"Outside of a dog, reading is man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it is too dark to read."

—Groucho Marx

University of Alberta

Reading Body: Observations by a Non-Reader

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the physicality of reading. Scholarship in fields such as reader-response criticism and book history often neglect the body and the physicality of the processes they study—examining reading as a disembodied act. However, reading relates reflexively to our texts, our cultures, *and* our bodies. By examining these relationships, I study how reading inhabits our bodies both through how we read and through how we are read. Since bodies are specific and personal, and knowing that I cannot claim objectivity about the process, I include images of readers as well as a personal narrative. The physical experience of reading changes us and our perceptions. In light of new media developments, which are already changing reading practices, we must try to gain a more thorough, rounded understanding of what reading is in order to have some stake in what it is to become.

Acknowledgements

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*All photographs and drawn figures by Joyce Tam.

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Two years ago, I sat down and read Italo Calvino's "If on a winter's night a traveler"—it was the first book I'd sat down and read and enjoyed in a very long while. Over the past two years, I have taken an interest in the act of reading—both in terms of my own relationship to it and in how it operates socially and culturally. This thesis details some of that interest. Many of the views I have come from the way that my reading has developed (and in certain instances digressed). I am fascinated, for example, by the book object—a direct result of longing so much to own them as a child. By weaving together my story of reading, as well as photographs of other readers, with this thesis, I hope to foreground Alberto Manguel's notion that there can be no definitive examination of reading—there can only be examination of particular readings and the history of these readings is the story of each of its readers. Without actually embarking on a sociological study, I cannot hope to avoid generalizing the embodied reader to some extent. These materials will return some of the specificity to these bodies, as well as allow us to explore our physicality, quirks and oddities, and motives –to further understand what the act of reading involves.

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[Fig. 0-1][1]

A Man Who Works With His Hands

[1] This and the photographs to follow are taken by me and are of readers in my life.

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We've all seen them—on buses, park benches, coffee shop patios. They do it in public, regardless, no matter what is around them. They are readers. They sit and they read and we sit and we watch. What is it about readers that we non-readers are drawn to? It's an anti-social habit—yet something to be proud of—, this reading. And, still, there is something ultimately sexy about the solitary reader: a strange, almost repelling, mystique. Perhaps it's that they aren't needy. They don't want anything from you. Perhaps it's the stand-offishness. They're busy with their book.

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Introduction: Reader-Response Theory

In *A History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel writes, "the reader has become deaf and blind to the world, to the passing crowds, to the chalky flesh-coloured facades of the buildings. Nobody seems to notice a concentrating reader: withdrawn, intent, the reader becomes commonplace" (42-43). Ironically, Manguel's critical survey has helped bring the reader into the limelight. He begins by describing various images of readers—starting with "the young Aristotle languidly read[ing] a scroll unfurled on his lap" (3) and moving to others such as Mary Magdalen, stark naked and "apparently unrepentant, [lying] on a cloth strewn over a rock in the wilderness, reading a large illustrated volume" and Jorge Luis Borges screwing "up his eyes the better to hear the words of an unseen reader" (4-5). A young Parisian reader "lean[s] on a stone parapet overlooking the Seine" (4) and Saint Dominic sits "absorbed in the book he holds unclasped on his knees, deaf to the world" while, "far from the busy city, amid sand and parched rocks," Saint Jerome reads a manuscript "while, in a corner, a lion lies listening" (3). Note that in each of these

images, Manguel focuses his description on the reader's pose—her space and the way that her body inhabits it. He goes on to discuss the importance of the physicality of reading and though his treatment is often anecdotal and unsystematic, it is vital.

Manguel's work can be seen as a recent variation of reader-response theory, a school of thought that gained momentum in the late 1970's and early 80's. Dissatisfied with formalist principles, reader-response theorists undertook to "narrativize, characterize and personify or otherwise objectify the reading experience and its condition"—in short, "to make the implicit features of 'reading' explicit" (Freund, 6). They attempted to demonstrate that "the practice of supposedly impersonal and disinterested reading is never innocent and always infected by suppressed or unexamined presuppositions" (10). In *The Return of the Reader*, Elizabeth Freund notes:

> The view that a text cannot live in isolation from a context of reading and response has acquired the force of a cliché mainly because the text's natural companion, the reader, slips so easily into the category of that which goes without saying. The inherent privacy and silence of reading have no doubt encouraged a tendency to suppress the embarrassment of subjectivity, placing it beyond the pale of a critical decorum which aspires to be objective. (2-3)

For years, readers 'went unsaid' and reader-response took it upon itself to "liberate the reader from his enforced anonymity" (6).

The first wave[2] of reader-response criticism did this by theorizing him—by constructing and examining the reader's role in the production of meaning. Wolfgang

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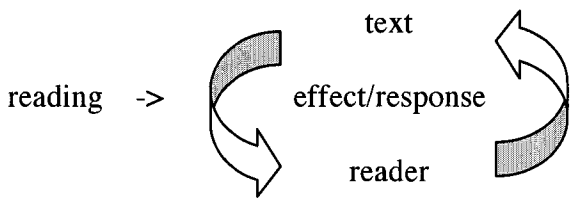
[2] Though reader-response criticism became a distinct movement of its own right only during the 1970's, its roots "can be traced as far back as Aristotle and Plato, both of

Iser, a seminal figure in the German school of 'Reception Theory' (*Receptionkritik or Rezeptionstheorie*), notes that the "traditional form of interpretation, based on the search for a single meaning, set out to *instruct* the reader; consequently, it tended to ignore both the character of the text as a happening and the experience of the reader that is activated by this happening" (22). However,

> As a literary text can only produce a response when it is read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response without also analyzing the reading process. Reading [...] sets in motion a whole chain of activities that depend on both the text and on the exercise of certain basic human facilities. Effects and responses are properties neither of the text nor of the reader; the text represents a potential effect that is realized in the reading process. (ix)

Here, Iser implies that though there is something (which he later defines as the 'artistic') inherently in the text that produces a response when read, no effect or response is actually produced until reading occurs.



[Fig. 1-1]

The Act Of Reading

Thus, the act of reading initiates the process whereby text/reader work upon each other to draw effect/response. As text and reader merge in the act of reading, the traditional

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whom based their critical arguments at least partly on literature's effect on the reader" (Rabinowitz 1).

dichotomy of subject and object is disassembled, and "it therefore follows that meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced" by the reader (10).

Iser identifies two traditional categories of readers: the real reader and the hypothetical reader. The real reader is "known to us by his documented reactions" and "invoked mainly in studies of the history of responses" (27). These documented reactions provide useful information about popular attitudes and norms of the time. Unfortunately, the reconstruction of the real reader depends, precariously, on the survival of documents[3]. The problem also lies in "whether such a reconstruction corresponds to the real reader of the time or simply represents the role which the author intended the reader to assume." For Iser, then, even the real (also termed contemporary) reader is partly hypothetical. Iser breaks the real reader down into three types: "the one real and historical, drawn from existing documents, and the other two hypothetical: the first constructed from social and historical knowledge of the time, and the second extrapolated from the reader's role laid down in the text" (28).

Opposite of the real/contemporary reader is the ideal reader—"a purely fictional being" who is infinitely useful because of this fact. Without base in reality, the ideal reader can take on whatever qualities are necessary to answer any question posed. Through this ability, he can fill in any gaps and inconsistencies that the real reader leaves, as well as position himself theoretically where the real reader cannot. The ideal reader, then, must encompass all possible meaning—he must "not only fulfill the potential

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[3] Book historians constantly face challenges when it comes to source material. For one, the practice of documentation, even today, lacks standardization. And, once created, the documents themselves cannot be guaranteed survival—paper, magnetic tape, and memory are fragile. More significantly, the process favors certain segments of society over others (usually those within the systems of government and bureaucracy).

meaning of the text independently of his own historical situation, but he must also do this exhaustively." However, Iser notes that the result of this "would be total consumption of the text—which would itself be ruinous for literature" (29). By consuming the text, this sort of reading destroys the possibility of a reflexive relationship between text and reader and thus also the act of reading and the meaning(s) it produces. The totalizing possibility that the ideal reader represents is the very thing that, if achieved, would destroy that which it set out to understand.

These traditional categories of real and ideal are problematic in that their basic concern lies in consequences "rather than with the structure of effects, which causes and is responsible for these results." Iser declares that it "is time now to change the vantage point, turning away from results produced and focusing on the potential in the text which triggers the re-creative dialectics in the reader" (30). He goes on to outline three delineations of the reader that have attempted to break out of these conventional, restrictive categories: Michael Riffaterre's superreader, Stanley Fish's informed reader, and Erwin Wolff's intended reader.

Riffaterre's superreader "stands for 'groups of informants,' who always come together at 'nodal points in the text,' thus establishing through their common reactions the existence of a 'stylistic fact.'" Here, style is no longer an isolated product of linguistic elements; rather, the idea is to objectify style by taking it out of the context of the conventions of language and placing it in the hands of perceiving subjects. This approach bypasses problems inherent in the stylistics of deviation "which always involves reference to linguistic norms that lie outside the text, in order to gauge the poetic qualities of a text by the degree it deviates from these presupposed extratextual norms." Thus, the

superreader, "as a collective term for a variety of readers of different competence," allows for "an empirically verifiable account of both the semantic and pragmatic potential contained in the message of the text" (30). Problematically, though, it "presupposes a differentiated competence and is dependent not least on the historical nearness or distance of the group in relation to the text under consideration" (31). In trying to take the 'stylistic fact' out of linguistic contexts, the concept of the superreader also takes the text out of its historical and social contexts.

Fish's informed reader also concerns himself with how the reader processes the text. The informed reader is "'neither an abstraction, nor an actual living reader, but a hybrid—a real reader (me) who does everything within his power to make himself informed." This reader works to gain linguistic, semantic, and literary competencies. After he possesses the necessary competence, the informed reader "must also observe his own reactions during the process of actualization, in order to control them" (31). This self-observation can only invoke an experience, however, "which, though indisputable, remains inaccessible to the theorist" (32). Thus, Fish's informed reader must necessarily become his own self-theorist—losing objectivity and unable to form community.

For Iser, Fish's informed reader would occupy the aesthetic pole—the realization that the reader accomplishes. Wolff's intended reader, on the other hand, occupies the artistic pole—the author's text and intent—for he is the "reader which the author had in mind." As a fictional inhabitant of the text, the intended reader "can embody not only the concepts and conventions of the contemporary public but also the desire of the author both to link up with these concepts and to work on them—sometimes just portraying them, sometimes acting upon them." With the intended reader, we can sketch out the

audience that the author wanted to speak to. The problem with the intended reader lies in its rather narrow confines. It has no provisions for a broader understanding of literature—how, for example, can a reader enjoy a work centuries later and still find meaning in it if it was never intended for her? And, though "historical qualities which influenced the author at the time of writing mould the image of the intended reader,... they tell us nothing about readers' actual response[s]" (33). Therefore, we "must differentiate between the fictitious reader and the reader's role.... The fictitious reader is, in fact, just one of several perspectives, for he finds himself called upon to mediate between them" (33). The intended reader can only be one part of the reader's role.

Problematically, each of the above three concepts has restrictions that make it inapplicable outside of its specific setting. Iser, Robert C. Holub comments, "wants a way to account for the reader's presence without having to deal with real or empirical readers, as well as the various abstract readers, whose characters have been predetermined—Riffaterre's 'super-reader' or Fish's 'informed reader.'" In "other words, he seeks a 'transcendental model'" (85). He finds this model in the implied reader. Iser notes that:

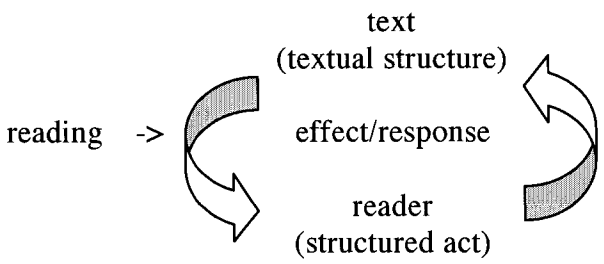
> we must allow for the reader's presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation.... He embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect—predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader.

The concept of the implied reader, then, does not define the reader; rather, it anticipates his presence by pre-structuring, through the text, the roles to be assumed. In other words,

the implied reader is the role that the text extends to the real reader. Thus, the "concept of the implied reader designates a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text" (34). It can be broken down into two parts: the textual structure and the structured act.

The textual structure brings about "a standpoint from which the reader will be able to view things that would never have come into focus as long as his own habitual dispositions were determining his orientation, and what is more, this standpoint must be able to accommodate all kinds of different readers" (35). Occupying this standpoint involves taking the different perspectives represented in the text and joining them together at a vantage point by finding the meeting place where they converge[4]. Thus, the implied reader is "firmly planted in the structure of the text" and defined largely in literary terms (Iser, 34). This is problematic though, Holub comments, because "if the implied reader were purely textual, it would be synonymous with the structure of appeal (*Appellstrucktur*) of a literary work, and to call it a 'reader' at all would be senseless, if not downright misleading" (85). Iser confronts this issue by noting that the textual structure is only fully implemented when it brings about structured acts. The structured act is the fulfillment of the intention carried by the textual structure. The "reason for this is that although the textual perspectives themselves are given, their gradual convergence and final meeting place are not linguistically formulated and so have to be imagined. This is the point where the textual structure of his role begin to affect the reader" (36).

[4] In this way, the implied reader is not simply a fictitious reader; rather, the fictitious reader comprises one part of the role.



[Fig. 1-2]

Iser's Implied Reader

While Fish's informed reader occupies only the artistic pole and Wolff's intended reader resides solely in the aesthetic pole, Iser's implied reader situates itself in the interaction between the two. Removed neither from the reader nor the text, the implied reader retains the historically situated intentions of the author through the textual structure and keeps the reader (and his linguistic/social conventions and norms) in mind through the recognition of the structured act. As well, unlike Riffaterre's superreader, it leaves room for context by allowing for the reader's own disposition. Iser notes that there are two selves to the reader: the role offered by the text and the real reader's own disposition, "and as the one can never be fully taken over by the other, there arises between the two tension... Generally, the role prescribed by the text will be the stronger, but the reader's own disposition will never disappear totally; it will tend instead to form the background to and a frame of reference for the act of grasping and comprehending" (37). And, the reader's particular disposition brings along with it the experiences that he brings to reading—experiences which determine the ways that the reader might choose to fulfill the role set out by the text.

Does Iser's implied reader, then, fulfill its role? Does it transcend the criticisms placed on the readers conceptualized by Fish, Wolff, and Riffaterre? Iser critiques Fish's

informed reader for producing an experience only accessible to the reader himself, thereby defaulting the possibilities of objectivity and community. Iser's implied reader, on the other hand, "represents a selective realization [...], whose own structure provides a frame of reference within which individual responses to a text can be communicated to others" (37). Thus, by establishing the text as the basis of the reader's realization of the reading act, Iser also establishes it as a common ground on which responses and experiences can be exchanged. He goes on to fault Wolff's intended reader for its narrow scope. Based only in authorial intention, the intended reader makes no allowance for either the reader's role or his historical and social contexts. Likewise, by relying solely on the readers to establish 'stylistic fact,' Riffaterre removes the text from its historical contexts. Iser's implied reader, however, makes room for the reader's realization of the text as well as the disposition and context he brings to the task.

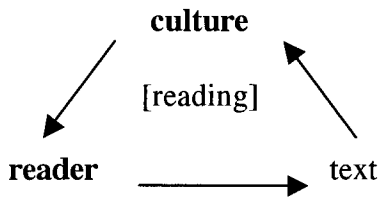
Iser notes that he wants to examine results rather than causes by 'focusing on the potential in the text which *triggers* the re-creative dialectics in the reader.' In other words, he wishes to examine the role that the text *offers* the reader. Significantly, though the reader is now necessary to the production of meaning, the impetus for reading lies within the text rather than the reader. Iser attempts to set up a reflexive relationship between the two; ultimately, however, agency rests with the text. The text is still the catalyst for the reading act. As well, Iser seeks a transcendental model—one that allows him to do without real or empirical readers. The implied reader is "a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader" (34). This, however, constitutes a rather serious blind-spot.

Reading has a history—the evolution of reading and its relationship with the text arises out of certain historical and material conditions. Without an integrated understanding of these parts—the text, the reader, and their histories—we will not be able to properly contextualize and understand the practice of reading today. Though Iser places importance on the reader's disposition in the process of actualization, he does not recognize that each reader's particular disposition is in part composed of, and influenced by past, real readers and their relationships with the literature of their time. Iser's neat model of the implied reader manages to take into account the relationship between text and reader; however, it does not situate either half materially, historically, or socially nor does it attempt to understand how readers might relate to other readers and texts to other texts. The model's self-containment results in an implied reader who is removed, generic, disembodied, and male. As Holub critiques, using this dual definition allows Iser "to move to and fro from text to reader without ever clarifying the composition and contribution of either half of this partnership. The implied reader may evidence a deficiency in rigor rather than an abundance of sophistication" (85).

Like Iser, Jonathan Culler, a seminal figure in the American school of reader-response, criticizes notions such as the ideal reader or superreader; however, he focuses specifically on their ahistorical approaches. In *The Pursuit of Signs* he notes:

> To speak of an ideal reader is to forget that reading has a history. There is no reason to believe that the perfect master of today's favorite interpretative techniques is the ideal reader, and it is not clear how the study of reading would benefit from positing a transhistorical ideal. Reading is historical, even though it need not be studied historically. (56)

Culler believes that "a self-contained encounter between innocent reader and autonomous text is a bizarre fiction. To read is always to read in relation to other texts, in relation to the codes that are the products of these texts and go to make up a culture" (13). I will argue later that to read is always to read in relation to one's body and to other readers, as well as to other texts. For Culler, the reading process begins with naturalization—a process that involves taking what is read and making it known through a culturally acceptable framework (Freund, 82). Though Culler does not posit a specific conceptualization of the reader, he examines how culture, rather than text, helps to designate the hypothetical reader.



[Fig. 1-3]

Culler: Culture Makes The Reader

Readings "are the product of interpretive conventions that can be described," Culler explains (74). One's "focus can be synchronic or diachronic; one can concentrate on readings of a particular work or readings of numerous works by a particular group of readers; one can draw data from diverse sources to focus on a particular problem or distinction, or one can seek out comparable interpretations for the easier identification of convergencies and differences." Here, Culler presents various models for "organizing information that comes from actual readers" (56). He notes that in conceptualizing, interpreting, and modeling this information, there will necessarily be a certain amount of idealization; however, Culler emphasizes, these idealizations must be made with context

in mind. Unfortunately, he does not address how one might balance idealization and contextualization in any specific way.

Yet, Culler goes on to note "any literary criticism must assume general operations of reading: all critics must make decisions about what can be taken for granted, what must be explicitly argued for, what will count as evidence for a particular interpretation and what would count as evidence against it" (139). Reader-oriented "criticism relies heavily on notions of the reader's experience, referring to what *the* or *a* reader finds, feels, wonders, conjectures, or concludes to justify its accounts of the meaning and structure of literary works" (*On Deconstruction,* 40). Thus, reader-response theorists are concerned with arguing for the importance of understanding the reader and his experience. In that vein then, Culler asks, if "the experience of literature depends upon the qualities of a reading self, one can ask what difference it would make to the experience of literature and thus to the meaning of literature if this self were, for example, female rather than male"? (42)

In *On Deconstruction,* for example, Culler asks what difference gender might make "to 'the reader's experience' of the opening chapter of *The Mayor of Casterbridge,* where the drunken Micheal Henchard sells his wife and infant daughter to a sailor for five guineas at a country fair?" He outlines three moments where feminist criticism wrestles with the act of reading. In the first, "the concept of a woman reader leads to the assertion of continuity between women's experience of social and familial structures and their experience as readers" (46). Criticism following this line of inquiry looks into how authors portray female characters, as well as attitudes towards women in any given work, genre, or period—and how women identify with those portrayals. However, what can the

female reader do if these portrayals are negative or problematic? Feminists must necessarily reject such representations but how, then, can they still to identify with the text?

The second moment, therefore, "confronts the problem of women as the consumer of male-produced literature" (48). It posits that women can still identify with the text because, as Carolyn Heilbrun asserts, their experience as women does not define or restrict their perspective; rather, it provides a useful critical standpoint. In other words, when a woman reads, she does not necessarily read *as* a woman; rather, female readers have learned to read as men (quoted in Culler, 49). The human experience has long been presented as male. Feminist criticism is concerned with the way that a hypothetical female reader affects the understanding and experience of a text. It "undertakes, through the postulate of a woman reader, to bring about a new experience of reading and to make readers—men and women—question the literary and political assumptions on which their reading has been based" (50-51). And, finally, the third moment must consider whether "the procedures, assumptions, and goals of current criticism are in complicity with the preservation of male authority, and to explore alternatives" (61). Thus, reading as a woman means playing a role that is based on the female identity—also a construct—so that, Culler posits, "the series can continue: a woman reading as a woman reading as a woman" (64).

Culler remarks that reading is historical; however, he believes that it does not necessarily have to be studied historically. Though one's approach need not focus or rely heavily on historical methods alone, Culler's summation and analysis of the concept of the female reader would benefit from some attention to history. For, often, when history

becomes peripheral, context is also pushed aside. Culler speaks of the various conceptual shifts in feminist reader-response as moments—as though they were indeed fleeting thoughts without a time or space basis. Each of those moments, however, did take place at a particular time and location—a political and intellectual climate—that helped foster it and that it, in turn, influenced. Understanding this context would help participants in the third moment better situate and evaluate their methods critically, for we must understand our tools if we are to avoid technological determinism and "critical modes in which the concepts that are products of male authority are inscribed within a larger textual system" (61). An understanding of how different women of different periods have related (in similar or diverse ways) to the texts of their time, as well as how these relationships do, and have, influence on literature itself, would have added that third reflexive moment to Culler's own critique. Though Culler attempts to situate his hypothetical reader historically, she is still generic (Culler's female readers are seen as a class of critical device) and disembodied. Though he has brought some specificity to the concept through gender, he calls for a semiotics (focusing on the abstract world of signs and symbols) of literature where "someone *like* the reader is needed to serve as center" (43, my italics).

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Second wave reader-response critics took up Iser and Culler's work; however, they recognized the need to situate the reader historically. Not satisfied with someone *like* the reader, critics such as Jonathan Rose and Janice Radway want to know the specifics of *actual* readers—both past and present. Jonathan Rose, a historian, sees book history[5] as

[5] Rose also notes that "'Book history,' of course, is not just about books. The term is a shorthand for the social history of the creation, diffusion, and reception of the written word" ("How to Do Things" 462).

an exciting field of study which allows for innovation and new methodologies. His work aims to recover the history of the common reader by tracing her responses through source material such as borrowing records, reader surveys, memoirs, and sales figures. However, he notes that these materials do not guarantee an accurate or unbiased portrayal. Catalogues, for example, "tell us nothing about borrowing frequencies, which is an exceedingly difficult riddle to crack when one is dealing with working-class readers" ("How historians study," 202). Often, ledgers do not survive. And, even if they do, they might not tell us as much as we would hope, for in groups such as the Victorian working class, very few books "would be bought new. They would be gifts or school prizes or family heirlooms, or borrowed from public libraries, relatives, or workmates." And, "we should likewise be wary of the assumption, widely shared among students of popular culture, that the influence of a given book is directly proportional to its circulation" ("How historians study," 205).

Yet, despite the many concerns that this approach broaches (arguably, one of its values), Rose adamantly asserts its necessity. In "How Historians study reader response: or, what did Jo think of *Bleak House*?," he notes that this "is not an essay in reader-response criticism for it does not deal with 'implied readers,' 'informed readers,' 'qualified readers,' 'superreaders,' or any other kind of hypothetical reader. My subject—which has been remarkably neglected by reader-response critics—is the response of the actual ordinary reader in history." In other words, his subject is the common reader and if "we want to discover which books changed the lives of their readers, then we must study those lives directly" (205).

Rose contends that the history department is best suited to this inquiry. He especially disparages literary criticism and studies of popular culture, citing their lack of empirical evidence. He begins "How Historians Teach the History of the Book" with a not-so-subtle attack on English departments, noting, "if you do love books, and the literature departments will not have you—the history department is across the quad" ("How Historians Teach," 221). He notes, to "put it bluntly, a large body of recent literary criticism, based as it is on the receptive fallacy, should be scrapped and done over again, using a very different method—perhaps one of the methods outlined here." Rose defines receptive fallacy as the attempt to:

> discern the influence of a text on an audience simply by examining the text. They are looking in the wrong place. If you want to know how Dickens shaped attitudes towards women in the minds of his readers, you are not going to find the answer in *The Pickwick Papers* or anything else Dickens wrote. You must interrogate the readers, because they all read unpredictably." ("How Historians study," 209)

Though I agree that the common reader has much to offer in way of understanding the reading experience, Rose's conception is rather unilateral. Writers do not write in isolation; rather, they exist in reflexive relationships[6] with their readers, with culture, with technology, with texts past and present. Because of these influences, I believe that one can tell something about how Dickens influenced his readers if one looks at the work of his contemporaries and also his own later works. Dickens affects his readers, who in turn respond through their cultural frameworks. Those responses go back to influence culture and it is out of the codes of this culture that Dickens and others produce their next works.

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[6] Later in my thesis, I will detail these relationships.

On the other side of the quad sits Janice Radway, Frances Fox Professor in Humanities (Department of Literature) and Professor of Literature at Duke University. Like Rose, she seeks to understand the common reader (which she terms the general reader)—their tastes, motives, and experiences. However, her focus is on contemporary American popular culture. Her interest lies not in what Literature people read in the past; but, rather, what popular print they are consuming now. Specifically, Radway examines the women romance readers of certain Book-of-the-Month clubs in the United States. In *A Feeling for Books*, she starts by giving an account of how she found herself a member of a Book-of-the-Month club during her undergrad—of how it was something that as a youth she desired, that as a graduate student she learned to hide, and that, as an ivy-league professor, she finally dismissed. Years later, she found it again as an area of investigation.

However, before she could even begin, she first had to fight the assumption of popular culture's inferiority to literature. She notes that when she first talked to the women, they:

> eloquently defended *their* preference for a genre that literary critics dismissed as simple, formulaic, and among the most debased of all popular forms. Slowly they demonstrated to me that, for them, romances were not only subtle and varied but immediately relevant to the condition of their daily lives. They showed me that romance fiction constituted a complex, living literature in the context of their day-to-day concerns, and this increased my doubts about the intrinsic status of textual complexity and the purported universality of the sacred literary canon. (6)

Radway identifies the text-centered approach as deterministic. She notes that these approaches "impute extraordinary control to simple objects or text." The conjecture that the author imbues meaning in a text, which then exists as a stable object that eventually determines the reader's experience posits humans, Radway notes, "as passive and somnolent, indeed as virtually mindless" ("Reading is not," 11). And, often women romance readers are considered to be mindless consumers driven by sensation and marketing. By "shifting attention from the text to the various processes responsible for its identification, selection, construction, and use," Radway makes the women's activities visible. In doing that, she identifies "the ways in which the women were acting upon the mass-produced culture offered to them and thereby altering or modifying the patriarchal message (always within certain limits, to be sure) to suit their own purposes" (13). By concentrating on how readers choose their texts, how they situate themselves in relation, how they shape their experience of those texts, and what they do with that experience, Radway highlights the way in which these readers influence and shape (and are influenced and shaped by) mass culture.

Wolfgang Iser attempts, though problematically, to posit a reflexive relationship between text and reader. Jonathan Culler, on the other hand, wants to place the reader in the center. Similarly, Jonathan Rose and Janice Radway turn their attention from the text; however, they focus on sociological variables such as gender and class, using empirical records and narrative accounts to study material issues such as costs, distribution, and availability. However, though their readers now had names and statistics, they remained disembodied.

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I was once a reader, I'll admit. Through all of elementary school I read. I read everything I could get my hands on: junior scientist books on the great inventors, books on animals- particularly horses and dogs-, simple histories, and encyclopedias. I loved encyclopedias. The only door-to-door salesman to ever visit our home managed to sell my parents two sets. I spent hours upon hours of my childhood poring first over the colorful Child Craft Library and then later over the red leather set of World Book Encyclopedias–so much so that the volumes flipped open automatically to the entries I looked up most. And novels. By the time I left my elementary school, I had read all four spinning-racks in the school library. Harriet the Spy and Farley Mowatt: I tore through them all at family dinners, in my bedroom, while my parents grocery shopped. Something, now lost, about those books held me. Oh, there were other reasons for sure. I mean, good kids were supposed to read. If you read, you were smart. Of course I basked in the praise, 'oh look at your daughter sitting there reading. My, isn't she smart.' But there was something else—something that kept me reading well after the guests had gone. And then one day I stopped.

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Alberto Manguel goes on to discuss various types of readers and reading—including many aspects of the physical act. He examines the private and social places of reading, the physical relationship of reader to book, the spatiality of the act, and even the physiology of the eyeball. For example, Manguel recounts how Sidonie-Cabrielle Colette discovered that "some books seem to demand particular *positions* for reading, postures of the reader's body that in turn require reading-places appropriate to those postures." Often,

"the pleasure derived from reading largely depends on the bodily comfort of the reader" (151). However, Manguel's accounts are meant to be narrative rather than theoretical. Though he details various stories of reading, he makes few arguments and draws few conclusions. Manguel's work is a "love letter written to reading" (Steiner, cover) rather than a detached examination. Though often anecdotal and unsystematic, Manguel's treatment of physicality is important. In subsequent chapters, I will extend theoretical analysis of readers to include the body and its manifold relationship to text, media, and society—relationships that are particularly crucial in light of new media developments.

I will examine reading as a physical act. Taking the work of scholars such as Gerard Genette and Roger Chartier, I will look at how theories used in analyzing the book as physical object can be applied to, and enhanced by, an investigation of reading as physical act. I hope to expand on the work of critics such as Victor Nell, who examines elements of the physiology of ludic (pleasure) reading such as heart rate, muscle movement, and reflexes, and Guglielmo Cavallo, who details classical medical works that describe reading as physical exercise. Using Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*, Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, and Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*—works that graphically depict the physicality of reading—I will explore how the reading body situates itself in space: from proximity of book to body to the physical and social implications of the reading space.

However, as Elizabeth Freund comments in *The Return of the Reader*, refocusing attention on the reader, though it opens up a new field of inquiry, ultimately "perpetuate[s] rather than escape[s] a determinate and positivistic structure of hierarchies." And thus:

> a further sequence of displacements and substitutions is introduced to erode the distance between the redefined terms until the irksome dichotomy of reader/text is abolished by an assimilation of the text into the reader or the reader into the text. The outcome of this turn of events is to undermine the reader-response project. (10)

Though through this latest development reader-response effectively undermines its own position, it has nonetheless provided valuable insight into the reader and the text[7]. And, while criticism has since shifted focus to the act of reading and the reflexive relationship between text/reader, it has done so largely without paying attention to the body—either the text or the reader's. These issues surrounding the reader's physicality, then, become more significant when one considers that the body not only reads, but is also read. After establishing the materiality of the reading body, I will use Elizabeth Grosz in conjunction with the three novels to look at the ways that the body is read, how they affect the interpretation of the social act of reading—the fictional, imaginary, and real observations about readers. Using Hayles's model of reflexivity in social construction (as outlined in *How We Became Posthuman*), I look at how the performative activity of reading, i.e. readers in public places and representations of readers, is understood.

Further, I will focus on the reflexive relationship between body, media, and society. New media developments can help us to further understand the significance of the body in reading. Using media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan and Joshua

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[7] Freund takes Jane Tompkins's line of argument that the conflation of the reader and text into one event results in "a praxis to which the post-structuralist name of 'textuality' is frequently given" (10). I will adopt this use/definition of the term 'textuality.' Thus, when the term appears in my text, I mean the reflexive relationship between the reader/text that is the act of reading.

Meyrowitz, and new media theorists such as Sven Birkerts, J. David Bolter, and Richard Grusin, as well as Ronald Deibert, I will conclude that the recent digitization and popularization of audio books (along with developments in technology such as Apple's iPod) changes, and is fostered by, the reading body and our definition of the act. The ways that we physically engage with our books reflexively affect our bodies, our perceptions, and our media. Manguel notes that, "told that we are threatened with extinction, we, today's readers, have yet to learn what reading is"—from the physical act to the way that the reader is read in society to the body's manifold relationship with the reading medium, I will explore this very important question (23).

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And then one day I stopped. Roughly around the same time that I started highschool, I stopped reading. I still read of course—textbooks and the mandatory highschool English fare. But somewhere around 1993, I lost it. I wonder if it's because they stopped giving out the gold stars. Maybe I never did read, after all. Maybe it was simply that I was an over-achiever in elementary school and I wanted more stars than anyone else. What I do know is that I stopped roughly around the same time that the gold stars did. Mind you, I was busier in highschool. There were practices and rehearsals and student council meetings and all that growing up to do. I wasn't a reader anymore, I had more important things to do.

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Chapter 1: Reading – A Physical Act

Reading a book was once a physically strenuous activity—requiring large amounts of co-ordination, movement, and breath. As Guglielmo Cavallo notes, until the second or third century AD, books came in roll, or volumen, form. The reader had to grasp the "upper portion of the roll in the right hand, unrolling it as he went with his left hand, which held the part he had already read. When he finished, the roll would be completely rolled up in the left hand" (71). And, since one commonly read aloud, the lungs and body were also involved. Cavallo writes that we "have evidence of how much effort readers put into reading aloud from works on medicine that place reading among forms of physical exercise good for one's health, which makes sense if we recall that reading was usually accompanied by fairly accentuated movements of the head, chest, and arms" (74). However, as Paul Saenger details, advances in manuscript formatting—

such as chapters, diagrams, margin notes, "tables of chapter headings, alphabetical tables by subject and running heads—became standard features of the scholastic codex" and this complex structure "presupposed a reader who read only with his eyes, going swiftly from objection to response, from table of contents to text, from diagram to text, and from the text to the text to the gloss and its corrections" (134). With the move from volumen to codex and the development of complex formatting, the reader's body (voice, gesture, and limbs) stilled and our attentions turned away from it. However, reading still inhabits the body and, though quieter than it used to be, requires at least the work of hands and eyes [see Fig. 0-1][8].

And, until we lost the embodied reader in the theory of the 1970's, there was much interest in how reading affects physiology. In "The Phsyiology of Reading: Print and the Passions" (Chapter 6, The Nature of the Book), Adrian Johns notes that readers in the seventeenth century believed that reading could be harmful to one's health. Philosopher Robert Boyle, for instance, claimed "that the reading of romances had had a permanent unhealthy effect on him. Clearly, he must have thought that reading exercised a remarkable power over mind and body alike." And, many "of his contemporaries testified to similarly impressive encounters with books at an early age. The natural historian Francis Willughby, like Boyle, was thought to have weakened his body during childhood by too much reading" (Johns 382-383). Accompanying these anecdotal

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[8] For me, watching someone read is watching someone work with his or her hands. I believe you can tell a lot from how someone holds and navigates their book and that both have an effect on how they perceive the text. Of course, the size and flexibility of both the reader and the book matters as well.

The man in Figure 0-1 enjoys working with his hands but has broken them so often that his ring and pinky fingers do not move independently –this then obviously affects the way that he grasps his book. Yet his hands are still strong and he holds the book steadily, much like he reads.

accounts were studies examining how the *passions* ("the emotional, physiological, and moral responses of the human body to its surroundings" (386)) played a part in the reading process –from what it meant to see (and how seeing affected perception and the other senses) to the complexities of neurology.

Today, the study of reading behavior continues to evolve. Armando Petrucci, after visiting several American universities, writes, "young readers are changing the rules of reading behavior that until now have somewhat rigidly conditioned reading practice. A European observer finds it all the more telling when such changes are found in libraries, because it means that the traditional model no longer holds up even where it once found triumphal consecration." He then goes on to catalogue this new '*modus legendi.*' First, social norms and structural determinants no longer confine the reader's body. For example, " a reader can stretch out on the floor, lean against a wall, sit under (yes, under) a reading room table, sit with his or her feet up on a table (the oldest and most widespread stereotype) and so on." In fact, these 'new readers,' Petrucci notes with amusement, "almost totally reject the normal supports for the operations of reading – the table, the reading stand, the desk – or else they use them in inappropriate (that is, unintended) ways." What once were places for books have become resting places for the reader's body—to put feet up, rest elbows, and so on in "an infinite series of variations on physical positions for reading." (See Fig. 2-1.) And, finally, the reader's physical relationship with the book has changed as well. Much "more intense and direct than in traditional modes of reading," the "book is constantly manipulated, crumpled, bent, forced into various directions and carried over the body. One might say that readers make it their own by an intensive, prolonged and violent use more typical of a relationship of

consumption than of reading and learning" (364). Writing in the early 90's, Petrucci demonstrates an interest in the changing physicality of reading and the reader's body that very much echoes the concerns of embodiment and materiality present at the time.

Victor Nell, a psychologist, takes an empirical approach to these concerns. In *Lost in a Book* Nell examines the activity of pleasure reading, or what he terms "'Ludic reading' (taken from the Latin 'ludo,' meaning to play). Starting from the relationship between reading and popular culture—how culture and society shape reading, Nell goes on to discuss the various psychological and physiological processes involved in ludic reading. In Chapter 9, he focuses specifically on the physiology of the reading trance. Nell notes that "the reader has not only a mind: there is a brain too, with a body attached to it, and the purpose of this chapter is to describe some of the things one's body might do when reading for pleasure and then to look briefly at some of the things it does do" (167). In a laboratory study, Nell measured levels of physical arousal caused by various types of reading and

rest by collecting data on muscle-activity, respiration rate, electrical activity of the skin, heart activity, and etcetera. He focused, during each type of reading or rest, on the "average arousal level across all of the subjects" as well as "the extent to which arousal fluctuated" (189). Nell aims to examine the differences between absorption and entrancement, and which of these states ludic readers fall into. Though the study did not provide as much information as Nell hoped, it does show "that heightened physiological arousal contributes to perceived pleasure during most-enjoyed reading" and "both theoretically and empirically that [physical] arousal does play an important role in reading" (195).

[Fig. 2-1]

Feet Up

More recently, critics such as N. Katherine Hayles and Elizabeth Grosz have continued to stress the importance of the body—that of both the reader and the text. Just as reader-response criticism was limited in its utility because of the privileged position offered to the reader, theories of embodiment too must take into account both reader and text (inextricably entwined because reading is a physical, embodied act)—they must take into account the materiality of textuality. This focus on the material, on the re-embodiment of readers and texts, both stems from and informs the fields of media studies, cognitive sciences, and cultural studies. Hayles asks "why have we not heard more about materiality?" She notes that, "within the humanities and especially in literary studies, there has traditionally been a sharp line between representation and the technologies producing them" (*Writing Machines,* 19).

Fields such as art history and anthropology pay careful attention to the material production of cultural artifacts. Art critic John Berger, for example, examines the art of photography in his book *On Looking*. He comments that during "the first period of its existence photography offered a new technical opportunity; it was an implement. Now, instead of offering new choices, its usage and its 'reading' were becoming habitual, an unexamined part of modern perception itself" (49). Consequently, in addition to examining seminal photographs, Berger studies the history of the camera–how it has been fostered by, changed, and incorporated itself into various historical, political, material, and social spheres–as a media technology. He examines how photographs are perceived and also theorizes the camera's various and developing relationships with the body, examining the similarities, differences, and ties between eye and camera and noting that the invention of the lightweight camera resulted in 'reflex' photography.

Berger differentiates between memory and photography, citing the first as a cultural artifact and the second as a material one. He also divides photography into private and public. The former contributes "to a living memory" (52) while the public photograph, especially when used by capitalism, "is torn from its context, and becomes a dead object which, exactly because it is dead, lends itself to any arbitrary use" (56). He proposes an alternative photography where the task "is to incorporate photography into social and political memory, instead of using it as a substitute which encourages the atrophy of any such memory" (58). To do this, one needs to create context for the photograph:

> Words, comparisons, signs need to create a context for a printed photograph in a comparable way; that is to say, they must mark and leave open diverse approaches. A radial system has to be constructed around the photograph so that it may be seen in terms which are simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic. (63)

Literary studies would benefit greatly from examining some of this context rather than being "content to treat fictional and narrative worlds as if they were entirely products of the imagination" (Hayles, *Writing Machines* 19).

Authors such as Italo Calvino, Mark Danielewski, and Jeanette Winterson have explored, through their fiction and narrative, the materiality of those worlds. All three portray readers—examining their relationships to books and texts in various acts of reading. Calvino and Danielewski even offer meta-narratives of reader's experiences with their own novels. These authors turn reader-response theory into praxis and help not only to forward the inquiry but also to disseminate the subject—demonstrating the reflexive

relationship both between these novels and reader-response criticism and between theoretical and creative work in general. Susan Suleiman notes that reader-response criticism proceeds on "not a single widely trodden path but a multiplicity of criss-crossing, often divergent tracks that cover a vast area of the critical landscape whose complexity dismays the brave and confounds the faint of heart" (Suleiman and Crosman, 6). This commentary can easily describe Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*, Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, and Winterson's *Written on the Body*.

First published in 1979, *If on a winter's night a traveller* consists of ten, intertwined, narrative incipits tied together by the Reader's search for an ending. Ian Rankin notes that with reader-response's shift in:

> critical emphasis from the author to the reader, Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler* has come to be seen as something of a homage to the reader, a novel which lays bare the relationships between author and reader and reader and text, and which acknowledges—to an extent which no novel before it has done—the importance of the reader to the literature making process. (124)

Katherine Hayles, however, sees it as the story of the "text's awareness of its own physicality" and the "anxiety it manifests toward keeping the literary corpus intact" (40). Hayles coins the term technotexts for literary works that interrogate "the inscription technology that produces it, [mobilizing] reflexive loops between its imaginative world and the material apparatus embodying that creation as a physical presence" (25). *If on a winter's night*, then, can be categorized as a technotext. Calvino objectifies the novel as a physical, tangible, thing. In fact, the book opens, "[y]ou are about to begin reading Italo

Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought" (3).

Right from the start, the reader is asked to focus on the material novel itself, on the act of reading that is about to begin and which has indeed already begun. As Mariolina Salvatori notes, right at the outset, our attention is called to "the *book* which, as an object of consumption, can be bought and possessed" (195). It is an object to be handled, "you have grasped a copy, and you have carried it to the cashier," something "which lasts until the dust jacket begins to yellow, until a veil of smog settles on the top edge, until the binding becomes dog-eared, in the rapid autumn of libraries" (6). The book is material, subject to degradation and wear. The narrator reminds the reader that acquiring the book was a physical process—"perhaps you started leafing through the book already in the shop. Or were you unable to, because it was wrapped in its cocoon of cellophane." Take "the book out of the bag, rip off the transparent wrapping" (7). Even when the reader begins to read the book he bought, Calvino's text does not allow him to forget its physical presence. He begins *If on a winter's night a traveller*:

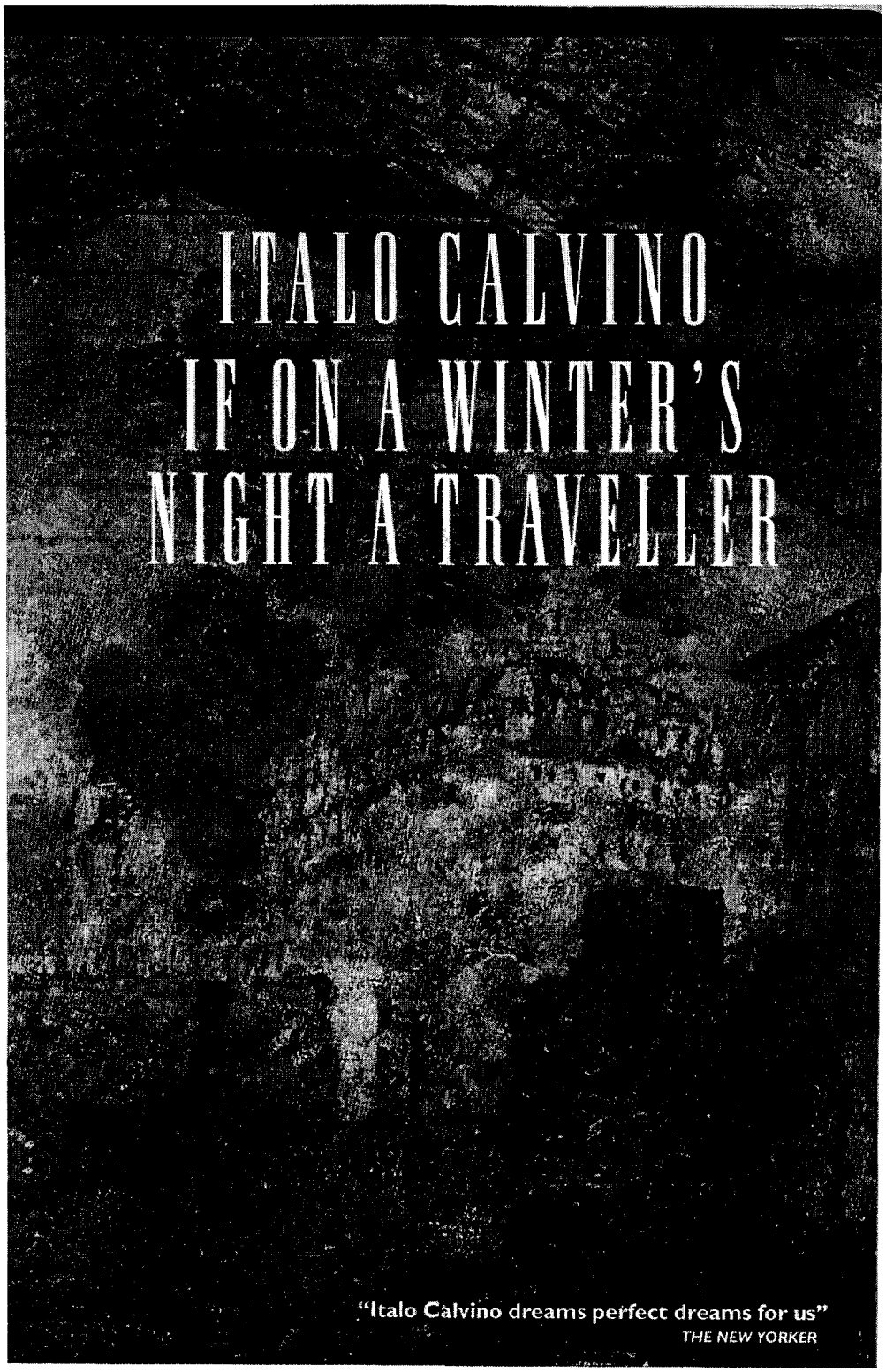
> in a railway station, a locomotive huffs, steam from a piston covers the opening of the chapter, a cloud of smoke hides part of the first paragraph.... The pages of the book are clouded like the windows of an old train, the cloud of smoke rests on the sentences. (10)

Reminding us of the text's materiality, Calvino entwines the text's pages and paragraphs with the story. Like when using a penknife to cut open the pages, progress "in reading is preceded by an act that traverses the material solidity of the book" (42).

In the pages and paragraphs of Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, a collapsing nest of narratives, lie the stories of various tangled readings. And, like Calvino, Danielewski's technotext also foregrounds the materiality of the text. Hayles notes that rather "than trying to penetrate cultural constructions to reach an original object of inquiry, *House of Leaves* uses the very multilayered inscriptions that create it as a physical artifact to imagine the subject as a palimpsest, emerging not behind but through the inscriptions that bring the book into being" ("Saving," 779). When Johnny Truant first enters Zampano's apartment, he finds a trunk and discovers that it contains a narrative composed by the old man that Truant then gathers, comments upon, and presents to the reader in the form of the fictional *House of Leaves*. He opens the trunk to find that:

> there were reams and reams of it. Endless snarls of words, sometimes twisting into meaning, sometimes into nothing at all, frequently breaking apart, always branching off into other pieces I'd come across later—on old napkins, the tattered edges of an envelope, once even on the back of a postage stamp; everything and anything but empty; each fragment completely covered with the creep of years and years of ink pronouncements; layered, crossed out, amended; handwritten, typed; legible, illegible; impenetrable, lucid; torn, stained, scotch taped; bits crisp and clean, others faded, burnt or folded and refolded so many times the creases have obliterated whole passages of god knows what...." (xvii)

Note that Truant describes the text in physical terms—there were not simply lots of words; but, rather, reams of them that snarl and twist and break. As well, the vivid descriptions focus on the text's physical media. Words do not simply float as signifiers but are anchored on napkins, envelopes, and even stamps. Inscribed by hand and by type,



[Fig. 2-2]

The Train Station

the text's stains and tears and folds and creases highlight its physical relationship with Zampano.

And, when the reader reaches page 120, presumably comfortably in Victor Nell's reading trance, the layout forces her to alter her physical relationship with the book. On page 120, the reader will note that there is a text box where the text appears backwards. Upon reaching this box, my own reaction was to turn back to the previous page to see if somehow the ink had leaked through. This is similar to the experience of Calvino's Reader, who, caught up in the story after having read about thirty pages, notes that:

> 'This sentence sounds somehow familiar. In fact, this whole passage reads like something I've read before.' Of course: there are themes that recur, the text is interwoven with these reprises, which serve to express the fluctuation of time. You are the sort of reader who is sensitive to such refinements; you are quick to catch the author's intentions and nothing escapes you. (25)

However, the Reader suddenly discovers that he has gone back to page 17 from page 32 and what might have been a stylistic feature is in fact simply a printer's error. The Reader has a defective copy. Continuing on in *House of Leaves*, one realizes, that unlike the case for Calvino's Reader, these are not print errors. On the following page, the column on the right of the page runs upside down. In order to read it, one has to turn the book in hand 180 degrees. Throughout the rest of the novel, text blocks are crossed out, blacked out, whited out, sideways, backwards, upside down, diagonal, and clustered to reflect the text thematically. These structural anomalies have the effect of jolting one out of the fictional world and forcing attention on to the physical object at hand.

They also affect the physical relationship between reader and text. In "Saving the Subject: Remediation in *House of Leaves*," Hayles examines the differences between the "graphically innovative chapter 9 and the action-oriented chapter 10." She notes that while "chapter 9 has more words per page than any other chapter in the book, chapter 10 has fewer" (791). The first is densely packed with philosophy, digressions, and sub-stories set in diverse fonts and orientations; the second sparsely set to thematically reflect violence-filled action sequences. Thus, while chapter 9 takes quite a bit of patience and time to traverse, "the rescue recounted in chapter 10, proceeds with minimal digressions and often with only a few words on a page, allowing the reader to zip through." And, Hayles comments:

> the time it takes to read a page functions as a remediation of the narrative action of the life-world of the reader, linking real-time decoding with the intensity and pacing of the represented events in a correlation that itself is a remediation of eye-tracking in cinematic action. Here the materiality of the page is mobilized to create a cybernetic loop that runs from the page through the reader's body and back to the page, a process that links the temporality of reading with the emotional pacing of the narrative. (797)

In this way, *House of Leaves* "implies that the physical attributes of the print book interacts with the reader's embodied actions to construct the materialities of the bodies that read as well as those that are read" (804).

Though the materiality of the text has become more commonly recognized, until recently few have examined the importance of the perceiver/receiver/reader's body. Readers are often studied as disembodied, abstract, ideas and statistics. As Hayles notes,

redefinition of route, even the absurd way the first hallway leads away from the living room only to return, through a series of lefts, back to where the living room should be but clearly is not; describes a layout in no way reminiscent of any modern floorplans let alone historical experiments in design.[146]

Sebastiano Pérouse de Montclos, however, has written a sizable examination on the changes within the house, positing that they in fact follow Andrea Palladio's structural derivations.

By way of a quick summary, Palladian grammar seeks to organize space through a series of strict rules. As Palladio proved, it was possible to use his system to generate a number of layouts such as Villa Badoer, Villa Emo, Villa Ragona, Villa Poiana, and of course Villa Zeno. In essence there are only eight steps:

1. Grid definition
2. Exterior-wall definition
3. Room layout
4. Interior-wall realignment
5. Principal entrances—porticos and exterior wall inflections
6. Exterior ornamentation—columns
7. Windows and Doors
8. Termination[149]

Pérouse de Montclos relies on these steps to delineate how Navidson's house was (1.0) first established (2.0) limited (3.0) sub-divided and (4.0) so on. He attempts to convince the reader that the constant refiguration of doorways and walls represents a kind of geological loop in the process of working out all possible forms, most likely *ad infinitum*, but never settling because, as he states in his conclusion, "unoccupied space will never cease to change simply because nothing forbids it to do so. The continuous internal alterations only prove that such a house is necessarily uninhabited."[150]

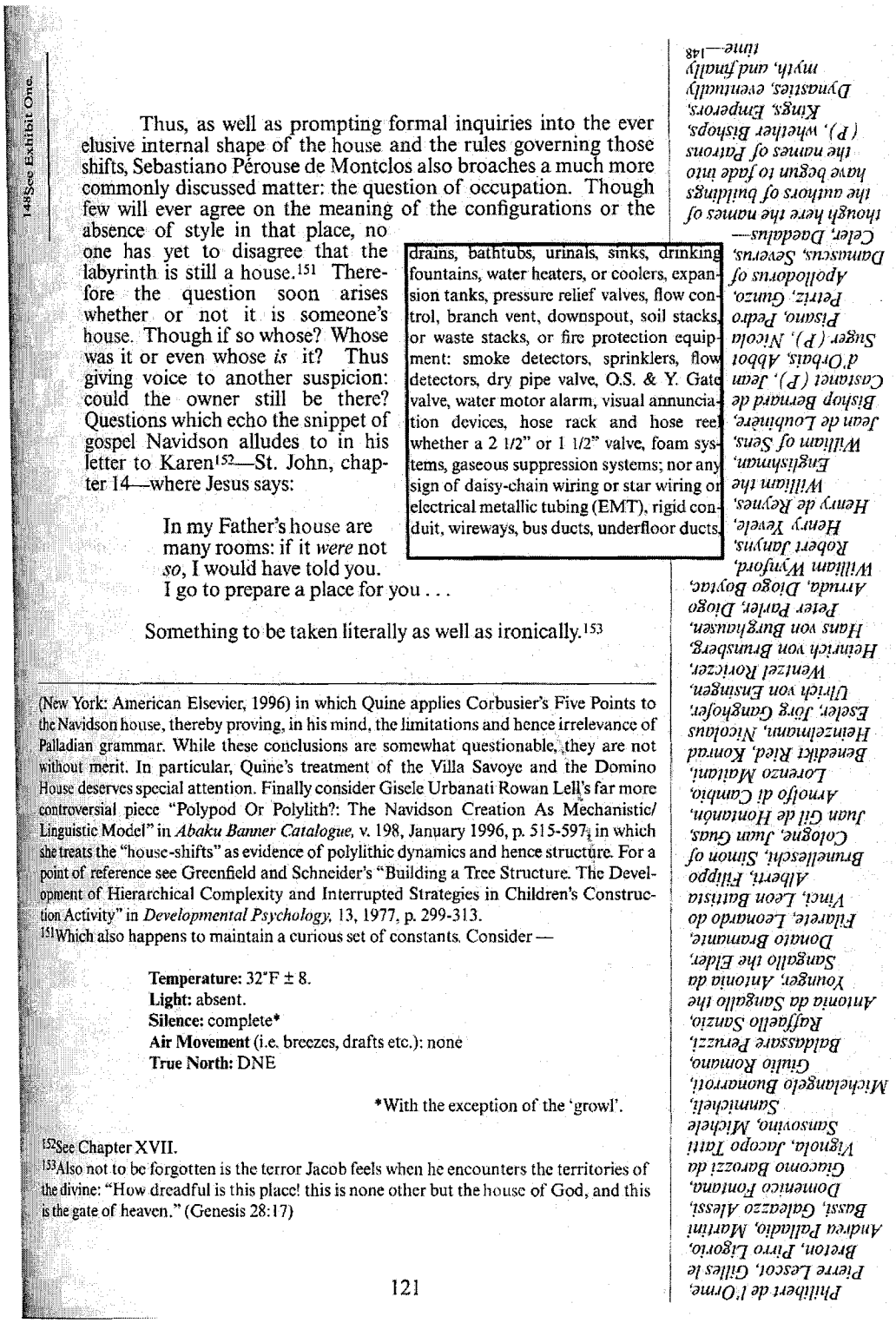
[146]For example, there is nothing about the house that even remotely resembles 20th century works whether in the style of Post-Modern, Late-Modern, Brutalism, Neo-Expressionism, Wrightian, The New Formalism, Miesian, the International Style, Streamline Moderne, Art Deco, the Pueblo Style, the Spanish Colonial, to name but a few, with examples such as the Western Savings and Loan Association in Superstition, Arizona, Animal Crackers in Highland Park, Illinois, Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles, or Mineries Condominium in Venice, Wurster Hall in Berkeley, Katselas House in Pittsburgh, Dulles International Airport, Greene House in Norman Oklahoma, Chicago Harold Washington Library, the Watts Towers in South Central, Barcelona National Theatre, New Town of Seaside Florida, Tugendhat House, Rue de Lacken in Brussels, Richmond Riverside in Richmond Surrey, the staircase hall in the Athens, Georgia News Building, the Tsukuba Center Building in Ibaraki, the Digital House, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, the interior of the Judge Institute of Management Studies in Cambridge, Maison à Bordeaux, TGV Railway Station in Lyon-Satolas, the post-modernism of the Wexner Center for Visual Arts in Columbus, Ohio, Palazzo Hotel in Fukuoka, National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C., the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery, Pyramid at the Louvre, New Building at Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, Palace of Abraxas at Marne-La-Vallée, Piazza d'Italie in New Orleans, AT&T Building in New York, the modernism of Carré d'Art, Lloyds Building in London, the Boston John F. Kennedy Library complex, Nave of Vuokseeniska Church in Finland, head office of the Enso-Gutzeit Company, Administrative Center of Säynätsalo, the Eames House, the Baker dormitory at MIT, inside the TWA terminal at Kennedy Airport, The National Theatre in London, Hull House Association Uptown Center in Chicago, Hektoen Laboratory also in Chicago, Fitzpatrick House in the Hollywood Hills, Graduate Center at Harvard University, Pan-Pacific Auditorium in Los Angeles, General Motors Testing Laboratory in Phoenix Arizona, Bullock's Wilshire Department Store in Los Angeles, Casino Building in New York, Hotel Franciscan in Albuquerque New Mexico, La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe, or Santa Barbara County Courthouse, the Neff or Sherwood House in California. Exterior of the Secondary Modern School, Maisons Jaoul, Notre-Dame-du-Haut near Belfort, The Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles, The Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois, The Alumni Memorial Hall at Illinois Institute of Technology, Guggenheim Museum in New York, or nothing of the traditionalism of Lawn Road Flats in Hampstead, the Zimbabwe House and Battersea Power Station in London, Choir of the Angelican cathedral in Liverpool or Memorial to the Missing of the Somme near Aras, Viceroy's house in New Delhi, Gledstone Hall in Yorkshire, Finsbury Circus facade, Castle Drogo near Drewsteignton Devon, Casa del Fascio in Como, Villa

[149]For an exemplary look at Palladian grammar in action, see William J Mitchell's *The Logic of Architecture: Design, Computation, and Cognition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994), p. 152-181. As well as Andrea Palladio's *The Four Books of Architecture* (1570) trans. Isaac Ware (New York: Dover, 1965).

[150]Sebastiano Pérouse de Montclos' *Palladian Grammar and Metaphysical Appropriations: Navidson's Villa Malcontenta* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1996), p. 2,865. Also see Aristides Quine's *Concatenating Corbusier*

[Fig. 2-3]

House of Leaves - Page 120



148See Exhibit One.

Thus, as well as prompting formal inquiries into the ever elusive internal shape of the house and the rules governing those shifts, Sebastiano Pérouse de Montclos also broaches a much more commonly discussed matter: the question of occupation. Though few will ever agree on the meaning of the configurations or the absence of style in that place, no one has yet to disagree that the labyrinth is still a house.[151] Therefore the question soon arises whether or not it is someone's house. Though if so whose? Whose was it or even whose *is* it? Thus giving voice to another suspicion: could the owner still be there? Questions which echo the snippet of gospel Navidson alludes to in his letter to Karen[152]—St. John, chapter 14—where Jesus says:

> In my Father's house are many rooms: if it *were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you . . .

Something to be taken literally as well as ironically.[153]

drains, bathtubs, urinals, sinks, drinking fountains, water heaters, or coolers, expansion tanks, pressure relief valves, flow control, branch vent, downspout, soil stacks, or waste stacks, or fire protection equipment: smoke detectors, sprinklers, flow detectors, dry pipe valve, O.S. & Y. Gate valve, water motor alarm, visual annunciation devices, hose rack and hose reel whether a 2 1/2" or 1 1/2" valve, foam systems, gaseous suppression systems; nor any sign of daisy-chain wiring or star wiring or electrical metallic tubing (EMT), rigid conduit, wireways, bus ducts, underfloor ducts.

(New York: American Elsevier, 1996) in which Quine applies Corbusier's Five Points to the Navidson house, thereby proving, in his mind, the limitations and hence irrelevance of Palladian grammar. While these conclusions are somewhat questionable, they are not without merit. In particular, Quine's treatment of the Villa Savoye and the Domino House deserves special attention. Finally consider Gisele Urbanati Rowan Lell's far more controversial piece "Polypod Or Polylith?: The Navidson Creation As Mechanistic/Linguistic Model" in *Abaku Banner Catalogue*, v. 198, January 1996, p. 515-597; in which she treats the "house-shifts" as evidence of polylithic dynamics and hence structure. For a point of reference see Greenfield and Schneider's "Building a Tree Structure. The Development of Hierarchical Complexity and Interrupted Strategies in Children's Construction Activity" in *Developmental Psychology*, 13, 1977, p. 299-313.

[151]Which also happens to maintain a curious set of constants. Consider —

Temperature: 32°F ± 8.
Light: absent.
Silence: complete*
Air Movement (i.e. breezes, drafts etc.): none
True North: DNE

*With the exception of the 'growl'.

[152]See Chapter XVII.

[153]Also not to be forgotten is the terror Jacob feels when he encounters the territories of the divine: "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (Genesis 28:17)

Philibert de l'Orme, Pierre Lescot, Gilles le Breton, Pirro Ligorio, Andrea Palladio, Martini Bassi, Galeazzo Alessi, Domenico Fontana, Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, Jacopo Tatti Sansovino, Michele Sanmicheli, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Giulio Romano, Baldassare Peruzzi, Raffaello Sanzio, Antonia da Sangallo the Younger, Antonia da Sangallo the Elder, Donato Bramante, Filarete, Leonardo do Vinci, Leon Battista Alberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, Simon of Cologne, Juan Guas, Juan Gil de Hontañon, Arnolfo di Cambio, Lorenzo Maitani, Benedikt Ried, Konrad Heinzelmann, Nicolaus Eseler, Jörg Ganghofer, Ulrich von Ensingen, Wenzel Roriczer, Heinrich von Brunsberg, Hans von Burghausen, Peter Parler, Diogo Arruda, Diogo Boytac, William Wynford, Robert Janyns, Henry Yevele, Henry de Reynes, William the Englishman, William of Sens, Jean de Loubrière, Bishop Bernard de Castanet (P), Jean d'Orbais, Abbot Suger (P), Nicola Pisano, Pedro Petriz, Guzo, Apollodorus of Damascus, Severus, Celer, Daedalus—

though here the names of the authors of buildings have begun to fade into the names of Patrons (P), whether Bishops, Kings, Emperors, Dynasties, eventually myth, and finally time—[148]

[Fig. 2-4]

House of Leaves - Page 121

the notion that our essence can be abstracted and extracted from the physical body runs rampant in literature, popular culture, and even empirical fields such as molecular biology. In fact, "a defining characteristic of the present cultural moment is the belief that information can circulate unchanged among different material substrates. It is not for nothing that 'Beam me up, Scotty,' has become a cultural icon for the global information society" (1-2). Grosz notes, in *Volatile Bodies*:

> On the one hand, there is a recognition of the role of the body, in the sense that virtually all the major figures in the history of philosophy discuss its role in either the advancement, or, more usually, the hindrance of the production of knowledge. On the other hand, there is also a refusal to recognize, which is evidenced by the fact that when the body is discussed, it is conceptualized in narrow and problematic, dichotomized terms. (4)

The dichotomy that Grosz refers to is that of MIND/body. Criticism and literature that posit abstract notions of readers and texts, ripe with pictures of downloading consciousness, brains in jars, and artificial bodies, have helped to reinforce both the mind/body separation and the privileging of the former over the latter.

Yet, despite its entrenchment in present culture, the fantasy of disembodiment is exactly that—a fantasy. As Hayles outlines, "human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival" (5). During the last half-century, developments in the study of cybernetics have shown that the body is crucial to perception, understanding, and even consciousness. For second wave cyberneticists such as Humberto Maturana, Hayles notes, reality "comes into existence for us, and for all living creatures, *only through interactive processes determined solely*

by the organism's own organization" (136). Through the organization of nerves, muscle groups, cells, etc, this process of autopoesis, or self-making, is accomplished. Maturana's study "What the Frog's Eye Tells the Frog's Brain," demonstrates this idea more concretely. In the process, researchers wired microelectrodes to a frog's brain to observe its processes of perception. They discovered "that small objects in fast, erratic motion elicited maximum response, whereas large, slow-moving objects evoked little or no response" (Hayles, 135). In other words, the frog's bodily, physical, organization alters its perception and its reality. Its wet-wiring allows it to organize its reality according to what is important—flies, while nullifying what is not—ie, turtles. (Of course, this system is a reflexive development of evolution.) The body must not be an afterthought. The reader's physicality cannot be extricated from her processes of perception and construction.

*****

That's not to say there wasn't the occasional lapse. I fell back into it once in a while. There were times when I wanted to be a reader again. Or, at least, to look like one. By then I was a non-reader and reading wasn't something I did anymore—it was something mysterious to be imitated. A trope to try on. I wanted the trappings—the artsy cafes and indy bookshops. I was still fascinated by the book object. Having never been allowed to buy them when I was young—my father firmly believed that books were a waste of money since you could get them for free at the public library—, I wanted them. I wanted to line shelves upon shelves in my home with them. And, very occasionally, a book still caught me and I would hide myself for a week reading and re-reading. But I was getting harder and harder to catch.

*****

The text is a material object and the reader is an embodied being. Reading, it necessarily follows, is a physical, substantiated act. Calvino's novel reminds the reader that they are participating in a physical, even potentially straining, activity and thus positioning is of the utmost importance. Right at the start, the narrator tells us to "find the most comfortable position: seated, stretched out, curled up, or lying flat. Flat on your back, on your side, on your stomach" (3). However, the narrator notes that:

> [the] ideal position for reading is something you can never find. In the old days they used to read standing up, at a lectern. People were accustomed to standing on their feet, without moving. They rested like that when they were tired of horseback riding. (3)

Yet few have put conscious thought into the various positions for reading and most readers simply take it for granted. The narrator counsels the reader to "adjust the light so you won't strain your eyes. Do it now, because once you're absorbed in reading there will be no budging you." Make "sure the page isn't in shadow, a clotting of black letters on a gray background, uniform as a pack of mice; but be careful that the light cast on it isn't too strong, doesn't glare on the cruel white of the paper gnawing at the shadows of the letters as in a southern noonday" (4). We often forget our physicality when we read; however, our bodies and the text's body are crucial to our experience of textuality. As Calvino writes, "having your feet up is the first condition for enjoying a read" (3).
If, and when, scholars have examined the reader's body, they have often done so in isolation from considerations of the text's body; yet, the two are reflexive of each other. How comfortably a reader can hold a book in her hand is a result of both the size of the hand and the size of the book. The reader's physiology affects how she reads, constructs, and relates to the book object; in turn, her body responds viscerally (from simply blurry eyes and cramped hands to complex stem cell responses) to the text. This is acutely exemplified in the Reader's reaction to the misplaced signatures.

After noticing that the narration repeats, the Reader sees that from page 32 he has gone back to page 17. The Reader reacts physically to the text's deformity. He wants to throw the book away, but not just throw it into the trash, the Reader wishes he could:

> hurl it out of the window, even out of the closed window, through the slats of the Venetian blinds; let them shred its incongruous quires, let sentences, words, morphemes, phonemes gush forth, beyond recomposition into discourse; through the panes, and if they are of unbreakable glass so much the better, hurl the book

> and reduce it to photons, undulatory vibrations, polarized spectra; through the wall, let the book crumble into molecules and atoms passing between atom and atom of the reinforced concrete, breaking up into electrons, neutrons, neutrinos, elementary particles more and more minute; through the telephone wires, let it be reduced to electronic impulses, into the flow of information, shaken by redundancies and noises, and let it be degraded into a swirling entropy. (26)

Here, the reader responds viscerally and viscously. As well, Calvino emphasizes the text's physicality—even the semantic units of his text are portrayed—morphemes gush out when the book is shredded—and they make up part of the book's material composition. Body and semantics intertwine here. And, later on, when the Reader tries to sleep, his experiences with the defective textual body interrupt his body's attempt to rest. He spends a "restless night, [his] sleep is an intermittent, jammed flow, like the reading of the novel, with dreams that seem to you the repetition of one dream always the same" (26). Even in its unconscious state, the body is affected by its reading of, and relationship with, the material text.

In *House of Leaves*, Zampano's haunted-house tale affects Truant's life profoundly. As he begins to read the bits and pieces of narrative, he starts to lose grasp on reality. At first, Truant never reads for more than an hour. However, "one evening [he] looked over at [his] clock and discovered seven hours had passed.... That wasn't the last time [he] lost sense of time either. In fact it began to happen more often, dozens of hours just blinking by, lost in the twist of so many dangerous sentences" (xviii). Those sentences eventually disassemble both his life and body. He comments:

> No one could reach me. Not Thumper, not even Lude. I nailed my windows shut, threw out the closet and bathroom doors, storm proofed everything, and locks, oh yes, I bought plenty of locks, chains too and a dozen measuring tapes, nailing all those straight to the floor and the walls.... At least the measuring tapes should have helped. They didn't. Nothing did.... I'm in a hotel now. My studio's history. Alot these days is history. (xix, sic)

Truant reacts to the 'twist of so many dangerous sentences' by trying to block them out physically. And, as his life breaks down, so does his body—in particular, his ability to sleep and eat. In his introduction, Truant tells us that, "I still get nightmares. In fact I get them so often I should be used to them by now. I'm not." Wanting to curb the narrative's effect on his body, he tries:

> every pill imaginable. Anything to curb the fear. Excedrin PMs, Melatonin, L-tryptophan, Valium, Vicodin, quite a few members of the barbital family. A pretty extensive list, frequently mixed, often matched, with shots of bourbon, a few lung rasping bong hits, sometimes even the vaporous confidence-trip of cocaine. None of it helped. I think it's pretty safe to assume there's no lab sophisticated enough yet to synthesize the kind of chemicals I need. A Nobel Prize to the one who invents that puppy. (xi)

Of course, Truant's inability to eat does not help matters. He tells us that, "I just fixed myself some tea on the hot plate here. My stomach's gone. I can barely keep even this honey milked-up stuff down but I need the warmth" (xix). Truant's body revolts against the experience of the book and comes out of the relationship permanently scarred. Addressing the reader, he hopes that, unlike him, "you'll dismiss this labor, react as

Zampano had hoped, call it needlessly complicated, pointlessly obtuse, prolix [...] –and you'll carry on, eat, drink, be merry and most of all you'll sleep well" (xxii).

Both Calvino and Danielewski remind us that reading is a physically substantiated act—arising out of the interaction between two material bodies and requiring a place in both time and space. Manguel further notes that, 'postures of the reader's body [...] in turn require reading-places appropriate to those postures.' In *If on a winter's night a traveller*, Calvino posits some appropriate locales: "in an easy chair, on the sofa, in the rocker, the deck chair, on the hassock. In the hammock, if you have a hammock. On top of your bed, of course, or in the bed. You can even stand on your hands, head down, in the yoga position" (3). Of course, choosing the appropriate place is not easy. As Manguel asks:

> But which little corner? And which little book? Whether we first choose the book and then an appropriate corner, or first find the corner and then decide what book will suit the corner's mood, there is no doubt that the act of reading in time requires a corresponding act of reading in place, and the relationship between the two acts is inextricable." (Manguel, 151)

Writing on the corner in *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard comments that, "despite its meagerness, it has numerous images, some, perhaps, of great antiquity, images that are psychologically primitive. At times, the simpler the images, the vaster the dream." He notes:

> To begin with, the corner is a haven that ensures us one of the things we prize most highly—immobility. It is the sure place, the place next to my immobility. The corner is a sort of half-box, part walls, part door. It will serve as an

> illustration for the dialectics of inside and outside, which I shall discuss in a later chapter.
>
> Consciousness of being at peace in one's corner produces a sense of immobility, and this, in turn, radiates immobility. An imaginary room rises up around our bodies, which think that they are well hidden when we take refuge in a corner. (137)

For Bachelard, each corner, each space, has a unique socially, historically, and aesthetically invested meaning. The reading spaces we choose, then, affect how we read.

Or, in the case of Will Navidson, it is the lack of space that delineates his relationship to the book. One of the most striking scenes in *House of Leaves* depicts Navidson reading *House of Leaves* in a black void. While trying to figure out how a series of spatially impossible hallways have inexplicably appeared in his house, Navidson, a filmmaker, decides to make a documentary of these explorations—a documentary entitled *The Navidson Record* which then becomes the subject of Zampano's writings. Near the end of his explorations, Navidson, lost, sees a window. He climbs through it and "for the second time during Exploration #5, confronts that grotesque vision of absence. This time, however, he can do little else but laugh." He finds himself on an ashblack slab "now apparently supported by nothing: darkness below, above, and of course darkness beyond" (464). Soon, Navidson finds himself sitting in the dark with dead flashlights, three flares, meager supplies, a microcassette recorder, and a book. The "first flare drops straight down, illuminating nothing but itself, never reaching a bottom, ultimately winking out in the darkness." The second flare, however, floats, and Navidson uses it as a lamp to read a few pages. The third flare flies straight up and

disappears. With nothing left, taking "a tiny sip of water and burying himself deeper in his sleeping bag, he turns his attention to the last possible activity, the only book in his possession: *House of Leaves*" (465).

He has for light one book of 24 matches. Knowing that the book is 736 pages long, Navidson "tears out the first page, which of course consists of two pages of text, and rolls it into a tight stick, thus creating a torch which [...] will burn for about two minutes and provide him with just enough time to read the next two pages." Unfortunately, he starts falling behind. Perhaps:

> his reading slows or the paper burns unevenly or he has bungled the lighting of the next page. Or maybe the words in the book have been arranged in such a way as to make them practically impossible to read. Whatever the reason, Navidson is forced to light the cover of the book as well as the spine. He tries to read faster, inevitably loses some of the text, frequently burns his fingers.

Poetically, Navidson finds himself with one page and one match at the end. He strikes the match after postponing this last moment as long as he could. Reading the first few lines by match light, he is soon forced to set the page itself on fire. Zampano notes:

> Here then is one end: a final act of reading, a final act of consumption. And as the fire rapidly devours the paper, Navidson's eyes frantically sweep down over the text, keeping just ahead of the necessary immolation, until he reaches the last few words, flames lick around his hands, ash peels off into the surrounding emptiness, and then as the fire retreats, dimming, its light suddenly spent, the book is gone leaving nothing behind but invisible traces already dismantled in the dark. (467)

Slowly, into the microcassette recorder, Navidson says, "I have nothing left" (468).

In this scene, Danielewski vividly shows the physical constraints that time and space put on the reading act—the precise timing, the physical burning of pages and probably fingertips, and the cold blackness surrounding it. The rate at which the pages burn dictates Navidson's reading speeds and the physical organization of the book conspires to slow him down. On the most basic level, reading requires a light source. We take this condition for granted in the electronic age. In the middle ages, reading was largely a daytime activity. And, of course, for many, even windows were a luxury. Often even printers and scribes had to work by the painfully dim light of a candle. Reading spaces have a symbolic significance as well as a physical one—where one chooses to read is telling. In *House of Leaves*, the focus on lighting both highlights the void's physical restrictions but also symbolically reflects the dimming, or end, of Navidson's, Zampano's, and Truant's stories. The void—in this case the lack of reading space—forces total consumption. Due to the nature of the physical materials at hand, Navidson must read the entire volume continuously through to the end and as he does, he brings about the end of Zampano's and Truant's explorations as well. And, with the material body of the text gone, as well as his sources of light and heat, Navidson's own body is in peril. Here, reading is a last, all consuming, activity.

Reading was once described in medical texts as a healthful form of bodily exercise. Changes in technology and society, however, have stilled the reader's body. Though reading practices, and postures, continue to evolve, most now ignore the body's involvement in the process. Yet, the material body is integral to reading. Authors such as Italo Calvino and Mark Danielewski have demonstrated this in their work. Both vividly depict the text's and reader's materiality. Book and reader grapple and mark, sometimes

even scar, each other. Reading, a physically substantiated act, occurs within a given time and space. The space of reading both symbolically and structurally affects the act. Reading is inextricable from the materiality of the text, body, and space.

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And, yet, without much thought, I applied to the Department of English at Simon Fraser University and in Fall, 1998, found myself an English major. There I was surrounded by a different type of reader: the poet-artist-student-in-turmoil-reader. These readers were demonstratively louder than the ones I had known before. They talked, argued, lamented over their reading. They read for information, for seminar fodder, for their writing. These readers had their own tropes: late night licensed café poetry readings and angst-filled chapbooks. And while they cut through their texts, I sat and I watched. I didn't want to be like these readers. There was something too bleak and bloody about it all. So I went with my friends to the cafés and sat through their readings, watched the readers reading, and did as little of it as I could. And I graduated, four years later, with a Bachelor of Arts in English. I wonder if they would have granted me First Class Honors had they known that I didn't even like reading.

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Chapter 2: Reading The Reader – A Social Act

Reading, then, as Roger Chartier elucidates, "is not only an abstract operation of the intellect: it puts the body into play and is inscribed within a particular space, in relation to the self or to others" ("Labourers," 50). In the Middle Ages, when the layman had a much better chance of hearing a book read out loud than of holding it in his hands (and even then he might not have been literate enough to read it), reading occurred as a social activity. As Alberto Manguel notes, there were traveling *joglars* who "would recite or sing their own verses or those composed by their master troubadours" (116), public readings where one "could listen to the anonymous *History of Reynard the Fox*," and

private readings where "books were read aloud to family and friends for instruction as well as for entertainment" (117). Today, though village story-tellers still exist and parents still read aloud to their children, reading is largely seen as a private activity.

Manguel tells the story of how as an adolescent, he discovered he could look up, "in the elephantine Espasa-Calpe Spanish encyclopedia, the entries that somehow or other [he] imagined related to sex: 'Masturbation', 'Penis', 'Vagina', 'Syphillis', 'Prostitution'" (12). A larger discovery, though, came one day when he "was curled up in one of the big armchairs, engrossed in an article on the devastating effects of gonorrhea, when [his] father came in and settled himself at his desk" (12). He realized when there was no reaction that "no one – not even my father, sitting barely a few steps away – could enter my reading-space, could make out what I was being lewdly told by the book I held in my hands, and that nothing except my own will could enable anyone else to know" (12). For many, reading constitutes a private refuge. As a child, watched over carefully by her mother and competing for reading materials against her father, Sidonie-Cabrielle Colette, found "her only refuge in her room, in her bed, at night." And, throughout "her adult life, Colette would seek out this solitary reading-space. Either *en ménage* or alone, in small courtyard lodgings or in large country villas, in rented bed-sitters or in ample Paris apartments, she would set aside (not always successfully) an area in which the only intrusions would be those she invited herself" (150).

Often, reading affords one a sort of immunity. The book becomes a shield. As Manguel notes, the "possession of a book sometimes acquires talismanic value" (120). Joshua Meyrowitz argues that reading demands more "personal commitment and affiliation than watching a broadcast television program or video cassette" (84). Thus,

people are less likely to disturb a reader. Janice Radway reports that the women she interviewed

> conceived of the book as a barrier erected quite consciously between themselves and their families. Once the women had immersed themselves in a story, they explained, family members were constrained to leave them alone. They were 'off limits,' so to speak. [...] As she put it at another time, the book was a message to her family that, 'This is my time, this is my space. Now leave me alone.'"

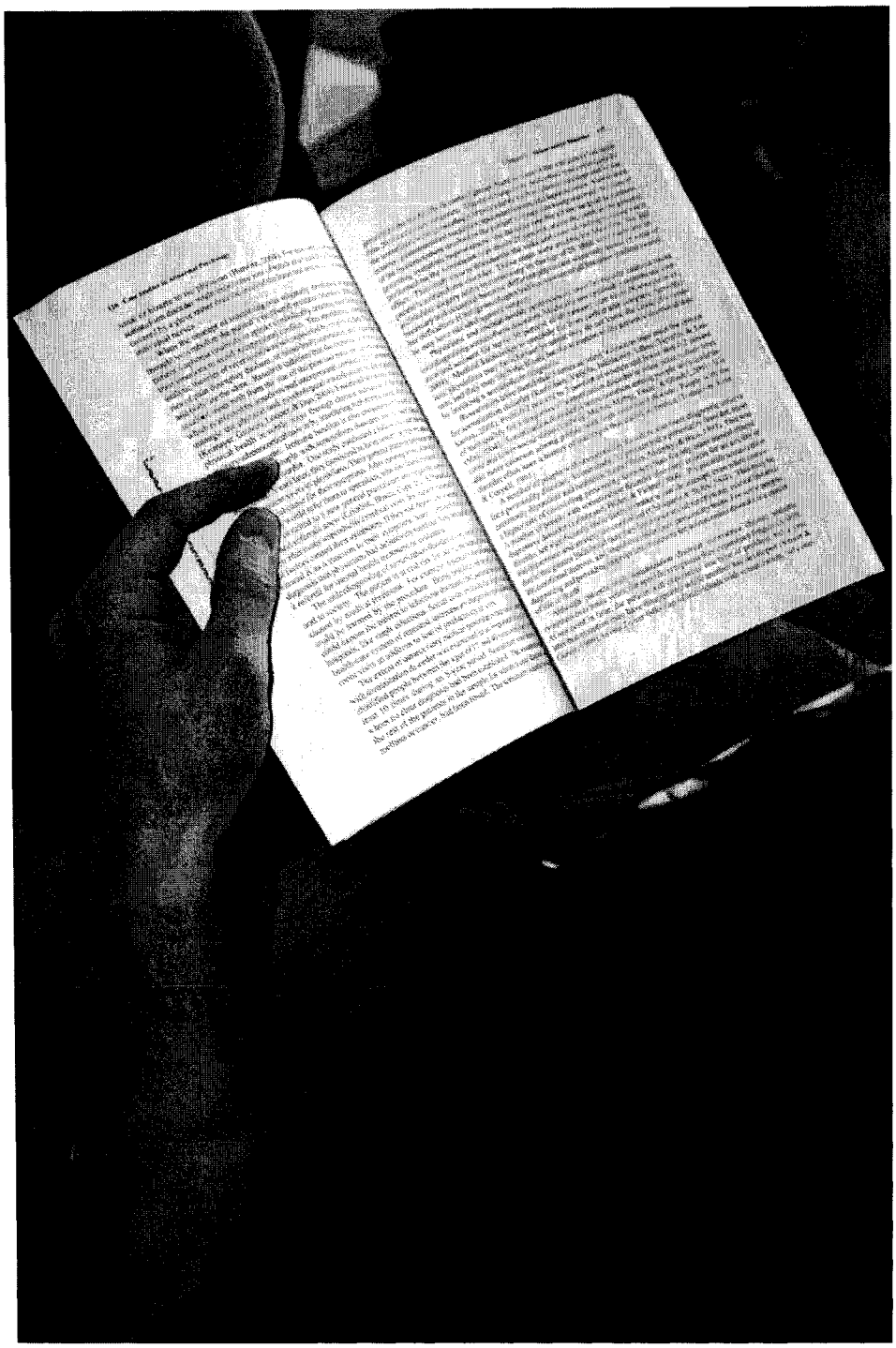
Thus, in "picking up a book the women walled themselves off from the arena of their usual responsibilities in order to focus on themselves alone" (*A Feeling* 14). As Meyrowitz prescribes:

> Reading is best done alone, in a quiet place, and to the exclusion of other activities. [...] In this sense, reading is 'anti-social'; it isolates the reader from live interactions. Reading is linear and absorbing. It is difficult to talk, eat, exercise, make love, or drive an automobile while reading. (124)

Seen as an anti-social act, reading places one in the private sphere and guards the reader against intrusion. Indeed, pulling out a book during a bus ride or at a coffee shop often has much the same effect as posting a *do not disturb* sign.

Yet, because of this, the reader's body not only reads but also becomes a sign to be read by fellow passengers and patrons. Often these observers find themselves navigating between their observations—their reading of the reader and the signs he or she is communicating—and the privacy of the act[9]. However, it is partly in this reading (or

[9] I find that the move of reading over someone's shoulder (Fig. 3-1) represents this ambivalence well. On the one hand, there is the desire to participate, to see and understand the reading through the reader's point of view (over the shoulder is as close as



[Fig. 3-1]

Looking Over Your Shoulder

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one can get to the same experience); however, there is also an understanding that participation is not equal or, generally, desired. One has not asked the reader to share—there is something inherently covert about it.

being read) that the act of reading remains public. Writers and theorists often utilize the idea of 'reading the body' as a trope to examine types of social interaction. As Grosz notes, "[b]odies are fictionalized, that is, positioned by various cultural narratives and discourses, representation forms, so that they can be seen as living narratives" (118). Both Winterson and Calvino are concerned with how bodies are read, particularly in their examinations of the relationship between lovers' bodies. The narrator in *Written on the Body*, for example, comments that:

> Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights; the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like Braille. I like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes. Never unfold too much, tell the whole story. I didn't know that Louise would have reading hands. She translated me into her own book. (89)

For her, bodies tell secret stories and Louise's reading (and re-writing) of the body is a most intimate act. In *If on a winter's night a traveller*, we have a reader's body being read. Detailing a romantic encounter, the narrator tells the Reader that:

> you, too O Reader, are meanwhile an object of reading: the Other Reader now is reviewing your body as if skimming the index, and at some moments she consults it as if gripped by sudden and specific curiosities, then she lingers, questioning it and waiting till a silent answer reaches her, as if every partial inspection interested her only in the light of a wider spatial reconnaissance. Now she dwells on negligible details, perhaps tiny stylistic faults, for example the prominent Adam's apple or your way of burying your head in the hollow of her shoulder, and she exploits them to establish a margin of detachment, critical reserve, or joking

> intimacy; now instead the accidentally discovered detail is excessively cherished [...] and from this start she gains impetus, covers (you cover together) pages and pages from top to bottom without skipping a comma. (155-6)

Here, Ludmilla, the Other Reader, engages with the Reader's body by going through the same processes that she would with a book and treating it as a text to be traversed, decoded, examined, pondered, and thoroughly experienced.

Calvino and Winterson imagine very private readings; yet, as Calvino writes, addressing the Other Reader, it "is not only the body that is, in you, the object of reading: the body matters insofar as it is part of a complex of elaborate elements, not all visible and not all present, but manifested in visible and present events" (155). The body is examined, studied, and interpreted within a social framework. This engages even the most private readings in a larger interaction. As Elizabeth Grosz details this 'complex' in *Volatile Bodies*, noting that bodies

> cannot be adequately understood as ahistorical, precultural, or natural objects in any simple way; they are not only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature itself. It is not simply that the body is represented in a variety of ways according to historical, social, and cultural exigencies while it remains basically the same; these factors actively produce the body as a body of a determinate type. (x)

Thus, "the body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural product" (23). And, Hayles

notes, the relationship between body and culture is reflexive. She writes that "culture not only flows from the environment into the body but also emanates from the body into the environment. The body produces culture at the same time that culture produces the body" (200). Due to this complex relationship with culture, the body cannot escape reading and interpretation.

How do we leaf through these reading bodies? Calvino depicts both private and social observations in *If on a winter's night a traveller.* In Chapter 6, author Silas Flannery "is looking through a spyglass mounted on a tripod at a young woman in a deck chair, intently reading a book on another terrace, two hundred meters below the valley." He notes that "'Every time I'm about to sit down at my desk I feel the need to look at her." In fact, he "does nothing but follow the reading of that woman, seen from here, day by day, hour by hour" (126-127). Flannery's voyeurism furtively translates the woman's reading as he tries to "read in her face what she desires to read" (127). In opposition, the Reader dreams himself into a very public reading. He finds himself in a long train crossing Ircania. Reading the other travelers and noticing that they are all absorbed in "thick bound volumes," he gets the "idea that some of the travelers, or all are reading one of the novels [he] [has] had to break off, indeed, that all those novels are to be found here in the compartment, translated into a language unknown" to him. He attempts a closer reading on them by trying to see "what is written on the spine of the bindings" (242). In the meanwhile, a "traveler steps into the passage and leaves his volume on his seat to show it is occupied." The moment he has gone, the reader reaches "both hands for the book, [...] skim[s] through it," and becomes "convinced it is the one [he] seeks" (242). However, his act of reading has not gone unnoticed. At "that moment, [the Reader]

realize[s] that all the other travelers are looking at [him], their eyes filled with menacing disapproval of [his] indiscreet behavior" (242). Here, the Reader both reads and is read socially—he attempts to interpret his fellow travelers and their volumes while they do the same to him.

Both Calvino and Winterson show that the concepts that we have developed for interpreting the book can also be useful tools for studying the reader. And, in return, applying these theories to the investigation of reading as a physical act enhances their scope and depth. Gerard Genette's concept of paratext, for example, offers excellent concepts for analyzing the reading act. In *Paratexts*, Genette notes that "text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations," which "are to be regarded as belonging to the text" (1). These paratexts surround and extend the text "in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense; to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book" (1). In other words, the "paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public" (2). Genette divides paratext into two components: peritext and epitext. Peritext exist within the same volume while epitext exist outside of it. Paratext can be textual, iconic, material, or even factual. Factual paratext "consists not of an explicit message (verbal or other) but of a fact whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received" (7).

In application to the reading act, we can say that it too "is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions." In addition to the book's paratext (much of which is readily available to the observer), the act is appended with the reader's body (from comportment to clothing to pose), the reading space, and any other objects or operations that might be associated (from the type of beverage the reader consumes to the reading aids used to what color bookmark is clipped between the pages). These paratexts frame the reading and present it—makes it present—to the world. Philipe Lejeune notes that paratext is "'a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text'" (quoted in Genette, 2). And, for Genette, this fringe "constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*" (2). Readerly paratext allows for transaction between the private reader and social reading.

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I wonder if the U of A knew, admitting me to a Masters program, that I didn't like to read. Someone should have caught on by now, you'd think. But, in any event, they let me in. Then, one day in Spring of 2003, a friend moved in with her books. And she read. She read for school and she read for fun and she read in the bath and she seemed to enjoy it. I found myself watching once more, but with a slight tinge of jealousy. I was fascinated and I wanted to read again. I noticed readers all around me. Readers on the bus and at Starbucks and through living room windows. I watched carefully as the man on the bus sitting opposite me opened his book, took his bookmark out, and put it between two pages further back. I tried it later when I got home but found that I didn't like the way that the bookmark made a small separation between the pages resting in my right

hand. But, for some reason, I found the man's simple action attractive. There was something about the ritual of it—this man was a reader and this was the way he read. I wanted it, or at least something similar, for my own.

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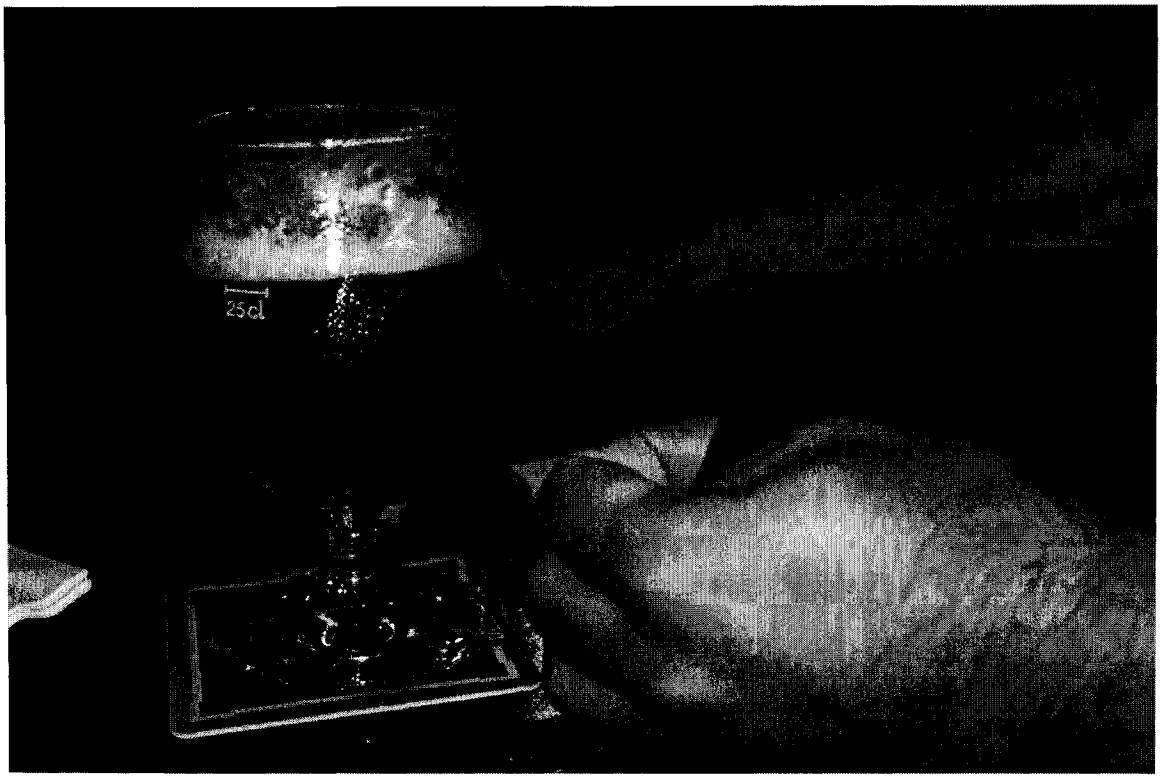
We can consider the reader's paratext to be that which influences, controls, or frames the observation of the reader- that which presents, or makes present, the reading act. Location, for example, can supply clues as to the genre or purpose of the reading—study, leisure, distraction, entertainment, information gathering, etc. Whether the reader sits in a coffee shop, bathroom, or library, at a desk or on the sofa, with or without paper and pencil in hand, says much about the act. What shape and size is the book they are holding? Is it a hardcover, trade paperback, or pocket paperback? A hardcover may show that the reader is willing to spend money on their book or perhaps that he or she wanted the book immediately after it came out and did not wait for the trade paperback to be released. A trade paperback usually denotes a certain amount of quality while the pocket paperback is generally a format reserved for mass pulp fiction. Within these formats, there are visually recognizable editions such as the Oxford Classics which can give the reader or observer a sense of affiliation. And then one might consider how the reader interacts with the book's paratext—whether they remove the dust jacket or not. Perhaps they recover or rewrap the book themselves, thereby controlling the information that it conveys or simply keeping the volume pristine. How do readers relate to the text? How, for example, do they find and keep their place? Some readers use bookmarks while others fold page corners. Some readers use the dust jacket flap to keep their place –others simply close the book knowing that they will be able to find their place later.

In many cases, an element can serve as paratext for both the book and the reader. The book itself is an important component of the reader's paratext. The familiar form of a Harlequin romance, for example, not only reflects on the contents of the book but when examined in relation to the reader reflects on him or her and perhaps the quality or type of reading he or she is engaged in. Some readers, aware of this reflection, make careful paratextual decisions so as to control it. Manguel gives the account of a cousin who:

> always chose a book to take on her travels with the same care with which she chose her handbag. She would not travel with Romain Rolland because she thought it made her look too vulgar. Camus was appropriate for a short trip, Cronin for a long one; a detective story by Vera Caspary or Ellery Queen was acceptable for a weekend in the country; a Graham Greene novel was suitable for traveling by ship or plane. (214)

Here, the book functions as an accessory and is chosen based on how it will reflect on its reader and its appropriateness for various social situations. However, Manguel notes, the book functions at a different level than the handbag. The "association of books with their readers is unlike any other between objects and their users. Tools, furniture, clothes – all have a symbolic function, but books inflict upon their readers a symbolism far more complex than that of a simple utensil" (214). He goes on to note that books signify a certain social and intellectual status. He tells the story of how, "in eighteenth-century Russia, during the reign of Catherine the Great, a certain Mr. Klostermann made a fortune by selling long rows of binding stuffed with waste paper, which allowed courtiers to create the illusion of a library and thereby garner the favour of their bookish empress" (214). "So important is the symbol of the book," Manguel concludes, "that its presence or



[Fig. 3-2]

A Book And A Drink

absence can, in the eyes of the viewer, lend or deprive a character of intellectual power" (213). Much like the drink you choose, the book you hold projects information about you, whether you mean to communicate it or not (Fig. 3-2).

In *No Sense of Place,* Meyrowitz also notes that the book functions as a symbol of self and identity. He argues that the book carries a stronger symbolic significance than more evanescent forms of media. Because "of a difference in the 'association factor,' people will watch things on television that they would be unlikely to read about in a book or magazine or to pay to see in a movie theater" (83). However, as "an object, a book is more than a medium of communication; it is also an artifact and possession.... Just as we choose styles of clothing not for utility alone, so do we choose books that 'appropriately' project our image and sense of group affiliations" (83). He goes on to note that each "book we choose to 'associate' with takes up part of our physical environment. It must be physically carried into the home and stored somewhere, whether on a coffee table or under a mattress. A book is a belonging" (83). This belonging not only affects how others see us but also how we see ourselves. Grosz reflects:

> the body image is capable of accommodating and incorporating an extremely wide range of objects. Anything that comes into contact with the surface of the body and remains there long enough will be incorporated into the body image—clothing, jewelry, other bodies, objects. They mark the body, its gait, posture, position, etc. (temporarily or more or less permanently), by marking the body image. (80)

As such, "external objects, implements, and instruments with which the subject continually interacts become, while they are being used, intimate, vital, even libidinally

cathected parts of the body image" (80). Books, and by extension the reading act, shape the way that both we and others read our bodies.

An interesting commentary on these observations can be found in the April 2005 issue of *Glamour*. Although the narrator of *Written on the Body* relegates women's magazines to the "arcane world of sex tips and man-traps" (74), this particular issue offers a humorous and insightful look at the social interpretation of the reading act in its "would you dare?" feature. This monthly feature takes a social taboo or faux pas (walking around with coffee foam on your lip, for example), exaggerates it, and then documents people's reactions to it. In the April 2005 issue, the magazine gives a volunteer three large format books with the titles, *Foul Body Odour Is Not Your Fault, So you really can't find a man, huh?,* and *Have An Orgasm Right This Minute.* The volunteer then reads them in various public places in Miami. People's reactions ranged from keeping a distance to giving advice to mild amusement to sincere interest.

The first reaction presented, however, actually belongs to volunteer Kristin Harmel. In the first photo (9:30 a.m.), she sits on a bus reading. The thought bubble floating above her head reads "Alone on the bus again...." Interestingly, the focus here is on Kristin's reaction to herself. Though she knows the scheme, Kristin can still identify – she reads herself as a reader and situates the paratext of that reading (reading alone, on a bus, a book entitled *So you really can't find a man, huh?*) socially, concluding that "Wow, I look *desperate.*" Her identification goes further, however, when at 10:15 a.m. she comes across a nun and her friend. While before she identifies by reading herself as a reader, here she identifies with the book as the reader. She becomes flustered that a nun knows that she's reading *So you really can't find a man, huh?* and so "feebly held it up

[Fig. 3-3]

Glamour Buzz – Would you dare?

for them to read and grinned like an idiot." Even though Kristin knows that the book is fake and does not consume any of its text—there is none—, she realizes that possessing it communicates something about her to the nun and she identifies enough to react to it. Simply holding the book—and thereby both absorbing it into her self-image and projecting it to the outside word—is enough to cause her embarrassment.

Others use the paratext to identify, categorize, and relate to the reader as well. In the example where she holds a book entitled *Foul Body Odor Is Not Your Fault!*, Kristen notes that the book acts "like a force field" and "repelled everyone within a 10-foot radius." Here, the message carried in the book's paratext (both the woman on the cover holding her nose and the title implying that the reader smells) is enough to send or keep observers out of smell's reach. Since the magazine makes no mention of Kristin actually smelling foul, it seems that those observers were intent to rely on the paratext presented rather than their own sense of smell. Though some wish to remain aloof, most of the observers are at least sympathetic. Kristin comments at 12:49 p.m., "I realized that, overall, Americans seem to have a soft spot for any sort of self-improvement." The book here symbolizes, or perhaps makes visible, a sort of effort. The book cover instigates social communication and evokes sympathy in the observer. And, in the cases of the waitress and the Japanese couple, it also becomes the impetus for social interaction and exchange. At 11:37 a.m., upon seeing *Have An Orgasm Right This Minute!*, the waitress runs over and says, "'Oh my God, you *have* to let me see your book!'," while earlier the "cute, old Japanese couple" who saw it noted, "'We'll have to buy that and practice!'." In both these instances, interaction and social exchange occurs. Not only did they observe the reader, they also engaged themselves in her reading. Though the situation is

dramatized, it clearly demonstrates the effect that paratext (in this case the dust jacket and title) can have on how readings and readers are socially imagined and constructed. "Would you dare?" amuses in part because it exaggerates the reactions that most people can identify with –how we read people, how we try to present ourselves to others, and how we think people read us. Through this feature, *Glamour* examines the types of social interaction and exchange that reading plays an important role in.

Some paratexts have a much less direct relationship to the body but still influence the observer's perception. These make up the reader's epitext. Books on a shelf, not currently being read, for example, still speak about the reader and the sort of reading he or she engages in. Upon entering Ludmilla's home, the Reader has:

> a look at the books. The first thing noticed, at least on looking at those you have most prominent, is that the function of books for you is immediate reading; they are not instruments of study or reference or components of a library arranged according to some order. Perhaps on occasion you have tried to give a semblance of order to your shelves, but every attempt at classification was rapidly foiled by heterogeneous acquisitions. The chief reason for the juxtaposition of volumes, besides the dimensions of the tallest or the shortest, remains chronological, as they arrived here, one after the other; anyway, you can always put your hand on any one.... (145-146)

And from this lengthy appraisal and the observation of books in various states of being read all over the house, the Reader decides that unlike "the provisions in the kitchen, here is the living part, for immediate consumption, that tells most about you" (146). Ludmilla's bookshelves give the Reader a structure within which to frame his

considerations of her reading. Linking this information with the other bits that he has gathered, the Reader concludes that Ludmilla's mind "has interior walls that allow you to partition different times in which to stop or flow, to concentrate alternately on parallel channels" (146). Readerly epitexts, though they lie outside of the immediate act, can provide rich data to the observer.

Of course, this data can be misread. Winterson's narrator, for example, brought a pair of handcuffs with her to the library and locked herself in her chair so that she would focus on her reading and release herself from thoughts of Louise. In this case, the narrator's physical relationship with the paratext allowed her to engage with the text. However, the handcuffs come into existence as paratext only when an observer interprets them as part of the reading act. Having given the key to the gentleman "in the knitted waistcoat and [asking] him to let [her] free at five o'clock," she noticed that "he'd disappeared from his place after about an hour" (94). When her mind wouldn't cooperate any further and her hand swelled from the cuff, she was forced to signal to a guard who cut her loose and charged her for "Wilful Damage To Reading Room Chair" (95). For the narrator, the cuffs were meant as a reading aid and while she hoped that the guard would read it as such and interpret the incident as accidental, "he filed his report very solemnly" and told her to hand over her ticket. When she tells him that her ticket is her livelihood, he responds, "'Should a thought a that before you handcuffed yourself to Library Property'" (95). For the guard, the cuffs were either dismissed as readerly paratext (the narrator is simply a vandal) or they presented to him the sort of reader and reading that did not belong in the library.

Through reading, reading others, and being read, one builds an understanding of the act. Because it is a physically embodied act, all reading, even the most private, participates in social interaction. For me, this becomes particularly poignant as the once firm borders between public and private spheres continue to dissolve. As traffic increases and as cities sprawl, many people find themselves spending more and more time in transitional spaces such as airports, planes, stations, buses, trains, and cars. It was in these spaces that I first really began studying other readers. Of course, I'd seen them in coffee shops and hallways and bookstores, but I had a special sort of admiration for people who could read in transit. The spaces themselves are often alienating—people are constantly coming and going (with many of them unhappy about it), the spaces are cramped, often uncomfortable, designed for short term use, and, most importantly, they're usually moving. Any sort of prolonged reading in a moving object will cause queasiness and headaches for me. To watch these readers, often standing, hold a book in one hand and steady themselves against the tides of traffic with the other astounded me. One day I asked a friend who read on plane trips how she did it. She commented that she used to get sick reading on the plane as well but because of how often she travels, she just got used to it. It was then that I began to think of reading as a physical act—as something that required adjustment and training, much like taking up a sport.

And this physicality puts reading into a larger social conversation that reflexively constructs the reading act. As I watch others read on the bus, I begin to form ideas of what reading is and how it relates to the body. My own reading changes and the changing physicality of how I read affects both how I perceive the material—how I relate to Calvino's readings and observations of reading bodies, for example—and how the

material acts on me. This then affects how I continue to read reading, how others read me, the materials that writers develop out of this social exchange, and how our bodies relate to it all. Through this and through the social construction of what it means to read, the reader also influences other readers.

Alberto Manguel's experience of reading and of his father's reaction to it has a profound impact on how he views the act. And, in turn, he influences how others view it through *A History of Reading*. Thus, his reading of the *Espasa-Calpe* Spanish encyclopedia, though it afforded him a certain kind of privacy, was still a social act. The mere knowledge that one is being watched—or could be watched—and the understanding that one is participating in a community (of readers and writers) affects how and what readers read. We can begin to engage in a dialogue about this reading—to outline and examine it—by using some of the concepts we have developed for talking about the book. Our readings and interpretations of reading reflexively construct the reading act. Hayles defines reflexivity as "the movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates" (8). Through complex social interactions, perceptions become depictions and expressions and these, in turn, alter how the reader perceives himself, others, and text. Perceivers help form the reading act by engaging it in social exchange–and, in doing so, become an integral part of the reading process.

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I made all the necessary preparations. I redecorated my bedroom. After all, having the right sort of environment is essential. Framed prints on the walls to give that artsy feel. I lit vanilla candles to put myself in the mood. A soft throw was deemed essential. And I started watching even more closely—the girl on the bus who uses the jacket flaps to mark her place, the lady holding her book open with one hand. I tried mirroring her but found that my hand fatigued. Maybe one needs to train for this like one trains for a sport. And why not? It is, after all, a physical act. I started experimenting with different poses, ignoring the cramps as necessary for muscle development. A month later, after much research, I sat down on my new 'reading chair,' surrounded by soft candlelight, with a throw on my knees, and started reading.

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Chapter 3: Reading Changes – The Audiobook

The relationship between our reading bodies and books informs and is informed by the textual bodies we interact with. We read this relationship as well and through this reading it becomes part of a broader social network that, in turn, constructs the reading act and the perceiver. From this emerges "complex feedback loops between contemporary literature, the technologies that produce it, and the embodied readers who produce and are produced by books and technologies" (Hayles *How We Became,* 29). Yet, these loops have only recently come to the fore—interest driven in part by changing, and increasingly technological, textual bodies. The development of new media causes feelings of uncertainty and fear for many in the Arts and academia. As Sven Birkerts notes in *The Gutenberg Elegies*:

> Over the past few decades, in the blink of the eye of history, our culture has begun to go through what promises to be a total metamorphosis. The influx of electronic communications and information processing technologies, abetted by the steady improvement of the microprocessor, has rapidly brought on a condition of critical mass. (3)

Cathy Davidson and David Goldberg respond to this calamity by contending that "if ever there were a time when society was in need of humanistic modes of inquiry, it is today.... [P]recisely because of the rapid developments in science and technology, we must think carefully about the nature of the human" (1). And, as Birkerts drearily observes, we cannot turn back. However, we can put ourselves in a better position to make sense of these changes. Understanding how new media affects our bodies, our readings, and our social structures requires that we grasp, or at least think about, how those things currently relate to each other. Doing so will allow us to make conscious choices about what to do with, and how to relate to, new technologies rather than submitting meekly to technological determinism.

One such technology is the audiobook. *Wikipedia* defines the audiobook as "a recording of the contents of a book read aloud." Sarah Kozloff identifies three direct antecedents for audiobooks: 1) "the tradition of reading books aloud" (83), 2) radio drama, which "has provided a model of how spellbinding an oral medium can be" (84), and 3) the "vast, quiet sub-culture of recording for the blind" (85). Usually "distributed on CDs, cassette tapes, or digital formats (e.g., MP3 and Windows Media Audio)", the term audiobook "has been synonymous with 'books on tape' for roughly twenty years" (*Wikipedia,* audiobook). The earliest recorded instances of the audiobook came much

before 'tape,' however. As early as 1933, anthropologist J. P. Harrington, "drove the length of North America to record oral histories of Native American tribes on aluminum discs using a car battery-powered turntable" (APA Factsheet, 1). As Kozloff notes though, the limitations on recording books stemmed from the fact that early records generally lasted only five minutes per side." However, the "invention and standardization of commercial long-playing records in the late 1940s restimulated interest in recording stories, plays, and poetry" (85).

Today, publishers expect audiobooks to account for 10 to 15 percent of a book's overall sale (APA Factsheet, 2). However, audiobooks are becoming more than just another way to squeeze a few more dimes out of existing print texts. Recently, writers such as Ron McLarty (author of *The Memory of Running*) have begun writing and publishing exclusive audiobooks (not available in print or other formats), endowing the form with legitimacy and fostering examinations of it on its own terms (merits, drawbacks, and possibilities)—both as a media art form and as a consumer product—rather than simply as a subsidiary of print books. Part of these changes result from the recent surge in audiobook popularity. As multitasking becomes a norm, commutes continue to lengthen, interest in health and fitness surges, and the popularity of digital audio players continue to skyrocket—with advances in digital technologies resulting in smaller cheaper units with larger storage capacities which, Kozloff notes, "could be taken places where TVs could not" (86)—, audiobooks have gotten a second wind. The Audiobook Publishers Association notes that from 2002-2003, retail and wholesale sales increased by fourteen percent while library sales increased by seven percent. In 2004, they estimated the size of the audiobook market at eight hundred million (APA Factsheet,

2).

Numbers aside, the partnerships and products that major audiobook companies, such as Audible, have made are even more telling. In 2004, for example, Audible partnered with Indigo Books & Music Inc. (Canada's largest book retailer) to offer Audible's download service for audiobooks on chapters.indigo.ca. Visitors can "now shop, download, and listen to best-selling audiobooks, periodicals, radio programs, language learning," and more (Business Wire, on Audible News section). Audible offers over 70,000 hours of content, including impressive exclusive material such as *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*, a paper that until recently remained "a holdout against the audiobook incursion" (Shokoff, 171). Part of Audible's success also results from their willingness to embrace new digital technologies—such as digital content cell phones and satellite radio—and the willingness of companies such as XM Satellite Radio to form partnerships is telling. In 2005, XM and Audible announced a strategic relationship whereby XM programming will be available for purchase and download on Audible while XM will produce programming focusing the world of audiobooks and programming available on Audible.com.

What does this world look like? Currently, Audiobooks come in three formats—cassettes, cds, and digital files. Cassettes are stamped with the title, often mimicking the book cover (if there is one) in font and color, while entire sections of cover illustrations and graphics are often resized and printed onto CDs. Both are then sold in boxes (there is usually more than one tape or CD per work) roughly resembling the rectangular dimensions of a book (an arguably conscious choice by publishers since a square box format would make more sense and less waste considering the dimensions of cassettes

and CDs). The cover of the book usually appears on the front of the box and the dust-jacket blurb or reviews on the back. These are sold most often in bookstores (although some specialty shops, music stores, corner gas stations, and even restaurants also carry them), often in sections devoted to audiobooks. The newest format, digital audiobook files, have increased in sales exponentially over the past five years. These files are embodied in hard drive tape and media cards that the consumer may never see or even know exist for that matter. As a result, many readers identify their computers or portable digital audio players as the 'body' of their audiobook.

In the midst of much criticism about how digital media endangers our society, critics such as Pamela Varley and Sven Birkerts examine the sorts of reading that audiobooks foster. Do we engage more passively when listening to a book than reading with our eyes? How does listening to an audiobook differ from scanning print text? What will this sort of reading do to our children? However, most of these examinations center on how audiobooks pale in comparison to printed texts—on how an audiobook is not a book. My interest in audiobooks, however, does not stem from the threat they pose to books or how they differ from them; rather, I am concerned here with how audiobooks change our bodies, our physical relationship to texts, and how it alters, or perhaps re-embodies, the physical act of reading.

There has been much interest of late in ebooks, particularly with the recent release of Sony's much anticipated Sony Reader (a device which promises a paper-like screen and clear-as-ink text, all with the convenience of hundred of titles at your fingertips). However, until recently, bulkiness, poor battery life, harsh glaring screens, and lack of content had plagued ebooks. They have not taken hold in the mainstream but rather

remain the project of select groups and institutions. Formatted, edited, contemporary content is limited and while the industry can occasionally generate buzzes of excitement, it is currently still shaky and un-established. Personally, I have never been able to get into ebooks. I find reading onscreen taxing and do not enjoy the experience – I still print out most of what I read 'online.' And, having not read more than a couple, I do not feel sufficiently informed to comment on them. Though I can engage theoretically with what the ebook may mean or effect, I do not feel that I should unless I can engage viscerally as well (particularly given the nature of my topic). Perhaps Sony's Reader will finally convert me but currently I am not sufficiently sold on their new e-ink technology (which is suppose to reduce eye strain significantly) to spend four to five hundred dollars on it.

Audiobooks, on the other hand, are an easier technology for most people to adopt. Most users do not have to buy extraneous or alien equipment (such as the Sony Reader or a PDA or tablet PC) to make audiobooks a feasible, portable, option. Audioplayers are commonplace and while new digital music players may be intimidating to some, most users will at least be able to cope with a tape or cd player. Our bodies have already begun adapting to and adopting these technologies. Audiobooks have plodded steadily for decades, evolving with new mediums and technologies[10] and becoming a household item for many (roughly "one in five American households listened to an audiobook within the last year—23 million households" (APA Factsheet, 2)). Yet, the bulk of new media theories have focused their attention, when examining new reading practices, on the possibilities or dangers of the sexier ebook. Comparatively few have studied audiobooks and no one has accused it of revolution. Yet, while the possibilities of the ebook are

[10] For example, audiobooks have now incorporated podcasting technology. Podiocasts or podiobooks offers works in serial, audio, form, for free—thus keeping content fresh.

certainly exciting, audiobooks have already changed reading for millions and I think that we must try to understand those changes if we are to gain a fuller understanding of the reading act.

How can we go about understanding audiobooks—as a medium, in relation to other mediums, in relation to ourselves? In *Laws of Media*, Marshall and Eric McLuhan set up a heuristic device in the form of a set of four questions which they call a tetrad. They believe these questions "can be asked (and the answers checked) by anyone, anywhere, at any time, about any human artifact" (7). The four are: 1) what does it enhance or intensify? 2) what does it render obsolete or displace? 3) what does it retrieve that was previously obsolesced? 4) what does it produce or become when pressured to an extreme? To varying degrees, these questions form the basis for much of media studies today. However, they are inherently problematic because they are structured in a way that places agency squarely on the artifact or media examined. Even when exploring older or existing media, the technology is examined in light of what changes, problems, and enhancements it brought when it first came into being. *What does, or did, this new media improve? What does it destroy? What can it bring back? What can it become?* The context from which this new media emerges becomes irrelevant and older media are rendered agentless—passively waiting to be replaced.

David Jay Bolter attempts to answer McLuhan's questions with his examination of what he terms the process of remediation; however, he does little better than the McLuhans in terms of addressing issues of context and agency. In his book, *Writing Space*, Bolter defines remediation as what occurs when "a newer medium takes the place of an older one, borrowing and reorganizing the characteristics of [...] the older medium

and reforming its cultural space" (23). This unilateral definition places power and agency on new media—depicting old media as helpless and needing to be replaced—and thereby negating the role that existing media play in fostering the context from which the new media emerges. Even the term remediation—derived from the Latin *remederi*: to heal or to restore health—reinforces the notion that existing media are to be reformed by new media technologies.

Later on, in *Remediation*, a joint effort between Bolter and Richard Grusin, they add the notions that "older media refashion themselves to answer new media's challenges" and that "each act of mediation depends on other acts of mediation" (15). Thus, "media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other" (55). Nonetheless, Bolter and Grusin ultimately comment that the "goal of remediation is to refashion or rehabilitate other media" (56). This still posits new media as the agent that acts on older media, which need to be 'restored to health.' The new medium is justified, then, "because it fills a lack or repairs a fault in its predecessor, because it fulfills the unkept promise of an older medium" (60). And, they ultimately spend the majority of their book illustrating "the voracity with which new media are refashioning the established media and reinventing themselves in the quest for immediacy" (267). Existing media's responses are seldom heard in their work over new media's calamity.

Though the reformulation of remediation by Bolter and Grusin places more power on older media than before (at least now they're capable of responding), their rhetoric points to a larger problem within their methodology: technological determinism. The problem is not simply whether agency rests on old or new media but, more importantly,

that it rests with media itself. Near the end of their section on theory, Bolter and Grusin tuck in a caveat under the heading of technological determinism. They write that in

> an effort to avoid both technological determinism and determined technology, we propose to treat social forces and technical forms as two aspects of the same phenomenon; to explore digital technology themselves as hybrids of technical, material, social, and economic facets.... [I]n all cases we mean to say that the agency for cultural change is located in the interaction of formal, material, and economic logics that slip into and out of grasp of individuals and social groups. (78)

Yet, despite their claims to explore digital technologies in context, they do very little work of the sort. Their examinations of media are often lacking the historical and social context into which they are introduced and out of which they were born. And, when they do examine those contexts, Bolter and Grusin speak of technology as the generative force.

In his book *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia*, Ronald Deibert offers a more holistic, evolutionary, model. He notes that by "attributing 'generative' causal powers to the mode of communication, the technological determinist model tends to slight the extent to which the technology itself emerges out of a particular context" (28). In order to "avoid these pitfalls," he notes, "we must underscore the 'social embeddedness' of technology. We must place greater emphasis on the historical and social context in which technologies are introduced" (29). Social needs, scientific knowledge, material resources, and popular imagination all help to drive technological innovation. In this sense, technology is always socially constructed. Once constructed, "new technologies of

communication do not *generate* specific social forces and/or ideas, as technological determinists would have it. Rather, they facilitate and constrain the extant social forces and ideas of a society" (Deibert, 36).

In other words, new media do not 'do' anything to society and culture; rather, certain trends, ideas, and practices are more suited to certain technologies. These cultural traits, being more suited, will thus be the ones to prosper in the new environment. And, conversely, this new environment, including the various social, economic, and material components, is what evolves and selects technology. Certain technologies are better suited to particular cultural and societal traits and moments (moveable type, for example, first invented in Asia, was ill suited to Asian languages and culture and thus did not thrive until its later introduction to a Western culture ripe for that particular innovation). Thus, Deibert sets out an ecological model, based on evolutionary theory, which illustrates the complex reflexive interplay between social, material, economic, and technological environments whose functional properties either reinforce or constrain certain traits and development.

The body is vital for this model—for it is, as Grosz has noted, the site for these exchanges. And, as such it 'produces culture at the same time that culture produces' it. Thus, in examining the social embeddedness of media, we must also look at the physical embeddedness of it—and not simply the material environment that technology fosters and is fostered by, but, rather, we must examine the important role that the body plays in the interactions between all these environments and the exchanges that shape it and that it, in turn, shapes. Thus, rather than simply discuss how audiobooks act upon or remediate the book, I will end by asking questions about both the social and material

factors that have fostered this technology—how are audiobooks embodied, what relationship they have to the body, and what traits and development might the two shape within each other.

Much of the current audiobook industry evolved from recording for the blind. These bodies that cannot see create an environment that is ideally suited for, and favors, alternate 'texts' such as audiobooks. And, in turn, the audiobooks have a direct impact on how these bodies sense, navigate, associate, and interact with the world—perhaps resulting in a world more acceptable to alternate audio content (even by simply providing more of a market for easy-to-use digital audio players, for example). However, as North Americans find themselves pressed for time, audiobooks are finding a niche in the mainstream as well. And, their use over the years can be seen to reflexively foster the same tendencies (ie. multitasking) that continue to generate a market for it. People are constantly looking for ways to fit more stimulus into less time and increasing pressure on our physical structures, such as highways, have created situations of congestion and frustration (in the United States, for example, "the average annual delay due to traffic congestion has more than tripled since 1982" (APA Factsheet, 3)). In this environment then, it is not surprising that 53% of audiobook listeners listen in the car or in some other form of transportation (APA Factsheet, 5). Yet, this sort of setting takes its toll on our bodies. Long hours of sedentary living have led to a surging interest in health and fitness. And, luckily for the audiobook industry, the boredom associated with repetitive aerobic exercise creates another environment suited to their product. Couple this with continuing advances in digital technologies, many of which are fostered out of the same social

tendencies (the ones which require everything to be smaller, faster, longer, more), and you have an environment ripe for audiobooks.

But how exactly do we relate to this new media? One cannot hold it—heft it, feeling the soft or hard cover pressing against our hands—or feel the smoothness of the page on the fingertips. In *Written on the Body*, reading without the body does not work. Having lost Louise, the narrator attempts to read, and write, her through medical texts. However, doing so deprives her of her personhood and agency. In the end, she realizes it is through the body that "we know ourselves and our losses, not by the memory as conceived by the mind" (Shiffer, 41). Where, then, do we find the audiobook's body and how do we relate it to our own? Audiobooks certainly change the way in which we embody the reading act—the listening act restricts the body less, for example. The reader can now talk, clean, exercise, or drive a car with ease while reading. Hands and eyes are now free for the most part and we should examine how this affects our thoughts and interactions differently than before when mostly only ears were free during reading. On one level, interaction during listening exists with the digital player. For many, it embodies the 'book.' Whether the reader understands the intricacies of how the sound is stored in bytes or whether he simply knows that the files are 'in there,' players (and the media within it that hold the bytes) give audiobooks a presence in the world. Apple's iPod, for example, encases audiobooks within a sleek white or black shell and provides the reader with a menu where she can set the playback speed, bookmark sections, 'scan' through chapters, and adjust the volume. Yet, these operations seem very bookish.

This is not surprising when we consider that many audiobooks are still inherently bookish—not simply in that they are the by-products of print books but also in the

choices that authors and publishers make in producing them. In the audiobook edition of Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*, for example, the listener is asked to think about their experience of buying the *book*, what they thought as they held it in their hands and read the blurb on the back. Considering that Gladwell himself narrates, it seems reasonable to expect that he could have adapted some of the text to fit the format better. However, he, or the publishers, made a conscious decision to keep the text that specifically referred to the work as a book. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, on the other hand, is a book that cannot be simply recorded (though he has recorded parts of it for incorporation into Poe's (his sister) album *Haunted House*). As Hayles notes regarding chapter [x], the "facing page shows only a blank space where the box has been, its defining blue border erased along with the text. Thus the fullness of an ink-black square is linked with nothingness, the blue screen of infinite malleability with the articulation of an infinite series, the opaque front of a page with a transparent back.... These effects are specific to the print book; they could not operate in the same way in another medium" (793). And, it is difficult to imagine how they could operate in an audiobook. Whether it is as simple as adjusting some of the text so that the listener is not told to turn to page x but rather asked to forward to minute y or as complex as reformulating an entire work, audiobooks need to create bodies tailored to their own format before we can reasonably expect to incorporate them into ours. Until the form develops to a point where readers are no longer asked to embody it as if it were a book, it will be hard to find its body and to interact with it using our own. Just as advances in the technology of the print book (chapters, margins, indexes) long ago changed our physical relationship to reading by stilling and silencing it,

perhaps now that we're once again reading aloud, we should re-examine these technologies.

And, when we do successfully take in an audiobook, the effects it has can be even stronger than those evoked by print. In her article, "As Good as Reading?," Pamela Varley recounts Betty Carter's reading of Ruth White's *Weeping Willow*, "about an Appalachian girl who is raped by her stepfather." Carter had read the book and liked it so she decided that she would listen to it in the car. Varley documents her reaction:

> When the pivotal scene came, Carter found, to her amazement, that her reaction was overwhelming. 'I had to pull off the road,' she says. 'I felt physically sick.' Later, reflecting on why her reaction to the audio version had been so much stronger, she theorized that when reading, she had subconsciously protected herself from the rape scene. 'I knew it was coming, and I kind of skipped over it quickly. You can move in and out as a reader. But on tape, it was right there in the car with me, and the impact was very strong. (260)

Perhaps one way to engage and embody an audiobook is to absorb it into one's own body while trying to limit the mind's interferences.

What this sort of reading do to our bodies? How do we react differently in hearing than reading? What traits and developments does audiobook reading encourage? Does it, for example, encourage a slower reader? Audiobooks change the time of reading. Manguel notes that "with silent reading the reader was at last able to establish an unrestricted relationship with the book and the words. The words no longer needed to occupy the time required to pronounce them" (50). With audiobooks, not only do the words have to occupy the time needed to say them, they have to occupy the time needed

for *the narrator* to say them. And, while the reader can skim a print text quickly if he feels that the story is progressing too slowly or read at slower rate when he wants to savor a particularly well-written piece of prose, he does not have the same control with audiobooks. With some digital audio players, like the iPod, you can adjust the speed of the playback to some extent (there is usually a slower or faster setting) but the pacing of the reading is set and listening to an audiobook will, for most, take longer than reading the equivalent book. Will that result in slower readers? Or perhaps more patient ones? Will it result in a more immersive experience?

Birkerts, for one, finds himself torn on the subject. Listening to audiobooks, he finds pace to be "a serious problem." He notes, "I became disgruntled, fidgety. Not because I couldn't apprehend the words, but because these were the very places in my reading where I would stop my finger in the margin and gaze out into the middle of the distance" (146). This experience may or may not hold true for other listeners depending on situation, personality, comfort with technology, and content. If someone were driving while listening, it would be ill-advised for him or her to try to pause and gaze out into the distance (though if one were driving, one would not be able to read a print book altogether). Some readers may choose to let the book continue to drive them along though their brains may want to wander. I, for example, will often purchase a book in audio form when I know I might not have the discipline to read it through from beginning to end. And, while some readers prefer to leave the audio controls alone, I pause and start and let my mind wander and rewind and skip forward regularly.

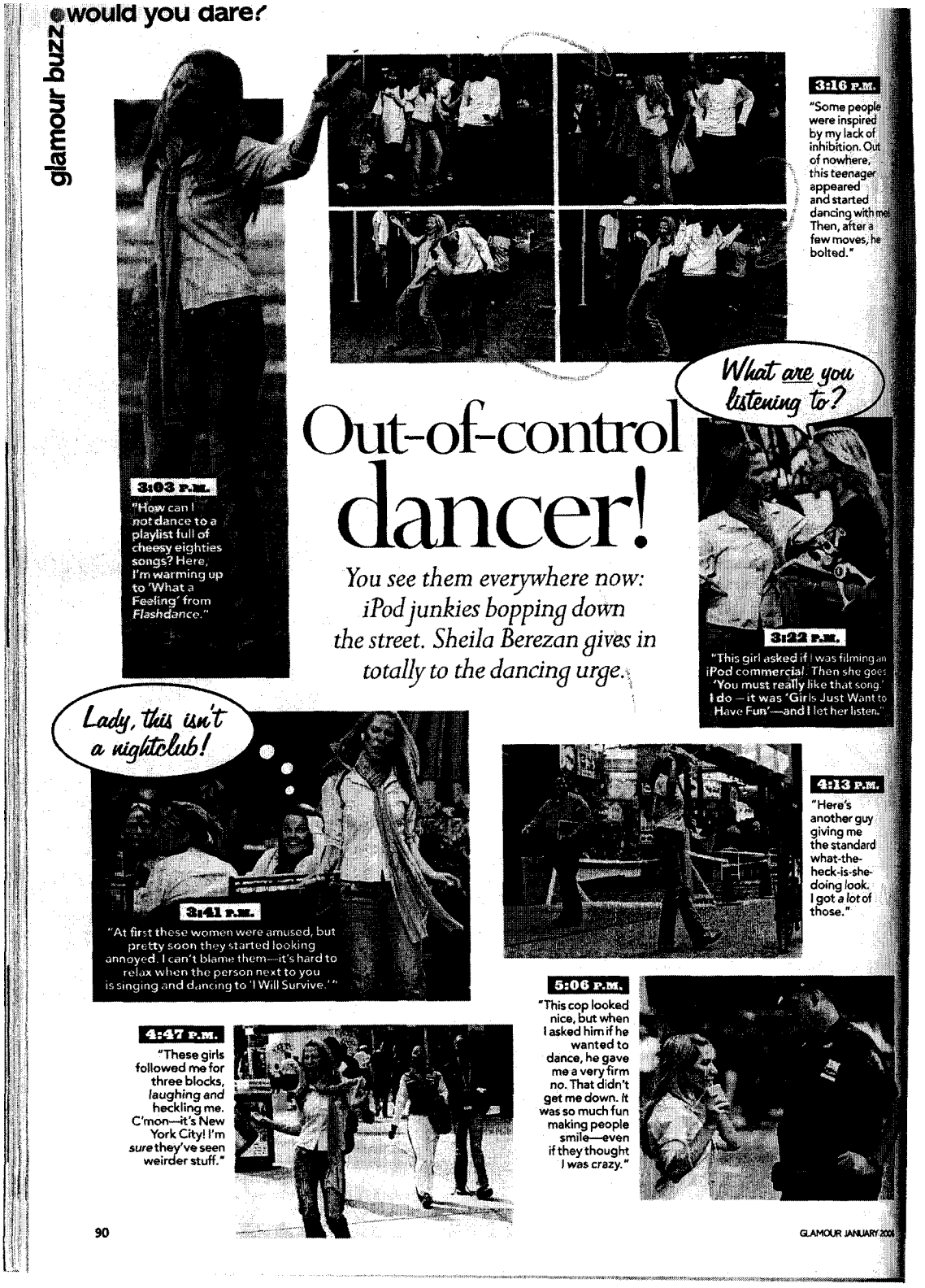
For Birkerts, more serious literature "incorporates levels of difficulty –in narrative sequence, referentiality, syntax, and linguistic density –and presupposes a reader who is

free to hover over a phrase, reach for a dictionary, and dart back" (145). Audiobooks, if they restrict the reader, may also lead to a more restricted kind of literature. Without the ability to stop and look off the page, *deep reading*—"the slow and meditative possession of a book [where] [w]e don't just read the words, we dream our lives in their vicinity"—is inhibited (145). Here again, though, much depends on the reader's personality and comfort level and, in many cases, the technologies currently being developed. For myself, 're-reading,' 'hovering,' and stopping have become second habit. I am also more likely to stop and consult the dictionary on my iPod or computer than to pull out my heavy Webster's Collegiate Edition and flip through its pages (especially since it inevitably lies in another room). I find that the click wheel on Apple's iPod facilitates a more active sort of listening; the dial/wheel mechanism provides tactile feedback and distance-time correlation between input and output as I scroll, making it easier to judge how far I am going. And, yet, despite his concerns, Birkerts listens to some audiobooks over and over –something that he is less likely to do when reading. As well, he sees the benefits of the audiobook's ability to "remind us of the sound of literature" since too "often we read serious books at the same rate at which we read the morning paper, stripping the sentences for their sense and jamming phrases together like the pleats of a compressed accordion" (149).

Whether serious or not, the number of places where these readings can occur certainly expands with audiobooks. With this format, reading is no longer dependent on having sufficient light; rather, it will depend on power sources (batteries and plug-ins). Audiobook reading can take place without the proper 'supports' that Armando Petrucci writes of. You no longer need a table or chair or even to be in a place where you can be

still. Coffee shops, park benches, and libraries could well be surpassed by gyms, cars, and shopping malls as the ideal places for reading. Manguel notes that one must find a suitable place and position to read. Perhaps audiobooks free the body to find much more comfortable positions—ones no longer restricted by the book object and its proximity and angle to the eyes. This opens up even more potential reading places. And, perhaps, this will encourage more reading in general. According to Meyrowitz, "electronic media affect social behavior—not through the power of their messages but by reorganizing the social settings in which people interact and by weakening the once strong relationship between physical and social 'place'" (ix). Here, he refers to the blurring of boundaries that occurs as a result of new media bringing the outside world into our private spaces. What happens, though, when social spaces become more private?

With the print book, the act of reading can be observed and read. The listening act, however, provides much less information. It is much harder to tell whether someone is listening to a mystery or travel narrative (or, even, whether they are listening to a book at all)—though the body still provides subtle clues through facial expressions, etc. As such, much less readerly paratext surrounds audiobook reading. Manguel notes that "I judge a book by its cover; I judge a book by its shape" (125). And, as we've seen, other people judge your book and your reading by both as well. But what happens when the observer, like Manguel's father, lack the usual information with which to judge? As the January 2006 edition of "would you dare?" illustrates, though, observers do try to read and interpret the listening (and in this case, dancing) act. Currently, to many, listening to an audiobook is simply "a debased or lazy way to read" (Kozloff, 83). However, as audiobooks and digital media become more prevalent, we must examine more closely the



[Fig. 4-1]

Glamour Buzz – Would you dare?

sorts of reading audiobooks foster and become better and more detailed in our reading and interpretation of it. Perhaps as the format evolves, it will develop its own set of readerly paratext –cover graphics may start appearing on a players' screen, group or public readings may provide opportunities for observation of reader-listener bodies and interactions. Regardless, it is crucial that we make conscious choices about what is important to us and then try to foster their development.

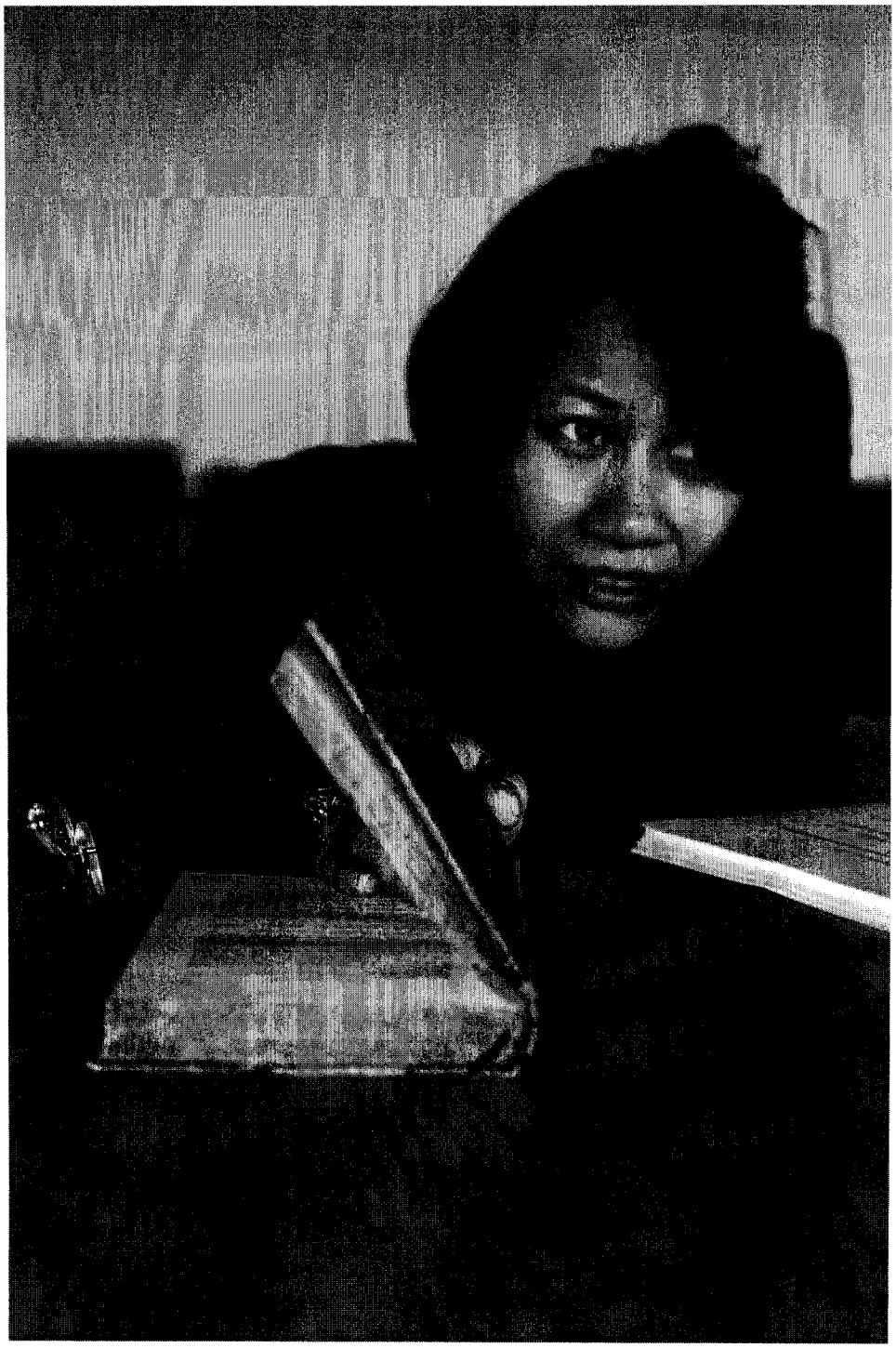
Conclusion

This leads us back to the solitary reader, who, nonetheless, in her solitariness exists as part of the larger social conversation that reflexively constructs the reading act. The 'deaf and blind' reader we began with through Manguel has become an auditory, mobile (perhaps even dancing) beast, keenly watching the world around her. Our reader is now physically transformed both as an observed object and as a reading subject. She no longer looks as we expect her to—book in hand, eyes down. Rather, she can be bopping down the street as the *Glamour* ad illustrates. The readerly paratext is gone: no dust-jackets, bookmarks, uncut pages. Tell-tale walls of books now exist in hard drives, out of view. We find our reader where we least expect her—staring back at us—in supermarkets, fitness centres, and looking out of car windows. She herself experiences reading differently. She can retain anonymity as a reader while still being visible. She still engages with the book; however, electronic machines mediate this reading rather than paper and ink. With the audiobook, the reader currently has less control over her experience of the text. However, much of this perceived lack of control comes from the fact that this text is drawn from the book form. As audiobooks develop—as authors begin to experiment with the format and as technology changes—, the reader's experience will also change. Our reader can no longer carry on reading practices as she would with the book and she now helps to develop a new set of rules, paratexts, social markers. She is now constructing new forms of engagement with a new community of readers. And, just as we have had to learn to read readers and reading, we need to develop an understanding of these new reading practices.

In the meanwhile, the field of reader-response continues to expand and develop. Scholars such as Kevin Sharpe, Steven Zwicker, Jennifer Andersen, and Elizabeth Sauer, for example, continue the work of exploring the role and activity of reading in the early modern period. In *The Book on the Bookshelf*, Henry Petrowski, focusing more on the material object, provides a history of reading through focusing on the infrastructures that we have developed to help us deal with the book –namely, the lowly bookshelf. Psycholinguist Richard Gerrig examines the reader's state of mind during and after the reading act, examining how they are transported to narrative worlds and the real world consequences of those journeys. And, finally, at the University of Alberta, David Miall and Don Kuiken continue their innovative explorations of empirical research on literary reading. They investigate processes of perspective-formation and interpretation, self-understanding and catharsis, as well as the experience of hypertextual literature.

I arrived at the University of Alberta with an interest in turn-of-the-century Victorian literature, technology, and the body. During my MA, I took a course on Book History and this thesis resulted. I had been fascinated with books my whole life and the course provided me with a critical discourse with which to talk about it. However, in studying the book, I developed an interest in the reader. This was not surprising considering that I had always been more interested in people than in texts. As I began watching readers and as I began to read regularly again, I became dramatically aware of how physical the act is—evidenced to me by sharp shooting pains in my neck and dry eyes. My own experience of reading has changed dramatically. I read a book on a plane for the first time in my life last month. I have learned that shifting positions periodically helps relieve the neck and back pain. I know now that despite the romantic views I have

of it, I cannot read outside—the bugs and the wind are too much for me. I also cannot read anything of a disturbing nature before bed because the text haunts my dreams. I look forward to the day when I can afford a comfortable leather armchair of the non-Ikea variety, in which I can read books of the non-Routledge variety. No longer the voyeur observing the reader all unobserved, I am myself becoming slowly "deaf and blind to the world" even as the audio book allows me to displace Borges' squinting "the better to hear." By examining the body's place in reading and the physicality of the act, we can gain a more thorough understanding of what reading is, how it is changing, and what we might want it to become.



[Fig. 5-1]

The End

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