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MULTIMODAL IMMERSION IN WORLDS AND FICTIONALITY
Reading Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts*

ABSTRACT

In this master's thesis, I explore the concept and experience of literary immersion as it appears in Steven Hall's multimodal novel *The Raw Shark Texts*. Immersion as a literary phenomenon commonly refers to the vivid experience of fictional stories and their worlds that is achieved through reading. It is primarily associated with traditionally mimetic narratives that seem to effortlessly draw readers in. However, recent studies among cognitive narratology focusing on reading as enactive and embodied activity suggest that how we engage with fiction is a remarkably complex experience and immersion may not be as restricted to conventionally accessible narratives as previously assumed.

The Raw Shark Texts theorizes immersion as its central theme and employs visual storytelling elements from photographs to typography and transmedia. It represents the 21st century wave of experimental novels exploring the potential of print and further extending onto digital platforms. Experimental literature involves unconventional forms that often require effort and adjustment in reading strategies before readers gain access to their worlds, which is why they are rarely regarded as immersive. By contemplating how immersion is presented as a theme and intertwined with the material design, I examine how Hall's novel plays with multiple ways of promoting immersion while also making its fictionality apparent.

I begin by introducing the novel's main characteristics and the concept of multimodality, focusing on the narrative's structural fragmentation and intertextuality. In the main theory section, I consult contesting approaches to immersion as either movement between worlds or enactive engagement with fictionality. My analysis delves into both the novel's inner world structure and multimodal design to explain how they connect to promote immersion. I propose that the reading experience is better explained through a combination of multimodal and enactive studies while the novel thematically portrays a conventional model of immersion. I then conclude that the use of multimodal metaphors, intertwining metafiction with thematical elements, and unsettling the distance between fiction and reality are the most prominent ways *The Raw Shark Texts* at times evokes simultaneous immersion and awareness.

Keywords: *The Raw Shark Texts*, Steven Hall, immersion, multimodality, experimental literature, fictional worlds, fictionality

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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Käsittelen tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa kirjallisuudellisen immersion käsitettä ja kokemusta Steven Hallin multimodaalisessa romaanissa *The Raw Shark Texts.* Kirjallisuudellisena ilmiönä immersiolla tyypillisesti viitataan uppoutumiseen, eli lukemisen kautta saavutettuun elävältä tuntuvaan kokemukseen fiktiivisistä tarinoista ja niiden maailmoista. Pääsääntöisesti ilmiö mielletään perinteisen mimeettisen kerronnan yhteyteen, joka vaivattomasti vangitsee lukijansa. Lähestyen lukemista enaktiivisena ja kehollisena toimintana, hiljattaiset tutkimukset kognitiivisen narratologian keskuudessa ovat kuitenkin ilmaisseet, että fiktion lukeminen on erityisen monimuotoinen kokemus eikä immersio välttämättä ole yhtä rajoittunut tavanomaisen helposti avautuvien kerrontojen yhteyteen kuin on oletettu.

The Raw Shark Texts teoretisoi immersiota keskeisenä teemanaan ja hyödyntää visuaalista tarinankerrontaa valokuvista typografiaan ja transmediaan. Romaani edustaa 2000-luvun kokeellisen kirjallisuuden aaltoa, jossa teokset tutkailevat painetun tekstin potentiaaleja ja levittäytyvät digitaalisille alustoille. Kokeellinen kirjallisuus sisältää epätavanomaisia kerrontamuotoja, jotka usein vaativat ponnistelua ja lukustrategioiden mukauttamista ennen kuin niiden maailmat aukeavat lukijalle, minkä vuoksi niitä harvoin mielletään immersiota tukeviksi. Tutkielmani pohtii, miten Hallin romaanissa immersio välittyy teemana ja kietoutuu materiaaliseen muotoiluun sekä eri tapoja, joilla teos leikittelee edistääkseen uppoutumista samalla, kun teoksen fiktionaalisuus tulee näkyviin.

Aloitan esittelemällä ensin romaanin pääpiirteet ja multimodaalisuuden käsitteen keskittyen kerronnan rakenteelliseen pirstoutuneisuuteen ja intertekstuaalisuuteen. Pääteoriaosiossani käsittelen vastustavia näkökulmia immersiosta maailmojen välisenä liikkeenä tai vaihtoehtoisesti enaktiivisena uppoamisena fiktionaalisuuteen. Analyysini tarkastelee sekä romaanin sisäistä maailmarakennetta että sen multimodaalista muotoilua tavoitteenani selittää, miten ne yhdistyvät edistämään immersion kokemusta. Ehdotan, että lukijan kokemus selittyy paremmin soveltamalla yhdistelmää multimodaalisen ja enaktiivisen tutkimuksen käsitteistä, kun taas romaani itse kuvaa tavanomaisempaa immersion toimintamallia. Päätelmieni mukaan multimodaalisten metaforien hyödyntäminen, metafiktion ja temaattisten elementtien yhteen sitominen sekä fiktion ja todellisuuden välisen etäisyyden horjuttaminen ovat merkittävimpiä tapoja, joilla *The Raw Shark Texts* ajoittain tukee kokemusta samanaikaisesta immersiosta ja tietoisuuden tilasta.

Avainsanat: *The Raw Shark Texts,* Steven Hall, immersio, multimodaalisuus, kokeellinen kirjallisuus, fiktiiviset maailmat, fiktionaalisuus

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck -ohjelmalla.

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1 Introduction

Throughout the history of literary studies, immersion has rarely been perceived as a worthwhile subject of intensive research but has recently begun to inspire more attention. The phenomenon is still primarily associated with storytelling that offers familiar and effortless reading experiences, but even unconventional narratives may present us with particularly captivating encounters. Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* represents a surge of transmedia narratives, which Jessica Pressman identifies as a response to the rapid progress of information technology and movement toward digital platforms. This growing trend of multimodality in 21st century novels seems to be a conscious innovation rising from the changes in the cultural environment (Gibbons 129). In contrast to traditional narratives, Hall's novel plays with the potential presented by the page by blending visual elements into the narration and using language as a tool of both reference and representation. Other examples of this wave of formal experimentalism can be found in Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), Graham Rawle's *Woman's World* (2005), and Jonathan Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2011).

Previously, critics have discussed *The Raw Shark Texts* mainly concerning its aesthetic and transmedia form (Pressman, Panko, Lea, Hayles) and posthumanist themes (Wurth). The novel evokes numerous other texts and images, crossing genres from gothic thriller to science fiction to metaphysical fantasy, and communicates an anxiety concerning the declining presence of print. It places great importance on physical forms of writing and traditional text, such as books and letters, over electronic alternatives, declaring the latter dangerous and unpredictable. Through multimodal storytelling, the novel then clearly aims to highlight the range and uniqueness of print novels.

While what Pressman calls "bookishness" has been the primary interest in previous studies, the novel also portrays immersion as an overarching theme, which has not yet been properly addressed. It is one of the novel's core themes and Hayles notes that the story specifically emphasizes the dangers of immersion. I concur and suggest that this is also significantly connected to its multimodal design. The novel elevates fiction's power to conjure worlds, and by associating

ontological structures to intertextuality, entangles its language and visual design with themes of water and immersion in the story. Therefore, in this thesis, I examine how literary immersion comes across as both theme and reading experience in *The Raw Shark Texts*.

Since the turn of the century, the concept of immersion has begun to generate new interest among New Media theorists and literary studies (Ryan 2015: 6). This renewed fascination with literary immersion is primarily emerging due to new developments in fields of cognitive sciences, particularly the increased interest in enactive and embodied experiences, as well as shifting influences in literary criticism concerning the study of virtual reality, interactivity, and transmedia storytelling (7). Werner Wolf proposes that while this phenomenon he refers to as aesthetic illusion is familiar to us all, it clearly calls for more research particularly in the context of transmedia literature (4). Also, growing interest in anti-mimetic and strange narratives among unnatural narratology has provided new perspectives on how to approach experimental novels that present us with worlds we may find difficult to reconcile or immerse in (Alber et al. 2013: 1).

Immersion itself is a curious subject in relation to postmodern and experimental novels, as they are more known for meta commentary and aesthetic appreciation. Concerning *The Raw Shark Texts*, I suggest that many of its visual and metafictional elements, which conventionally could be understood as obstructing immersive reading, are in fact utilized to promote immersion through their entanglement with theme and multimodal design. It is also worth contemplating whether the established effect is comparable to traditionally mimetic immersion or whether it is something else altogether. Studies on similar multimodal and experimental novels have noted how such narratives generally call for new types of reading strategies and make different demands on readers than traditional novels.

Arguably some of the most notable work on theories of literary immersion and interactivity comes from Marie-Laure Ryan, who regards them as opposing phenomena that engage the reader differently. For this thesis, Ryan's model of fictional worlds provides a foundation for conventional immersion and useful terminology for discussing the inner world and textual system *The Raw Shark*

Texts creates. However, unsettling the boundaries between fictional worlds and properties of reality, contemporary experimental literature has returned scholars to questions contemplating the nature of mimesis: the illusionary imitation produced by fiction. Thomas Pavel proposes that while mimesis is "essential for understanding what fiction is", it is utterly inadequate for providing an understanding of what it is that fiction *does*, which he ultimately views as a more important question concerning readerly engagement (521-2).

Rhetorical views on fictionality suggest that this question concerning the nature of fiction is not entirely separate from the question concerning its function, rather, they are ultimately the same. Jean-Marie Schaeffer's notion of "*seeing* the represented object while *knowing* that one sees a mimeme" implies that it is fictionality we immerse in while reading as opposed to imaginary worlds (165). This suggests that forms of aesthetic and enactive engagement may also serve as sources for immersion, as further debated by Merja Polvinen, Miranda Anderson, and Stefan Iversen.

Discussing immersion, scholars then seem to assume different positions on the purpose and nature of mimesis altogether. Some assert that fiction is necessarily mimetic, others recognize the "partial role" of imitation in relation to fiction, while some argue for the total rejection of this imitative aspect of fiction (Pavel 521). In this thesis, I consider both conventional view of immersion as fundamentally mimetic and a rhetorical enactive approach, which considers our engagement with fiction to be fundamentally defined by our understanding of its artificiality. I ultimately propose that a middle ground between purely mimetic and purely rhetorical views appears most relevant for *The Raw Shark Texts*.

I begin by offering an overview of the novel's main characteristics and an introduction to multimodality based on Alison Gibbons' study. I then present theoretical approaches to discussing literary immersion from two different foundations: theories conceptualizing immersion as movement between worlds and ones understanding it as enactive engagement with fictionality. These chapters inform the rest of my thesis, as I then return to *The Raw Shark Texts* to analyse immersion as both theme and reading response. My analysis is divided into four parts and discusses

1) the novel's fictional world structure, 2) its multimodal designs, 3) how immersion operates in the story, and 4) how it operates in the reading experience. I suggest that analysing the novel with these contesting approaches provides means for explaining the topic's overarching and seemingly paradoxical effect in the novel.

My analysis combines aspects of both content and form since they co-operate in shaping the reading experience, which is a defining feature of multimodal novels, according to Gibbons (1-3). Foregrounding ontological themes and echoing them in the textual form is also a common occurrence in postmodern literature (McHale 38-9). I suggest that it is primarily these ontological questions concerning the nature of fiction and reality, and how they manifest multimodally on several layers from story to material design that promote immersion and awareness simultaneously. Finally, I conclude my thesis with a chapter outlining my findings and final thoughts.

2 Approaching the Novel

In order to examine immersion and narrative features, it is beneficial to first establish some main characteristics of *The Raw Shark Texts*, since these aspects also shape the reading experience. In this chapter, I therefore provide a structural overview of the novel. Since my analysis focuses heavily on the novel's multimodality, I also introduce the concept here. This chapter then forms a basis for the central features I will later analyse more closely in relation to the topic of immersion.

2.1 Main Characteristics

At its core, *The Raw Shark Texts* stays true to the famous Rorschach test its title playfully alludes to. Like the inkblot test, the narrative is ambiguous and intentionally incomplete, open for multiple ways of reading. Blending genres, it portrays a story of traumatic grief, presented in the form of metaphysical fantasy thriller that mainly circles around topics of reality, fiction, and human cognition. The protagonist Eric Sanderson wakes up with no memory of his life and finds out he has been suffering from recurring episodes of expanding memory loss after his girlfriend died in a scuba-diving accident three years prior. However, Eric begins to receive letters from a previous version of himself, warning him of a conceptual shark that hunts him through the currents of language and interaction. The creature feeds on the sense of self and is presumably the true cause of his memory loss. After an encounter, Eric begins a quest to rid himself of the shark and by unveiling secrets of language and reality, discovers a strange flow of fictions and parallel worlds.

The novel plays with theoretical notions from semiotics to cognitive sciences, entertaining a question at the heart of many cognitive narrative studies: what is reading? Additionally, it revolves around the idea of technogenesis and philosophical notions concerning the nature of reality and human consciousness. The story discards consensus reality and instead constructs a strange narrative N. Katherine Hayles considers a representation of the "slipstream" genre, with its primary purpose being tied to the feeling of strangeness it induces (2011). While also briefly commenting on the novel's immersive qualities, Hayles focuses on aspects of transmedia and database in her

analysis (2012). In what follows, I outline the main characteristics as they serve my own focus in relation to the theme and function of immersion in the novel.

2.1.1 Fragmentation and Transmedia

The strangeness induced by the narrative is not uncommon in postmodern fiction. *The Raw Shark Texts* presents numerous characteristics of postmodern literature, which have also been discussed since it was originally published in 2007 (Lea, Pressman, Wurth). In addition to multimodality, the most prominent formal features of the novel are its fragmented structure and nonlinear storytelling. In postmodern texts, the mechanics of the world construction are often made deliberately visible. Fredric Jameson considers postmodernism in general to be about abandoning tradition in the name of new aesthetic forms (1991). The novel uses various strategies to foreground its form, which is also a prominent characteristic in postmodern narratives according to Brian McHale (148). The novel consists of multiple nested narratives embedded in the main narrative frame. Some of these nested narratives are in the form of letters from "The First Eric Sanderson", others include decoded recordings of lost memories, stories narrated by other characters, and several other texts. The main narrative framing these texts involves the second Eric's journey as he attempts to piece together fragments of his lost life and what happened to the first Eric in order to somehow free himself of the relentless thought shark.

To complicate the temporal structure, there are essentially two main stories unfolding simultaneously in the narrative: the story of the first Eric Sanderson and the story of the second Eric. The main narrative follows the second Eric's journey, his "second life" without memories, which then revolves primarily around uncovering what happened to the first Eric. This ultimately forms a patchwork-within-patchwork structure, as the diegesis level represents the collection of texts constructed by the second Eric, but below that level there is also another patchwork of texts previously composed by the first Eric. Finally, under this secondary patchwork there are the original

lived events, which the memory fragments are attempting to preserve. This creates a third level, which is only ever present in the form of recitations and partly conveyed through dreams.

While the main narrative moves forward in an order that reads primarily as chronological, the fragments and the second underlying story disrupt the inner temporal structure of the narrative. Eventually even the main narration loops back, creating new narrative frames under the surrounding diegesis. What this means is that Eric as the narrator suddenly indicates to the reader that what they are reading is actually a written record rather than the active narration of the story, which they are only now entering. This happens twice, and the second time also loops back to the beginning as Eric begins writing his own story up to that point, starting with the exact words the novel itself opens with.

Wayne C. Booth defines the term narrator as the "I" voice of the work and as a concept that always exists within the narrative but should not be confused with a text's implied author (73). In the case of *The Raw Shark Texts*, there is no confusion between the implied author and the narrator, for the main narrating character seems to be the protagonist, second Eric Sanderson. His narration represents both an active inner voice and written accounts of the events depending on the part of the novel. These two sides of the narrator's voice are not always clearly separated but rather intentionally ambiguous, which asks the reader to readjust their perspective as the narrative frame suddenly shifts. Additionally, the narrator changes entirely as the reader encounters the nested narratives, for they are narrated by other characters. The narrator voice in some of these short stories is in third person and they are embedded within the main frame of Eric's first-person narration. The first Eric's letters and a text I refer to as the lake document, are also portrayed through first-person narration and employ direct address. This creates an effect that breaches the narrative frame by seemingly addressing the protagonist and the reader simultaneously.

In addition to this inner fragmentation, the narrative also exists partially outside the published novel. These external texts represent lost fragments of the story and are referred to as un-chapters, or negatives, by the author. They each correspond to chapters in the print novel. The

negatives are transmedia extensions found on the Internet, but the reader is never given explicit information of their existence depending on the edition they are reading. Some editions of the published book in different languages contain lost fragments or hints to them, while some do not, which means there is no single correct form of the original novel. For example, while the US and UK editions do not contain additional hints to material outside the print, the Canadian edition includes a cover page of *The Aquarium Fragment*, revealing that this text exists in the outside world as well as within the inner world of the story.

For every chapter in the novel, then, there exists a negative, even though only a few of them have ever been discovered. An internet forum hosted on the author's official website includes an archive called "The Red Cabinet", where all recovered fragments and negatives have been collected through the collaborated effort of readers. Also, negatives solely found in foreign publications, such as the Brazilian and Israeli editions, have been translated into English by collaborators of the community. The forum hosts discussion and the author's commentary along with the negatives. For several years after the novel was first published the archive was active, but at the time of writing most of its content is primarily only available for access through a website archive. However, some vital texts can no longer be found on the platform. One of those is negative 1, *The Aquarium Fragment*, which also acts as the prologue to the print novel. Thus, parts of the novel that once were found have been lost again to some extent, much like the scattered memories and texts they represent in the novel.

The external fragments transform the reader's interaction with the novel from a solitary act into a collaborative effort. The novel is an example of partly interactive fiction and a hybrid of traditional print and digital text. Previous studies have suggested that the fragmented network structure of the narrative and its interactive aspects function more similarly in the ways of a hypertext narrative rather than a traditional print novel (Wurth 134). Hypertext as a term originally referred to "non-sequential writing" but is now mainly considered almost exclusively in reference to texts in digital environments (Bell 1). Hypertext fiction is a more recent concept, referring to

interactive digital literature, which is accessed through the Internet and is inherently a self-reflective form of fiction (2, 7). These texts may include images, videos, or sounds, but most notably they create a textual network system of their own. What this means is that these texts essentially imitate the structure of the world wide web, by creating links branching beyond the text itself. This network structure is a standard form of hypertext fiction (Ryan 2015: 167).

While *The Raw Shark Texts* constructs a textual system of its own, the print novel still supports a reading process, which is more traditional compared to some purely hypertext fictions. However, since the published novel exists in the form of various incomplete editions and includes both parts of the narrative outside the print as well as abundant references to other existing works the reader is encouraged to follow, the comparison to hypertext fiction is certainly not unfounded. Wurth also expresses how the novel's general incompleteness boosts its "urban myth-like status", comparing it to "a rumour spreading around" (134). I concur with Wurth and argue that this may also promote a type of immersion by blurring these ontological boundaries, resulting in a reading effect more associated with contemporary experimental print novels than postmodern literature.

2.1.2 Experimental and Intertextual

The term experimental is commonly used to describe innovative literature that places itself under reconfiguration by exploring the "visual dimension of language", cross-media platforms, the creative process and "ontological arenas" of fiction (Bray et al. 6-13). According to Joe Bray, experimental novels of the twenty-first century are still fascinated by the visual potential of the page surface, which Jessica Pressman also connects to a particular anxiety concerning the status of print in the era of digital media (465-6). Experimental literature most often explores both the limits of concrete poetry and new dimensions across media, producing self-reflective transmedia narratives that foreground interactivity and playfulness of form (Bray et al. 9-11). This type of fiction tends to be process-oriented, and the spectacle rises generally from the performance itself (13). In her article *New Perspectives on Reading*, Heta Pyrhönen defines experimental texts as ones that upset familiar

patterns, deliberately complicating the reading process and access into the text (4). A common result of this is a degree of defamiliarization, a concept I will address later in 4.2 concerning its relation to immersion.

By these definitions, *The Raw Shark Texts* is an example of contemporary experimental literature with its playful use of typography, visual design, transmedia extensions, and self-reflective exploration of the imagination process. Another feature of cross-media experiment is the abundant use of borrowed materials, which the novel weaves into an intertextual collage of allusions, metareference, and pastiche. In postmodern fashion, it alludes to numerous sources from theories and myths to literature and film, discarding hierarchies of high culture. The novel contains explicit quotes from some fictional texts, more subtle allusions to others, and the ending presents a blatant recreation of the final scene from the film *Jaws*. So, while the negatives expand the reading experience from solitary act into a form of interactive and collaborative effort, intertextuality is one of the overarching core elements foregrounding the novel's interconnectedness.

The print novel is divided into four parts, each preceded by a quote from different actual authors whose work the novel strongly alludes to. For example, a quote on the semantic relationship between word and idea from Italo Calvino leads the reader into the fourth and final part. This is the novel's way of making some of its intertextual connections intentionally visible, as if citing sources for the intellectual and imaginary recycling of them. In the first memory fragment, Eric and his girlfriend Clio even discuss the specific scene from *Jaws* the novel later recreates, clarifying that the resemblance is not by accident. The novel conjures a vast number of intertextual connections. Some notably borrowed texts concerning the construction of both world and story are Jorge Luis Borges' fictions, Haruki Murakami's works like *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1999) and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1991), as well as Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975). However, the novel also alludes to an enormous number of other sources from the Bible to Greek mythology, and from films like Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) to theories of language, personal identity, and the multiverse, among many others.

While the deliberate foregrounding and use of found materials is nothing new in literature, the era of digital fiction and new media platforms have undeniably inspired a fresh surge of interest for this art of appropriation, bringing the concept of originality under a crisis in the twenty-first century (Epstein 311). "Where does one draw the line between originality and plagiarism in an era that takes the recycling and recombination of existing materials to be key expressive techniques?" (311) Concerning originality and ownership, Raymond Federman reminds us that all art is essentially a form of stealing, be it intentional or unintentional (566). To successfully separate where one's thoughts or language truly originated and where they began to merge with others' proves an endless struggle. This convoluted ambiguity of origin inspires some authors, like Hall, to abandon the aspiration for originality altogether as they choose to play into this intertextual recycling of literature through means of pastiche, allusion, quotation, metareference, or fragmented collages, which can all be found in *The Raw Shark Texts*.

The intentional recycling of materials is what Federman refers to as a form of "playgiarism" (565). Furthermore, the idea of writing being, in essence, an act of quoting leads him to suggest that the process of imagining could also be regarded as little more than a form of repetition (575). The world of *The Raw Shark Texts* reflects this idea of imagination being a form of intertextual referencing as well, in the sense that whatever we construct from the text during the process of reading is always connected to our pre-existing ideas and images originating from other sources. In other words, were we to imagine a ship in our heads, the image of it is defined by the ships we have previously seen or imagined. In 5.3, I expand on this in relation to immersion and how a similar process of imagining is constructed in the story.

These additional elements, like quotations, surrounding the main textual body of the novel are commonly referred to as paratexts, which, as Gérard Genette tells us, are essentially means of presenting the text to the reader (1). Acting as "thresholds" between the outside world and the textual content, paratexts guide readers into the text by enabling and defining this transition (1-2). In addition to quotations, these include the title, forewords, acknowledgements, notes, and physical

attachments, such as the cover. Genette distinguishes between different paratextual elements based on their location: whether they exist inside or outside the main frame of the textual body (4-5). The previously mentioned features all belong within the published volume and are thus referred to as peritexts. Alternatively, any elements existing outside the main textual body and its peritexts are called epitexts (4-5). In the case of *The Raw Shark Texts*, these involve the negatives scattered on the Internet, the discussion and archived material on the online forum, a YouTube video of Tilda Swinton performing a fragment from the novel, and other external content. The YouTube video was part of the novel's marketing campaign, and closer to its publishing there was also an interactive memory game on the forum that the user needed to solve in order to gain access to *The Aquarium Fragment* (Panko 267, Wurth 134).

However, since the negatives are actually part of the fictional narrative, merely located outside the physical volume, they are not truly paratexts in any regular sense. In the fictional world, the negatives are pieces of the story that have been lost and are therefore also omitted from the published volume in order to mirror their absence in the fictional world. The purpose of this separation is, then, to deliberately upset the threshold between the inner fictional world and the outside world. It is to this similar purpose that the novel employs so many quotations and intertextual references in its peritexts.

These different textual elements essentially serve the purpose of creating tension between the word and the world by emphasizing the language level of the narrative, which causes an effect McHale refers to as an "ontological flicker" (196). As readers we may regard the linguistic medium or aesthetic features as separate from the imaginary world it helps us to construct. It seems as if the word withdraws into the background as the world, which we might assume to be "free-standing, independent of the text's language", comes into view (156). In reality, however, this is "the reverse of the true state of affairs" (156). I argue that one way *The Raw Shark Texts* captivates its reader has to do with deliberately foregrounding and challenging this separation between word and world.

As the physical design and language on the pages rearrange themselves in ways that directly represents the action in the fictional world, this internal world then falls somewhat at the mercy of the external medium. McHale considers the consequence of these types of textual features to be "ontological instability", in which the textual world "flickers between presence and absence" but ultimately sees no notable purpose for the effect other than cyclical collapsing and reconstructing of the view, as well as the foregrounding of "empty formalism" (158-9). However, compared to traditional postmodern print narratives, multimodal fiction operates in a distinct manner concerning its formal and aesthetic features. I argue the effect of foregrounding the form is far from "empty" in the case of *The Raw Shark Texts*. In the next part, I introduce multimodality as one of the novel's most defining characteristics concerning its reading experience.

2.2 Multimodality

The Raw Shark Texts is what Alison Gibbons calls a multimodal print novel. This term refers to how it utilizes multiple modes of storytelling, such as graphics, typography, coding systems, and transmedia (1-2). Gibbons argues for the unique role these aesthetics play in multimodal fiction based on how they participate in communicating the narrative to the reader and thus should not be disregarded as mere additions (86). The difference between regular illustrations and multimodal visuals is that while the former can be excluded from the work without affecting the narrative, the latter cannot. Similar to what Gibbons observes about the labyrinth structures in Danielewski's *House of Leaves* and the use of images and codes in Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,* the visual design of *The Raw Shark Texts* participates in creating the story as well as in conveying it to the reader.

These features, however, do not all serve the same exact purpose. Some visual elements only aim to align the reader's perspective more firmly with that of the protagonist's, while some features also demand physical interaction, foregrounding the reader's role. In the print novel, the most physically interactive feature is a flipbook section, which demands the reader to alter the

process of turning the pages into a conscious manipulation with certain speed and direction. The negatives, in turn, call for the reader to shift from physical print onto digital platforms, which also significantly changes the way the text can be interacted with. Some of the digital material also contains flipbook-like segments but despite the platform that would allow graphic animation of such pictures, they are merely gathered as a collage of image files on the forum. The visuals on a screen and the motions of opening and clicking through them is notably different from physically flipping through pages of the print novel, altering the reader's embodied performance of the text.

Multimodal narratives ask the reader to engage with them in more than one way and are considered a form of experimental literature. Gibbons also views them as separate from postmodern literature based on how, while assuming many of the same characteristics, they nonetheless abandon others and are thus approached as a new kind of movement since the turn of the millennium (1-2). While multimodal narratives are not defined by any specific designs or structures, some features they may often involve are unconventional textual layouts, inventive use of typography, playful forms of concrete poetry, metafiction, flipbooks, and blending genres (2). The common ground with postmodern literature then mainly has to do with unsettling the ontological structure and metafictional writing. Multimodal fiction often plays with these ontological boundaries both thematically and structurally, deliberately blurring the lines between narrative levels or worlds. In such cases, Gibbons proposes that "the worlds do not merge but instead the boundaries between these worlds are obscured somewhat in the reader's experience of the text" (211). *The Raw Shark Texts* includes all the aforementioned features Gibbons identifies as qualifiers of multimodal literature, which is why I approach the novel primarily as a multimodal text.

As the interest of this thesis is immersion, Gibbons' use of the term multimodal metaphor is particularly useful for illustrating how the metaphor "language is water" is integrated and constructed on different layers of the novel, from the story to the page. The operation of immersion itself is also paralleled on several layers as dual sides of perception, which I will discuss in 5.3. This structure ties into the reading experience since the novel communicates its story and message

through multiple modes at the same time (31-3). Gibbons argues that analysing specific elements or effects of multimodal narratives should take into account how the text produces meaning through these integrative strategies, supporting my decision to include both thematical and formal features in the analysis. Considering how the novel builds its metaphors on multiple modes is vital for drawing conclusions concerning the reading experience and understanding of the text. These patterns generate specific multimodal meaning, which is why the analysis should be "similarly integrative" (15). *The Raw Shark Texts* uses both evocative narration tricks as well as multimodal designs to parallel the reader's and Eric's experience. Gibbons explains that these multimodal elements can make the reading experience more intense by encouraging "performative engagement from the reader" (210-1). In such cases, their vividness is often produced by the text's overt materiality by making the reader an aware participant in the performance.

Multimodal narratives are "opaque" instead of transparent, present to the reader as means of experiencing the story, drawing attention to their own materiality (114). This foregrounding of the design can complicate the reading process and possibly prevent fully immersing into the imaginary, according to Gibbons (113). Traditional novels aim to draw the reader's attention away from the language level and instead direct it within the text, toward its mimetic notions. In contrast, multimodal literature expects the reader to maintain awareness of both layers, since they both participate in creating and communicating the text (114). Such narratives rarely adhere to the visual cues and appearance of traditional novels, such as familiar reading paths on a page. This means that instead of striving to make the medium seem transparent, they call for "a dynamic reading strategy", which the reader needs to adjust to before the text can fully open up to them (114). In other words, the objective of multimodal texts is to direct the reader into an active role, while also maintaining connection to the fictional world. Potential immersion is then created by using both visual and verbal elements in order to conjure the inner world of the narrative (114). According to Gibbons, what defines multimodal literature is precisely this "perceptual fluctuation between looking *at* the material surface of the page and looking *through* the page to immerse oneself in its

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content" (115). Since Gibbons' study primarily focuses on reading responses, I return to her concepts later in chapter 4.

The reading experience is then susceptible to variation depending on the effort the reader grants it. The ambiguity of *The Raw Shark Texts* allows various interpretations regardless but understanding some of them requires more careful reading of both the print and negatives. For its visual and interactive features to be experienced properly, the novel then calls for an active reader: one who ideally engages with the multimodal aspects of the text. This is a reading strategy experimental literature commonly requires (Gibbons 114, Pyrhönen 4). Therefore, my study of the novel's immersive qualities in relation to its reading experience presumes this type of active reader. With multimodal texts, it seems reasonable to also question whether the immersive effect they produce is identical to the phenomenon conjured by more traditional novels, or whether it is something different altogether. In the next two chapters, I outline ways the phenomenon has been conceptualized conventionally and more recently in order to create an informed foundation for my analysis of *The Raw Shark Texts* and how the novel, as a multimodal narrative, promotes and plays with immersion.

3 Immersion in Worlds

In this chapter, I introduce the first of two different theoretical approaches to literary immersion. The theories assume two separate positions on fiction concerning its mimetic nature, as Thomas Pavel observes (521). I begin by presenting perhaps the more conventional view of fiction as fundamentally mimetic and immersion as a cognitive movement between worlds. To establish this foundation, I consult Mary-Laure Ryan's extensive work on the poetics of immersion and interactivity, in which she outlines a world-oriented understanding of immersion, how it happens, and what type of narrative elements have been thought to enhance or hamper it. For the purposes of this thesis, her theory primarily provides a framework for discussing of the novel's inner world and for explaining how immersion operates as a central theme.

The following sections have been divided according to different aspects of Ryan's theory, from the world model to interactivity and simulation. Ryan conceptualizes immersion and interactivity as closely related opposing forces. *The Raw Shark Texts* involves interactive elements in the form of multimodal and digital features, which is why I also discuss interactivity in relation to immersion here. Lastly, I include Ryan's position on what she calls simulation, which ties into the second approach I present in the following chapter.

3.1 In and Out of Worlds

> At its best, immersion can be an adventurous and invigorating experience comparable to taking a swim in a cool ocean with powerful surf. The environment appears at first hostile, you enter it reluctantly, but once you get wet and entrust your body to the waves, you never want to leave. And when you finally do, you feel refreshed and full of energy. (Ryan 2001: 11)

The Raw Shark Texts depicts immersion as analogous to submersion in water and Marie-Laure Ryan also playfully uses this metaphor to describe the experience of literary immersion. Her theoretical study on the topic has been regarded as some of the most influential work on immersion

within the field of narrative studies during the last couple decades (Bell, Anderson and Iversen). Since the turn of the century, Ryan has identified a demand for further development of theoretical models for the purpose of studying immersion and interactivity in literature. Immersion in particular, since the phenomenon has long been largely dismissed and denounced as trivial or even harmful regarding literary criticism (2015: 9-10). Challenging the view that immersion endorses passivity from the reader or necessarily exposes a naïve reader merely seeking entertainment, Ryan argues instead that since immersion requires intense and complex mental effort, it can hardly be taken as the mark of passive reading (2001: 11).

However, immersion is fundamentally a subjective experience, which renders it resistant to strict theoretical frames and thus challenging to analyse. The term is often associated with almost any type of pleasurable or engaging activity, but Ryan defines literary immersion as a mental state, a vivid sense of being in a world (14). Text is then conceptualized as a world, which the reader accesses through the narrative. Immersion occurs when the reader sees through the language form and agrees to imagine the world it describes (90-1). In other words, immersion makes the reader see the world behind the language and perceive the text as more than words on a page. The artificial language level becomes transparent when the reader is drawn to the content: the places, characters, and events within. This happens through cognitive movement in and out of the world.

But what constitutes a "world"? In her newer work, Ryan outlines its definition as the required presence of four elements: "a connected set of objects and individuals, a habitable environment, a reasonably intelligible totality for external observers, and a field of activity for its members" (2015: 63). Texts may be approached through other analogies, such as game or network, but Ryan considers regarding the semantic domains of texts as worlds to be productive for theorizing immersion in particular (62). This world-oriented approach originates from possible worlds theory, which Ryan adapts from a real-world model into one suited for analysing narratives.

3.1.1 Possible Worlds

Possible worlds theory refers to an ontological plurality of worlds as the structure of the universe. These worlds are hierarchically organized around a designated centre. According to David Lewis, an early developer of the theory, this centre is the world that is understood as the existing objective reality, or the actual world (70). Every conceived possibility forms a world that revolves around this centre. The worlds are defined possible based on their connection to this actual world: the more they differ from the actual world, the farther from the centre they are. The difference between actual and possible can be understood "absolutely, in terms of origin, or relatively, in terms of point of view" (71). Actual world refers to an objective reality existing outside the human mind, while possible worlds are formed by mental activity like imagining, dreaming, or theorizing. In Ryan's words, actual world is "the world from which I speak and in which I am immersed, while the nonactual possible worlds are those at which I look from the outside" (71). Other possible worlds would then, in theory, be experienced as actual by their inhabitants. Using this definition avoids issues concerning relativity by allowing the concept of the actual world to incorporate subjective variations, placing these overlapping representations of reality at the centre, superposed upon a "mind-independent reality" (71).

Worlds can also be deemed impossible if they are unreachable through the "accessibility relation", which connects possible worlds to the actual centre (70). The term refers to a set of rules that concern several criteria, the most common being the principle of noncontradiction concerning the laws of logic, while others include physical laws and linear understanding of temporal direction, the relation of cause and effect. According to Ryan, we initially presume textual worlds to be similar to our own and only modify them based on what the narrative tells us. For example, if a story involves talking animals, we adjust the rules of the world to accommodate this feature but do not make any other changes until further specified by the text. This "principle of minimal departure" maintains that the distance between worlds is determined by the nature and number of cognitive changes we are required to make in order to access them (1991: 51).

While fictional worlds are not the possible worlds of logicians, the analogy is useful for the study of literary environments and phenomena such as immersion, according to Ryan (2015: 69). Alice Bell also considers the theory highly compatible with analysing inner world structures in hypertext fiction and particularly the ontological self-consciousness of fictional worlds in such texts (7). However, applying the model to literary theory in a straightforward manner would be "doubly reductive", for the reason that the same division of actual and possible reappears once again within the text itself (Ryan 2015: 73). Fiction involves worlds and characters within itself, and those characters, most often, are understood to possess powers of thinking and imagination similar to real people. This means that within a fictional world, a character may have a dream, which in itself becomes another possible world circling the fictional variant of actual world. Ryan emphasizes that being able to distinguish this fictional objective reality, the textual actual world, from the worlds created through dreams, thoughts, or beliefs of characters is crucial for reading comprehension (72-3). "Mimetic texts project not a single world but an entire modal system, or universe, centered around its own actual world", meaning that a fictional universe reproduces the ontological structure of our actual universe, with all its complexity (72).

In Ryan's model, actual world then refers to our reality, while textual world signifies the world conjured by a text. Narrative is seen as a window through which the textual world, "something that exists outside language and extends in time and space well beyond the window frame" may be viewed (63). We access textual worlds through narration and thus, the narrator also exists within a level of that world, but not necessarily within the textual actual world, which is the level of characters and story events. Even with a first-person narrator, as is the case in *The Raw Shark Texts*, the narration exists on a separate in-between space between the actual world and the textual actual world, connecting them. Postmodern and experimental fictions often intentionally foreground or unsettle this ontological boundary (McHale, Bray et al.). For example, parts of the novel's main narration exist as objects within the textual world as well as in our actual world.

Additionally, the narrator voice seems to ambiguously, or even paradoxically, be both the protagonist's active thoughts as well as written records at times.

Ryan emphasizes that "for immersion to take place, the text must offer an expanse to be immersed within", meaning that a text's immersive power is directly tied to the successful realization of a textual world (62). A text does not need to be fictional for immersion to take place; it only needs to contain a hypothetical reality the reader is able to mentally construct and engage with (2001: 90-2). However, it is not implied that the reader becomes completely unaware while reading, but in fact "maintains a split loyalty" to both worlds by engaging in a wilful pretence, commonly referred to as suspension of disbelief (2015: 68, 75). The term comes from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, but Ryan primarily refers to Kendall Walton's adapted concept of the "game of make-believe" instead, as it supports her conceptualization of textual worlds and offers a separation between defining immersion and merely separating fiction from nonfiction (78).

Engaging with fiction requires what Ryan calls recentring, which refers to shifting cognitive deictic centre into the textual world. The reader's consciousness is temporarily relocated and reorganized within this world to experience the world from the inside. Fictional worlds may then be experienced as actual through recentring, which Ryan considers a vital condition when it comes to immersive reading (73). In other words, for the duration of reading, the characters become real for us because we participate in a game of make-believe where the textual world temporarily acts as the actual one (1991: 21). This appears to make some sense intuitively but presumes that we perceive fiction as an imitation of reality.

3.1.2 Transportation

Ryan describes fiction as "a mode of travel into textual space", while "narrative is a travel within the confines of this space" (5). Immersion, then, is achieved by deictically shifting from the actual world into a textual one, and this recentring requires a form of mental movement. To explain how this travel between worlds happens, Ryan adopts the metaphor of transportation from Richard

Gerrig (2015: 64-65). According to Gerrig, the reader is "transported" into a world by the text "as a result of performing certain actions" (25). The element of action in this script is especially central to Ryan's conceptualization of immersion as an active state of reading, contrary to the stigma of inherent passivity it has been labelled with (Bolter 155). Hence, Gerrig and Ryan both regard immersive reading as performance, where the reader is not the receiver of any established world within a text, but rather a participant in its creation by engaging with the narrative.

Gerrig explains this shifting between worlds to involve a sense of distance, which causes some aspects of "the world of origin" to become inaccessible (25). With this he refers to how the reader must adjust their thinking to conform to the laws of the modal system within the text. Approaching the text with existing cognitive frames and models of reality, the reader will reorganize or discard them according to the narrative cues. Similarly, the reader may choose to follow these cues fully, partially, or not at all (Ryan 2015: 65). However, a text always contains guidelines on how to access it, which means that immersion largely depends on how well the reader follows these instructions. The reader's performance ultimately creates immersion and defines their own enjoyment (65). While the reader's mind is recentred within the textual world, inferring from the principles of the actual world is then temporarily obscured. Ryan claims that this is because the reader cannot simultaneously be contemplating the text from two different worlds, for such intense mental activity creates a state where other concerns or even immediate surroundings are out of focus and temporarily "disappear from consciousness" (65). Returning to the actual world, the reader's consciousness always comes back somewhat altered by the experience, which means that reading is understood as having an impact on our thinking regardless of its intended purpose or fictionality (65).

An important aspect of this transportation, according to Ryan, is also that rather than being a single feat, it is a state of flickering between the textual and actual worlds (68). The reader's cognition fluctuates between worlds based on both how the narrative enables them to maintain a sense of connection to the world and how they follow the text's lead (65). This in-and-out model of

immersion leads Gerrig to declare difficult materials as inherently less immersive than familiar ones, but Ryan disagrees. While affirming that familiar and stereotypical texts are easier to access and therefore seem more immersive, she asserts that when a state of effortless immersion emerges from a process involving "struggle and discovery" instead, the resulting experience may often be even more satisfying and powerful (68). I argue this to be the case with *The Raw Shark Texts.*

3.2 Interactivity

Although recognizing immersive reading as active engagement, possibly even involving struggle, Ryan separates the phenomenon from interactivity. Hypertext fiction and multimodal narratives are commonly understood as interactive storytelling but, according to Ryan, with the cost of immersion (251). Interactive narratives are inherently non-immersive because immersion is fundamentally mimetic. Ryan views them as producing aesthetic rather than immersive experiences. Applying the text as world metaphor is relevant for discussing a type of immersion, for which the defining feature is the transparency of the medium. However, interactivity requires awareness and contact with the surface level, which is why Ryan suggests that such texts should be approached differently altogether by using the analogy of text as game, complementing the poetics of immersion without undermining them (118).

Interactive fiction sacrifices world creation for game and playfulness of form, which demands the reader's participation but also results in dysfunctionality. Narratives are considered dysfunctional if they obscure efficient communication by violating rules of noncontradiction or linear time, which could describe narrative fiction in general if compared to informational texts (137-8). Ryan considers interactive narratives particularly dysfunctional regarding linear storytelling as they often generate a fragmented textual system, which usually offers the reader opportunities to choose a specific route or order of accessing said fragments, resulting in various possible paths for the text to follow depending on the choices made. Dysfunctionality, then, interferes with effortless sense-making in ways that impede immersive reading, depending on the

degree and nature of it (137). Regarding interactive texts as dysfunctional in respect to their world-creation, Ryan's use of the term seems to touch upon defamiliarization, a concept I address later in 4.2 in connection to how slowing down our sense-making may be reconciled with immersion.

While the narrative of *The Raw Shark Texts* resembles hypertext fiction in the sense that it is comprised of nonlinear fragments, with some of them existing outside the print, the fragments within the book still exist in a certain order and are meant to be read in that given order. Therefore, the reader is not compelled to jump over anything in the story or to independently follow one narrative route with the expense of another as, for example, tree modelled narratives or some network fictions would demand (167-9). N. Katherine Hayles and Nick Montfort also present interactive fiction as a form of experimental literature for how it cultivates multiple reading paths and "plays with the reader's expectations" concerning conventions of the medium (455-61, 465). In print this can involve playing with typography, code poetry, narrative sequences, and "the collision of multiple worlds" (465). *The Raw Shark Texts* can then be perceived as an interactive print novel for how it uses the aforementioned elements but lacks the navigational properties more common in hypertext fictions. The novel's multiple readings rise from its layered meanings and vast intertextual connotations rather than directional choices made by the reader. Thus, readers may recognize different interpretive options during reading or be unaware of them.

To further distinguish some forms of readerly involvement, Ryan divides immersion into spatial, temporal, and emotional variations. The first is understood as "response to setting", the second as "response to story", and the third as "response to characters" (2015: 85-86). Based on this division, she observes that interactive fiction generally fails to establish effective temporal or spatial immersion as both world creation and experience of time are fractured. However, interactive texts may still hold some emotionally engaging effect. In narratives where fragmented structure or linking pathways are used to mirror a stream of consciousness, the reader may experience a form of emotional immersion through an intense representation of a character's inner life (203-4). This

effect is crucial for the immersion *The Raw Shark Texts* evokes, and I connect it to Gibbons' concept of subjective resonance in my analysis.

The fragmented narrative structure and fractured, multiplying, or splitting worlds often found in postmodern or experimental narratives also depict what Ryan considers the shift from the conceptualization of text as world to text as game, as "their scattered remnants could no longer build a coherent imaginary space and time, but they provided the perfect material for play" (118). Play of form, self-reflection, and foregrounding the creative process are often present in interactive storytelling. According to Ryan, these narratives fail to construct a coherent textual world due their fractured structure, or they cannot keep the reader situated within it long enough to enable immersion. "Even when narrative coherence is maintained … immersion remains an elusive experience in interactive texts", because the reader will always automatically assume an outside perspective regarding the textual world if given incentive (2001: 19-20).

Metafiction, in particular, aims to draw the reader's attention to the text as a self-conscious construction of language, and by announcing the fictionality of its hypothetical world maintains the "ontological center" in this reality (1999: 126). Metafiction is an element that is in some ways present in all literature, according to Patricia Waugh, and refers to how texts first construct an illusion and then take it apart (5-6). What this means is that regardless of how immersive or conventional the structure, all novels fail to conceal their artifice and literary conventions at play to some extent. Other novels, however, consciously build metareference and commentary as their dominant features, which is why these texts are the ones we primarily refer to as metafictional. The difference then lies in whether the novel is intentionally dismantling its own illusion in order to draw the reader's attention to this trick and to the material object (4-7). According to Ryan, this then prevents suspension of disbelief and obstructs immersion in the textual world, as "the price of consciousness is an ontological expulsion from the fictional world" (1999: 126). Consequently, any form of metafiction is often considered fundamentally incompatible with immersion, but Ryan concedes that some texts, by not entirely preventing access to the textual world and captivating the

reader through game instead, may elicit engaging aesthetic appreciation. When a narrative keeps drawing the reader's attention out of the textual world to the surface level of the text, while still allowing brief instances of make-believe to occur, it creates a "game of in-and-out" between the text and the reader (126). In this game, the reader's attention also flickers between shallow immersive instances and awareness, inspiring an appreciation for the layered textual form. But now the text has effectively conjured a game rather than a world, which is why aesthetic appreciation, associated with texts that foreground form, cannot be categorized as immersion according to Ryan (126).

Hence, a text may be able to create a degree of oscillating engaging effect despite drawing attention to the medium, meaning that a single text could possibly generate both a shallow form of immersion and distance but never at the same time. Even then Ryan categorizes the effect through the notion of game instead of immersion, as the text invites the reader to play rather than to get "lost in a book" (2015: 66-7). While *The Raw Shark Texts* is clearly playful and could also be regarded as a game in these terms, Ryan's theory does not truly offer a possibility for a narrative to also be immersive because of its interactive aspects rather than in spite of them.

3.3 Simulation

This last part of the chapter briefly includes Ryan's take on mental simulation. Simulation in association to reading fiction has to do with shifting point of view and can be closely associated with the concept of recentring into a world, as well as transportation. However, it often involves more than merely relocating within a world; it is also shifting into the consciousness of characters, and thus more about generating emotional immersion and enactive experience than constructing spatio-temporal worlds (80-84). Regarding the role of simulation for immersion, Ryan states that it appears easier to create mental visuals of movement than static features or details. This explains why we tend to instinctively visualise the gestures and movement of a character, and identify with that subjective experience, but find it harder to visualise details of their appearance (82). Drawing on Anežka Kuzmičová, Ryan acknowledges that our bodies may participate in this engaged mental

activity through a "sense of presence" (95). But while acknowledging some possible merit in this approach to immersive reading as "embodied" and "enactive" experience, it is not mainly supported by her model. Ryan argues that while a sense of movement, as well as auditory and visual data to an extent, may possibly be conjured through mental simulation, other senses, such as taste or smell, can still only be processed semantically through association, which means cognitive simulation cannot offer an overarching theory for readerly engagement (82). This conclusion reflects how the foundation of Ryan's theory presumes that our experience of a textual world is a separate imitation of our experience of the real world, and that immersion is necessarily tied to how vividly we can temporarily experience said world as real.

Therefore, immersive reading may urge our bodies to feel the echo of some intense mentally simulated movements, such as running, jumping, or holding one's breath, which may occur in the context of scenes with highly charged emotion or action. However, according to Ryan, immersion is above all measured through the "sense of being in a world" and recentring the mind within that world in order to experience and make sense of it (2001: 14). The textual world cannot be viewed simultaneously from outside and inside. So, while simulation can be considered "the reader's mode of performance of a narrative script", true merging between interactive and immersive experiences cannot take place within the confined space of literary text (2015: 82-3). In the next chapter, I will introduce cognitive enactive approaches to immersion, which represent a rhetorical viewpoint to fictionality, contesting the idea that literary immersion is necessarily about accessing worlds.

4 Immersion in Fictionality

The second theoretical approach to immersion is a more recent one. It views the phenomenon as a rhetorical effect and emphasizes the cognitive process of reading and imagination over its product. This approach involves several theories that all represent a version of the rhetorical view but disagree on various aspects among themselves. Some view embodied enactment as a core element of immersive reading experience (Caracciolo), while others consider it as an expulsion from fictionality (Schaeffer). I focus on the former and introduce two theories, which concentrate on analysing immersion in the context of metafiction and unnatural narratives in particular. To build my case concerning *The Raw Shark Texts*, I use what Merja Polvinen notes about the thematization of self-awareness and perception, as well as what Miranda Anderson and Stefan Iversen suggest about the possible co-existence of immersion and defamiliarization.

4.1 Enactive Engagement

Second generation cognitive narratology has become increasingly more interested in the ways reading connects the mind, body, and story in ways that essentially challenge the ontological models of entering fictional worlds. Approaching fiction primarily as rhetoric creates an alternative view on literary immersion, which claims the phenomenon to be more complex and the reader's autonomy more vital than Ryan's possible worlds model suggests (Polvinen 2016: 19, Anderson and Iversen 569). Instead of transportation between worlds, Merja Polvinen advocates for an enactive approach to explaining how we experience fiction. Enactivism, originating from cognitive sciences and extended into literary studies by researchers like Marco Caracciolo, proposes that a fictional world "does not pre-exist an organism but is brought forth or enacted through the organism's sensemaking activities" (Caracciolo 2012: 373-4). Ryan considers immersive reading as constructive mental effort as well but separates a world from the language code that conjures it. In contrast, enactive approaches suggest that engaging with stories and constructing meaning is

already inherently interactive regardless of narrative characteristics, because reading itself is an enactment of the narrative (373).

The enactive view of immersion challenges Ryan's theory on the basis of the 4E cognition model, which comprehends human thought process as "embodied, emotional, enactive and extended" (Polvinen 2016: 20). Polvinen suggests that world-oriented models, which are solely based on ontological deictic shifting, while seeming to make sense intuitively, are held back by their limited perception of fictionality (2012: 94). If we examine literary immersion through an enactivist view, it broadens our focus from cognitive back-and-forth movement between worlds, to understanding perception as a more multi-layered phenomenon. As a result, immersive reading becomes more than merely "seeing" a world.

4.1.1 Paradoxical Mimesis

Within literature, mimesis refers to the imagined illusion generated by the text: a form of representation or imitation of reality. Immersion, thus, is associated with the mimetic. To understand immersive reading, however, we first need to understand how we process fiction and how this differs from our processing of reality. Using Jean-Marie Schaeffer and Richard Walsh's notions of fictionality, Polvinen states that conceiving literary immersion as not merely engaging in a world, but also as the act of engaging with a narrative, opens the door to understanding this seemingly paradoxical coexistence of awareness and immersion (2012: 105-6).

Examining our engagement with literature is then generally approached in two different ways: as world-oriented or fiction-oriented. The former involves deictic shifting and understands fiction as fundamentally mimetic, while the latter understands fictionality itself as the element that ultimately "makes the construction of any kind of meaning out of the fiction possible" (2016: 23). This rhetorical nature of fictionality is advocated by Jean-Marie Schaeffer, Richard Walsh, and Dorrit Cohn among others. Portraying fiction as an aspect of life in general, not just of literature, Schaeffer presents a significantly different understanding of immersion in comparison to Ryan's

theory. In this fictional immersion, the experience is defined as being immersed in fictionality rather than a world. Walsh also argues that fictionality is not "a boundary between worlds", in contrast to what theories of fictional worlds operating through reference would suggest. Instead, fictionality should be considered "a communicative resource, rather than an ontological category" (36). On these grounds, analysing readerly engagement and our relation to fiction should be examining the act of producing rather than the product. That is to say, in Walsh's view, we should focus on the cognitive process of interpreting a narrative rather than on any naturalization of fictional environments.

Asserting fictionality as central to the experience of fiction, and for the study of metafictional texts especially, Polvinen proposes perceiving mimesis in dual terms instead of as the separate imitation of reality, which Ryan's theory presumes. What is suggested, then, is that understanding mimesis only as an illusion that demands the exclusion of awareness of fictionality fails to realize the complexity of the concept (97-8). When a narrative intertwines its worldliness with self-reflective exploration of imagination in the formal features, it manages to create immersive effect without hiding the narrative's fictionality from view. Jan Alber also takes similar notice concerning the effects of intertwining theme and form in unnatural narratives (2018: 430-1). Polvinen observes an example of this effect in John Banville's metafictional novel *Infinities* (2009), where the narrator lies in bed contemplating memories, theories of parallels worlds, and the nature of reality in a way that essentially combines "immersion and self-aware thematization of the imagination" (2012: 96). This makes the reading experience highly immersive while the work's fictionality remains explicit. On these grounds, she argues in favour of mimesis as a complicated phenomenon: paradoxically "world-reflecting and world-creating" at the same time (96).

Postmodern fiction is particularly known for utilizing self-conscious writing as a textual device for breaking frame, creating irony, or elevating the artifice (Jameson, McHale). Especially among more recent experimental fictions arising from the ripples of postmodern literature, self-reflection often serves new purposes and creates distinctive effects compared to what it has

previously been used for (Polvinen 2016: 20). While Gibbons focuses specifically on the effects multimodal designs have on the reading experience, Polvinen observes similar effects concerning the use of self-reflection in other forms of fiction as well. She presents the argument that attempting to explain immersive reading by relying on world-oriented models proves ineffective particularly in cases of self-reflective fiction. She claims that certain texts can compel readers to experience both states of immersion and awareness simultaneously, and that creating this effect can, in fact, be the primary intent of such texts (19-20). In my analysis, I combine this notion with multimodality and how such designs participate in the effect in order to support to my case concerning how *The Raw Shark Texts* portrays and promotes immersion through both self-reflective and multimodal means.

In order to comprehend this claim of simultaneous awareness and immersion, we must begin by shifting our approach to fictionality. According to Schaeffer and Polvinen, the first mistake world-oriented models generally make is that they approach fictional imaginations as alternative imitations of reality (23). The idea that fiction is something separate from reality but inherently similar is the basis for Ryan's concept of minimal departure: how we begin with the assumption that textual worlds are similar to ours and only make adjustments based on revealed dissimilarities. But drawing on Schaeffer, Polvinen argues fictionality is already part of our perception of reality (2012: 94-5). Therefore, what the focus should be on is not how fiction is similar or dissimilar to reality, but rather, how our perception of fiction operates within and as a form of real-world perception. In a sense, fictionality is not a barrier we attempt to overcome in order to see a world, but instead something we rely on to construct the reading experience. Hence, the reader's ability to experience a sense of worldliness from the text is reliant on the rhetoric and the semantic skills required in the reading process (2016: 30).

From this point of view, our engagement with fictional environments is not measured by models which presume to construct them as imitations of reality, because we will always knowingly construct them as fictions instead. Ryan acknowledges that readers maintain some sense of reality while reading but her theory explains this as the result of swift flickering between two views.

Polvinen disagrees and emphasizes the reader's own active awareness of the pretence, which is understood as a significant factor in the experience of immersion as well. As a result, even self-conscious use of the semantic skills needed to conjure and perceive the imaginary "does not mean that the 'worldness' of fictions disappears from view" (30).

4.1.2 Duality of Perception

Approaching immersion from a rhetorical perspective indicates that the artifice is always present, even while we entertain its imaginary notions. But how can we perceive both simultaneously? Here Polvinen turns to Alva Noë's cognitive notion of perception, which implies that even when focus is shifted from one aspect to another, such as from the language level to its content, the combined totality is not lost. A distinction is thus made between perception and attention, in which the latter is a functional task within the former (30). Perception itself requires sensemaking and understanding, according to Noë (1). Ryan's suggestion that difficult texts are able to provide more powerful and satisfying states of immersion once they open up to the reader also appears to support this understanding.

Noë exemplifies this duality with the visual of a plate propped on a wall: when viewed from the front, the plate appears circular, but by shifting viewpoint to the side, the same plate now appears elliptical in shape. No matter what angle the plate is viewed from, our perception is able to combine and maintain the different aspects of it, so that even while the elliptical side is in view, we do not forget that the plate is simultaneously round (78-9). Polvinen considers this cognitive function to apply to how we engage with texts as well. The reading experience is constructed with two intertwined elements operating simultaneously within our perception: how we see things (the illusion) and how we know them to be (fictional) (2016: 30). Thus, self-reflective fiction may play with the reader's "sense of access" concerning the direction of attention but does not demand the kind of exclusive flickering between worlds Ryan suggests (30-1).

If we understand fictionality as part of our real-world cognition and perception as a layered function, it follows that we are able to maintain view of the language while also accommodating deep stages of focused imagination. However, it should be noted that in the context of fiction, the reader's perception is also guided and shaped by the narrative, which makes our interaction with fiction distinct from our perception of reality. Polvinen declares that since we regularly entertain contradictions and counterfactual notions in our every-day lives, encountering them in fiction is not as unsettling to our sensemaking as Ryan's theory indicates. We are able to conceive contradictory wishes concerning a story, such as wishing for a character's survival while also wanting the narrative to be tragic, as Shaun Nichols notes (471). Hence, we can actively influence and evaluate our interpretation of narrative cues during the process of reading. The fact that we are able to do so implies that our reading experience is constantly defined by our own mediated participation and awareness of the text's fictionality (Polvinen 2012: 105-6).

This simultaneous affective and evaluative process is particularly elevated in multimodal texts, according to Gibbons. The reader's autonomy and participation in performing the narrative are vital in determining the intensity of the literary experience (84). Multimodal texts call for doubly deictic subjectivity, which refers to how readers are aware of their interaction with both the physical and psychological aspects of the text while they experience it simultaneously as themselves and as a fictional character (209-10). That is to say, when the reader's and the focal character's experiences align, subjective resonance occurs. This resonance does not require for the reader to necessarily identify with the character, only mirror their subjective experience, which makes it similar but slightly different from the emotional immersion Ryan refers to (210).

Multimodal print narratives promote this effect through the use of graphic designs and visual elements that are used to align the reader with the character's view or otherwise parallel the reader's performance with the action in the textual world. For example, the textual staircase in Danielewski's *House of Leaves* urges the reader to enact with their eyes the physical path of the stairs as the character climbs them in the story. Doubly deictic subjectivity can occur in narration

that is not multimodal as well, or in any form of literature, as a result of engaging textual strategies that encourage the reader's experience and emotions to strongly align with a character's (156, 210). *The Raw Shark Texts* uses both evocative narration tricks as well as multimodal designs to parallel the reader's and Eric's view. These elements make the reading experience more intense by demanding "performative engagement" on the reader's part (211). Their vividness is then connected to the text's overt materiality. While both Ryan and Gibbons build on world-oriented theories, Gibbons stresses that examining any "emotional responses" to multimodal novels "must take the embodied nature of cognition into account" (224).

Multimodal narratives allow readers to be situated in the actual and textual world at the same time, according to Gibbons, while Polvinen argues that foregrounding the spectacle does not necessarily make the reading experience less immersive either. In order to understand this seemingly contradictory cooperation Polvinen talks about, we need to recognize that our perception is able to hold more than one position while reading. This perspective is vital when examining works of metafiction. Following Booth and Rabinowitz's logic on how the narrative design guides the reading, and by extend imagining, Polvinen concludes that texts, which "work their self-awareness into the fabric of their story and themes" evoke simultaneous spectacle and engagement (2012: 98). Assuming that utilizing metafiction to further connect the narrative design to its textual world allows this paradoxical cooperation, we can then build a case for such an effect in *The Raw Shark Texts*.

Various other novels have also experimented with a similar type of metafictional writing during the last two decades. In addition to Banville's *Infinities*, China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) and multimodal novels like Danielewski's *House of Leaves* and Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* are prime examples of similar literary experimentation. Rather than establishing a clear back-and-forth movement between imagination and aesthetic appreciation, these novels instead seem to generate a feedback loop between positions of immersive and self-aware

reading, in which the two aspects are intertwined in order to enhance each other. It is my argument that this is also the case with *The Raw Shark Texts*.

The multimodal features of *The Raw Shark Texts* seem to emphasize how the textual world's strange lifeforms and conceptual stream, are connected, present, and visualised through the language on the pages, which suggests that the worlds outside and inside the novel are not clearly separate from each other. While, according to Ryan, the difference between immersion and interactivity is based on whether the text conjures a world or a game, Polvinen counters this by suggesting that it can do both in a way that involves the reader "being played" by the narrative (2012: 108). She explains this metaphor as readers being "the audience of a magician, being tricked even as they are aware of the trick" and simultaneously "instruments, producing music specifically by allowing themselves to be played by the text" (108). The act of playing in this metaphor would indicate full interaction. This idea draws on Rabinowitz's audience roles, which recognize that the reader, as the actual audience, can also adopt a role of the intended audience and thus experience the narrative through both (20-8). Polvinen's approach then offers more nuance to understanding the reading of metafiction by allowing the cooperation of immersion and awareness. I consult her views in my analysis concerning how the reader reconciles these two effects.

4.2 From Scale to Matrix

After establishing both world-oriented and fiction-oriented approaches, in this section, I will now briefly introduce a recent proposition for a more encompassing model for immersion, which combines cognitive and unnatural narratology. While Werner Wolf conceives what he calls aesthetic illusion as a scale between "rational distance" and total "imaginative immersion" (16-17), Miranda Anderson and Stefan Iversen argue that portraying the phenomenon in such a way overlooks its true complexity (571). Wolf, like Ryan, does emphasize that immersion is, above all, a complicated cognitive experience and understands it as a question of distance between the imaginary and reality. However, Anderson and Iversen re-envision and expand this idea by

suggesting that readerly engagement is better conceptualized as a matrix instead. They focus on distinguishing different reading positions based on immersion and defamiliarization, arguing that the latter can intertwine with the former particularly in self-reflective and unnatural narratives (578). This focus makes the perspective useful for explaining how the sense of strangeness in *The Raw Shark Texts* participates in blurring the boundaries between textual and actual world as means of enhancing immersion rather than obstructing it.

Unnatural texts, as a form of experimental literature, often seek to challenge conventions and potentially elicit a sense of strangeness, be it through their form or content (Alber et al. 2013: 1-2). The act of making something strange has commonly been perceived as generating the distance Wolf refers to, and thus, in association to immersion, has connotations to the other end of the scale. This effect has also often been called defamiliarization. A well-established view among literary criticism has been to observe immersion and defamiliarization as "opposing phenomena": two contradictory effects that remove the presence of the other (Anderson and Iversen 569). But this perspective fails to recognize the complexity of both experiences. It is why theories that polarize self-reflection and immersive experience cannot properly address multimodal and metafictional narratives on this topic with nuance (571, 575-6). Thus, in what follows, I briefly explain the concepts unnatural narrative and defamiliarization, and then move on to introduce how Anderson and Iversen suggest that these narratives in particular may generate different types of immersion through a mixture of reading positions. Their proposal elaborates on Polvinen's notions and emphasizes another perspective on how evaluative process often plays a vital part in how we immerse in fiction.

According to Brian Richardson, what makes narratives unnatural is whether they defy mimetic conventions by contradicting themselves, whereas Jan Alber considers narratives as unnatural simply based on impossibilities, which do not fall under conventional literary elements (Alber et al. 2013: 5-6). This means that common violations of logic or physics, such as time travel, talking animals or other well-established elements of fantasy are not to be equated with the

unnatural. It is because, while clearly in contradiction with the natural, they have already been "turned into cognitive frames, during the course of literary history" and are therefore not truly unnatural to the reader anymore (6).

Unnatural narratology suffers the same fluidity of definition as postmodern and experimental fiction: while many characteristics are widely agreed upon, many scholars define what makes a narrative unnatural with slightly different focus or criterion (1). These three forms of literature tend to overlap in their characteristics, but in contrast to traditional postmodern writing, experimental and unnatural narratives can often deviate from metafictional conventions in how structures are not foregrounded purely for the sake of them, but as a way of philosophically engaging reality and fiction (Bray et al. 12). I view *The Raw Shark Texts* as both experimental and unnatural narrative and adhere to Alber's definition of unnatural in this thesis, since it explains how the active reader my analysis presumes might reconcile the novel's defamiliarizing elements. Since my focus is on immersion, I only refer to such elements as they prove relevant for my arguments.

Defamiliarization has traditionally been regarded as "an aesthetic metadevice" and a hallmark of both experimental and postmodern literature (Anderson and Iversen 579). It refers to textual devices or elements, which disturb the reader's natural and automatic sensemaking. Sometimes also referred to as estrangement, the concept famously comes from Viktor Shklovsky, who explains that art is the "device" that makes "the stone feel stony" again, making us experience something through means of perceiving rather than by recognizing it (6). On these grounds, this "process of creativity" is understood as the fundamental purpose of art and should thus be prolonged. Making forms difficult and objects unfamiliar to us is precisely what makes the form of art distinct (6).

Based on this, Anderson and Iversen, among others such as Caracciolo (2016: 65-6) and Bernaerts et al. (72-4), argue that defamiliarization is thus more than merely an aesthetic device. Rather, in the context of "readerly dynamics", it should be understood as a reading effect, which foregrounds and challenges the reader's conceptions of situational expectations and genre norms

(580). Viewing defamiliarization as merely an aesthetic device reduces the effect to its formal features rather than considering "the functional aspects of the process it attempts to capture" (579). I connect this with Gibbons' observations on how multimodal texts highlight specifically the function of the design in the process of reading, and how what Anderson and Iversen note about defamiliarization in unnatural narratives can easily be extended to multimodality as well.

Similar to multimodal texts, unnatural narratives may call for a "dual-level reader", in which case the text demands the reader to maintain a sense of awareness of both the mimetic and that which attempts to disrupt it during the reading process (Richardson 44). As a result, these types of texts often generate multiple ideal readers and tend to be self-contradictory, according to Richardson (46). A reader of *The Raw Shark Texts* could resist the story's strange elements and explain them as the dissociative fugue Eric is supposedly suffering from, or they could accept the otherworldly as it is presented and strive to make sense of it. The novel allows both readings. In my analysis, I assume the reader to focus on the latter, while also being aware of the alternative. This is certainly not the case for all readers of the novel and therefore my approach cannot and does not attempt to represent a reading of it in any universal sense. The ever-present ambiguity and how the text asks the reader to co-create its meaning ultimately gives rise to a range of possible ideal readers (46).

While unnatural narratology debates whether readers will attempt to explain the unnatural (Alber) or be content in experiencing the strangeness (Iversen), cognitive literary studies maintain that we respond to narratives based on the cognitive frames and scripts we possess. Alber's claim that unnatural fictional scenarios prompt readers to "create new cognitive parameters" by modifying and mixing "pre-existing frames" means a reader's reaction to defamiliarizing elements would also be an attempt to make sense of them (2014: 261). For example, reading about conceptual fish living in the flow of language in *The Raw Shark Texts* evokes a strong sense of estrangement from reality. However, the novel urges us to share the protagonist's perception, which allows us to experience these unnatural elements through a process of subjective resonance. When the story presents us with

elements we struggle to visualize, such as encountering a conceptual fish with no physical form, it is through enactive sensory descriptions and perceptual alignment with the character that we construct the experience.

Anderson and Iversen suggest that the interaction between a reader and a narrative may construct different types of immersive and defamiliarizing experiences based on two variables: suspension of disbelief and direction of attention. Both can be regarded as scalar phenomena, but it is by combining the two continuums that we may understand reader responses more accurately. They concur with Polvinen that the oscillation between the imaginary and the language level is not a perceptual shift but an attentional one and interpret Shklovsky's defamiliarization as not either an aesthetic device or a means of restoring our "sensation to life", but potentially both (582). The two merely direct us into different reading positions: either reflecting on the artifice or our own world. In either case, it is an invitation to engage in making sense of that which has been made strange.

World-oriented and fiction-oriented approaches to immersion are essentially both understood merely as different reading positions rather than excluding each other. In a position represented by world-oriented immersion, our attention is on the fictional text. Enactive immersion, in turn, requires simultaneous attention to our own body and world, while sustaining suspension of disbelief. Anderson and Iversen boldly propose that these various positions can all promote immersion through different textual strategies, and that a single text can also evoke more than one position. Their model constructs an integrative definition for immersion, which is too broad to fully address in the scope of this thesis, but something I consider to be worth more attention. Therefore, I will merely adopt their insight on how defamiliarization is able to co-exist with immersion and direct the reader's attention toward the extratextual.

4.3 Application

Against the purely rhetorical notions, my description of the fictional environment primarily follows Ryan's model, since the logic is present in the story itself. I adopt her terminology for discussing

the internal world structure, referring to the novel's fictional world as textual world and to reality outside the text as actual world. I consider the multimodal designs from the perspective of enactive engagement, while also referring to Ryan's descriptions of interactivity. My assumption is that the self-reflective thematization of immersion affects the reading experience and how the novel's own immersive effect forms, which seems to follow Polvinen's claims.

I further argue that the novel promotes immersion at times even while its fictionality is explicit, and that multimodality, metafiction, and subjective resonance are central elements in establishing this seemingly paradoxical experience of immersion. The more blatant shifts between the inner world and language level resemble the flickering effect Ryan refers to, but the narrative seems to construct it in order to deliberately exhibit how world-oriented mimetic immersion operates. The reading experience then appears more complex when immersion is integrated as a theme and constructed within the novel's multimodal metaphors. In the next chapter, my main analysis considers how the thematic and aesthetic play with immersion is present in the story and how this affects the reading of *The Raw Shark Texts*.

5 Multimodal Immersion: *The Raw Shark Texts*

After establishing the novel's main characteristics and theoretical framework for immersion we can now move on to examine *The Raw Shark Texts* more closely. This final chapter consists of four parts. The first two are divided based on two main aspects: Inner world and material design. In the first part, I look at what type of world the novel conjures and how immersion is connected to the metaphor of water. Some analysis of the shark is also included as it is a central aspect of the world. In the second part, I consider the multimodal designs primarily from the perspective of how they affect the reading experience.

The last two parts address how immersion operates in the story and as a reading experience. The third part concerns how immersion is depicted as flickering between two views within the textual world, whereas in the final part, I focus on how the novel ultimately guides the reader to maintain view of both form and illusion simultaneously. It should be noted that as all these aspects are considerably entangled in the novel, the divisions made here are similarly not absolute, rather they are approximations with some inevitable overlap and cross referencing. My argument is that the novel blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction in a way that promotes immersion rather than dismantles it: not merely pulling the reader in but extending toward them as well. Its multimodal and self-reflecting aspects are vital in creating this effect.

5.1 Textual Worlds and Waters

In the context of the possible worlds model, the "ontological status" of both the fictional characters and their worlds are vital for the analysis, as Alice Bell reminds (22). I concur and consider these aspects the most productive place to begin as the novel seems to self-consciously thematize and play with similar notions. The reader's access point to the world is Eric, who is constantly being pulled from the solid materiality of his world into an ancient unseen stream of language. This metaphor of language being water is constructed thematically in the story and multimodally on the pages of the novel. In some sense, we could then understand that the novel is conjuring both textual

worlds and waters. By primarily reflecting on the possible worlds model, in what follows, I discuss what type of world the reader encounters and some elements foregrounding the theme of immersion.

The excessive use of water as imagery and metaphor is one of the first themes predominantly associated with immersion that stands out, the second one being grief. While water creates an allusion to physical submersion, the theme of grief conveys a psychological sense of sinking. Depth is naturally linked to immersion. Depending on how the reader interprets the novel, they are either co-witnessing a strange reality of many worlds or dissociative fugue caused by trauma. The thematization of immersion is powerfully present as both immersion in world and language experienced by the protagonist: grief makes Eric lose connection to his life, while language and the thought shark cause him to lose his sense of reality and self. The story revolves heavily around the questions concerning our experience of the world and fiction, and how immersion into them is portrayed as both different and the same. The novel is self-aware of these aspects and it is partly how it maintains its worldliness, while also making the reader reflect on their own reading similarly to what Polvinen observes in Banville's *Infinities*.

The world itself also appears vastly different based on how the reader chooses to interpret the events and which intertextual allusions are recognized or focused on. One way of reading the story is as a metaphysical fantasy of unnatural worlds, while another involves a realistic world but a hallucinating unreliable narrator. This main duality is settled based on which one the reader chooses to view as more unreliable: the narrator or the world. To a reader who accepts the otherworldly elements, the novel depicts a side of reality, which is illustrated through the metaphor of water. The textual world appears similar to the outside reality in other aspects, which makes it accessible according to the "accessibility relation" (see 3.1.1). What turns it into impossible, is the aspect I will refer to as conceptual space, though it could also be considered a dimension or a zone, resembling what McHale calls "intertextual zone" or "*spatialized* language" (56). In her analysis of the novel,

Hayles does not distinguish this space from a world, but in this thesis, I primarily regard it as a type of in-between space that overlaps worlds.

The novel builds its strange world from the understanding that narrative must have developed with language and cognition. According Hayles, "narrative, language, and the human brain" seem to be fundamentally "co-adapted to one another", and in relation to the capabilities of digital media and databases, "narrative remains a uniquely human capacity" (2011: 130-1). At the heart of the novel, lies a similar notion that narratives are essential patterns of our sensemaking process: tools to perceive and prescribe meaning to information. The conceptual space is then based on the idea that human perception of the world operates through language, which, in turn, functions by means of the semiotic sign as visioned by Saussure. The signifier, or the word, connects the mind to the signified, the designated concept or idea (Allen 8). In the novel, these concepts form a vast intangible ocean, which is tethered to physical reality and accessed through language. It embodies all individual thought currents that flow between larger bodies of collective memory, history, and intertextual reference; but most importantly, it hosts conceptual lifeforms. By reading or even thinking, Eric engages in this space, allowing the shark to catch the scent of his recognizable thought patterns in the language currents.

The first part of the print novel involves Eric seeing Doctor Randle, his psychologist, for a year while he receives mysterious letters he does not open, as Randle has warned him not to. However, when he receives a box with books, letters, a videotape, and a broken lightbulb he grows curious and discovers part one of The Lightbulb Fragment, which is a transcribed memory of his past with his girlfriend Clio. By reading it he has unknowingly allowed the shark to pick up his trace, and after opening a mysterious locked room in his apartment and finding only a single page of text from an otherwise empty filing cabinet, Eric sits down to read potentially the most overtly metafictional piece in the novel. This is the point where the textual world begins to drift from possible to impossible. As Eric starts reading, the narrator voice shifts to direct address. The nested

narrative reaches through the boundaries of the narrative's ontological structure, speaking simultaneously to Eric within the textual world and to the reader in the actual world.

The text begins with the words "Imagine you're in a rowing boat on a lake", which are followed by an evocative description and a vivid display of traditionally mimetic immersive fiction. The text gives direction for the reader on what they are to imagine seeing, feeling, and doing and then suddenly commands:

> Stop imagining. Here's the real game. Here's what's obvious and wonderful and terrible all at the same time: the lake in my head, the lake I was imagining, has become the lake in your head … Behind or inside or through the two hundred and eighteen words that made up my description … there is some kind of flow … a stream that can only be seen if you choose to look at it from the precise angle we are looking from now" (54-5)

The text deliberately paints a vivid scene, drawing on mimetic and enactive ways of engaging the reader's senses to bring the illusion into view, only to then explicitly dismantle it and demand the reader to reflect on this imaginary place, and furthermore, what is truly happening when we immerse ourselves in it. Drawing on Waugh, this makes the text overtly metafictional and, according to Ryan, cancels immersion into the textual world as a consequence (see 3.2). However, the text later asks the reader to participate in the illusion by visualising the lake, while also contemplating the fictionality of the place. "The real game" is how this stream is inherently part of Eric's reality rather than a separate possible world, emphasizing the dangers of immersion. The danger is being presented as the idea that this imaginary space is not sterile, and that our absolute control over it is a naïve fallacy. Here the purpose of bringing the artifice into view is, then, to suggest the reader is also immersed in this same language flow by reading the text.

Taking up nearly two pages, the document finally directs: "Now, go back to your lake … But this time, know the lake; know the place for what it is and when you're ready, take a look over the boat's side … Be very quiet. Keep looking into the water. Keep looking and keep watching"

(55). The warning is two-fold as the water refers both to the conceptual space and to the language on the pages. Furthermore, because the text is dangerously "live", both Eric and the reader experience its meaning as the shark attacks not long after. The shark's presence breaks apart Eric's sense of reality. His living room disappears as he suddenly sinks into an ocean of dissociation, trying to "force the idea back behind the physical", to feel the floor under him and air in his lungs but finding only "words, ideas, signs and attachments for these things" (60). This defamiliarizing scene disrupts the reader's view of the textual world and spatial immersion into the fictional environment. However, it is a result of Eric himself losing view his world, which does not interrupt the reader's subjective resonance and emotional immersion in Eric's cognition. On the contrary, the various scenes in which Eric submerges into these textual waters, while defamiliarizing, compensate for the loss of worldly view by enhancing the subjective resonance between reader and character by shifting the narration style into a stream of consciousness.

Part two of the novel begins with a collection of images depicting linguistic cell organisms made of alphabetical letters, conceptual fossil fish reconstructions, and a preserved computer virus mosquito (93-6). Later in the story, Eric receives a mysterious book delivery with Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. As he opens the book and the reader turns the page, they are presented with Eric's view of the book, which includes an intrusive representation of linguistic algae and its visual movement through the words on the page as if the text itself was water.

oftenest visited by insects, and would be oftenest crossed; and so in the long-run would gain the upper hand. Those flowers, also, which had their stamens and pistils placed, in relation to the size and habits of the particular insects which visited them, so as to favour in any degree the transportal of their pollen from flower to flower, would likewise be favoured or selected. We might have taken the **plant plant** visiting flowers for the sake of collecting pollen instead of **plant**; and as **plant plant** is for **plant** sole of fertilisation, its destruction appears a simple loss to the **plant**; yet if a **plant plant** were carried, at first occasionally and then habitually, **plant plant** pollen-devouring **plant** from **plant plant** flower, and a cross thus effected, although nine-tenths of the **plant** were **plant plant** still **plant plant** gain to the **plant**; and those **plant** which **plant plant plant plant plant plant** had larger **plant plant** anthers, would **plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant** When our **plant**, by this **plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant** **plant** attractive flowers, had **plant** rendered **plant** attractive **plant plant plant plant** **plant plant plant plant** regularly carry pollen **plant plant** to **plant**; and that **plant** **plant** most **plant plant plant**, I **plant** easily **plant** by many **plant plant**. **plant** give **plant** one not **plant** very **plant** case, but as likewise illustrating **plant** step in the **plant** of the **plant** of **plant**, presently **plant plant** to. Some holly-trees bear **plant** male flowers, which **plant** four **plant plant** rather a **plant plant**, and a rudimentary pistil; **plant** holly-trees **plant** only **plant** flowers; these **plant** a full-sized pistil, and **plant** stamens **plant** shrivelled **plant**, in which not a **plant** of pollen **plant** be detected. **plant** found a female tree exactly sixty **plant plant** a male tree, I put the stigmas of twenty flowers, taken from different branches, under the microscope, and **plant**, without exception, there were pollen-grains, and on **plant** a profusion of pollen. As the wind had set for several days from the female to the male **plant**, the pollen could not thus have been carried. The weather had been cold and boisterous, and therefore not favourable to bees, nevertheless every female flower which I examined had been effectually fertilised by the bees, accidentally dusted

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plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant imaginary case: we may suppose the **plant plant plant plant plant plant plant** the nectar by continued selection, to be a common **plant plant plant plant plant** insects in main part on its nectar for food. I could give many facts, **plant plant plant plant** bees **plant** to save time; **plant** instance, their habit of **plant** holes and sucking **plant** nectar **plant plant** of certain flowers, which **plant** can, with a very little more trouble, enter by the **plant**. Bearing such **plant** in mind, I can see no reason to doubt that an accidental deviation **plant plant** and **plant** of the body, or in the curvature and length of the proboscis, &c., far too slight to be a **plant** by us, might profit a bee or other insect, so that an individual so characterised would be able to **plant** its food more quickly, and so have a better chance of living and leaving **plant plant**. Its descendants would probably inherit a tendency to a similar slight deviation of **plant**. The tubes **plant** the **plant plant plant** **plant** common red and incarnate clovers (Trifolium **plant plant** incarnatum) **plant** not on a **plant** glance appear to differ in length; yet the hive-bee can easily **plant** the nectar **plant** of the incarnate clover, but not out of the common **plant** clover, **plant** visited by **plant plant** alone; **plant plant** whole **plant** of the **plant plant plant** in vain an **plant plant** supply of **plant plant plant**. **plant plant** a great **plant** to **plant plant** **plant** a slightly longer or **plant** constructed **plant**. On **plant plant** **plant**, **plant plant plant plant** by **plant** that **plant plant** of clover **plant plant plant plant** bees **plant** and **plant plant plant** the **plant**, so as to **plant** the **plant plant plant** stigmatic surface. **plant**, again, if **plant plant** insects to **plant** rare in **plant plant plant** **plant** advantage to **plant** red clover to **plant** or **plant plant plant plant** to its corolla, so **plant** the **plant plant plant plant plant plant plant** I **plant plant plant plant** **plant plant** become, **plant plant plant** or **plant plant** other, **plant plant plant** in **plant plant plant** to each **plant**, by the **plant plant plant** of **plant plant plant** presenting **plant plant plant** favourable **plant plant plant** I am **plant plant plant** doctrine of **plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant** **plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant plant**

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Image 1. Darwin text. *The Raw Shark Texts* pp. 126-7

These conceptual organisms are visualized for the reader through text that mimics the movement of the idea they signify. This illustrates how the lifeforms originate from language, which as an environment imitates the earth's oceans and it being the birthplace of early life on the planet. The designs on the pages then communicate more than the informational content of the language. They convey the conceptual metaphor "language is water" through the embodied connection between visual and verbal components. In other words, through the analogy of biological evolution and the cooperation between linguistic meaning and visual storytelling, the novel communicates a multimodal message about these fictional lifeforms. It is an example of how the aesthetic designs in *The Raw Shark Texts* are not separate from the narrative and the reader's understanding of the textual world.

The meaning of these pages is not otherwise explained since Eric himself does not understand what the book means. Depending on whether the reader infers the meaning at this point,

they either share Eric's confusion and frustration, or gain an additional understanding of the world and experience satisfaction for having made the discovery. Both outcomes seem to promote enactive immersion, either through subjective resonance or successful sensemaking. Additionally, this aquatic environment hosting life asks the reader to suspend their disbelief and accept such notions as possible in the textual world. When this notion is then visualized on the pages, it does not obstruct the imaginary from view but rather brings it quite literally into view by extending the fictional idea though the ontological boundary to the discourse level. Through multimodal storytelling, the narrative then asks the reader to negotiate these fictional elements as part of both the textual world and the language that describes it. Based on what Pyrhönen and Alber state about readers' abilities to find ways to make sense of challenging elements in a meaningful way, the reader rarely stays in a state of defamiliarization even if the text presents them with unnatural elements (2018; 2014). That is to say, while the reader may feel the need to stop and make sense of these messages at times, they eventually evoke a more compelling experience and understanding of the fictional world.

The shark also appears visually on the pages. Its appearance is notably always different, a constantly reshaped typographic window to devoured memories, which Wurth recognizes as a visualization of Eric's recurring reinvention of self (131). The narration itself is never arranged into the shark's form, instead any readable portions within the shark's visage consist of Eric's lost memories. The designs then depict how the shark is made of the essence it consumes. Since the shark is not made out of physical matter, its visual body manifests as projections of what the mind may only register through language. Panko notes that it is unclear whether these visuals are meant to show the reader what Eric sees, or something separate from his view (276). I argue that the visuals can be understood as simultaneously aligning the reader's view with Eric and also communicating something to the reader alone. The purpose of the latter is to highlight the reader's presence in the narrative performance. When the shark appears, sometimes the reader may realize that based on his narration, Eric is not literally seeing the same typographic image that is on the

page, because it is the way the shark appears to the reader specifically, breaching the surface of the textual water they are looking at. The visuals still align with Eric's perspective, while the reader experiences the shark not only as Eric but also as the one reading the novel. This conveys an impression of the shark haunting the pages of the novel itself.

Thus, there are two superimposed participants involved in enacting the story: the protagonist/narrator and the reader. The text attempts to align these two perspectives through both multimodal means and changing narration style, which means that rather than attempting to shift the reader's cognitive deixis into a world, the narrative directs it within Eric's cognition. Wurth duly notes how Eric, without any memory, seems less of a protagonist and more of an enactor himself (121). A significant source of immersion for the reader is their subjective resonance with Eric's experience and the various metaphorical and literal instances of immersion he experiences. The reader begins this strange descend into fiction and alternative worlds already several layers down by both knowing that what they are reading is a narrative and because Eric refers to it as the start of his second life. The reader never knows how deep they actually are at the beginning of the novel and the true depths of the textual world are arguably made clear only in the negatives. However, assuming the reader elects to make sense of the textual world through its otherworldly elements, the world is eventually revealed to be a multiverse of parallel worlds.

The possible worlds model helps to uncover a sense of logic behind the otherworldly leaps and visions between parallel worlds that Eric experiences. In the print novel, the clearest hints to a textual multiverse come after space turns upside down and Eric, with his companions Scout and Doctor Fidorous, fully enter the conceptual space to defeat the shark in a showdown near identical to the climactic final scene of *Jaws*. After defeating the shark, a photograph Eric carries around transforms from a Greek island into a visual portal to his house. As he refuses to return to his mundane life without Clio, the ink shifts again into tropical fish, closing the portal to that world. Depending on the reading, this signifies either Eric's death, how he has entered yet a new world (Hayles), or remains in a space of fictionality between worlds. Resembling the cyclical creation in

Borges' "The Circular Ruins", in his wish to resurrect Clio through memory, Eric is ultimately reduced to a mere simulacrum himself. The physical novel represents the fractured relics of Eric, with pieces left scattered among various platforms and worlds. The beginning of the story is lost with only incomplete echoes of it preserved in these lost texts, and while Eric refers to the events in the novel as his second life, the question of whether the previous Eric was the first lingers.

In the prologue, when the first Eric finds the shark with hopes of restoring Clio, it becomes clearer what the shark truly is. The Ludovician, as the ultimate fusion and feedback loop of form and content, is essentially a bridge between worlds: a wormhole moving through the conceptual space that spreads across the textual multiverse like a membrane between worlds (Hayles 2011: 127-9). With strong allusions to Borges' "The Aleph", the shark is also found behind a trapdoor underground and the vision of it sheds the illusion of reality as a "horrific clarity came into the world, a sense of all things being exactly what they were … filled with relevance, obviousness and a bright four-dimensional truth" (-8). Eric's thought process halts as he sees it "partly with my eyes or my mind's eye", and the shark starts visually materializing on the page as Eric feels it "swimming hard upstream against the panicking fast flow of my thoughts" (-7).

The shark is both a portal and a living afterlife, ultimately representing a form of total and final immersion from which one cannot return. Entering it is multimodally depicted for the reader through the mirrored upside-down line at the end of the prologue. "My life, into the Ludovician in every way possible" is turned into the reflection of the sentence "The Ludovician, into my life in every way possible", visually depicting the flip between view and reflection, and signifying Eric's transportation from his previous life into the main narrative of the print novel, as Hayles notes (127).

To
Do
you
wha t
like   at
He's   was
then   that
so   card   but
see   key   to be
       wanted
       always
Can you   the   remembr
2are there   can
Mr. Morris   amazing how   sad
I don't think   there are some   as you
whatever   here is a   nother   be you
Dixon   just don't   expect   ibilities
Tyco   but   "What   the fuck   to alw
                   is a
3 the   **Olm**   then   **so he**   puts his   what
Bob   does   "is that your   best plan   do youmike
Street   that   where the sun   shines   ike it?bright
Danielle   it is   Ronald Reagan   she
Such thing as a much of   Listen   fast
Stunt horse Otherpaul "   la   I
             If you
             Like

The Ludovician, into my life in every way possible.

My life, into the Ludovician in every way possible.

Image 2. The Ludovician. *The Aquarium Fragment* pp. -6

Here, the metaphor of language being water is once again visualized in the shark's approach on the page and the reflective surface between the worlds of prologue and main narrative. The scene also underlines the two-way street of reading Rita Felski speaks of, according to which we bring ourselves into the text we read, while allowing the text to affect us in return (3). The shark embodies the danger of immersion and upsets the clear distinction between worlds. Its typographic materialization on the pages trespasses into the actual world and implies the fictional content is influencing the actual materiality of the text. In their article on metalepsis in transmedia fictions, Bell and Alber explain this as the fictional entity possessing "transworld identity" and also how narrative studies primarily focus on characters or narrators performing ontological movement rather than other entities within the world (180). The shark's simultaneous appearance in both worlds, textual and actual, multimodally conveys the idea of it being a creature of language, not inhabiting a certain world. As a result, the language level becomes immanently included in the game of make-believe the reader is invited to.

     Eric losing himself into the shark by allowing it into his life represents how immersing in fiction can feel like transportation into other worlds, in this case quite literally. The purpose of the multimodal design is to foreground this danger by visually showing how the conceptual fish push

through the boundary between content and form by materializing before the reader's eyes simultaneously as they appear within the story. Their presence foregrounds the notions of how imagination can conjure a world into being and how fiction has power over the reader, affecting them in the actual world. The effect produced here demands the reader to perform the narrative from both worlds simultaneously rather than flickering between the illusion and physical design. Hence, while the textual and actual worlds cannot properly merge as they do in the story, in the reader's experience these boundaries are nonetheless partially obscured, as Gibbons proposes is the case with various multimodal novels (211). She uses the term "figured trans-world" to refer to how the active role multimodal novels position the reader in makes the textual world open up "for figuration" (80). That is to say, the reader becomes more than an observer, forming and defining the world in ways traditional narratives do not allow.

Aspiring to still maintain the boundary between actual and textual world, Gibbons proposes that a trans-world combines the reader's performance and the action in the story "without assuming absolute 'transportation' or compression of worlds" (80). I concur and also suggest that this distribution between materiality and imaginary does not need to downplay the text's immersive power if the textual world is also realized through the multimodal design. Enactive theories of literary immersion introduced in chapter 4 support an understanding that such "absolute transportation" is not the only source or measure of the effect and may even be misguided. In *The Raw Shark Texts*, the reader's embodied performance along with the encroaching shark deliberately unsettle such clear world boundaries. However, the purpose here is to engage reality by making the reader question the nature of these boundaries rather than merely revealing them for the sake of spectacle, as is often the case with postmodern texts and metafiction (McHale, Waugh). While process-oriented fiction is primarily considered to be more of an aesthetic category even within experimental literature, Anderson and Iversen's argument that defamiliarization is not merely an aesthetic device, nor the opposite of immersion, allows us to consider this potential of a different type of immersion generated by contemporary multimodal and transmedia narratives.

Since the writing style itself is clear and sharp, the main narration also provides an immersive pull that often compensates for the more defamiliarizing elements of the novel. The narration establishes subjective resonance by constantly adjusting to reflect Eric's cognition. This becomes particularly apparent in how dynamic narration during the final shark attack attempts to close the distance between words and action by shifting to a more mimetic style, emphasizing the immediacy of distress and bringing it closer to the reader. The scene occurs in the fourth part of the novel, which is an overt pastiche of the finale from *Jaws*.

Structure and syntax fall slightly apart as the narration becomes a wall of text, reduced to simple observations and verbs of action. Narrative tense changes from past to present, which creates a temporal effect, in which time appears to be accelerating and much happens fast in a small space of time. In other words, the narrator's voice shifts from traditional narration into a hectic stream of consciousness that conveys Eric's disconnection from his own mind in the fast-paced chaos where there is no time to think, only act. The scene is vividly present for the reader and imitates the immersive experience of watching rather than reading: an effect, which could additionally be an intentional imitation of its intertextual film source. Hayles considers this the novel's most traditionally immersive scene and an example of immersive fiction in general (2011: 120). Ryan also deems this type of narration to be highly immersive, as changing the tense from past to present creates a "simulacrum of real-time" events instead of narrated speech, which "pulls the reader from the *now* of the storytelling act to the *now* of the storyworld" (2015: 98). The same effect is generated by similar instances of intense action in the novel.

An important element of the danger in the story is that it does not truly arrive until Eric thinks about it. This underlines the message of how the conceptual fish are creatures born from a sea of thoughts. They can only partially materialize for us through language because it is depicted as the coding system embedded in our cognitive processing. The novel emphasizes the role language plays in guiding our meaning making and understanding of the world, which is why, when the shark appears in the story, it also appears on the pages of the book as a typographic image made

of language. It interrupts the reading process as it does the scene in the story. But since this type of interruption only mirrors what is happening, the reader is still tethered to the world, never fully pulled away from the scene. The shark appearing for the characters while it also does so for the reader emphasizes the encompassing metaphor, in which the story moves outward toward the reader as the text on the pages acts like water. The reader is reminded of the text's materiality but simply interacting with it is painted as the true danger, linking them to the shark in the first place. This creates a looping effect where, as the reader's attention shifts to the surface of the page, the multimodal design will ultimately draw them back into the world behind it again.

The reader is then presented with the idea of reading having the power to conjure not only a world but this living danger as well. While the textual world is separate from the actual world, the conceptual stream seems to be paradoxically a space between worlds and also a part of the textual world. Gerrig's idea of mental transportation between worlds is imagined here but the story suggests that the distance between worlds is not empty. While the Ludovician acts as the ultimate portal between worlds, it is in these fictional in-between currents where Eric's mind immerses while reading. Thus, it is implied that the by reading the novel, we place ourselves in the same stream of language as the characters, which allows the shark to appear on the pages.

5.2 Encodings-Within-Encodings

In this section, I turn to consider the novel's three other prominent multimodal features besides the shark and water: encodings, flipbook section, and images in the last chapter. I focus on the role these features have in the novel in relation to what they communicate about immersion as a theme and how they affect the reading experience. I also briefly comment on the significance the narrative assigns to print in contrast to digital text, since it is closely related to how the physical novel underlines the importance of its material presence in the reading process. The novel itself consists of both the primary print volume and digital text in the form of negatives to reflect the anxiety of shifting primarily to electronic databases, where the embodied presence of the text is lost, and

connections become unmanageable. This is directly connected to why the print novel also employs features like the flipbook section in order to demonstrate the reader's embodied role in performing the narrative in collaboration with the material design. As such, engrossed reading becomes more than imaginary transportation disconnected from the body and material object.

I begin with the encodings, which are some of the first visual designs the reader encounters. There are two primary encryptions relevant for the reader: the QWERTY code and its additional hidden encryption. The main code is a keyboard-based encryption, which Eric uses to decode a document called The Lightbulb Fragment, a record of memories written by the first Eric. There are also references to other recordings, which have been lost, such as The Aquarium Fragment. For Eric, decoding this encryption is a complicated process, which relies on sequential order and context. Deducing the right letter then requires comparing it to possible following letters and re-evaluating it on levels of words, sentences, and paragraphs. This highlights how understanding the fragmented story is also dependent on context and order. Furthermore, it represents how a degree of cognitive decoding work is needed to gain access to texts in the first place. The implication is that if the reader dedicates time and effort to it, more layers and a better understanding of the textual world will also emerge, similar to the coded memory fragments.

The final, correctly decoded letter will always be one of those adjacent to the Morse code letter. For example, if you translate an 'F' from the Morse code, the actual letter you are looking for will be one of the eight adjacent to 'F' on the QWERTY layout:

The translation letters also 'rollaround'. This is a way of saying if a Morse code letter touches the edge of the board, as B does

the possible translation letters will not only include V, F, G, H and N, but also R, T and Y, as the three unavailable bottom spaces are rolled up to the top.

74

This rollaround is applied to all edge-of-grid letters, as shown here:

As you are probably noticing, the code is not very specific. When translated from Morse, each letter has eight possible solutions. Only one of these will be the correct letter. This means clean text cannot be constructed at the level of the individual letter. Possible translations must be constructed at word level, re-evaluated at sentence level and refined at paragraph level. It makes the process very

75

Image 3. QWERTY code. *The Raw Shark Texts* pp. 74-5

The stories hidden behind the different layers of code are revealed only after Eric constructs them through the decoding process. This process is arduous but primarily omitted from the narrative. However, the first Eric's instructions on the code are similarly present for the reader and the second Eric. For maintaining immersion through subjective resonance, it is significant that the instructions are not, in fact, narrated by Eric, but instead by his previous self. The instructions employ direct address, meaning that as the reader contemplates them, they are also enacting this process from the perspective of the second Eric within the textual world. The letters are addressed to the second Eric, so they do not upset the boundary between textual and actual worlds as overtly as the lake document.

In addition to the initial decoded memory, there is another text hidden behind another encryption within The Lightbulb Fragment. While the first code emphasizes contextual interpretation, the second one is based on the physical shapes of the alphabet and visual movement of writing. Using the original coded document, the hidden double-coded text is pieced together by

visually drawing the direction the decoded letters were found on the grid to create shapes of new ones.
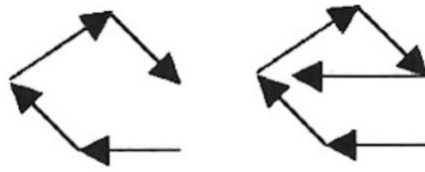
Image 4. Hidden QWERTY code. *The Raw Shark Texts* pp. 293

The purpose of the codes is to foreground the aesthetic and language as a coding system itself, but also to emphasize how seeing past it to access the content requires cognitive and embodied process. The implied function of the encodings is two-fold: they protect both the reader and the encoded content from the shark by making the form difficult, and as a result, more challenging to access. They slow down perception as the reader is placed in the position of a decoder, following Eric's process. Initially, they resemble the interactive structures of hypertext fiction as Ryan and Bell identify them (see 3.2) but are not fully interactive in the sense that the reader would have to choose how the code is applied or the direction the story proceeds. I argue that their visual presence on the pages, in fact, assists in maintaining connection to the textual world, since understanding the codes becomes a quicker and easier process with visual aids. In other words, while the designs draw attention to the page, they also show the reader what Eric sees and assist in perceiving how language is used in the textual world as a cognitive sensemaking tool and embodied movement.

A central feature of the QWERTY code is that even though it seems like a computer source code, it is not "machine-readable" (Panko 268). Instead, it can only be deciphered through contextual interpretation. Rather than competing with digital textuality, the narrative seems to merely imitate it as a way of ultimately elevating the importance of the embodied presence of language (270). The use of typographic visuals, photographs, and kinesthetic elements, such as the flipbook, establish print as an adaptive form that can remediate multiple media types and expand to include digital textualities while simultaneously undermining them. Evaluative appreciation of the

novel's own materiality and power is then a significant aspect of the reading experience. The reader is reminded of their own embodied performance by also recognizing the novel as an embodied object that needs to be handled in order to tell the story and give it meaning. Or as Panko expresses: "the book can become a memento or a site of social exchange; it can even become a place where a lover encounters the traces of his lost lover's body" (295).

The novel self-consciously introduces these encodings-within-encodings as protection against the shark, which embodies the danger of immersion. The codes are part of unravelling the story and depicted in ways that align the reader's perception with Eric's as he learns to apply them, as mentioned above. As a result, while the world shifts to the background and the aesthetic is foregrounded, the reader is still doing exactly what Eric is doing, mirroring his concentration in trying to understand the encodings. The codes are visually present as a way to show what Eric sees, which anchors the reader to the textual world through Eric's perspective, while their attention is also on the physical design. Gibbons refers to this as doubly deictic subjectivity through subjective resonance (210-1). Drawing on Anderson and Iversen, this concentrated effort could also be understood as evoking a type of immersion into the sensemaking process itself rather than into a textual world.

Gibbons observes a similar case in Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, where the reader might become frustrated with the coding, and as a result, experience the emotions the character is also feeling. Since this is its purpose, the multimodal code successfully communicates its intended meaning to the reader (156). With *The Raw Shark Texts*, the process is mostly laid out and considerably easier, so the effect mainly concerns slowing down the pace as it asks the reader to form an understanding of the code alongside Eric. The reader can choose to skip past the code, however, understanding how they work offers insight into how they may protect one form the shark. This means that if the reader chooses to bypass the code, they are still able to follow the story but also lose a more comprehensive logic to how language acts both as a conduit for the fish as well as protection from them. In such case, the reader avoids the somewhat defamiliarizing sensemaking

process, maintaining their pace with only a brief cut from subjective resonance. This attempt to achieve more effortless immersion means the text, and by extend its world, is less likely to eventually open up to the reader as profoundly as if they had done the work.

Experimental novels are especially associated with this gradually revealing effect because of their difficult forms that often resist easy access (Pyrhönen 4, Bray et al.). Thus, the type of immersion evoked by experimental novels, if such an effect is produced, is unlikely concerned with making textual worlds effortlessly accessible. Instead, they foreground the reflective and sometimes arduous process of deeply engaging with a text in order to gain access. While understanding these texts requires effort, it does not necessarily negate their immersive power once such understanding is achieved. In *The Raw Shark Texts,* the layered coding structures represent both how the language code hides the illusion from view and how understanding is achieved only through the devoted process of decoding it. The implication is that the immersion evoked by difficult texts can be even more satisfying and powerful precisely because it requires effort to achieve (see 3.1.2).

What makes the relation between the coding systems and immersion complex is also the fact that, in the novel, the codes themselves are part of the stream of information as much as other texts or forms of writing. What this means is that, in the textual world, all texts essentially serve two opposing purposes at the same time. They are both the environment where the conceptual fish evolved and the stream through which the shark keeps catching Eric's scent. Physical texts in particular can also be used as traps or means to confuse and mislead the shark. The embedded structure of the encodings illustrates how the first Eric is able to record his remaining memories without automatically attracting the shark: the layers of the code obstruct the view from the reader as well as from the shark.

Complex narratives with nested and fragmented structures or loops are also portrayed as idea traps, which represent the notion that while such narratives are more difficult to access, they are similarly more difficult to exit once one has managed to enter them. In the textual world, these structures are protective puzzles and nets of trapping conceptual fish but can also represent the

reader's experience of the novel. The more layers to the story the reader uncovers, the more captivating the story and its world become. McHale refers to similar narrative structures as Chinese-box worlds (113-30).

In one of his letters, the first Eric mentions how factual books create "solid channels of information in many directions", while fictional texts "generate illusionary flows" made of imaginary people and events, ultimately creating a "labyrinth of glass and mirrors" for the fish to get lost in (68). Physical representations of these flows, such as library books or letters can then be used to disguise a person's trail in the conceptual flow. When the shark attacks Eric for the first time after his memory loss, he is unwittingly saved by the bookshelf he knocks over. As dozens of books fall on him, the shark loses sight of its target, and when Eric later regains consciousness only to find himself under a pile of books, the shark is gone. This illustrates how the shark does not perceive the solid physical world at all, only the thoughts and traces of identity flowing into the language waterways. Later, after Eric encounters Scout, an eerie double of his dead girlfriend Clio, they manage to get away from the shark again by using Scout's "letter bomb", which explodes, scattering around old typewriter keys with all their associations and histories while the sound of the explosion attracts attention from people nearby (166). The combined effect scrambles the conceptual current, misleading the shark and allowing them to lose it for a while.

The function of the language code is then self-reflectively thematized and thus affects both the story events and the reading experience. Here, the world-oriented theory struggles to account for self-reflective thematization without disregarding its layered effect, as Polvinen notes (2012). The novel builds self-awareness into its story by connecting the language of the narrative to the textual world, which, according to Polvinen, intertwines states of immersive and self-aware reading into a loop rather than a back-and-forth movement (98). While the narrative employs enactive strategies to make Eric's experiences more vivid for the reader, the coding mainly represents how the process is meant to slow down perception in order to shield one against easy immersion into the conceptual currents.

According to Ryan, directing attention to the visual design and the decoding process obstructs immersion by withdrawing the world from view. However, since the narrative self-consciously declares this function as the purpose of the encodings within the textual world, the effect transforms into a form of enactment as well, as processing the code directly parallels Eric's perception and actions within the textual world. It foregrounds the boundaries between textual and actual world, but subjective resonance with the character helps the reader maintain cognitive deixis partially within Eric. In this way, the reader is simultaneously aware of both the encodings on the pages and their correspondents in the textual world.

As established in the previous part, reading is metaphorically depicted as looking at water and being pulled into it. The text on the pages reflects this through the shark suddenly emerging visually on the page, interrupting the narration. This doubles as an imitation of how in *Jaws*, and similar films, the water is calm until a shark either bursts through the surface or its silhouette suddenly approaches underwater. A visual representation of the latter is created in the novel through a flipbook section. The pages suddenly turn blank as Eric falls overboard from the conceptual shark-hunting boat into the ocean and by flipping the pages forward the reader reveals the approaching shark. It is arguably the most interactive part of the print novel and imitates digital textuality since "inscriptions emerge differently with each reading", meaning that the pages are never flipped exactly the same way twice (Wurth 131). By changing how the volume is held and controlling the motion and speed of flipping the pages, the reader's physical interaction with the book literally animates the scene.

The shark emerges from the distant depths of the page, getting larger and clearer as it moves toward the reader. As it gets closer, the next sentence of narration appears on the page, visually representing the surface of the water. The sentence traverses downward from the top of the pages as the reader flips them, illustrating Eric's perspective of being pulled toward the surface as the reader's eyes enact the movement. The sentence is duplicated and blurred in a gradient manner the closer it gets to the bottom of the page to reflect a surge through the surface. The text and the

surface of the page once again visually communicate the conceptual metaphor of language being water. The movement emphasizes subjective resonance as the reader's vision is paralleled with Eric's. Gibbons calls this embodied action, which mirrors the action in the textual world as an additional "performative dimension" to Gerrig's notion of transportation (74). In other words, the reader is not completely pushed away from the textual world because their embodied performance of the design echoes the character's action. The visual design transforms mental simulation into movement as the reader's eyes become counterpart with Eric's through the approaching shark and ascending motion.

In Ryan's view, these interactive elements obstruct immersion because the reader becomes a user, who consciously navigates a dysfunctional text like a game, instead of observing the world (see 3.2). The flipbook's function is different in the sense that while it does require physical interaction, the purpose is to simulate the fictional scene, not to negotiate the narrative or choose a path. Were the reader to not flip the pages, the fictional scene itself may not be perceived at all. The perceptual effect is lost, which would inevitably disconnect the reader from the events in the textual world. Therefore, I suggest that while the flipbook causes the reader to become aware of the novel's materiality, the interactive participation does not necessarily negate immersion, instead it is central for maintaining it in order to experience the fictional scene.

While the novel constructs a textual system not dissimilar to hypertext fiction with its fragmentation, borrowed materials, digital text, and references that represent hyperlinks in print form, it declares print and physical writing as unique for their material presence. Panko states the novel contributes to the question concerning how texts can hold significance not only for their capacity to represent but for their material design as well, conveying something beyond their content (266-7). Print and physical writing are portrayed as useful precisely because the words are solid representations of their conceptual flows, unlike electronic text, which has no concrete form. As a result, print can be held and manipulated physically, in contrast to electronic text. According to Panko, the narrative is then an embodied design as well as "an informational representation" (266).

In contrast to print, digital systems only represent data, lacking the embodied presence of the text, which is implied to be crucial for constructing a subject as vivid and genuine as possible, tied to a certain place, time, and a particular body (266). This emphasizes the embodied and enactive performance of the narrative as vital for bringing it to life, echoed in how Eric attempts to resurrect Clio as not merely an imitation but as a living human being with essence, which now gradually fades away from memory and page alike.

Ryan explains that words cannot summon the presence of a represented object the way images do. An image draws the viewer within its world by automatically evoking the presence of what is represented, while words can only "signify conventionally" (2015: 76-7). However, the typographic visuals of the shark create a self-conscious play with this concept by using language to convey meaning multimodally and becoming more than a record of informational content. The visuals evoke presence through image, while also signifying meaning through the text they are constructed from. The reader then forms an understanding of the multimodal meaning by combining what is communicated visually on the page and simultaneously conveyed through its language, like the flowing plant-life in Darwin's text or the approaching shark and traversing line of surface in the flipbook. Thus, the reader is drawn to the world in a manner that is both immersive and self-aware of the language that creates it.

In addition to the actual typographic visuals, alphabetical letters within the text act like images at times as well. The shark's eye is a large O as it first appears, and similarly, as Eric wakes up in the beginning of the novel, his "eyes slammed themselves capital O open" (3). Panko explains how similar to the shark, Eric's body is also described typographically here. Thus, both Eric's identity and physical body are in some sense constructed from language as well (287-8).

Reading as a mixture of cognitive and embodied performance is also multimodally communicated to the reader in the form of a map. On the way to Fidorous' hidden paper house, layers of print and written language form a labyrinth of scattering conceptual streams through un-space: tunnels, underground structures, and other no-name-places (80). The physical layers of

language prevent the shark from finding its way in. The tunnels are visualized in the shape of a word, forcing Eric and Scout to navigate their bodily movement by visualizing language as physical space. Versions of the map as Eric gradually traces their path are included as multimodal elements on the pages between the narration, allowing the reader to similarly visualize the word as a space and the characters' movement through it.
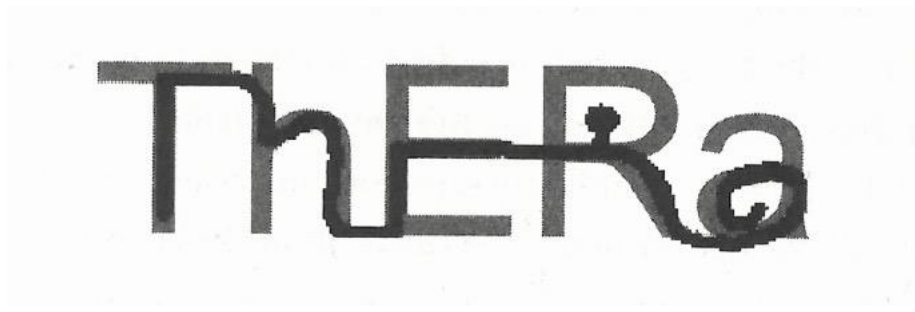

Image 5. Complete ThERa map. *The Raw Shark Texts* pp. 232

This physical mapping creates another layer of language code, adding to the protective structure of the place. Foregrounding the aesthetic, it makes this spatial reading process enactive and visible for the reader. The map turns language into embodied movement, requiring Eric and Scout to "write" through movement, feeling the shape of the letters with their hands and feet as they crawl through the word (Hayles 2011: 124). By doing so, they move deeper into both un-space and language itself, arguably closer to a state where the veil between physical and conceptual gets thinner. The word Thera is a reference to a Greek island (or its ancient city) near Naxos, the island from Eric's memories where he lost Clio. Following the interpretation in which Eric is merely hallucinating, this journey through the word could represent him processing the trauma and gradually getting closer to confronting those memories in his mind. The map also functions as metareference. The letters spell the beginning of the novel's title, ambiguously embedding the novel within its own inner world. Moving through the letters is thus associated with moving through the story. Also, mirroring the circling main narrative frame, this insinuates an additional looping effect between the inner world of the story and the novel's paratexts.

The final multimodal designs discussed in this section are the images that make up the entire last chapter of the print novel. The chapter does not contain narration at all. Instead, it

consists only of a chapter title followed by images of a newspaper clipping and a two-sided postcard. The other side of the postcard is visually present on the other side of the page. By turning the page, the reader then physically turns the card over and reveals a photograph frame from Michael Curtiz's film *Casablanca* (1942) on the other side, which is another film the novel explicitly references multiple times. Without a narrator voice or guidance, the ending is left open for interpretation based on the meaning the reader assigns to these images, which also seem to offer contradictory information.

The newspaper announces that Eric's dead body has been found, while the postcard is a farewell to his psychologist, received a few days earlier before the article. In the postcard, Eric expresses that he is well but never coming back. The reader is then presented with a choice of interpretation, making the underlying duality between the two main ways of reading the story explicit. However, the images contradict each other's information, and a Greek stamp in the postcard reveals a problem with the first interpretation. In the penultimate chapter, Eric and Scout are left swimming through the conceptual ocean toward familiar Greek shores from the memory fragments, conveying a strange implication that the postcard somehow came from another world. The final image portraying the toasting couple from *Casablanca* acts as the novel's final word, visually implying that in death or another world, as Clio or Scout, Eric's lost love has been found again.

The ending is ambiguous and paradoxical. This "double-coded attitude" is particularly common in postmodern literature, according to Bran Nicol (47). The purpose is to either encourage the reader to interpret texts in a paranoid manner or to intentionally frustrate attempts of making sense of them, which makes extracting a final meaning a complex and potentially indefinite process. The images generate various potential meanings without surrounding narration to "fix" a certain understanding, which enables the reader to choose how the story ends (Gibbons 135). The ending then calls for multiple ideal readers (see 4.2). Drawing on Roland Barthes, Nicol also notes this as a

sign of "writerly" text, referring to how the text directs the reader into a role of a "co-writer" rather than a consumer (44).

Fracturing the world in this way makes the narrative dysfunctional and blocks immersion to the textual world as it becomes more interactive than mimetic, according to Ryan (see 3.2). However, the defamiliarizing contradiction also engages the reader into a sensemaking process, in which they attempt to reconcile the narrative through existing cognitive frames (see 4.2). Is Eric dead or alive in the end? Whether the reader chooses to explain the story as dissociative fugue ending in death, or as an unnatural journey into language and alternative worlds, neither reading appears without problems. However, even assuming the many worlds reading, the story seems to portray both immersion in worlds as well as in a stream fictionality, depending on how the reader interprets the conceptual space.

Without clear narrative cues, the ending raises questions concerning the nature of reality and whether there is even any difference to death and crossing between worlds. This uncertainty is further fuelled by the myths describing the Ludovician as a "living afterlife" and the last narrated chapter being titled "Just Like Heaven" (265, 420). I argue that the narrative also allows the reader to adopt an interpretation in which Eric exists in multiple worlds at once, in a state Bell and Alber call "counterparthood" (186). In this case, both readings are simultaneously true but merely represent different perspectives from within the textual universe. Like Schrödinger's cat, Eric is both dead and alive, permanently hovering in an existential superposition, any given meaning dependent on what textual world is centred as actual. This allusion is also evident throughout the novel in the form of Eric's own cat that seems to shift between worlds and states of existence depending on the memory fragment.

The reader may then change their entire understanding of the story based on how these last images are interpreted. Additionally, a hint that makes the many worlds interpretation explicit is the final chapter title "Goodbye Mr Tegmark" (426). This reference to Max Tegmark, a cosmologist known for his multiverse theory, showcases how some of the peritexts represent hyperlinks that

cannot be operated like digital text but which the reader is expected to follow regardless (Bell 12). The name is mentioned without context or explanation and so its purpose in provoking the reader to research and make sense of this clue is clear. The novel clearly uses some of its peritexts (e.g. chapter titles, quotes and the original cover art) as a way of revealing insight to story elements the reader may otherwise overlook in the text.

These visible links to outside sources foreground the reader's role as the one who performs the narrative and imbues it with meaning. The borrowed materials from *Jaws* and *Casablanca* promote a type of "ontological play" that activates these outside sources from within the textual world, drawing attention to the boundary between textual and actual and the narrative's own artificial nature (Bell 180). As a result, the reader may discover new layers of meaning to the story by paying attention to the paratexts and allusions. The references could even be regarded as their own layer of encoding in addition to the actual encryptions within the story. The Lightbulb Fragment unfolds into different texts through various encoded layers, which is echoed in how the intertextual connections allow the reader to discover new meanings to the novel as well.

5.3 Flipping the Coin

After establishing an understanding of the textual world and some of the multimodal designs in relation to immersion, I turn to consider how the concept of "flickering" between two views is portrayed in the novel. This function, according to Ryan, concerns understanding the language level and world as separate sides of the virtual object, removing each other from view (see 3.1). The novel multimodally intertwines the idea of this double-sided perception with other dualities in the story and structure. Therefore, in this section, I discuss how immersion and self-awareness are portrayed as two shifting sides of perception in the story, and I further specify how this metaphor emerges from multiple layers of the narrative in order to intertwine theme and form.

In the story, when Eric and Scout find Doctor Fidorous, an expert on the conceptual fish, together they start building a ship-shaped non-divergent conceptual loop the shark cannot pass

through. Their mission is to kill the shark, and to do it they need to fully cross over into the conceptual space on this ship befittingly named Orpheus: an allusion to Greek mythology and a journey to the underworld. "Conviction" and "ways of looking" are portrayed as "powerful tools" that allow the mind to shift perception of the world by not merely suspending disbelief but abandoning it completely (273). Eric envisions this perceptual shift as a flipping coin in his mind. One side can fully come into view only when the other is turned away. This is alluded to throughout the novel, but finally made clear when Eric tries to turn a glassful of paper into actual water by convincing his mind to invert word and idea. The written word disappears as the idea becomes corporeal and space turns inside out: "When the word *water* turned to real water in the cellar, it was as if the coin had flipped over … From somewhere inside me a phrase rose up, *the view becomes the reflection, and the reflection, the view*" (385). The cellar disappears behind the ocean and the Orpheus turns from boxes and computers into an actual shark-hunting boat.

The terms view and reflection represent a division between solid reality and conceptual space, but also the boundary between parallel worlds, which Eric has arguably already shifted through multiple times. Furthermore, they mimic the concepts actual and possible as Ryan describes them, with the exception that this total immersion happening in the story resembles more a life-like simulation in contrast to the mental exercise Ryan explains real literary immersion to be. In other words, Eric's perceptual shift brings forth the imaginary to the extent it is not distinguishable from reality.

The construction of the Orpheus particularly illustrates this act of flipping, as the narration lays out the process of suspension of disbelief for the reader. When Fidorous offers to show Eric around the boat, by turning the page the reader is suddenly greeted with a detailed visual and indexical description of the boat instead of regular narration. By bringing the fictional action to a halt, the index briefly disconnects the reader's view of the active events in the textual world in order to make them familiar with the ship's parts. By presenting this detailed construction, the narrative asks the reader to carefully create a vivid mental image of the ship while also understanding what it

is. This draws attention to the language level but also to how most visuals we conjure in our minds while reading are actually less detailed than we realize (see 3.3). So, as the characters are physically building Orpheus, the reader mirrors the process by meticulously following the index and constructing the ship in their mind. Establishing this effect presumes the reader follows these instructions as they are presented and does not skip them. As a result, slowing down perception is foregrounded as the necessary process before the product, Orpheus, can be brought to life in the mind. The scene communicates the idea that imagination produces more powerful and vivid experiences if they first involve struggle and effort, which applies for real readers as well (see 3.1.2).

The ship's description is far more detailed than what a reader would typically encounter even in descriptive traditional narratives, emphasizing how the characters are attempting to build the idea itself, not an imitation. Fidorous explains how the familiar shape helps in suspending disbelief and bringing the idea into view in a way that turns a game of make-believe into true conviction and ultimately triggers the inversion. The ship is convincing because it represents the western world's "current collective idea of what a shark-hunting boat should be" and is thus easily visualized (315). This refers to what Federman notes about our imagination automatically drawing from familiar visuals and clarifies how the conceptual space is fundamentally mimetic: the ship becomes the one from *Jaws* because the space can only operate through reference (575). From that point forward, free will turns into an illusion and imagination into imitation. Eric, Scout, and Fidorous are all predestined to play their parts as Brody, Hooper, and Quint from the moment they step onto the ship and shift to the conceptual space, as the narrative itself can now only become an imitation of *Jaws*.

Full immersion is then portrayed as an act of flipping, in which the language disappears and is replaced by the world behind it. Imaginary worlds are temporarily accepted as true, or actual, in order to experience them (see 3.1.1). However, in the story this type of worldly perceptual shift also requires more than make-believe. For his mind to shift view, Eric needs to believe rather than

merely imagine. So even while the story portrays the dangers of immersion as getting lost and scattered among worlds, it also implies a difference between imagining and believing when it comes to reading. As discussed in 5.1, the conceptual space seems to exist as part of the textual actual world rather than being its own separate world. Whether it represents merely the flow of fictionality or a type of world itself is uncertain. This ambiguity ultimately allows the reader to perceive the textual universe both as a separate set of fictional worlds and as something encroaching on the actual world through the implication that the flow of fictionality is part of the reader's reality as well.

Assuming the many worlds reading, the story's inner multiverse represents the world-oriented intuition more clearly. When a world becomes actual in one's view, other worlds turn to reflections. This imitates the logic of the possible worlds model, in which any world is perceived as actual by its inhabitants (see 3.1.1). The recurring imagery of dark holes in the memory fragments and Eric's dreams represents windows between these worlds, consequently revealing the multiverse structure. The negatives eventually provide a way to make sense of similar references in the print novel.

In the English translation of negative 8, which represents the first Eric's 175th letter and is available online on the "The Red Cabinet" forum, he writes how there are holes in his mind. Eric describes them as "dark wells containing only echoes, while others contain dark water in their depths.". Hayles observes how the lake document is evoked here again with dark water as the signifier for the shark's emergence (2011: 126). As he gazes into them, Eric describes seeing "a distant full moon, and the silhouette of a person looking back at me. The shape terrorizes me. Is it me down below? Is it you? Maybe it isn't anyone. The view becomes a reflection and… something more, something else." This last thought also finally becomes clear in the second Eric's mind but by grasping for its meaning, the negative hints at how the coin metaphor extends from the story to the novel's physical design as well by referring to these sides as "Inside and out. Object and reflection. Front and back. Positive and negative." The digital negatives then represent the hidden flipside of

the visible published print novel; they are the reflection from the view of the second Eric's story, which implies the first and second Eric inhabit different parallel worlds within the textual universe. The prologue also conveys this idea by visually flipping the text to indicate the shift from negative to positive, one world to another (see 5.1).

The page numbers in the prologue run backwards from zero to indicate how it occurs before the events of the print but also on this flipside of the main narrative. The term negative itself also alludes to photographs and how both Clio's fish photos and the photograph of Naxos Eric carries around can disappear and reappear between worlds, implying that the negatives are similarly accessible because they shift through the conceptual space and wash upon the shores of different worlds. Scattered among different editions and on the Internet, the negatives represent how these different relics of Eric can be, in some ways, regarded as reflections from the view of our own world as well.

The world of *The Raw Shark Texts* is then plural in a manner similar to many postmodern narratives (McHale 33-9). Eric is both dead and not dead depending on the viewpoint, referring to both the centred world and the reader's interpretation, as mentioned earlier. That is to say, following the possible worlds taxonomy, the definition of actual becomes a matter of perspective based on what world constitutes the view. Additionally, reminiscent of the notions in Borges's many works, such as the creative power of imagination in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and "The Circular Ruins", the novel implies that we may be no different to Eric or the fictional characters of imaginary worlds, for our reality could also be merely a reflection from another view.

Both metaphors, "language is water" and "perception is a flipping coin", are mirrored in multiple layers from thematic elements to physical design and interpretation. The most prominent dualities echoing the metaphor of the two-sided coin are word/idea, actual/parallel worlds, realistic/otherworldly reading, and print/digital form. Gibbons identifies similar structures in other multimodal novels and considers them a form of multimodal metaphor, referring to the "interaction and integration of modes" in the construction of the metaphor (33). The material design thus

participates in constructing the metaphors from the story, which also ultimately enhances the novel's multimodal message about the dangers of immersion and unsettled boundaries between reality and fiction.

Also, while the perceptual shifts in the story clearly portray immersion as the flip between physical and conceptual, the conceptual space remains unnatural, partially resembling fictionality as naturally embedded part of reality and how we think rather than a separate world. What appear to be twists and turns of perception, could then be merely an illusion of two sides where there is truly only one, portraying a Möbius strip-like world. Whether it is a world or spatialized fictionality Eric immerses in remains ultimately ambiguous, underlining how the narrative evades any definite conclusions or interpretations.

In contrast to Eric's total immersion, Ryan reminds that real readers never completely lose perception of reality while reading. Even while immersed in the textual world, they flicker between these two states, which allows an easy return back to reality, only slightly changed by the experience (see 3.1.2). However, Ryan's division between immersion and interaction seems somewhat incompatible with multimodal narratives like *The Raw Shark Texts*, as it suggests that even if both elements can be present in a single text, they cannot occur simultaneously. The text either conjures a world or a game. Yet, the concept of flickering does not appear completely unfounded. Based on my observations in 5.1 and 5.2, I suggest that the reader's focus does fluctuate between observing and evaluating depending on which effect the narrative foregrounds. However, this shifting is better described as attentional rather than perceptual task, as explained by Polvinen, Anderson, and Iversen (see 4.1.2 and 4.2). The reader must maintain both language and illusion within their perception in order to understand the multimodal meanings of the narrative. The layered metaphors then integrate the process of imagination into the story and co-create new meanings, promoting "simultaneous immersion and self-awareness of fictionality" (Polvinen 2012: 105).

Therefore, while the textual universe seems to primarily portray Ryan's logic, the novel evokes a more complex reading experience than the possible worlds model presumes. For this, Gibbons' concept of "figured trans-worlds", by assuming the reader's mind can be positioned simultaneously inside and outside the world, offers a useful augmentation to the world-oriented model (80). Multimodal designs thus seem to evoke a specific type of reading experience in comparison to traditional novels or fully interactive hypertext fiction. Rather than adhering to Ryan's opposing categories of immersion and interactivity, *The Raw Shark Texts* forms a hybrid. I propose that since the novel seems to call for reading positions that do not clearly adhere to the logic of the in-and-out model, the immersion promoted by the text could be different to how Ryan conceptualizes it as well. Since the visual designs of *The Raw Shark Texts* participate in communicating the narrative, as demonstrated in 5.1 and 5.2, the reading experience is better understood through a combination of enactive approaches and Gibbons' augmentations to the world-oriented theory.

5.4 View and Reflection

After establishing how the story portrays the artifice and illusion as two opposing sides, I will now look more closely at how the reading experience itself involves maintaining view of both. In this last part of my analysis, I address the novel's metafictional and transmedia aspects and how the reading experience appears more complex than the perceptual flipping portrayed by the story and Ryan's theory. Focusing on how the novel extends its fictional world toward reality, I consider the looping effects created by the narrative and how they entangle immersion with self-awareness. In other words, when it comes to immersion in relation to self-reflective narratives, rather than the either-or notion of flipping, such texts seem to present a case better described as a "both-and scenario" (Anderson and Iversen 582).

The Raw Shark Texts embodies various metafictional elements. In addition to the lake document and the shark, the most prominent ones are the shifts between narrative frames and

worlds discussed in 5.1 and 5.3. When the textual world turns inside out, an unnatural metalepsis occurs. This refers to ontological jumps within the narrative construction, which can be conceptualized as either transgressions between narrative levels (McHale), or between worlds (Bell and Alber). Perceived through the possible worlds model, Eric jumps from textual actual world to another world within the textual universe. The ambiguity of whether Eric is somehow in-between worlds or whether he exists in multiple worlds at the same time makes this shift particularly unnatural (Bell and Alber 171-6). The effect is defamiliarizing but not solely an aesthetic device for revealing the fictional construction, since it also communicates a central thematic message concerning the dangers of immersion (186).

Metalepsis is also a common occurrence in postmodern literature, especially with nested narrative structures, according to McHale (119-27). However, some experimental narratives specifically utilize these elements to reveal the process and construction in order to engage the reader in philosophical exploration of fiction and the reader's own performance (see 2.1.2). The reader of *The Raw Shark Texts* is then engaged in a fictional world that deliberately entangles the concepts of worldliness and fictionality. A sort of loop appears, in which the elements that make the story strange and blur the ontological boundaries are the ones to also emphasize the themes and construct the world. In this way, foregrounding the materiality merely plays into the game the story initiates: the reader, like the protagonist, is already immersed in the language stream by reading the text. Hence, these metafictional aspects may cause the reader to gain awareness of the artifice, but in a way that is never clearly disconnected from the textual world and events themselves. As Polvinen notes, this seems to make mimesis paradoxically both "world-reflecting" and "world-creating" at the same time (2012: 96).

At times the meta commentary is overt, like how the narration of the lake document breaks through discourse level. However, most times it is subtle, not disturbing attention to the inner world unless the reader makes a connection to the double meanings. For example, in the hidden memory fragment, the first Eric, devastated after Clio's death, contemplates how "stories are all we're ever

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left with in our head or on paper: clever narratives put together from selected facts, legends, well edited tall tales" (413). While Eric is reflecting on his own life here, the comment simultaneously functions as metareference. The narrative is describing itself in this passage, as this is also what the novel ultimately is.

Furthermore, actual authors and existing works of fiction are referenced in the story, creating similarities between textual and actual world. What this means is that parts of our world also exist in the fictional world. The conceptual stream in the story seems to consist of narratives also existing in the actual world, which further unsettles the boundaries between textual and actual. Also, some of the references directing the reader to other sources outside the novel like links in hypertext fiction embody this textual interconnectedness and the idea of texts creating conceptual flows as they do in the story. The reader then co-creates the textual system with the narrative by making the connections, which may lead them back to the textual world with a new understanding of it.

The expanding and looping structure of the main narrative also causes the reader's attention to circulate from Eric's active voice to his writing and further to their own reading of the text. As a result, the boundaries between world and discourse, fictional and actual, become increasingly visible but deliberately unsettled as well. The reader becomes aware of structures, which, according to Ryan, should remain transparent in order to maintain view of the inner world. However, as the themes of language, water, grief, and immersion fuse into an entangled spiral in the story, the novel's materiality clearly attempts to echo this effect, which makes the story more vividly present for the reader. In other words, the novel attains evocativeness by closely integrating themes, syntax, visual design, and psychological effects (see 4.1.1). Furthermore, as the ending resists conventional closure, resembling Eric's ambiguous superposition between worlds, there is no clear return for the reader either.

From the perspective of Ryan's world-oriented theory, metafiction appears incompatible with immersion specifically since drawing attention to these ontological boundaries foregrounds the

text's own artificiality regardless of medium (see 3.2). But in the case of *The Raw Shark Texts*, the structure is clearly revealed for the purpose of unsettling it, as also previously discussed in 5.1 concerning how the shark trespasses the boundary. The novel's multimodal design makes distributed attention to both illusion and materiality vital for performing the narrative and for constructing the inner world. Rather than a world or a game, the reader conjures a "figured trans-world", in which they are engaged by obscuring the clear distinction between worlds. Gibbons observes a similar response with other multimodal novels (84, 157). As a result, the reader is connected to Eric's vivid experience of the textual world, while simultaneously paralleling it with their own experience of the text.

While this experience may create attentional fluctuation between content and evaluative process, the effect appears somewhat different from the flickering between world and aesthetic, because it involves thematized self-reflection rather than simple aesthetic appreciation, which Anderson and Iversen conceive as distinct experiences (see 4.2). Evaluative processing, according to Polvinen, is always part of how readers interact with fictional notions, even during immersive reading experiences because reading is never an unmediated process (2016: 25). I concur, and surmise that on the grounds of what Polvinen suggests about perception and mimesis, the metafictional and aesthetic elements in *The Raw Shark Texts*, while revealing the artifice, do not necessarily work against immersion as they also carry vital thematic meaning. Aspects like the expanding narrative frame and direct address through the narrative boundary in the lake document deliberately construct a vivid immersive illusion only to dismantle it, which does seem to cause a clear shift in the reader's focus. However, in these instances, the novel is orchestrating the effect with the intent of making the reader aware of how mimetic world-oriented immersion operates. The text's own fictionality is laid bare in order to thematize the process of reading and engage the reader in a story that revolves around immersing into worlds and fictionality. Here, revealing the creative process then carries meaning as a form of exposition and world-building, becoming part of the novel's inner world.

According to Patricia Waugh, metafiction may envision a new type of literary quest of theorizing about itself by turning inward, and as a result, changing the "traditional fictional quest ... into a quest for fictionality" (10). *The Raw Shark Texts* could then be perceived as not merely a fictional journey inside a textual world but also a philosophical and intertextual exploration of our experience of the world. In other words, the reader is not merely a voyeur observing a fictional story from another world but also an active participant in its realisation, interactively carrying on the quest beyond the print novel.

The negatives transgressing into the actual world as transmedia extensions physically actualize this breach between worlds. As discussed in chapter 2, these fictional epitexts eventually transform the reading experience more clearly into interactive play. The reader may know about them before reading the print novel, discover them later, or never even become aware of their existence, meaning that the knowledge and experience of the story can vary for different readers. Reading the negatives first may alter the suspense and immersive effect evoked by gradually unfolding the mystery from the second Eric's perspective. Assuming the reader discovers them afterward, they transform the reading experience into an extended quest. As a result, the reader becomes a fully interactive user, taking on a new type of physical role in performing the narrative (Bell 2). It makes the novel resemble the interactive network structures of hypertext fictions, in which a narrative becomes freely navigable. While a narrative is always "a virtual object" in the sense that it generates worlds and interpretations, according to Ryan, hypertext fictions add another level to this virtuality as their meaning is defined by how the reader constructs the narrative in addition to how it is interpreted (2015: 33-4). The negatives introduce this dimension to *The Raw Shark Texts* as well.

Neither Eric nor the reader can recover all the missing pieces. For Eric, they are lost, and while the reader can find some of the negatives, most have not been found, or perhaps even released by the author. Furthermore, the prologue reveals a parallel between the reader's interactive quest and the first Eric's original search for Fidorous: a quest prompted by quotes and references leading

from one source yet to another. The story then becomes an endless search started by Eric in the textual world and carried on by the reader in the actual world. In doing so, the reader transforms into Eric's next successor in the task of unravelling the story.

Due to its referential structure and "writerly" nature, the novel opens up more after a re-reading and depending on the effort the reader brings to the process. As such, the textual world is not conventionally immersive in a manner that engages readers to merely observe it, rather, they are also invited to solve the mystery of it. Even when faced with experimental forms, contradictions, and worlds that seem unnatural, an active reader attempts to overcome and make sense of them (Alber 2014). Such texts might need to be reread with care in order to achieve this understanding (Pyrhönen). Concerning *The Raw Shark Texts*, reading the negatives and finding intertextual connections make the process of rereading it a satisfying activity. The more allusions the reader understands, the more likely they are to discover new ways of reading and immersing into the text.

While in the context of traditional narration, immersion and awareness may more easily appear as flickering sides of view, the multimodal designs of *The Raw Shark Texts* ultimately make layered perception explicit by demanding attention to the page and the inner world at the same time. Exposing this "figured trans world" to the reader, the novel evokes both awareness of fictionality and immersion to its creative process (see 4.1). The effect seems intuitively different from the mimetic immersion traditional narratives promote, and compelling in a way that, while not adhering to conventional scale models, is undeniably immersive. It is why I suggest that *The Raw Shark Texts* and similar multimodal and transmedia metafictions may be evoking a different type of immersion altogether. Werner Wolf also suggests that we may not yet fully grasp the complexity of this phenomenon particularly in relation to transmedia literature, and how it can appear even paradoxical at times (4).

What captivates the reader is not an effortlessly accessible textual world, but the process of puzzling and discovering it. As Alber tells us, even the strangest scenarios and fictions ultimately lead us back to ourselves, to "the nature of the human mind" and to questions about our own world

(2009: 87). Drawing on Anderson and Iversen, this contemplation of the extratextual is how defamiliarization may co-operate with immersion, expanding our thinking from the textual world into the world before us (582). In other words, instead of returning us to the familiar sensation of life Shklovsky talks about, the novel directs the reader toward real theories of many worlds. In some sense, the strange is then rediscovered in reality, with implications that our world may be unknown and vast as well. The reader's return to the actual world becomes intentionally shrouded in vagueness, resembling Ryan's notion of immersive fiction keeping the reader in its grasp for a while even after reading, as they return slowly and slightly changed (see 3.1.2). While *The Raw Shark Texts* leaves the reader similarly engaged and wondering, the effect rises more from a sense of mystery and the narrative's push toward reality.

6 Conclusion

In this thesis, I set out to study how immersion occurs in *The Raw Shark Texts* as a theme and how it is present in the reading experience. I have argued that while the story primarily portrays immersion and perception as an act of flipping between different views, similar to Ryan's notion of flickering between worlds, the novel itself assists readers in maintaining a sense of immersion even while aware of the text's fictionality. As Polvinen observes, this is possible if we accept perception as a complex function that is able to involve attentional shifts without losing sight of the whole (2016: 30-1).

 The Raw Shark Texts seems to evoke different types of immersion in part by conventionally drawing attention away from the material surface, and in part by deliberately foregrounding its own embodied materiality as part of the wilful pretence. Acknowledging that the text allows multiple ways of reading and that immersion is inherently a subjective and relative experience, I have aimed to demonstrate how the novel promotes immersion by introducing it as a theme and further intertwining it with the narrative design. The novel's use of typography creates a sense of presence by using language as a tool of reference as well as visual representation. These multimodal visuals along with the scattered digital fragments extend the novel beyond its own inner world. I have also argued that the multimodal design and paratexts introduce an aspect of interactivity to the print novel and how the reader performs the narrative. I have then further proposed that immersion and interactivity co-operate in the novel as means for the reader to meaningfully perform the narrative. Gibbons expresses a similar notion in the context of other multimodal fictions, but her work also invites more study. She suggests enactive studies in particular could provide further insight on the reading experiences of multimodal print novels, which is what I have explored in this thesis (224).

 The reader must maintain awareness of both fictional world and their own enactive performance of it while reading *The Raw Shark Texts* in order to successfully infer the novel's multimodal meanings. From this, we can further conclude that rather than being on the opposing

end of interactivity or defamiliarization, the novel's immersive qualities seem to be partially intertwined with these aspects. While it may seem contradictory to propose that elements foregrounding the novel's fictionality could also enhance its immersive qualities, I argue that this is conceivable if we understand reading as enactive and embodied performance, and mimesis as paradoxically both creating and reflecting, as Polvinen suggests (2012). By combining this notion with Gibbons' augmentation to world-oriented theories concerning how multimodal narratives position readers simultaneously in textual and actual worlds, I have proposed that this reading position is therefore not inherently less immersive. Thus, it seems productive to direct our attention to the ways such texts, while resisting easy access or conventional closure, demand dynamic reading strategies and engage readers in multiple ways.

The Raw Shark Texts constructs this position by employing multimodal metaphors, intertwining its metafiction with thematic elements, and unsettling the distance between fiction and reality. The sense of mystery and discovery the novel presents, engages readers in a way that is different from conventionally effortless immersion but no less captivating. In addition to the multimodal design, immersion is thematically present in the protagonist's evocative experiences associated with water, grief, stories within stories, parallel worlds, and the constant but ambiguous trespassing between worlds in the story.

This thesis has thus focused on both thematical elements from the story and the novel's visual design. However, it draws from subjective interpretations concerning both the narrative and the specific conceptualizations of immersive reading, which means the text and its reading experience could be modelled in multiple ways. This could alter the results, since the approaches utilized in this thesis provide a specific type of answer, which therefore leaves space for further study. Additionally, the methods used in this thesis could also be expanded on and applied for examining ways other experimental novels engage readers.

While the rise of hypertext fictions and VR-technology presents new forms of immersive interactivity, the innovation these developments have spurred among experimental print literature is

also worth notice (Ryan 2015, Bray et. al). The model proposed by Anderson and Iversen seems to offer a new and more integrative conceptualization of immersion in the context of unusual narratives, but it also calls for more research. Further study could then discover ways immersion may also be promoted by other multimodal print narratives. Applying enactive reading theories could lead to a more nuanced understanding of the differences between the immersion evoked by traditional mimetic narratives in contrast to experimental forms. As Werner Wolf reminds us, immersion remains a somewhat elusive phenomenon, and particularly in transmedia literature, its seemingly paradoxical nature still calls for more study (4).

All in all, my analysis contributes to the existing discussion on *The Raw Shark Texts*, and by building on previous studies, also offers new perspective on how some aspects of the novel may be interpreted particularly concerning its otherworldly elements. Furthermore, the value of this thesis is the way it explores how experimental novels employ unconventional and multimodal means of engaging readers, and how this may evoke potentially new ways of experiencing literary immersion.

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