people, seems utopian, perhaps these goals have found a home in the network computer and the Internet, where distribution is wider, quicker, and inexpensive. The digital era has brought to our attention that we have always worked with the assumptions of the technologies and media we have. Networked space particularly points to the overlapping qualities of the spectator and actor, the reader and the writer, as roles that are far from mutually exclusive. Our technologies are embedded in us and we in them and it is through the assumptions of these relationships that we build subjectivity, community dynamics, and, more specifically for the digital literature and art discussed here, human expression.

**The Multimodal Computer: Experiments in Sensation**

The digital era has not only converged the relationships between spectator/actor, reader/writer, consumer/producer, but has also collapsed divisions between media themselves and the discourses that attend to those media. While there is a substantial history of multimedia experiments in writing, music, theatre, and visual arts that predate the rise of the computer, the functional abilities of the computer today assume the production of multimedia works. The computer itself only needs to read the binary code describing the files a human user is accessing. The computer’s ability to work with multiple media not only eases amateur creative projects but has also sparked an increase in interdisciplinary work where artists in one field are exploring, experimenting, and collaborating with artists from others fields to create multimedia pieces. Writer and code artist Morrissey chooses to work with Talley a digital artist and Hamer a computer scientist, because the various specialties and perspectives that come out of each of these field of creative activity are required produce a piece that can communicate to the literary, art, and computer worlds that comprise the network surrounding *The Error Engine*. Similarly
William Burroughs collaborates with painter Brion Gysin and computer programmer Ian Sommerville to work through collage text projects and audio-editing projects respectively.

It seems that the divisions that institutions have built between various disciplines, separating them into distinct academic departments that divvy up available approaches that humans have devised to understand our world, become a questionable metaphor for knowledge making in the digital era. Now that we have computers that can handle the massive amounts of materials and forms that previously forced humans into acute specialization and we increasingly adopt a network model of interacting with our world, multimedia works appear to be the underlying assumption of any expression of the digital environment of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Digital technology has altered what Hayles calls our “material metaphor” (*Writing Machines* 22) where instead of working with the assumptions of literate culture such as the category, definition, linearity, and hierarchy we take on the assumptions of the computer-as-scene-of-creation, which rightly include the multimodal, interactive, networked, programmed, and associative or nodal. Changing our material metaphor alters our relationship with the world at large and the meaning of the message we aim to transmit within it. Raley’s *Tactical Media* argues this point, positing that digital media radically alter the mechanisms of how people, and particularly artists interact with or resist their political, social, and economic reality. Similarly, Hayles’s *Electronic Literature* explores how literature made by and viewed through the computer challenge traditional expectations of verbal literatures that we have naturalized after hundreds of years of print technology.

**A Digital Literary Tradition**

Digital writing practices are not dependent on the computer but enhanced by it. The assumptions of single linear textuality have been challenged long before the first personal computers became available in the 1970s or even the first digital computers were developed in
the 1940s. Several critics have argued that digital literature, from hypertext, to cybertext, to digital poetry to hypermedia, all continue the work of experimental print literature by breaking up continuity, using algorithmic procedures, and emphasizing media qualities (Toft 227, Hayles *Electronic Literature* 26, Block et al 25). Futurist Filippo Marinetti forwarded his idea of *parole in liberta* (Words-in-Freedom) in the early 1910s. The conceit of his “Words-in-Freedom” agenda was to break away from syntax in order to make language more dynamic. By using the forms of the letters to invoke movement and landscape, Marinetti accentuates the visual aspects of the letterform that are forgotten when reading for meaning alone. In exploiting print technologies by using several typefaces and colors, he also aims to achieve an immediate sensation rather than the linguistic-based contemplation used to approach most verbal communication (Webster 29). Though more mimetic than Marinetti, Apollinaire also worked with breaking verbal communication not by disrupting syntax but by adopting a visual syntax that bends and cuts the linear nature of written text. By bending the lines of his poems into shapes and visual configurations he exposes how differently we process verbal and visual information and what challenges await us in creating, consuming, and interpreting multimedia works that mish-mash the conventions of various media together. Without a clear entry point, readers of his calligrammes must invest in a series of choices in regards to how they decide to travel through the page. The tendency to see the narrative and poetic as a space in which the reader travels and wanders rather than only as a conceptual space of imaginative immersion becomes more obvious with such literary experiments that question the boundaries between the pictorial and the linguistic.

Not only did categorical breakdowns between text and image exist in the arts and letters long before the first hypertext works, so too did algorithmic and programmed writing. The
Oulipo (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* or “workshop of potential literature”) is well known as a group of mathematicians, musicians, and writers that create works based on explicit constraints. By creating their own constraints rather than or in addition to adopting traditional ones (such as the sonnet as a form), Oulipian writers undermine the assumption that human creativity is contrary to machinic calculation. Creating constraints entail more than establishing a rule to be enforced during the composition process. Instead Oulipian writers consider the constraint as a generative device that affects not only the form but also the theme of the piece (Perloff 25). Negotiating with a set of Oulipian constraints while writing does not seem too dissimilar from writing with the computer and its functional restrictions perhaps especially when it comes to working with text generators. Even when looking at criticism and analysis of experimental print literature, many consider Stéphane Mallarme’s poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard* the beginning of modern literary experiments with page setting, type, and attention to textual materiality or media. By turning to the visual arts and looking at language and the book as more than utilitarian, Mallarmé demonstrates the meaning potential of literature that regards the traditions of a genre as an historicized rather than natural form. Pushing the boundaries of a medium beyond established forms and uses exposes the assumptions a community makes about the function and nature of communication.

All the boundary pushing and interdisciplinarity forwarded by experimental print literature has often made categorizing its products difficult, particularly in the case of those that traverse textual and visual arts. Such obstacles are only aggravated by new media where all media are embedded in one another and encoded into the same 0s and 1s. Camille Utterbach’s digital art piece *Text Rain* provides one example. While it is discussed as an art piece, it is clear that the words that rain down onto the viewers’ shadows are coherent, even poetic, and obviously chosen
to be read. The work is labeled art rather than literature because the viewer’s experience in more aligned with interacting with a program. Roberto Simanowski suggests that a piece is not digital literature unless the text is a significant linguistic phenomenon meant to be read (53). Since he does not view the linguistic portion of Text Rain to be the central focus of piece, he does not recognize it as digital literature. On the other hand, Marie-Laure Ryan argues that Michelle Glaser, Andrew Hutchinson, and Marie-Louis Xavier’s Juvenate is a piece of digital literature even though it lacks written language. Because Juvenate introduces characters and a chronology of a family’s life, Ryan recognizes the purely visual piece as conferring a substantial amount of narrative information that would warrant the title of digital literature (Ryan Avatars 166). While many of the analyses of hypertext, cybertext, and digital literature propose categories for different types or genres, Hayles undermines this effort, arguing that while having a rough catalogue that addresses the permutations of a developing medium holds its own significance, she questions works whose goal is to simply establish such categories. Hard and fast categories can easily limit our vision, making new multi and transmedial arrangements challenging to recognize. In this study alone, the example texts that I will discuss at some length are placed within specific fields, largely digital art or digital literature. Because of a common history in multimodal experimentation throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries and a lack of convincing arguments to do otherwise, I chose to group them together as similar manifestation of a network aesthetic that expands previous models and definitions of literary narrative.

Are Digital Art and Literature Distinct?

Categories themselves pose a challenge to digital literature because the vast majority of literary works made to be read on the computer are hybrids. Bertrand Gervais argues that these digital hybrids are iconotexts that combine visual and linguistic reading methods, merging the semantic meaning of words with graphic design components making digital texts “first and
foremost seen as images instead of writing. They are no longer read, they are experienced as a spectacle” (196). The idea that verbal and visual marks are entwined has a long history. Loss Pequeño Glazier argues that visual elements were always important to writing evident in Chinese characters, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and cave paintings. The codex form delivers a short reprieve in which the text and image were separated in history (Digital Poetics 169). Friedrich Kittler follows a similar line of thought, affirming that early print technologies like Gutenberg’s press were designed to visually compete with handwritten manuscripts rather than become machines of mass production (38). On a more fundamental level orthography theorist Pierre Duborgel claims that children learning to write make no distinction between writing and drawing, viewing each as equally iconic and gestural (Noland 223-4).

With digital hybrid texts, we are not only faced with the merging of the verbal and visual but also with motion and change, as digital animation and film editing programs continue to mature and enter more general use. The concrete stability of the printed image and letter give way to such effects as John Cayley’s use of letter permutations in Translations or Judd Morrissey’s smooth page transitions in The Jew’s Daughter. Audio elements are also no strangers to digital literature, borrowing voice-over from cinema, dialogue from the dramatic arts, and all varieties of music from instrumental to vocal to electronic. With the inclusion of visual, kinetic, and auditory elements in digital literature, the field cannot rely on traditional emphases on narrative or narrative theory that do not credit extra-verbal components. If we are not looking for plot, character development, diegesis, or other such staples of literary narrative theory, what are digital writers and artist using as the keystone to their projects? In essence, the question asks what motivation lies behind literature that is augmented by the networked space of the computer?
Maria Mencia is a British digital media artist, however, literary critic, N. Katherine Hayles, has argued that Mencia’s piece *Birds Singing Other Birds’ Songs* is a work of electronic literature. *Birds Singing Other Birds’ Songs* is composed of one looped moving screen image of a blue sky with white fluffy clouds on the bottom half of the screen. The bottom center of the screen has thirteen numbered sets of “play” and “stop” symbols that the viewer can manipulate. Each play button will introduce one flying bird onto the screen and each stop button will make that corresponding bird quickly disappear. Any number of those thirteen birds can be activated at a time. Playing each bird will result in a sound, text, and image. The sound is a digitally altered recording of a human imitating a bird call taking a natural and instinctual sound through the animal, human, and machine. The text is the transcription of the syllabic sounds of the altered birdcall, and the image is the shape of the bird that interacts with the text corresponding to that bird. Beyond including the vocal aspect of oral culture, the textual aspect or literate culture, and the visual animation and coding of digital culture, Mencia mentions being particularly inspired by the birdcall recordings she heard because they were very similar to sound poetry (“Birds Singing”). In forming the visual images of the birds, Mencia borrows conventions of visual and concrete poetry, where birds one, three, and seven are composed by wrapping the syllables around the form of the bird similar in style to Apollinaire’s calligrammes and birds five, six, eight, nine, and ten take the form of concrete poetry where the syllables fill out the form of the bird.

As a piece of electronic literature, *Birds Singing Other Birds’ Songs* offers no clear plot but rather movement through a compositional space. The clouds as well as the letters and/or birds move around, across, and outside of the screen space. The bird and letter movement is dependent on the viewer’s willingness to work with the computer to create a reaction. Should no
one click on a play button, the moving sky background is all the viewer will see. The idea of interacting with the piece is not the major conceit of the work given the ease of the interface and a lack of any hidden triggers. Rather the pleasure derived from this work seems to rise out of being able to compose the space by choosing which bird images and sounds should and should not play together. Enacting the remix through a subjective aesthetic choice may very well be the action par excellence of the spectator, of inhabiting their networked space by making connections between materials available in that network.

Composing a digital space is equally a central trope in Stephanie Strickland’s poem, *slippingglimpse* though it presents the act of composition in ways that Mencia’s work does not. While *slippingglimpse* works with moving background images and animated text, it does not have an audio track. On each text screen short phrases and words appear to move with the background image and seem to recede and approach the viewer by shrinking away and returning. The words are shown in a script font that resemble handwriting. Eventually the background fades to black and only the words are visible. At the bottom center of the screen is the option to call forth a scrolling screen that reveals a portion of the poem. After reading the poem for each page, the reader notices that the floating words and phrases above are taken from the poem. Unlike Mencia’s piece where the viewer can manipulate which birds to activate, the reader of *slippingglimpse* does not choose the words or control their movement. The reader senses that the poem itself is being tossed around especially considering the choice of words Strickland makes, such as “thrown in the ditch”, “flying from”, “plucked”, and “drowned”. Other words give the impression of weaving, planting seeds and growing plants, or composing with computer software. Looking at the piece without considering the scrolling poems available to the reader, the undulating words and phrases creating a dynamic network of linguistic material providing a
potential space for the reader to make their own mental connections between the phrases or compile those pairings that the animation is programmed to do itself.

Turning to the scrolling poems available when the “scrolled text” option is selected, the reader seems to have gotten the phrases and words to scatter themselves into a recognizable textual order. The words are dispersed across two columns where the vertical line between them seems to change from being a hard line dividing columns to one the viewer can disregard while reading across it. The page setting of each line makes the poem look like it is still floating and pulsating with moving water as it wavers from left to right again and again. Because each line of the poem seems to be able to move to several places without diminishing semantic values, the reader cannot help but wonder if the scrolling poem is composed as an anchor, as the poem or if this is one version of how all the words and phrases found one another when they receded into an illegible squiggle. The role of the computer in composition is in fact a larger theme of the scrolled poems where Strickland writes: “use a cursor to travel around it or you can / be inside / take your pick / QTVR [QuickTime Virtual Reality] space / scanner space” (Strickland slippingglimpse). She also writes: “somebody will shoot all the clouds / you’re going to replace into the sky / the compositor composites it all” and further “what language do you write in / C++ / Do you work in the Mac or PC world” (Strickland slippingglimpse). While the images and movement of the natural landscapes and the words and phrases appear organic, each are computer generated where Strickland jokes in the scrolling poem that her digital performance was so convincing that people took it for photography. For Strickland, writing is not the exclusive property of the human or of machines. She notes the frustrations that she experiences as a poet who openly collaborates with machines saying: “you’ve got the purists to whom / algorithmic art / is the only way to go / but then who’s to say that’s right / I find myself kind of
alone at the Academy they’re into turning out people / who can get jobs / in the animation industry” (Strickland *slippingglimpse*). Strickland’s poem seems to function as both an explanation for her work and writing in a digital space in general as well as a demonstration and opportunity for the reader to see digital composition in the making. The program chooses the movement of the text and the reader chooses the direction and movement of reading those lines. Regardless, both the reader and the programmed animation simultaneously compose semantic meaning by browsing through the available textual material. The author’s role appears to equally be an act of joining phrases that arise out of a digital database even if those words were of her choosing.

Electronic literature and digital art bring to the fore the fact that reading and writing or viewing and creating in the digital space are altered from traditional print models of interacting with texts. Glyn White looks to experimental print literature that is particularly attune to their material structures, arguing that writing and reading is a process that not only reveals its presence but also makes that process of creative negotiations and struggles the essence of experimental print writing. Mencia and Strickland’s pieces each present themselves as processes of composition in which the viewer or reader must negotiate by making choices. White quotes Viktor Shklovsky: “The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (White 10). Rather than offering a comprehensive plot and narrative exposition, the digital writer has to create a space that has the potential to evoke sensations in the reader who is essentially placed in a situation of constant choices and risks, choosing a path on which to build meaning and risking incoherence with each
step. While the writer is turned into a sensation harvester, the reader is made into a hunter gatherer skimming through information in the networked databases of the digital world looking for information he or she can use to solve problems and build meaning (Johnson-Sheehan par 15). Instead of building grand narratives, writing and reading in the networked space of the digital is invested in creating areas where sensational occurrences are possible. These sensational occurrences risk a visceral experience, which can mediate between contemplative and immersive models of understanding. Ryan describes Saint Ignatius’s *Exercises* as exactly that, saying that the practice of imagining the descent into hell through our five bodily senses immerses the practicant in the world space of hell while also causing him or her to contemplate the state of their soul (*Narrative as Virtual* 116). Sensation is so powerful because it combines the awareness of embodiment and the risk of that body being compromised that comes with contemplation as well as the captivation and immediacy that compels us to participate even given the risks of immersion.

**Digital Narrative as Pattern Recognition**

What happens to narrative in the discussion of literature in the digital space? Narrative has served as a major element of literature for so long that it is unreasonable to expect it to lose all relevance despite the growing resemblance of literature to other, presumably less narrative, arts in the digital era. It is no mistake that the reader of electronic literature is labeled a hunter/gatherer, or if we want to update that analogy, a window shopper or browser. The concept of having the reader travel through, affect, alter, or compose the space of the narrative comes out of the expressed and blatant abilities of the computer to apply human input almost instantaneously and react or respond, making the reader capable of editing while the computer composes or vice versa. Narrative cannot ignore the interactive and programmatic capacities of the computer. Marie-Laure Ryan explores changes brought about by an overlapping of narrative
and interactivity. She argues that interactive media are not very good storytellers chiefly because narrative meaning comes from responding to linear structure assumed by the text rather than any combination of texts a reader may compile (“Beyond Myth” 607). In order to make room for interactive elements in storytelling, narrative has to let go of plot as its defining feature (Narrative as Virtual 257). Digital literature though cannot dismiss narrative since a degree of narrativity is necessary to gain exposure in art or entertainment (“Beyond Myth” 607). While the narrative and database logics that Lev Manovich posits against one another are not opposites, they are divergent and thus propose a difficult union. Ryan does offer examples of incidences where narrative and database are joined successfully, particularly with stories that are familiar to the audience, modular stories, stories that privilege setting as crucial, and databases designed for easy retrieval of information (Avatars of Story 149). In each of these examples of successful narrative interactions, the reader is given a space that welcomes immersion into smaller details without compromising the overall experience and comprehension of the story as a whole. For instance, if a reader is familiar with the story of Frankenstein, browsing through Shelley Jackson’s Patchwork Girl is not a scattered attempt at discerning a narrative but a series of supplemental pauses that take up themes of the book without doing violence to Mary Shelley’s novel.

Moving away from plot-centered narrative becomes a crucial difference between print narrative and digital narrative. Instead of honing causal relationships the digital reader browses, exploring a space of potential associative connections. With associative models of thought, readers do not focus on the same thing nor do they maintain focus on the same thing throughout the reading experience. We see this reading and writing method sprouting out in Virginia Woolf’s The Waves where jumping from relating to one character or another often happens
rapidly and unpredictably. What arises as central to *The Waves* is the handful of images that repeat across the different personae weaving a pattern throughout the narrative space, not a line of causal events. The same applies to the baroque fugue. The subject and countersubjects of a fugue do not develop in causal ways but seem to travel through the circle of fifths, creating a pattern through their reappearances in different keys on the circle. David Ciccoricco summarizes the narrative shift with digital media astutely, stating:

> As [Laura] Trippi suggests, in narrative texts no longer dominated by a singular overarching plot and causal unity, the very notion of *story* recedes as other qualities of narrative, such as pattern and mood, are brought to the fore. These elements are not necessarily representational narrative elements, which is to say that they do not necessarily correspond to something that exists or could possibly exist outside of the text itself. Nonetheless, much in the same way that the patterns of a Bach fugue are meaningful to the listener, these nonrepresentational elements can carry the meaning of the text. Pattern recognition is thus implicit in the practice of reading network fiction. (7)

Narrative is clearly becoming an exploration in pattern recognition where instead of closing off interpretations of a text, narrative satisfaction results from a process of exploring and wandering through a text (Ciccoricco 42). Ciccoricco points out that Stuart Moulthrop’s examination of hypertext resulted in similar findings, in which Moulthrop concluded that narrative was a question of “itinerant desire” rather than of logic or sequence (Ciccoricco 43).

Even studies in more traditional narrative theory conclude that narrative is turning to thematic, associative, and spatial elements. Rick Altman’s *A Theory of Narrative* posits three narrative models based on three major methods according to which the reader is invited to follow the characters. Altman associates these three models with specific cultural conceptual eras saying “the general development of the dual-focus to single-focus to multiple-focus literature does indeed map clearly the progression from medieval culture (where people are defined by feudal or religious ties), to early modern society (establishing individual worth through Reformation, revolutions, and romanticism), to the modern world (ushered in by sociology and cubism)”
The dual-focus narrative functions by having the reader follow oppositional storylines where the individuals are abstracted into members of one of two conflicting groups quite common in epic scenes of war while the single-focus narrative has the reader follow a main character who filters all experiences the reader can encounter. Digital literature falls largely into Altman’s model of multiple-focus narratives in which many storylines are possible depending on the reader’s path while travelling through the narrative space. While he used literary texts to explicate the dual and single focus narrative, Altman chose to use the woodcarvings of Pieter Bruegel and their subsequent drawings to demonstrate the functions of the multiple focus narrative. This seems particularly appropriate for digital literature that is increasingly indistinguishable from digital art.

Altman takes Bruegel’s *The Fair at Hoboken* and *Children’s Games* to show that multiple focus narrative is unique because it does not privilege a central figure creating a consuming periphery where a theme or connection can be developed. Rather than being guided to a central area, the viewer of Bruegel’s carvings wanders through village-scapes visiting several different characters and buildings in a non-hierarchical manner. Travelling through undetermined paths gives the viewer cause to question their assumptions when experiencing dual or single focus narrative pieces. Since Bruegel does not pay much attention to the details of people’s faces, the viewer is equally not given reason to pause and identify with a particular character, viewing a face as a vector, a hint at another trajectory to direct one’s sight, rather than a relatable individual (214). Altman argues that because readers or viewers of a multiple focus narrative are placed in the position of following an “itinerant desire” and of building thematic associations from non-hierarchical material, the readers or viewers take up questions far beyond plot and character that are central to dual and single focus narratives (263). Rather, the reader or
viewer becomes interested in theme and mood, or building up a sensual subjective interpretation
of the narrative tidbits the writer or creator assembles in one composition. Here the reader/viewer
does not identify with a character but develops a theme from the growing intersections of paths.
By fixating on common traits Altman argues that characters are no longer autonomous but
representative of a reader determined theme (286-7). Multiple-focus narrative then are for the
people at large. While the reader does not necessarily become the author of digital spaces, he or
she does serve as a compositor.

Compiling : Compositing :: Writing : Reading

Digital artist Mark Amerika takes up digital writing specifically in his net-art trilogy,
which includes GRAMMATRON, PHON:E:ME and FILMTEXT, of which we will look
specifically at FILMTEXT. Amerika views the trilogy itself as an exploration into the concept of
writing that is expanding with digital technology. He posits that with network-distributed
environments, writing is becoming increasingly performative and “requires a more proactive,
resourceful approach to making things, often collaboratively, with computers” (Amerika,
“Expanding the Concept” 9). In conceptualizing digital writing, Amerika does not shun popular
genres but targets mass-media entertainment as potential avenues to further expand digital
writing. Playstation 2 in fact, commissioned FILMTEXT, and the net-art project includes forms
familiar to the popular audience such as the video screen and email in-box. While the piece
includes overtones of Jean Baudrillard and science fiction, let us put those aside for the time
being to discuss FILMTEXT as a model of networked digital narrative.

Amerika incorporates multiple media in order to expand writing beyond the verbal
especially because he found that his literary and artistic works were converging with, or as he
states, “infecting”, one another. He understands this infection of the literary onto the artistic and
vice versa to stem from a common agenda of finding “Life Style Practices” for the “digital
apparatuses” dominant today (“Expanding the Concept” 11). *FILMTEXT* seems to combine the qualities of Mencia’s *Birds Singing Other Birds Songs* and Strickland’s *slippingglimpse*, taking the literary/poetic quality of verbal expression of *slippingglimpse* and the reader’s ability to compose the screen space through his or her choices of textual, filmic, or auditory elements available to activate. *FILMTEXT* includes eight levels each containing a still image scene of rocks, deserts, cliffs, or space satellites. Each level includes elliptical rings that can be clicked to activate either an email in-box or a video screen each with the option to choose audio loops, video thumbnails, or pop-up and animated text. The piece itself claims to be an event rather than an institution or document: according to the reader’s role of selecting what elements are activated, the event is one of reader-driven remixing of the composition. It is curious that Altman had mentioned the unifying force of Bruegel’s *The Fair at Hoboken* was the repeated circular figures throughout the scene. With *FILMTEXT*, the reader scans the screen space looking for the elliptical spaces in order to find additional material to build an associative web of information that the author supplies. There is no claim that because the reader has a choice between set options such as changing the background noise, clicking to another email, or playing one film clip over another is empowering to the degree that the reader is equivalent to an author. Rather Amerika seems to take *FILMTEXT* as a demonstration of reading and writing with the digital apparatus. The writer creates a space with certain thematic qualities and potential for sensational connections to which the reader processes and composites the material, coming to a meaning through the act of pattern recognition.

Having to engage with visual, verbal, and auditory material exemplifies the complexity of digital reading, making the digital reader no passive consumer but a spectator who activates and looks for patterns. Yellowlees Douglas takes the essence of narrative as connectedness not plot
or character. With this in mind, the reader of digital narrative is directly confronted with negotiating which connections to make from the options available to composite. Douglas cites Wolfgang Iser’s emphasis on narrative connection: “narratives represent opportunities for us ‘to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections – for filling in gaps left by the text itself’” (Douglas, The End of Books 66). Whether the process feels more like skimming, browsing, searching, or contemplating; making connections, recognizing patterns, and interpreting are all essentially acts of reading. Digital technologies have only made people more aware of reading extending beyond studying the poem or novel and traditional models of narrative as a linearly sequential diegesis of causal events.

If writing and reading are not just the creation and comprehension of causal or thematic relationships of verbal text, what are the crucial characteristics of writing and reading in the digital era? Maureen Walsh posits that with new media, reading involves “interacting and responding as well as viewing and listening, while ‘writing’ can involve talking, interacting, designing and producing” (102). Reading and writing then are equally productive and participatory acts that move far beyond linguistic meaning to include multiple modalities and semiotic systems (Walsh 106). In examining classroom digital literacy practices at the K-12 level, Walsh concludes teaching design strategies to students helps them understand “the social construction and purpose of a multimodal text”. Though the designer has been dismissed in favor of the artist because of the designer’s commercial interests and utilitarian underbelly, the digital era seems to forward design and even especially commercial design in the logo as the cornerstone of digital communication: it combines texts with image, proliferates a pattern through repeated use of that logo, and makes and solicits aesthetically based choices which hint at ethical and political affiliations.
Affect, Risk, and Aesthetics

Though aesthetics has often been brushed aside as a dismissal of ethical and political motives deemed more important, the increasingly visual nature of digital works, in literature especially, show that aesthetics does in fact hold a crucial place in interacting with the social, political, and economic aspects of our lives. Aesthetics help us come to an understanding of the technologized world in which we live in, and perhaps to determine how we can relate to and influence a world increasingly estranged from us because of imbalanced developments of technology and the conceptual and rhetorical models we need in order to cope with those technologies. N. Katherine Hayles describes the environment of the currency exchange trader as one such heavily abstracted, technologized, and estranged locale resulting from digital communication and network capabilities. She notes that screens consume the traders who are constantly looking at the exchange rates when at work, at home, or dreaming (Electronic Literature 95). Though “the market” is the combined result of worldwide transactions over network connections and exchange rates change in split seconds, Hayles notes that the brokers do not view the currency exchange market as abstract at all. She quotes one trader who call the market “a lifeform that has being in its own right … it has form and meaning as a greater being” (98). Others describe trading on the market as similar to sexual and physical vulnerabilities or violent bodily penetration. As abstract as we may think our networked “spaces” are, the physical and machinic seem to overlap, which becomes the premise of John Klima’s software art piece, ecosystm.

While some critics argue that Klima’s ecosystm is mimetic and only replicates the structures of the domineering currency exchange market, Rita Raley finds it to be subversive in its aesthetic choices. Klima designed ecosystm for Zurich Capital Markets as software that uses live feed of currency exchange rates and weather forecasts to visualize the data, providing an
alternate narrative of global capitalism and particularly currency exchange. Each country and currency has its own tree and flock of birds. If the currency exchange rate becomes volatile the tree loses limbs and the flock of birds scatter, become aggressive, attack, and diminish in size (Raley 117). While illustrating the currency exchange market as an ecosystem, Klima does not undermine global trading or interrupt its methods, but by offering his interpretation of a network space as an ecological game space, he suggests another paradigm, humanizing the seemingly calculated and abstract world of global capitalism and highlighting the pain of responsibility we all carry as part of a global society. Showing the market as birds and trees allow viewers to immediately grasp the interdependence of the digital and real worlds, the market and the people, in a way that columns of exchange rates cannot.

Klima mentions several examples of how *ecosystm* affects its viewers, particularly during its *BitStream* exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art. During its exhibition, the Argentine peso crashed to the point that the Argentine flock became momentarily aggressive before diminishing to only two birds, the minimum number possible in *ecosystm*. Museum employees at Whitney observed several Argentine nationals mourning their sad flock and bare tree (Klima 264). Not only does *ecosystm* make currency exchange more relatable to human experience, bridging the market and the people, it also demonstrates how interrelated digital and real worlds may become within the digital imaginary. Though the quality of the graphics of *ecosystm* often lend themselves to a comparison with video games, Klima does not refuse this claim. In fact, viewing the art piece as a game expounds the serious effects of seemingly abstract information. If someone wanted to “play” *ecosystm* he or she would have to purchase currency on the exchange market, calling attention to certain brokerage firms that do in fact have the ability to greatly alter the “game space” of *ecosystm* if they so desired (Klima 265-6). *ecosystm*
does not just depict the currency exchange market as a system itself but highlights the consequences of global capitalism.

The choices Klima makes in how to depict currency exchange result in its own interpretation of a global ethics. Instead of seeing numbers as markers of potential profit for one firm, Klima’s *ecosystem* proposes a view of the global market as a system of intimately related life forms of a quasi-organic environment. In such an aesthetic-ethical model we cannot ignore the seemingly abstract space of global exchange trading in digital networks as anything but what it is, a constant potential for risk to the health of a community, nor can we escape from our responsibility to the well being of these digital representations of ourselves. By making *ecosystem* look like a game, Klima actually shows us how ungamelike trading can feel if we see more than numbers and profit shares. Klima’s *ecosystem* is an example of using data visualization in an aesthetic rather than pragmatic way. Unlike pragmatic visualization, aesthetic visualization does not assume that data is neutral or subordinate itself to calculation. The goal of aesthetic data visualization is to “visualize and materialize the data so as to give it a kind of ideological and political impact that it might not otherwise have” (Raley 23). For Raley, visualization has come to replace representation with the information society we experience today. Rather than the goal of concrete reference that representation carries, data visualization aims to both make complex processes understandable to the public but also create an affective response obscured by data as neutral statistic (Raley 91). Timothy Murray makes similar claims, arguing that digital aesthetics bring us away from mimetic representation and towards a virtualization that blends spectacle and participation. He states: “The future promise of digital aesthetics is its enhanced zone of ‘interactivity’ through which the users’ entry into the circuit of artistic presentation simulates or projects their own virtualizations, fantasies, and memories in consort with the artwork” (Murray
Bringing in personal relevance and affective responses to data usher in new assumptions about what we are looking for in the aesthetic experience which is neither complete spectacle nor distanced contemplation, but the negotiation of risk.

Norman Klein, however, brings the idea of data visualization back to literature, arguing that the late 20th and early 21st centuries have developed data as a form of storytelling. He points out that while data during the Enlightenment was the fodder of science and few narrative films with the exception of documentaries, were dominated by data, data became the mode of storytelling for computer and video games, the Internet, and mapping by 2004 (Klein “Waiting” 86). With the prolific amount of information made available by digital networks, it is no surprise that writers, artists, and designers of data are as overwhelmed as was Virginia Woolf in her writing. Just as Woolf turned to the Baroque fugue as a model to organize material thematically in a repetitive structure, Norman Klein argues that the Baroque picaresque novel serves as an ideal model for data narratives. The picaresque novel works by creating a virtual (or imaginary) space in which the reader encounters pockets of information. Klein writes: “Simply put, data story on the computer is a picaresque filled with aphorisms, with pieces of narrative that never ‘fill in the blanks.’ Meanwhile, the reader gets immersed in all this ‘atmospheric’ data. Next, the reader evolves pleasantly into the author. Finally, instead of ending, the reader imagines herself about to start writing” (“Waiting” 93). Here the emphasis is not on a fixed plot or the writer or reader as thinking subject but on what Murray calls, “the flow and energetics of mania and possession in all of its mystical intensity” (Murray 46). With digital technologies like the computer to aid in this “flow” of information we have only more cause to view narrative as firmly based on data accumulation and movement through that data driven by itinerant desire rather than by a self-knowing subjectivity and their representations.
Writing and reading in the digital apparatus become clearly much more than creating and consuming verbal semantic material. Instead, the process of writing and reading is a massive field of data forcing the writer and reader to face risk, desire, penetration, interpretation, and constant remixing of the composition. Writers must take into account the role of reader participation that alters the progression of the storyline, the presence of the computer as a collaborator in the act of writing, and the database logic that comes with working on networked computers. Readers must use their own desires and experiences to navigate through unfamiliar territory risking incomprehension and exposure. Both writers and readers have to do more than craft and comprehend linguistic material but must negotiate with multiple media and their semiotic systems designing a writing and reading experience with each semantic, typographic, visual, auditory, and programmatic decision. Michael Böhler writes, “Regarded aesthetically, hyperfiction is not so much a new literary text form as a new way of reading and a new text-reader relationship. This site of the literary ‘theater’ is shifted from the inner brains of mental processes to the outer interactivity space, where sensorial perception and haptic acts of selection takes place” (Auer 281). As the previous digital literature and art examples have shown, such characteristics are clearly not limited to hyperfiction but are idiosyncratic to the networked space of digital media. With the nature and expectations of the writer and reader so significantly altered by digital technologies, the time has arrived for the humanities to take up the challenge of incorporating these traits into our cultural capital. To do so we must assemble a rhetoric for the digital apparatus, bringing awareness to this new model of creating and interacting with communication and human expression. Once we have some instruction on how and why all the literary, artistic, and popular media projects discussed in this study function, we can take this
knowledge to school where our ideas of literacy are far too limited to be of use to a digital subject working with a networked computer.
CHAPTER 5
THE MERGER: AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

Set against the plurality of opinions, truth has a despotic character: it compels universal assent, leaves the mind little freedom of movement, eliminates the diversity of views and reduces the richness of human discourse. In this respect, truth is anti-political, since by eliminating debate and diversity it eliminates the very principles of political life.

-- Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves

If humanities scholars do not make a concerted effort to relinquish traditional definitions of literature and scholarship, their professional destiny will be that of the ‘digital archivist,’ and their success will be measured by the size of their supposedly canon-undermining archive projects.

--Marcel O’Gorman

This study began with the renewed relevance of the debate between Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukács over the nature of popular aesthetics. Their debate was not only one of formal aesthetics or of which aesthetic method, realism or modernist estrangement, was more representative of modern subjects and their expression. Brecht and Lukács’ positions concerning art and literature were each Marxist perspectives positing one literary or artistic tradition as better suited to combat the fascist struggle (Lunn 12). While Lukács advocated “the ‘noble’ resistance of individuals against their environment, portrayed in the great novels of the nineteenth century” (Lunn 26), Brecht forwarded the need to galvanize the audience and thus cause them to act in the socio-political realm of their world (Lunn 15). Though Brecht and Lukács’ aesthetic preferences for the avant-garde and realism respectively have merged in new media as Lev Manovich has argued in The Language of New Media, a political model of resistance that joins the contemplative and ideal with the active has remained scattered and often dismissed. This stall in solidifying a political model out of aesthetic material comes from a long-standing resistance in philosophy to recognizing their similarities.

Using aesthetics as a political model has an established history of close to two hundred years. Hannah Arendt takes up Immanuel Kant’s model of aesthetic judgment as that of her
political theory. Before her, Theodor Adorno argued that aesthetics was an antidote to the regime of reason and calculation that has dominated the capitalist world (Ross, Toni 169). For Adorno, aesthetics offers an instantiation that resists utilitarian or instrumental aims and models non-domi neering relationships in the public realm. Previous to Adorno, Friedrich Nietzsche posits aesthetics as the way out of pure nihilism that is the result of a techno-scientific mentality. By continuing to deny value to appearances and forwarding a Platonic denunciation of the aesthetic for the ideal truth, Dana Villa argues we commit the ultimate nihilistic act. If we want our world to have meaning, we have to recognize that appearance and aesthetics do hold meaning especially meaning that is separate from truth-value (287).

Aesthetics is not a veneer for a politics of truth. This is in fact where the hesitation and fear of discussing politics and aesthetics as intertwined is based. Rather than an aestheticized politics, Jacques Rancière clearly explains that art and aesthetics are not political because they contain or represent political content. Instead art is political because it provides a model of politics that does not depend on functioning through reason but instead creates a space in which artists and audiences can reconfigure the spatial, displace perception, and maintain undecided situations. For Rancière, art and aesthetics is political precisely because it is closest to what he imagines as the structure of political struggle. Politics “is not the exercise of, or struggle for, power. It is the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and as pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them” (Aesthetic and Its Discontents 24). With politics a marking or definition of a space of action and aesthetics an attention to appearance and composition, their joint efforts at renewing agency in the 21st century appears to have potential. Rancière elsewhere argues that art in fact is a
precursor to work since it forwards the idea of abstracting one’s perspective in order to create a sensory experience for the community at large. He stretches this argument into the rational for the avant-garde’s call to reinsert art into life, since aesthetic attention is the backbone of community building (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 44-5).

A common trait of politics and aesthetics then lies in their shared nature as public realms of appearance and performance where the politico-aesthetic agent can act within and upon. Brecht saw his work in theatre as inherently political because it enabled performance as a way of exploring the consequences of actions (Horn 46). Politics thus has more to do with play-acting and dissimulation than truth or reason. Arendt even justifies her merging of aesthetics and politics on the basis of their shared performative and public qualities. Just as art requires an audience to view the work, political action requires an organized sphere of spectators in order for such actions to take place (Fry 50). Politics and aesthetics appear to have less to do with their official institutions than with a mentality or behaviour in the public realm. Herein lies the reason that Björk and Gondry’s work in music video is a crucial model for established traditional institutions of order like the Academy. Music videos such as “Bachelorette” are made exclusively for the public realm, with the intention that they should become part of a shared cultural capital. It does not present itself as an idealistic debate, an outright revolt against the conventions of the genre, the mental masturbation of an artist-genius, or simply a device of commercial promotion. Björk and Gondry’s music videos are rather a set of aesthetic judgments that perform a worldview to a community that is inherently pluralistic regardless of the assaults pluralism has faced from instrumentalism and blind consumerism.

The use of aesthetic judgment thus is proposed as a way to empower all people regardless of position. Paul Corcoran demonstrates this power quite well by showing that while the
Australian government failed to pass official recognition of the mistreatment of Aboriginal natives, the Australian people had already accomplished that feat through massive musical concerts featuring lyrics representative of a political debate that had gone stale. The public realm is the space of political and aesthetic action, not the closed off walls of Congress or museums. Corcoran quotes Beiner’s interpretation of Arendt’s model of aesthetic and political space as a realm of appearance, arguing that with such a model of public space, “human agents, acting together, disclose who they are and what they wish the world to look like” (77). While several arguments could be made for the spectacular nature of such massive public performances, I tend to agree with Rancière’s observation: “When we say that the organized spectacle of thousands of bodies is ‘proto-Fascist’, we say strictly nothing, we just express a vague association which masks our ignorance” (The Politics of Aesthetics 78). Our ability, through performance, to think and later judge, are capacities that we all share and one that we must hone in order to shape the world to our liking. Disavowing the aesthetic of political meaning only supports the instrumental and utilitarian mindset that disciplines behaviour and deemphasizes the individual’s ability to create a public space in which our shared faculties of thinking and judging may take place.

The model of re-imagined intellectual work that this study proposes is not a utilitarian one, not a set of steps to execute, but outlines a shift in cognitive models and social behaviour called for by a world that is increasingly aesthetically aware of itself. Such a model finds support in Arendt’s theory of aesthetic judgment as political theory to explain how social performance is not simply spectacle but is the seat of human potential to shape the environment in which they appear: the public sphere. Many have criticized Arendt’s decision to appropriate Kant’s model of aesthetic judgment as his unwritten political theory, particularly because Kant had written his own political theory dependent on reason and truth. Whether or not it is correct to argue that
aesthetic judgment is the true political theory of Kant is irrelevant to this study. Arendt makes aesthetic judgment her political theory and argues that it is a relevant and pertinent choice because both aesthetics and politics are based on appearances (Corcoran 78). This common origin hints to Arendt that a common action is not only possible but already established in Western philosophy through *The Critique of Judgment*.

Aesthetic judgment appeals to Arendt because it is capable of maintaining plurality and subjectivity, a position she views as more humane than the reign of truth. She appropriates Kant’s aesthetic judgment and summarizes it as the process of first responding through taste which is reconciled with the community through representative thinking made possible by what Kant calls *sensus communis* and enlarged mentality. Judgment originates from a personal and sensual response that is particular to each individual. After being separated from the purely subjective through enlarged mentality, *sensus communis*, and the resulting feeling of disinterestedness, the particular is brought to the general without being subsumed (Passerin d’Entrèves 112). Crucial to this process is the fact that judgment is the action of the spectator since the spectator is not invested in the outcome of an event as a participant is. In this respect, the spectator is not the passive consumer. Rather, the spectator is what all participants and actors depend on since it is the active participation of the spectator that determines the public space where action is possible. Arendt’s interest in aesthetic judgment seems to lie in its ability to serve as a bridge between supposed opposites such as objective/subjective and contemplation/action. Judgment can bring questions of taste into the community and also serves as the connection between judging as determining an opinion of a thought and judging as an activity of creating public space. Because judgment contributes to the composition of a society, of who it decides to include, what it prioritizes, and what it will deem valid, judgment is more than a contemplative
tool but an active shaping of the public realm. This dual nature of the spectator’s judgment parallels my earlier discussion of the *spectactor* as neither passive nor active but simultaneously both. This public realm, because it is based on taste and not truth, is “an intersubjective place of free discussion not mediated by a concept or rule” (Ferguson 3). Kant called this between space of objective and subjective, pluralism, a central concept in Arendt’s ideas of political freedom. Aesthetic judgment as political philosophy of the public realm then cannot be reduced to truth, reason, or rationality. Arendt’s politics cannot induce agreement or compliance because it is the product of creative freedom rather than truth. Truth is entirely anti-political to Arendt, who argues that its default action is narrowing possibilities and creating hierarchies of power and knowledge (Ferguson 104). The concept of truth destroys the human experience, which is essentially plural (Villa 64) and thus more concerned with consensus than truth in the first place.

For Arendt, totalitarianism of the 20th century brought to bear the crucial need to develop judgment as a major faculty where it had previously been treated as minor by philosophy and political theory in the past. She posits judgment as one possible remedy to the modern world that, through increased alienation, has diminished the opportunities for spontaneous social action in the public realm. The regimentation of the public realm finds its clearest and most compelling example in Nazism that creates a social opinion that does not make judgment impossible but create standards and conventions of judgments that overpower the individual’s ability to judge reflectively. As totalitarianism in Europe has come and passed, Arendt recognizes that the standards and conventions of judgment that we previously depended on to order the public realm have been polluted by their hyper versions manifested in fascism. Her turn to aesthetic judgment arises because “in this situation the only recourse is to appeal to the imagination, which allows us to view things in their proper perspective and to judge them without the benefit of a pre-given
rule or universal” (Passerin d’Entrèves 106). Though writing much later in the 20th century, Arendt shares with Lukács and Brecht the goal of finding ways to use aesthetics as a model to escape the reign of fascism and disabling spectacle. She chooses aesthetic judgment as the key to avoiding fascism because aesthetic judgment implies an awareness of socio-political construction that fascist subjects like Adolf Eichmann lacked. It was not until Arendt witnessed the trial of Nazi officer Eichmann that she realized that judgment as a human faculty is what allowed fascism to perpetuate. Eichmann was not an evil man or a dumb bureaucrat but rather was a man who had neglected to exercise his faculty of reflective judgment so as to recognize that a situation needed his individual attention and thought instead of simply applying a set of principles or rules to every situation that crossed his desk (Jackson 46).

The appeal to aesthetic judgment as a remedy for social and political problems of the 20th century is a call to critical thinking that is intersubjective or plural, that is neither objective truth nor subjective taste but a responsible and conscious effort to create a public space that reflects our desires for the world. Because this is an aesthetic model of the world, judgment is a process of design, a mindset that architects, urban planners, playwrights, novelists, and artists have long functioned from. Aesthetic concerns are not frivolities or marketing ploys but are a part of the human experience and its expression. Virginia Postrel introduces her book *The Substance of Style* by arguing that the women of Kabul painted their nails and men shaved their beards after being liberated because aesthetics is an inherent interest of humanity. Because there were no prolific marketing or advertising mechanisms in Afghanistan, Postrel argues that aesthetic value is much more than commercial mind control (x). Though aesthetics is concerned with the surface, it is far from superficial. Instead, viewing aesthetics as a politics can renew the public realm, pluralist thought, individual responsibility to the whole, and regain the importance of
feeling, desire, and personal opinion as relevant knowledge. The space articulated in Björk and Gondry’s music videos are models of how to create a public space through the three tropes outlined throughout this study: instinct and desire as the source, collaboration as the process, and appropriation through collage and related practices of media mixing as the product. These larger tropes derived from the nature of creating the public space of a music video coincide with the key points of Arendt’s adoption of Kant’s aesthetic judgment as a political philosophy: an initiation in taste, making feelings relevant (not relative) through sensus communis, and the privileged role of the spectator in the creation of the public realm. By drawing attention to the formal aesthetic and technical qualities of the many works discussed in this study, we find Arendt’s proposal of the nature and use of judgment can become a possible model of the potential of academic work that is responsible to the needs of the contemporary student and the demands the present world has in regards to a student’s training in the humanities.

**The Source: Instinct, Desire, and the Seat of Taste**

Hannah Arendt recognizes many areas of concern when addressing life in the 20th century. While there are deep seeded issues that have brought the West to an amoral state of being, Ronald Beiner points out that the real danger that Arendt pinpoints is how bureaucratic, technocratic, and depoliticized the public space has become. This has proliferated to such a point that humans rarely participate in critical thinking because of their general indifference and their willingness to follow a dominant opinion made available to them. They allow themselves to absorb the status quo as a method of absolving themselves of any responsibility they have to the public sphere and the community as a whole (113). This lack of awareness and complacency is where we began our analysis of Björk’s Isobel myth. Isobel was Björk’s figure of instinct and feeling, a woman of nature whose calling it was to enliven the humans of the urban environment by reminding them of the power of their feelings and instincts. By sending out her moths to the
city, she hoped to save the people from their overdependence on logic, shaking them loose from their complacency. Though Björk’s work is technically and musically complex and ordered, her creative process begins with feeling and she, at least initially, composes her music through affective associations. She argues that what has made pop and folk music powerful is its ability to unite the people through shared emotion. Organization through feeling or emotional response also appeared as a larger conclusion to the structure of digital literature where the reader travels through the space of a composition with “itinerant desire” as their guide. Rick Altman determined that to be one defining characteristic of his multiple-focus narrative, which he recognizes as a prominent organizational model for modern literature. Not only do desire and feeling dictate the methods of reading digital literature in the late modern era of media, feeling is a major consideration in the content and structure for the creator of a work in this situation. John Klima chooses the organizational model of a natural ecosystem to depict the currency exchange market in ecosystem not because it is more logical, objective, or clearer than the columns of exchanges rates traders use. Rather, the ecosystem model is more relatable to humans because the visual of diminishing flocks and an unhealthy environment depicts the danger of falling currency in a more visceral way than declining numbers. This is no surprise to anyone who has seen a handful of television commercials. Commercials for the Christian Children’s Fund, for example, do not present statistics or schematic maps but show the faces of the children they wish to help and the dire living situations they find themselves in. They encourage your sponsorship by appealing to your capacity to feel rather than to reason. Organizing information or people around feelings can be an effective way to unite a population or expose the dangers or motives of a dominant power and it is for this reason that Arendt’s argument for aesthetic judgment as a political judgment is particularly compelling.
By turning to judgment, Arendt confirms that an objective moral system does not exist. Because we cannot depend on fixed general principles or rules to determine what is right or wrong we have to depend on the consensuses that we may create through shared judgments. Because aesthetic judgment is in this line of reasoning based primarily on an initial appeal to taste, a consensus in the public realm is dependent on the population’s willingness to express its feelings in a way that can be translated across the experience of individuals. As Kant points out in *The Critique of Judgment*, judgment “reflects upon the form of the object in order to derive a ground of pleasure that can be universalized for all judging subjects” (Corcoran 76). The initiation of a judgment is thus a two-step process: taste and disinterestedness.

Michael Denneny points out that taste and judgment as faculties, gain importance as values decline (260). That being, when a community loses its footing with rising conflict and an alienating public sphere, the population can balance itself by uniting around a consensus based on shared feelings, using taste as a way to bypass the ethical determinism introduced by René Descartes, and proliferated through the techno-scientific modern mentality. The idea and term of “taste” was first coined by the Spanish Jesuit, Baltasar Gracián, as a faculty that perceives reality as neither subjective nor objective thus avoiding Cartesian subjectivity dependent on the divide between subject and object (262). In a statement of taste or aesthetic judgment, we do not discuss the object itself or the viewer or subject alone but the intertwining of the two through the object’s affect on the subject (“This pleases me”) and the subject’s impression of the object (“This rose is beautiful”). Because we rely on our feelings to come to such a response, we avoid relying on objective truths.

Because judgment is based on taste, the power of aesthetic judgment lies in its ability to use the particulars in a way that does not subsume them to general rules of judgment, but brings
about a judgment through a web of associated feelings within the public realm. Working from the particular is also a way to make the individual accountable to the community since he or she is then required to confront and align their responses with responses with those of others in the public realm. This requires critical thinking and an awareness of the environment that Eichmann’s blind application of rules does not. Working with the particular increases the chances of a personal investment on the part of the subject because the particular is specific to that subject. This is why the Christian Children’s Fund says that they will send you a picture of the child that you will sponsor. Facing a particular person raises your own feeling of responsibility to an individual human being rather than an abstract idea even though, in all practicality, your money could have been used to benefit any number of children. The immediacy of the particular, like the immediacy of an emotional response, is powerful precisely because it is particular and you cannot completely dissociate yourself from that a particular object. You are thus placed in a position of risk analogous to that I previously identified for readers of digital literature, who are exposed by works that require them to examine their particular motives and feelings so as to organize narrative space.

The aesthetic judgment is first based on pathos rather than logos or ethos. Arendt points out that in a reflexive judgment where no general principles are proposed, the judge does not determine the beauty of a rose through logic. The judge does not say “All roses are beautiful, this flower is a rose, hence this rose is beautiful” (Zerilli 159). It is not the category of “rose” that confronts the judge but the particular rose that requires and later results in an emotional response. This lesson of the particularity of the rose is not only the stuff of aesthetic or political theory. Reading Arendt’s claims of Kant’s discussion on taste recalled immediately the children’s story The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The little prince cared for a rose on his asteroid
and after she annoyed him, he left and came to earth. He does not realize the importance of his rose until he meets the fox, who teaches the prince how to tame him. Before meeting the fox, the little prince sees a garden full of roses that he thought looked just like his own rose. When he asks the roses what they are he is disappointed and sad to hear that they are roses. Saint-Exupéry writes: “he felt very unhappy. His flower had told him she was the only one of her kind in the whole universe. And here were five thousand of them, all just alike, in just one garden” (54).

After the fox teaches the prince to tame him, to turn him from a general label of “fox” to a particular “my fox”, the prince realizes that his rose was right and she was the only one of her kind in the universe because she was his rose, the rose he tamed, cared for, and invested his efforts and responsibility. The prince thus uncovers a newfound significance in his life since he discovers that he loves his rose and his rose needs his protection. The immediacy of his feelings and the risk of harm to the rose inspire the prince to action, to return quickly to his rose at all costs.

The power that feelings have and the influence that taste creates in our individual behaviour are impressive and thus threatening. Arendt recognizes this when she affirms that issues of taste can be disturbing. Because one cannot be logically convinced to change his or her tastes, it is easy for an aesthetic judgment to overpower one’s behaviour in a very narrow-minded fashion without regard to the presence, much less needs, of others. However, the potential risks cannot overpower the critical thinker who recognizes common sentiment as a useful tool in building a public space where everyone may participate. We weigh the usefulness of our tools against their risk daily, for example, choosing to drive to work even though car accidents account for a large percentage of yearly deaths, and we as drivers are likely in our lifetimes to have experienced at least one accident (though usually without serious injury). The benefit of earned
time seems worth the potential risk of death or injury. Aesthetic concerns are no different especially because they contain within them assumptions beyond the superficial (something many forget as they assume that aesthetics is concerned with the surface alone rather than providing a model of existence itself). What actually makes taste, and pathos appeals in general, dangerous is that they run the risk of being purely personal. If the personal emotions one feels cannot be abstracted to a degree in order to be relevant to those not directly involved, the subject may not actually contribute to the public sphere that humans, as social beings, must work on together as a community. By remaining personal, it is also easier for dominant powers to play off the feelings of their community members as a ploy to distract them from examining the motives behind any actions or decisions made to affect the public realm.

The larger lesson I would like to draw from the importance of taste as the initial step in the process of judgment and of desire or instinct as the beginning of the creative process for many of the artists, writers, and musicians I have discussed, is that our attention to how we present ourselves and our work in the public space is an important step in shaping what we want the world to be like. Unlike many science fiction films, novels, and television shows, the “future” is not full of impersonal and regimented people in uniforms carrying out their duties in an objective and orderly fashion (Postrel 33). Our feelings and the resulting personal investments and responsibilities have affected the social world in very concrete ways. Businessmen often discuss aesthetic concerns associated with design as crucial for practical reasons, chiefly because price and quality can no longer be a defining factor between their product and their competitor’s, however, the need to be attentive to the aesthetic is more than a question of profit or success. Aesthetic concerns often are the difference between a group investment and being scoffed at. As a young child, listening to news coverage on environmental concerns during the Bush senior
administration came along with the connotation of hippie tree-huggers and impractical dreamers serving as roadblocks to the progress of industry. I knew long before grade school was over that if a larger population were ever going to become environmentally conscious, the environmentalists would have to repackage their message into something desirable (pathos) not in moral (ethos) or logical forms (logos). Attention to one’s presentation is not simply styling the surface, but is a complex negotiation between subjective and objective domains of expression. While the reader of digital literature or the consumer of a computer should have a personal emotion inspired by interactions with a particular object, that object must equally be abstract enough so as to be relatable to others without giving up its feeling of particularity. N. Katherine Hayles discusses the importance of media specific analysis, following this same line of reasoning, that being, a need to be aware of the connotations inherent in how literary material is presented not only the content of the literature (the text alone). I hold this to also be the reason why Sir Elton John calls Björk a “living artist” (Inside Björk) because her message of the potential of popular music and thus the public sphere and the larger population of spectators, requires an attention to presentation and a commitment to the message that goes beyond the content of her CDs and DVDs, spanning but spans across all her expressions through music video, film, fashion, and gestures.

Through the process of growing up, humans are taught what is and is not significant, of what is serious and what is play to such a degree that we often dissociate feeling and desire from a form of knowledge. Dismissing the pathetic (that relating to emotions) is a rather pathetic (miserably inadequate) way of discrediting a form of knowledge humans have from birth. Judgment based on taste is a faculty of which everyone is capable (unlike genius) and thus can serve as the common point to join together what a society privileges in its public spaces of
creation. This, however, is only possible if taste can become abstracted and generalized to a degree that reaches beyond the personal.

**The Process: Collaboration and Sensus Communis through Imagination**

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry makes the story of the little prince immediately relatable through its narrative conceit. By having the story told from the point of view of a pilot who met the prince rather than the prince himself, the reader is already aware of how one person was touched by the prince’s story in such a compelling way that the pilot even relates the story of the prince to his own childhood. The reader than is prepared to make his or her own connections with the prince’s story by dint of the pilot’s example. By showing that judgment is based first on taste we realize that it is not purely objective. However, the second part of judgment, the feeling of disinterestedness, shows that neither is judgment purely subjective. When judging, the judge must separate him or herself from the object of inquiry in order to properly observe and evaluate the object. This is equally a law of physics: you cannot push a car if you are sitting in it. You need the force of a friction coming from outside of the car just as an object needs a disinterested judge to be evaluated in a public space. Because it is neither objective nor subjective, judgment depends on what Kant calls the *sensus communis*, the common or shared sense, the communal consensus that creates the public space (Ferguson 6-7). Judging thus requires your presence in the public space and hence a recognition of the supremacy of the public consensus and one’s own part as a member of a larger community. When one states that something is beautiful, that person expects others to encounter a similar feeling and veneration of the beauty of the object because the statement is made, ostensibly, from a disinterested point of view. By imagining how others would view the object in addition to themselves, the judge creates a statement that he or she expects to bring about a consensus because this is a judgment and not a statement of opinion (Myskja 71). Working through a consensus in the public space is the basic tenant of associative
ordering since such ordering works from recognizing patterns already present in the public sphere rather than creating a hierarchy which one uses to discipline a given set of materials. Associations are a bringing together of items based on shared characteristics and thus harbors more of the push-pull dynamic required of true collaboration, rather than a hierarchical model of ordering can offer.

This brings us back to the beginning of our discussion on our second major trope of working with both contemplative and immersive models of thinking: collaboration. Björk and Gondry’s music videos were successful, I propose, because the videos were personal to both of them while also being general and objective enough to allow others in the public realm to relate to them. The “Human Behaviour” video is one such example where Gondry relates the setting to his own childhood inquiry as to whether the earth is made of concrete with dirt under the forests or of dirt with concrete under the cities. He also relates it to a more obscure children’s book of which he has distinct memories of. For Björk, this video is the beginning of her Isobel trilogy and her use of moths and playing acting a moth herself allow her to adopt the animal figure she relates to her mythical heroine. However, for the audience who may not necessarily be aware of all the back-story behind the video, the hints to the common nursery rhyme “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” present a handle by which to grasp the conceit of the story, that humans are not at home in nature, are ignorant of their surroundings, and behave in stranger ways than the animals.

Drawing our emotional responses and judgments of taste into the sensus communis is an effective way of editing pure subjectivity, feeling, and creativity. After discussing the bachelor machine and the forcework as models of artistic production and having examined the laws of physics (briefly assuredly), tension and friction are crucial to maintaining a dynamic and responsive public space that we need. Gondry sees this as a balance between creative liberty and
the requirements of production. In his *Be Kind Rewind* Protocol he allows participants to create films of any nature but imposes time limits and certain general rules of conduct to maintain active making rather than constant contemplating and debating, drawing thought into action and one’s subjective opinions into the public space. The larger picture of Gondry’s project of community filmmaking was to enliven the public space again. His initial inspiration for the project was seeing all the abandoned and reappropriated theatres in Montmartre where he lived as a young adult. He imagined his own utopia where the community could sustain itself financially and emotional through theatre productions. The loss of community space, creative intuition, and reflective judgment are alarming because they undercut the agency of the everyman to contribute to shaping their own realities. By investing heavily in our individuality we exclude the disinterested feeling required to work in the public space; by separating ourselves from others we make creating Kant’s enlarged mentality impossible.

The enlarged mentality is the way of thinking that results from coming through the *sensus communis*. An enlarged mentality is the ability to see a phenomenon from perspectives other than your own (Arendt “The Crisis in Culture” 217). In order to hone this way of thinking, the judge has to use his or her faculty of imagination not understanding (Zerilli 174), building an arsenal of perspectives with which he or she is familiar. The previous discussion of Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* in relation to collaboration is a double demonstration of the important role imagination has in understanding. By looking first at how the characters model our contemporary subject position as dependent, communal, and unstable we see that they each come to know about themselves and others by imagining. Rhoda imagines that she is a queen or the hands of the clock are soldiers in the sand in order to relate her feelings to the very different situation her friends find themselves. Bernard does likewise, imagining he is Byron as a way to become the
writer he wants to be. In addition to the subject position the characters model, the formal elements of the novel itself demonstrate how one medium imagines itself within another. Being inspired by Beethoven’s late string quartets, themselves influenced by the fugue structure championed by Johannes Sebastian Bach, Woolf grafts a loose fugue form into the structure of the novel. The emblem *par excellence* of imagination and enlarged mentality appears in the carnations scattered throughout the novel. The carnations are the compilations of the lives of each of the characters, made particular through each character’s individual perspective of the flower and communal in its united appearance in the public space, the middle of the table between all of the friends. With imagination we see that disinterestedness does not result from completely divorcing oneself from the world, the *sensus communis*, but by being representative of someone else through one’s imagination (Villa 104). Imagination functions like a lens allowing us to see near and far from ourselves, bringing distant perspectives closer to us and bringing ourselves farther from what we are passing judgment upon so that we may come to an understanding (Beiner 97).

Judging is the one contemplative faculty that Arendt recognizes as requiring an audience. By being framed by the *sensus communis* that results from disinterestedness and imaginative representation of others, it is important that communities work together and communicate to maintain a healthy and active public space in which creativity may flourish. To communicate we have to work from an enlarged mentality by which we can imagine the perspectives of others and make them part of our own, *collective* perspective. We thus become intimately attached to those in our community as Bernard describes his own body as parts of all his friends’ bodies. We are then responsible for those around us that help comprise the public space and equally dependent on them as well. If we do not find a way to communicate we will never understand one another,
only perpetuating the alienation Arendt sees as the bane of the modern world (Arendt Lectures on Kant’s 74). The larger message of collaboration and the sensus communis for education today is how imperative building relationships between disciplines is in order to rebuild a public sphere of creative freedom where we now face extreme departmentalization.

Similarly, imagination is a crucial contemplative faculty that should be recognized and exercised in institutional educational environments. Imaginative work is often dismissed as child’s play or as unproductive amusement, but it is through imagination that we widen the perspective on which we see and experience the world. Such an education would be unlike the formulaic training and testing seen in many schools today but that does not mean that we sacrifice productive behaviour. To do so we must encourage creative behaviour rather than just creative thinking. Committing our ideas to paper, film, tape, etc. makes that material fodder for exercises in the public realm. While many consider themselves creative thinkers, only a few of those people act upon their creative ideas in ways that can be shared or extended by others, which is of little use to the public. In exactly this arena of creation, academic work cannot maintain itself or its relevancy if it ostracizes itself in a vacuum. As one form of the public space, the modern university has to recognize the needs of other sectors and prepare its students as citizens of a mediated and information rich world. Digital writing classes and programming courses struggle with training their students as users of a specific software as previous print based composition classes trained students to write academic essays. Instead of looking at the learning process as one subordinate to pragmatic concerns alone, the student would be better served if he or she is taught to judge a situation, experiment with particulars, and problem shoot through affectively-initiated creative thinking. While a series of keystrokes may be outdated with
the next software update, the mentality of a person that is design conscious, creative, and responsible to the public sphere will function well on all platforms.

The Product: Appropriation and the Specta(c)tor

The beauty of becoming such a design conscious, creative, and responsible citizen of the world for both Kant and Arendt is that anyone is capable of acting in such a manner. Rather than the genius, who is a rare manifestation of originality and unnatural exceptionality, Kant and Arendt privilege the spectator as the central figure of judgment. It is not the actor or creator that passes judgment, rather the spectator who judges the actor. Judging then mediates between thinking and acting since it occurs in the in-between space of the spectator’s judgment and the actor’s action (Heller 149). Privileging the spectator came directly from Kant’s observations of the French Revolution, which Arendt supports in her politics based on aesthetic judgment. First, the true meaning of the revolution was only evident to the spectators not the actors because the spectators were sufficiently disinterested in the actual events (Passerin d’Entrèves 115). The Revolution, argues Kant, became a world-historical event because there was a mass of sympathetic spectators present to witness the importance of revolutionary acts. This reveals the fact that actors are always dependent on spectators to recognize them and form opinions of them, to judge them in order to rise to public acknowledgement. The actor then does not conduct him or herself through reason or logic but in accordance to the spectators’ expectations (Arendt Lectures on Kant’s 55). Further, Arendt describes the qualities of the spectator, observing that “Spectators exist only in the plural. The spectator is not involved in the act, but he is always involved with fellow spectators. He does not share the faculty of genius, originality, with the maker or the faculty of novelty with the actor; the faculty they have in common is the faculty of judgment” (Arendt Lectures on Kant’s 63). Clearly the spectator is not the actor but neither is the spectator a passive consumer but rather what I have called the spectactor. Because everyone is
capable of judging, the faculty of judgment the spectator holds becomes the common thread that unites the whole creating the public space where action is possible. The spectator is not an outside observer of a system but the very basis of a system of creation.

By working through collage and appropriation, Robert Rauschenberg and William Burroughs work under the assumption of a privileged spectator. By choosing collage and cut-up as their primary method of representation, Rauschenberg and Burroughs elect a method that is less demanding of trained artistic or literary skill, welcoming other laypersons to participate in their work. Burroughs argued directly to his readers that they should all do cut-up rather than simply read his product since the power of the method is in its process. Collage and cut-up themselves are divorced from the ideal of the genius because they are recyclings of ready-made or existing materials rather than an inspired and original artistic generation of material. This conversation on the artist-genius began with Björk’s use of sampling in her recordings. By pulling from existing material in addition to creating her own original recordings, she demonstrates that working from samples is no less a creative feat. Sampling does not undermine the quality of creative work but rather recenters creativity on the public space from which such materials can be found instead of the inner recess of one’s mind where original creation supposedly emerges. Sampling does, however, undermine the concept of the genius as the sole and true creator and introduces the compositor as a key figure in creative activity.

In the shared ubiquity of their methods, the compositor and spectator are almost interchangeable. This push to open the arts to everyone, showing the general population that art is relevant to their developing knowledge of the human experience and a field in which they can participate was clearly present as early as the Futurist movement where their leaders often spoke of how their work was not for the curator, the museum goer, or the critic but the farmer and the
tire maker, highlighting a significant shift in the arts in the 20th century towards an interest and investment in the public space. Curiously, almost one hundred years later, critics and artists are still pushing this position. Ada Medina fervently states: “To consider all this [artistic knowledge] a realm only for select people (in the now specialized areas of art or philosophy) is to perpetuate separation. Awareness and conscience is also the province of the plumber, who fixed the drippy faucet here last week. We all have a stake in being primarily ethical and creative beings” (20). By demystifying the creative process and divorcing it from the ideal of divine inspiration, we make artistic and creative learning again a part of the public space that the people at large not only have access to but also are significant parts of their daily lives.

Mark Amerika also contributes to this conversation when he outlines the characteristics and functions of the video jockey or VJ. Instead of being a trained expert in a certain medium, a method of education common to art schools around the world, VJing is more about a state of mind, a methodology and mentality than the “object” created. In this case Amerika states, “It’s the artist who is the medium or instrument that is most capable of conducting radical experiments in subjective thought and experience” (Amerika “Portrait” 65). This in particular is why discussing “product” has been a challenge to this study. The product, the completed object that results from a process, is neither determinable nor relevant when the emphasis of both the process and the mentality that supports it is on remixing within the public space. The product is ephemeral for all practical purposes because it may be decomposed as easily as it was recomposed. This is also why new media and the many experimental artistic and literary movements before new media have posed an especially difficult challenge to education. Where universities increasingly become training grounds for specific jobs, the importance of the humanities as an education in community, expression, politics, and thought has been both de-
emphasized and sadly packaged as rear-guard, old school, or irrelevant to the productive student and future citizen. The humanities then should reconsider that **what they should really be teaching their students is how to be a VJ**, of essentially how to be critically aware of their environment, confident in their active role as spectators and compositors of the materials available in the public space that they themselves develop, and both willing and able to judge rather than accept their situation. This, however, does depend on rebuilding the public space we have lost with extreme individualism, departmentalization, and a job-training mentality in education. Luckily the act of appropriation and compilation goes hand in hand with an interest in the public space.

The elements Burroughs and Rauschenberg chose to reappropriate speak to their investment in the public realm. Burroughs cut up popular science fiction, detective mysteries, and pornography, and popular science magazines. His meticulous and often lengthy cut-up process was done on pulp fiction because Burroughs thought those texts offered the most interesting juxtaposition of materials for his own novels. Rauschenberg took a keen interest in photography and popular media images for his silkscreens such as photographs of President Kennedy and then contemporary space exploration. His combines were compilations of rubbish, advertisements, and other ordinary denizens of the streets of his neighborhood. Even by using the television and the conversations of his assistants in his studio as background noise (and often inspiration for his work) show how dependent and drawn in his work is to the public space that it constantly pulls from. While Burroughs and Rauschenberg are creators, are actors or artists in the public space, they work from the functions of the spectator as the central part of their creative process, making them excellent public figures to champion spectactorship as legitimate and crucial to the survival of the public space. Arendt actually argues that it is the spectator and the
critic who create the public space and not the artist or actor. The action of the spectator, the reflexive judgment, is the filter that determines what will and will not pass into the public sphere, essentially determining what belongs in the common world and what does not (Zerilli 179). Burroughs and Rauschenberg can be viewed as specta(c)tors because Arendt describes the spectator as not a specific person but simply a mode of relating to or being in the public space of the common world. By forwarding such a mode of being in the world, Burroughs and Rauschenberg privilege the spectator’s mentality through their media choices and creative methods and interests in collage/cut-up and appropriation in general.

The spectator, as the creator of the public realm itself through the filtering effect of reflexive judgment, assumes a position of great responsibility. Spectators are responsible for recognizing and then judging the phenomenon of their lives from a subjective position and reconciling that perspective with the perspectives of others, which they are able to imagine through an enlarged mentality and the resulting sensus communis. Perhaps the most difficult recognition the spectator must face is his or her own capacity in the public space. Rancière argues that the goal of critical art is to make the spectator “a conscious agent of world transformation”. The problem for critical art is that oppressed or exploited spectators are not dominated because they do not understand. The exploited are often the most aware of the rules of domination. Instead, they are dominated because they lack the confidence in their own ability to transform the world (Aesthetics and its Discontents 45). As Arendt has pointed out, a lack of understanding is not the cause of alienation and a refusal to judge reflexively. The problem lies in the decreased or suppressed use of imagination to view the world from another perspective and then judge appropriately to create the public space that the community benefits from the most. Henry Jenkins points to the positive role video games can play for children who feel
disempowered in their real lives by allowing them to role-play positions of political significance. He extrapolates that perhaps by playing a mayor in *The Sims*, people can learn the meaningfulness of their own judgments in the creation of public space, as *The Sims* mayor has immediate effects on the creation of the game space. Unfortunately, the mentality of world building in the game space is not automatically transferred to the real world. This could partly be the stigma associated with game playing which is popularly figured as an escapist, non-communal, or external activity to the player’s life in the real world. However, if John Klima’s *ecosystm* has taught us anything, it has demonstrated that the game space and the real world are not as disparate as we like to assume.

To reiterate, the spectator is not a passive individual that needs to be turned into an active contributor, a model that Jenkins hints at with the use of video games as a training guide and confidence booster for real-life political activity. Rather, emphasis should be on the fact that spectators are already acting by judging their environment. This judging, which is most effective in the disinterested spectator rather than the biased actor, creates the public space where action is possible. In a way, Arendt’s adoption of Kant in her political theory answers the longstanding riddle “if a tree falls in the forest and no one sees it, did it fall?” If there is no witness, no spectator to mark the importance of an event from a tree falling to the French Revolution, than the occurrence is denied entry into the public space. If something is not part of the public space, it is not relevant to peoples’ lives in a society and therefore it can hold no meaning. The significance of the world is thus the responsibility of the spectator who must witness and judge what should and should not be a part of his or her public space. By labeling herself a popular and folk musician rather than an avant-garde composer, Björk affirms the importance of the public space as what is truly relevant in the world of the people at large. By
bringing her avant-garde inspired experimentation into popular music she attempts to enliven the popular audience so they can see that the limits of the conventions of popular music are based on the audiences’ own decisions to accept generic music rather than recognize their ability to alter the public space through their judgments of aesthetic merit.

We cannot continue to be crippled by the myth that the genius, a masterpiece, or a creative savior in any shape or form will liberate us. Instead, by recognizing and acting upon the power spectators have as judges and filters of the public space, we can alter our environment from the inside out. Rita Raley underlines this strategy as the very avenue of success for tactical media works which, as digital art pieces already exist as scattered bits of information across a single computer, several servers, and the Internet. Tactical media works recognize that there is no center, nothing concrete to revolt against, combat, or overthrow. Instead, by using the tools made available from writing to programming in ways that defy a production model we demonstrate that pragmatics, efficiency, and productivity are not the defining characteristic of the human experience, nor are they all a society needs to run well and in a responsible way.

Such an interpretation is increasingly visible in other sectors of the public world. Marty Neumeier makes a compelling observation that the business world itself cannot depend on efficiency, profit management, and production alone. He points out that the effective businessperson today is a design-minded heuristic thinker (39). An awareness of one’s business perspective, place in the public space, and presentation require a company and its employees to recognize that design and aesthetics are not a veneer, a style placed over a product, but instead that design and aesthetics are ways of thinking that have to be an intimate part of making a public persona for the company and products that relate and benefit the public space spectators want in their world. Neumeier argues that the best businesspeople are those that will stay with a
problem and work with its creative tension rather than create solutions to dissolve all such tensions. He goes as far as to say that design-minded leaders “reject the tyranny of ‘or’ in favor of the genius of ‘and’” (47). Truth and the correct solution are disprivileged over the faculty of aesthetic judgment dependent upon imagination to bridge the subjective and objective, the immersive and the contemplative. Neumeier’s explanation of a successful businessperson sounds eerily like the descriptions Jean François Lyotard uses to discuss Marcel Duchamp’s *Large Glass*. Neumeier is essentially advocating that the successful businessperson, and leader for a community is someone who makes and works with bachelor machines. If this is the mentality that the present world is demanding of its citizens, a critically reflexive, discriminating, imaginative, design conscious judge to rebuild the public space, the humanities is where students will find such an education granted a few updates.

**Education and Aesthetic Judgment: Design Transformation and the Scrutiny of Analysis**

From the avant-garde to new media, the collage to the computer, the human environment has drastically altered. While the humanities are panting, catching up to technological developments, it is becoming increasingly clear that the goal of a humanities education must respond to the needs of its students as they prepare to participate in the public space of their global communities. In defining the goals of education in general, the New London Group states that, “its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life. Pedagogy is a teaching and learning relationship that creates the potential for building learning conditions leading to full and equitable social participation” (The New London Group 9). To be successful, education and its methods have to account for the lived needs of a community and the nature of public life economically, politically, historically, artistically, and so forth. Educators have recognized the increased influence of media other than print since at least the rise of television in the early
1960s. At that time educators realized that they would have to include the television as a significant part of children and young adult’s experiences (George 17). Even composition texts from the 19th century used images as prompts and objects of analysis as a way to come to terms with the need to make efforts at teaching visual rhetoric as an important tool to modern communication (George 20-1). One would be hard-pressed to find anyone who does not concur that we indeed live in an increasingly visual environment. Unfortunately that does not mean we know how best to teach or use these newfound media tools to their (and our) best advantage. By using images, video, television, and the computer as ways to support an already existing model of education that privileges analysis and logos based argumentation does little to help develop a mentality of bachelor machine making that Neumeier argues is and I adopt as the wave of future public leadership. The tension, beauty, and significance of the bachelor machine is that it merges the contemplative, the practical and logical models of architectural plans and engineering’s models of machination with the immersive, the imaginative and creative quality of the unexpected and the aesthetic without subsuming one to the other.

While the Academy still favors writing and print-literate models of problem solving as the hallmark of intelligence, of essentially more contemplative and Lukàcian models, the world around them prefers other media and their respective cognitive models. If reading and writing today is as media conscious and participatory as digital literature and art projects present them to be, then the humanities educator’s duty is to develop a student’s skills as a compositor who is not simply a writer of academic essays but a critically aware judge that is cognizant of media specificity, visual rhetoric, and design in addition to his or her verbal and literary skills. In this way we adopt the concept of composing in a way that is more true to its definition, to compose parts together, reminding the writer that photographers, artists, and musicians are also composers
What we are looking to do is not repackage or restyle literate logos based on contemplation but rather forward a method of learning, teaching, working, and living in ways that combine our analytical and creative skills. This is an entirely different beast. While there are several schools of thought currently working on developing such a model of education, Marcel O’Gorman of the E-Crit school describes the dilemma quite well:

Shaping a new apparatus also involves more than a scholarly remediation of printed texts [...] Carl Raschke observes that “today’s typical college classroom, excluding perhaps the décor and architecture, does not look or function much differently from the way it did in the 1920s. Can one imagine any other crucial pillar of culture, or sector of the economy, that has not changed that much in eighty years?” (xv-xvi)

Clearly, there is no time like the present to embrace the potential of new media and its effects on the human experience to create educational experiences whose goals are not to train one’s taste, uphold tradition (in content or methodology), or continue to use the teaching of print genres as the goal of composition or analyses. In this way we can also address The New London School’s position that our jobs as educators is to create students who are “able to engage critically with the conditions of their working lives” rather than “produce docile, compliant workers” (The New London Group 13).

While the Academy has remained stubbornly “rooted in notions of realism, empiricism, and a belief in the scientific method” (Doloughan 57), it is not immune to the effects of the avant-garde, postmodernism, or poststructuralism. By examining the artistic achievements of Björk Guðmundsdóttir, Michel Gondry, Robert Rauschenberg, William Burroughs, Virginia Woolf, and those of many other expressly digital artists and writers, we see that interdisciplinary and multimedia works are an intimate part of 20th and 21st century representations and explorations of the human experience in a technological world. Hard boundaries between high and low culture or between various disciplines and genres no longer hold, if in fact they ever
held. The novelist is no longer a master of the written word but must be fluent in a craft spanning several media genres and disciplines. These curious tinkerers fiddle with the musical form, the theatrical stage, computer programming, and the visual arts as intimate parts of their writing process. Donald Jones expresses his hope for the future of creative critical thinking by investing in digital literature which he argues starts with the intellectual tension of what you feel and what you want to address or say (209). In this way composition (written, visual, musical, or otherwise) is shown to essentially be a series of judgments from the numerous possibilities of genres, methods, topics, content, and frames that the computer puts at your fingertips. This sort of education is not about social networking, computer training, coding or programming. Instead we are attempting to balance the prevalence of Lukácian models of realism with Brechtian models of artistic, inventive learning, of teaching citizenship in a visual world through aesthetic judgment as a process of discernment and understanding that relies on feeling and imagination as crucial tools of knowing. N. Katherine Hayles’ observations of the future of academic writing run a parallel with these goals. She proposes: “Maybe now is a good time for a double-braided text where the generalities of theory and the particulars of personal experience can both speak, though necessarily in different voices. A text where both voices can be heard, at first very different but then gradually coming closer until finally they are indistinguishable” (O’Gorman 21). She does not describe the personal essay, the autobiography, or the literary analysis: rather she is describing an intimate collaboration between theoretical and personal material, balancing the scrutiny of analysis with the transformative power of personal relevance and critically designing a text.

This equally describes the aims of the Florida School, led by Gregory Ulmer and Robert Ray who work to supplement, not usurp, hermeneutic models of learning by recognizing the
validity of personal experience, desires, and associations in academic work. The aim of such a pedagogy is to develop a heuristic learning environment whose products are not analyses of literary, artistic, or theoretical works, but are compositions inspired by using such texts as methods of inventing rather than objects of analysis (Ulmer *Heuristics* 5). By encouraging students to see connections between such creative and theoretical text and their personal experiences and popular culture that surround them in the digital world, these students are asked to compose work through pattern recognition and design their environment around personal inquiry in a way relevant to the entertainment world, the academic world, and their personal lives. Arranging the elements of each of these sectors of one’s public (and private) life is the act of composition in a world that is increasingly designed, interdisciplinary, multimodal, and dependent on a unstable subject position.

One major difficulty of creating this “design-minded heuristic thinker” is the need to create and design while working with the media one uses rather than first determining appropriate ideas and then including them in a set of pre-selected media. This is precisely why understanding what aesthetic judgment entails will be more helpful in composition in the digital realm than creating explicit instructions on multimodal writing. The entire point of the “multimodal genre” itself is its existence as a remix of the capabilities of each medium used. Skillful composition lies in the strength of one’s power to discern or judge what medium and its connected implications are best for the message you intend to make. M.A. Syverson used a group generated multimedia web project for his composition course largely to develop skills in visual rhetoric and creative problem solving. Such ventures in digital writing are what Bruno Latour call “thinking with eyes and hands”, hinting at how “our technological applications are no longer simply tools that we use to implement our ideas, but become the very media of thought itself”
(Syverson 174). Marcel O’Gorman of the E-Crit School has generated similar assignments where students do not write about a literary figure through argumentation, analysis, or critique, but rather write with that figure by imagining an extension of his original composition, very much a mirroring of Bernard’s usage of Byron to develop his own writing style.

Turning to design as a metaphor for what composition and a humanities education in general now requires is essentially a recognition of what is needed at this time to not only bring significance to a university education but also mend the public space Arendt disparaged as increasingly weak. While hermeneutic, Lukácsian based learning through critique and analysis is an important part of growing mentally, Gunther Kress argues that design is an essential method of learning when we find ourselves in times of great transition or unrest. Critique is effective in evaluating existing models in a relatively stable social environment. Our transition into the digital world and the impact of the networked computer has rivaled the invention of the printing press, modern transportation, and other groundbreaking inventions. If ever there was a need for design and its ability to shape “the future through deliberate deployment of representational resources” (Hocks 644) it is here at the dawn and development of the digital era. Design as a model of learning supplements criticism with invention. As Arendt argued that the spectator’s act of judging creates the public space necessary for social and particularly political action to occur, Mary Hocks points out that “The ‘shaping’ of resources gives students’ work social and political impact and allows them to learn how to represent new forms of knowledge” (644).

The significance of design as a model for education resembles my beginning this study with the music video genre as an inspiration for academic renovations. Design bridges high and low culture where fine artists have designed and exhibited lamps or chairs or have used high art methods in commercial design. Design is also a meeting of the rational/logical and
irrational/emotional. Richard Buchanan writes design “is rational to the extent that there is conscious understanding of the laws of nature; it is irrational to the extent that the sciences have not yet succeeded in revealing the laws of complex phenomena” (34). Design also finds itself working with many media at once in both its creation and presentation. However, design, like rhetoric, has been displaced in academic study for quite some time. David Kaufer and Brian Butler argue that rhetoric has been unstable because the Academy, a print-literate based institution, does not know where to place rhetoric, as a field of study based on oral discourse (7). Similarly Buchanan points out that design has been divorced from the process of making by the Industrial Revolution and mass production and banned from the fine arts because of its practical and commercial intentions. Still today, design is often subordinated to marketing or product design as purely a function of corporate business (34-5). That these two fields should be related to one another now, in a time of both technological transition and increased aesthetic awareness in a designed world, is appropriate and fitting to the needs of education and world citizenship. Such phrases as “that’s just rhetoric” or “design is surface styling” is not only a simplification of the complexity of these fields that is unwarranted but it is also a way to rob the spectator, the everyman, of their political power to alter the public space in which they function.

The significance of Arendt’s use of Kant’s aesthetic judgment is simply that such an appropriation takes aesthetic judgment as an analogy for political and social behaviour. Aesthetic judgment is not confined to questions of beauty but is the basic faculty of humanity to learn and determine what we like as a community, of what we accept as part of our communal experience. Aesthetic judgment is thus not reserved for the viewer of a work of art, a curator, or music critic. Aesthetic judgment is the intuitive and quotidian method in which everyone processes and simultaneously creates his or her world. Not only was Arendt’s political theory a shock because
it so directly blended aesthetics with politics, it also rearranged our established model of ethics and morality by introducing the importance of the subjective experience in ethical decision making. Enlivening the crucial need for all individuals to invest in developing public space made aesthetic judgment into the responsible action of the world citizen rather than the discriminatory and hierarchical activity of the champions of discursive order, of the curator, critic, and thinker. A world where the public realm and popular culture in addition to the participation of the amateur as well as the professional is one that forwards an environment of universal responsibility and participation. Without being able to rely on objective ethical codes, everyone must assume the role of the spectator critically aware of his or her environment and the needs of the individual in relation to other community members. The possibly disorienting element of such an environment is the level of dependence it implies we all share with one another. After absorbing individualism as a way of being since the Enlightenment, the transition to networked environments and multimedia spaces proves to be an uncomfortable readjustment to a different vision of social life.

Aesthetic judgment is a way for the spectator to design public space, to relate their feelings and tastes to the common sense of the community, to come to an understanding of the human experience through imagination in addition to analytical scrutiny. If we reject aesthetics as a meaning-making tool we disempower the people of the ability to collaboratively create their social and political reality. If we let aesthetics, style, design, or taste consume us we forget our responsibility toward critical thought and allow the dominant opinion projected by existing power structures to prevail, making spectators tools to a purely subjective reality, a totalitarian environment. Instead, we have to use our powers of judgment to design our community, bringing pleasure and substance to our daily lives (Postrel 191). While people do have an inherent
capacity to judge, to discern, and to create aesthetic environments, a good education would teach students to master aesthetic, analytic, judgmental, and critical skills to not only raise awareness of the role each student has to the community but to also teach them how to best act on their abilities to discriminate what should and should not be a part of a healthy political and social environment. By challenging existing conventions in the creative arts, the literary, musical, and visual arts, the figures discussed in this study demonstrate how an aesthetic judgment that invests seriously in the importance of the public space by supporting popular music as a genre, using the immediate and quotidian environment as inspiration, by depicting the subject as intimately dependent on the other for identity, or placing the reader and writer as negotiators of shared designed spaces can alter the structure and meaning of human civilization. The aesthetic judgments made by each of these figures simultaneously imply judgments about human society, ethical models, and our political activity. Supporting creativity and imagination as a faculty that should function alongside rational logic to understand the human experience validates the sentiments, intuitions, and opinions that we have always recognized as present in our lives even if suppressed in our “intellectual” endeavors. While pragmatics loses touch with purpose and creative play veers from social responsibility, by combining our faculties of analytical scrutiny with the transformative powers of design in our practice of aesthetic judgment, we can account for both our immersive desires and contemplative analyses, providing humanity with innovation in addition to productivity.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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