7 Conclusions

And then the miracle happens. The sun comes up again. So you get up and do your morning things, and one thing leads to another, and eventually, at nine, you find yourself back at the desk, staring blankly at the pages you filled yesterday. And there on page four is a paragraph with all sorts of life in it, smells and sounds and voices and colors and even a moment of dialogue that makes you say to yourself, very, very, softly, "Hmmm."

- From Anne Lamott, Bird by Bird, 1994

7.1 Thesis Statement

In this document I have addressed issues of the changing media technology landscape and the way in which society has gained new perspective on the world through these media. This new media technology also includes the development of computer technology, the globalization of computer networks, and the emerging new medium which is an amalgam of television and the internet. The storyteller will need to invent new creative processes and work with new tools which support this new medium, this new narrative form. *Metalinear narrative* is the name proposed by this research for this new narrative form. The metalinear narrative is a collection of small related story pieces designed to be arranged in many different ways, to tell many different linear stories from different points of view, with the aid of a *story engine* which sequences the story pieces.

Metalinear narrative has three primary components:

1) An abstract story structure composed of narrative primitives which a writer can manipulate and rearrange according to her creativity. The story structure provides the narrative framework, or spine, for the many linear narratives to be produced from the metalinear narrative
2) A representation of story granules to be resequenced in various ways. This representation incudes annotations of how each granule fits into the story structure and the narrative relationships between the story granules
3) Methods of resequencing story granules based on their representation and the provided abstract story structure. The story engine chooses granules which fit the story structure according to predetermined narrative styles

My thesis is that a writing tool which offers the author these three key elements, as well as knowledgeable feedback about narrative construction and context during the creative process, is essential to the task of creating metalinear narratives of significant dimension.

7.2 What Was Done

To prove the thesis, a software writing tool was developed which stores, represents and sequences metalinear stories. The process of using this tool was then observed as writers tested the software by creating metalinear stories.

The software writing tool, *Agent Stories*, consists of a set of five environment screens for authoring metalinear narratives. These environments are:

1) The Structural Environment, in which the structure of the narrative is described using abstract narrative primitives

2) The Representational Environment, in which knowledge of the various story elements is captured in the form of relationships between story granules or clips. In this environment, each story clip is also labeled as to how it can fit into the narrative structure defined in the Structural Environment
3) The Writer Feedback Environment, in which the writer is given feedback from Agent Stories on the constructability of the collection of story clips. The feedback is in the form of short textual descriptions of why each clip was chosen for its place in the story. This story clip sequencing is done through the implementation of software agents called *story agents*
4) The Presentational Environment, in which the story agents work as video editors, intelligently sequencing and orchestrating the different story elements according to a particular agent's individual stylistic preferences. The audience chooses which story agent to activate, thereby choosing the type of story they will receive.
5) The Agent Scripting Environment, which offers the writer an easy way of directing the narrative construction, by designing new story agents

The story agents act as the drivers of the story engine. While not story engines themselves, a story agent's unique parameter values determine how the story engine operates. Story agents select and sequence the story pieces, according to (a) a user specified abstract narrative structure, (b) the relationships between the story pieces, and (c) the unique parameter values of the story agents. The system supports the writer's thinking about and structuring a metalinear story by assembling simple narrative constructs during the rewrite process. Agent Stories is primarily intended for an author's use in the creation of metalinear multiple point of view textual stories, before the stories are realized as multimedia presentations using video, audio, and still pictures.

It is difficult to write a metalinear narrative, largely because it is difficult to break the deeply learned habits of linear narrative thinking. While the human brain is the most versatile tool for the job, it is difficult enough keeping all the narrative structures and details in one's head when the narrative is small and simple. When the narrative is large and complex, I maintain that the task is nearly impossible to accomplish without external tools. This is why a writing tool which can store the story details in a meaningful way, and which offers knowledgeable feedback about narrative construction and context during the creative process, is essential to the task of creating metalinear narratives of significant dimension.

7.3 How the Thesis was Proven

My hypothesis has been that with the appropriate tool, writers can successfully write in a form which departs from the strict single linear narrative, in favor of a form which will allow multiple reconstruction into many different linear narratives. This hypothesis was proven through the use of the software tool Agent Stories and an analysis of metalinear stories created with this tool by selected writers.

The writers I chose were predisposed to writing with a tool which allowed them to manage multiple voices in their stories. It also helped that they were not trying to achieve a standard linear result through Agent Stories, but instead wanted to experiment and be open to what they could discover as they wrote. The results were varied but overall positive.

Tools such as Agent Stories will support a changing world through metalinear narrative design. As our world becomes smaller, our need to communicate through a variety of methods, with a variety of voices, increases. The stories we share, whether traditional, political, or personal, can increase our understanding and tolerance of each other. Tools such as Agent Stories can offer writers and readers the power shape and reshape our world. Metalinear narrative may make it easier for all of us, not just a few of us, to tell our stories.