

INTERFACE

by

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we  
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards  
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Interface

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Julie Carr

A book of poems dedicated to the impact of digital technologies on intimacy, family, space, and the interpersonal. The speaker and subjects of the poems are ambivalent toward their relationships with the screen that has become an extension of themselves. On the one hand, they believe that new technologies hold tremendous possibilities for increased, meaningful human interaction. On the other hand, they are anxious that new modes of communication will inevitably lead to the sacrifice of other modes and perhaps meaningful human intimacy as well.

For my family and Mark.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 1990's, as a direct result of emerging information technology, the rural Silicon Valley town where my family has lived for generations drastically changed in every way possible. During that time, the population all but doubled, my father used a car phone, we owned a personal computer, I had a hotmail address and an AIM handle, Napster changed how I listened to music, everyone was suddenly rich, everyone was suddenly poor, phone numbers were forgotten, land-lines unplugged, and now I can update my Facebook status to instantly reach hundreds of people while never speaking to the man next to me on the bus.

This short history of how information technology has impacted my life is probably a somewhat familiar one. When I wrote *Interface*, I set out to unite my usual poetic subject matters of intimacy, family, space, and the interpersonal with my undecided feelings about human/technology interaction. On the one hand, I believe new technologies hold tremendous possibilities for increased, meaningful human interaction. On the other hand, I am anxious that new modes of communication will inevitably lead to the sacrifice of other modes and perhaps meaningful human intimacy as well. I may be able to correspond easily with an old friend in Australia via email or Facebook while riding the bus, but as a result, I never spoke to a man sitting inches away from me. When hundreds of people can fit in a hand, how can one ever be completely alone, or alone with another human being?

The expression of my questions and anxieties surrounding the replacement of face to face human interaction with face to interface human interaction is the central objective of the book. The opening poem places the speaker of the project between what exists in her visual field and her perception

of it. The speaker then becomes concerned with the measurement of the distance between spaces and where she might fit into these spaces. Finally, the poem invites you into itself, and into the book as it exists as a physical object: "the folding tree." This poem was written specifically to be the first poem of the book in order to set up the expectation that the project would contain an "I" speaker who would permeate the poems. I felt that opening with the ultra narrative *Proximity* would make the transition to the more analytical *Screen* section unpleasantly unexpected for the reader.

Some of the poems in *Proximity* were written while I was at work about two years ago. These poems have existed in many forms including a remix video project, several versions of one poem called "The Sciences Of", and as a part of a multimedia art installation. The pronoun characters of the *he* and *she* emerged out of my observations of the strange social dynamics that existed between men and women in my science heavy workplace: the University of Colorado's Joint Institute for the Laboratory of Astrophysics. I was also reading Rosemarie Waldrop's *Reluctant Gravities* at the time and I was interested in how she used pronouns to create a disjunctive narrative of gender dynamics. Prose poems for this section made complete sense to me. Not only because *Proximity* is ultimately a story, but because the intersection between poetry and prose enacts another layer of negotiation, an interfacing, between two separate but overlapping entities.

The goal of *Proximity's* narrative is to establish a strange human relationship where intimacy is further complicated by human technologies like elevators, pens, books, computer screens, and architecture - technologies that were developed to facilitate human movement and communication but also have potential to become barriers for intimacy. The word "proximity" itself expresses this section's concerns over the role of distance in both space and time in the measurement of human intimacy. Elevators, like Facebook, change one's potential distance from (and therefore time from) other human beings. Besides Rosemarie Waldrop, this section attempted to draw from some of the direct narrative

moments of Donna Stonecipher's *Cosmopolitan*, and the gentle tone of intimacy and uncertainty in Carole Maso's novel, *The Art Lover*.

If *Proximity* establishes the human component of the human/screen interface, then the second section, *Screen*, attempts to introduce the machine side of that interaction. What becomes quickly clear however, is that it is easier to separate the human from the computer screen than it is to separate the computer screen from the human. A computer screen was made by humans, used by humans, and serves little utility without interfacing with people. The word "screen" is meant to be taken as a computer screen, but also as a filtering device, and a physical barrier used for separation. Whether it's feminism, the home, family, sex, money, the body, or writing itself, *Screen* acts as a kind of catalog of issues involving technology's facilitation of or barrier to human intimacy. The pronoun characters are absent but the "I" makes herself present once again, describing various experiences with technologies that mediate her perception and relationship to the physical world. Some poems in *Screen* were inspired by the playfulness of Caroline Dubois's *You are the Business*, and the feminine vulnerability and wavering strength of Jean Rhys's narrator in *Good Morning, Midnight*.

The final section, *Mediation*, was written and compiled as a way to literally mediate between the first two sections. The word "mediation" also describes the role of technologies that mediate our perceptions. For example, a photograph is an image mediated by the lens, the aperture, and even the paper. *Mediation* opens with a poem that visually enacts the back and forth movement that the section attempts to negotiate in its content. The pronoun characters of the first section return and are not granted a definite resolution. Their relationship is still as uncertain as the "I's" relationship to herself, to the "you", and to the mediating devices that construct her reality. Both the section and the book end by conflating the screen and physical space (scrolling down an elevator.) Because *Mediation* is an attempt to unite the first two sections of the book, the influences previously mentioned find their way into the final section of



the book as well. The last main influence to mention is Barbara Guest in general, and her book *Stripped Tales* specifically. Her work with pronoun confusion and the prose poem form were always in mind while writing *Interface*.

Like *Interface's* own speaker, I have had my own uncertainties about a relationship that is very important to me and to this project: my relationship to poetry. While writing *Interface* the lingering question in my mind has been: why poems? I am a digital artist and the book is about computer technology, so why is it a book of poems? This wavering of faith is the only explanation I have for the existence of the biblical imagery littered throughout the book. The answer I have come up with is that language is the single most important technology that builds or breaks down human intimacy. Furthermore, technologies like the Internet are literally built with language, just like a book of poems. My choice of medium makes sense in the context of that answer, but more importantly I have had to come to terms with the existence of the question in the first place. At first I took this doubt to be an attack on poetry as an art form-an art form that I usually have so much faith in; but now, I believe that it was actually out of deep respect for it. Poetry continues to teach me to question everything I know, and if it didn't teach me to question poetry itself, I don't think it would be the great teacher I have come to know it to be. By working on this project, I started to see this questioning as less of a faithless act, and more of an awareness that prevents me from taking the choice to perform any creative act for granted.

## INTERFACE

I am the same in every direction. Tonight the fog is self absorbed with water where I noticed the dark. There it is. Me, my perception as apparatus, as the black and white filter that can neutralize noise. Me, my intimacy with every screen in every hand in every home, to the lateral view of my sliding glass doors. How many numbers accelerate distance.

How far to the ocean. I want to know those numbers. How far to California. One thousand stretches its eleven letters over the landscape and I see for myself. I am revealed as just audible, come in,

come on, onto the nail  
in the folding tree.

## PROXIMITY

She comes from one of those could be anywheres.

She comes from one state over from where you placed your  
finger on a sphere-like screen. Spinning and spinning.

The building has no lift and there is little hope it ever will.

He is a scientist. A man with military economy. A scientist  
with a photograph of a notebook page.  
Lend him your pen, and don't come back without it.

She is a paperwork woman, a support the sciences woman.  
She tells her scientist that he is recognizable. The man's hand  
trembled when he took the pen so she pointed to the image of a  
notebook in his hand. He wrote nothing and knelt like  
communion.

*I'm going out for a while*, said her expression.

And she knew that the elevator was human made. But it's not an airplane, or chocolate croissants or incorrect. Elevator mirrors, indeed, help to alleviate the negative feelings that often accompany waiting.

There's a key he turns for the tenth floor.



She knows that floors are a spectrum. He missed his chance to hold the door open. Only the beautiful women cross their right leg over left, she thinks about it often and never switches legs.

She owns a portrait-safe dialogue and black wedges. She owns no platforms to speak of. There is sweat in her posture, she is a shadow that knocks on the door. Her voice might sound like fine grain sand but it was never digitally filtered. It has a unique signature like the four creases of her knuckle.

He pointed to the bridges, he made his own. Anchored and  
steel-bound over unreflecting water,  
that binding was a kind of lingerie.

What kept it together was functional stillness.

Those stairs only go from the basement to floor two.  
This tiny elevator, his body, prostrate, jumps with every floor.

These floors sound like hours.

Conscious of her shoes, the reflection,  
she sees the underneath, between the fluorescence and the tile.

The panorama frightens him, he seeks out a long table near the wall. She likes the way her hips feel in red, wonders what her hand would look like with a lit cigarette.

He hears her breathing, he won't look down, he fears floating  
down this tower. She turned into the sun setting, standing in  
the view. Coffee grounds fill his nails and teeth.

An appetite for anything can be sold.

He only answers his conversations. Yesterday he saw her trying to leave. She wasn't moving, no not at all but she held a map in her gaze. What she really meant was nothing by it. No, but what she meant was if she were the map she would communicate something. Distance.

He owns felt-tipped muscles. The kind that install things like ideas in notebooks. He owns very little blonde hair to speak of but owns other transparent fabrics that spin into something like your finger on the screen.



He catches her behind him in the reflection of spectacles.  
She knows these open spiral staircases remove the ground, the  
privacy beneath her dress.

Those stairs are drill bits through the building.

He saw the years as ascending number lines and wrote no child  
next to 53. She saw years like highway guard rails and wrote  
Paris in the white space.

No one looks back at him from the back of his mailbox. She walks through the hallways with manila folders, wondering if anyone dies, or is dying to know their contents.

She likes to think of those below her.

She looks at him with red tinted skin, too polite to ask why he throws himself down to drown out the sound of each floor's bell.

He sees her first when the doors open, another chance missed.

Whether or not the circles wrap around to make a line, he sees the view shrink to wet coffee grounds on carpets. He worries he's floating into her dress, he might be if she weren't already gone, another chance missed.

He floats through the spectrum, the hours.

SCREEN

After choosing not to display you in color, I put blush on my own cheeks without thinking of the real heat. Sometimes sweat and rain both smell like dogs so I closed my eyes and guessed. Not that the water really matters. How many thousands of people have seen you translated into discernible shapes. I feel less alone knowing I am millions of colors, two different blues.

There are still missing components.  
Hard and soft components. Hard and soft compromises.

I have this understanding.

Used a hand, fit the cloud to the window  
to frame out the middle between

*hand me the keys will you*

fingers on what's not yours  
it's not information  
not exactly see-through  
it might be the same room

people are pretty dressed  
one sound echoes tiles  
hundreds are voice overs  
that's it. Flat  
surrounding us.

No way to touch us or a red silken tie  
through four framed windows.



If this is the same room  
what bridge is lifting  
what tree is as audible  
as the notebook it made.  
I am human made.  
A knuckle folds  
a desire hand made  
for please you, please stay here.  
If this is the same room  
we keep our with standing  
with please you, please stay here  
our pictures sent with gaze  
no numbers to divide  
the carpet  
kneeling itself  
into a stairwell.

This wasn't the space we were promised.

We train girls in the component skills of a soft approach.  
Hard lines and an imitation of man.

That square is the same storefront, brick and brick and every  
kind of frame. From a softer place the globe and the wires  
bounce. Materials that give up are feminine materials.

You chose to abort and execute benign commands  
in brackets.

Men and women deal with the world of things.

My fingers are running down the shiny grid of that skyscraper  
expecting letters to appear and fall to the ground. That code,  
that word is malicious.

Our communication is rolling on a sphere in an overlit city  
tunnel.

No space is neutral.  
We know that the grid requires grout requires give.

It is a partition, a dividing place.  
The divide is you holding numbers in your hands  
sprinkling them around a home  
until the floor is domain,  
the wall is domain.

Four corners, each with a square of its own to hold.  
Take a corner and drag it inward to skew the whole object.  
Four corners, each with a square of its own hold.  
Take a corner and drag it inward  
When a corner spins to another corner, I stop  
worrying.

How I access memory is by carrying it around  
by placing it here, setting it there.  
This touch is fluid.

I kept the mouse moving to burn the newborn to the screen.

I asked for the exact circumference of any baby's head:  
proportionate to twenty four thousand miles, equal to the sum  
of each movement made by each time I lifted circles into  
ponytails and yarn.

His picture is far away,

his picture  
a filigree of color light  
lips, a coarse blanket.

That orange stalled flicker of skin is  
me being there.

Rain-like levels of transparency

severe and fragile.

The screen is melting, flameless.

The paper is heavy.

This money doesn't flicker.

I can't even type kill monster without help. Spontaneous discussions can't work out puzzles. After all it's only words. Talk of intimacy and my sexual response to the competition was thrust upon older boys. Ingratating, my seduction strategy was ineffectual, connoting limpness. I mean the rooms, real or not, are explored in real life.



Cascading sound down the display keeps getting smaller the tinier our eyes never become the obvious letters and images we keep asking them to be our bodies have always wanted to be immersed into a perfectly pointed shadow filled entirely with air that can deliver more than just breath that space that is empty except on days when the fan is on and the light enters what was disturbed.

I make the deck move with a camera, I make the snow move  
with the deck with the camera, I make a fist in the snow on the  
deck with the camera, with the camera I make the camera cold  
on the deck with the snow with the camera.

## MEDIATION

Blue casing of the window  
outside are only lines.

I coil a scarf to keep off the cold  
mixing and straining the weather.

A space waits in textile folds  
up and over .

the floor is domain,  
the wall is domain.

Two boys put money in a meter,  
no space opens up.

This same time feels every unbuttoning  
one little fastening at a time.

I have a survival that can fit inside years  
this wooden tent:

Face to workstation there are inches between her. She applies  
scent with the same distance in mind, its reach should be  
come closer. Its reach should be no further than a shaking hand.  
Wrist to neck she measures invisible transfers of innuendo, the  
wind in her hair from the desk fan.

She said an intelligent toaster knows color by heat. She said it was her favorite object. Technical details interfere with the body. Technical details don't have to interfere with the body.

I felt you settle into the scarf I made for you out of yarn. Did you expect it to be made from something else just because it's possible- like shoelaces, or pulp?

You settled there, settled like the oil half of the peanut butter and that was fine, creamy even but we both felt real enough to actually be there and of course we were there watching the warping of water of water of watering holes filled with letters meters long we stopped

you read one to yourself.

Hi, take off your sweater. This welcome isolates.  
When every wall is blackest, you rely on image  
for light. How do I look wearing all this sound?  
A customer wants to know where I come from.



I say the kitchen, of course, with your food.  
No, she says. I wasn't talking to the waitress.  
There is no word for writing a poem topless  
see how your skin reflects image, they live

when you decide they live, when you think  
of the word for writing a poem with breasts  
exposed. Have you ever seen a quatrain  
alone like the only car left in the driveway?

It was some morning, a dog was running on fingernails and wood. An aperture reopened then slammed shut. I made the most of my mediation by watching the window itself, looking sideways at the screen. I put myself in a mirror position to self assemble. You pretended not to see the word invention as my simultaneous eyes closed.

Her houseplants are process-like, compiled to run in favor of grooming. She values the circle and she values what is closed. Dominance might be sustained through simulation but it began as a town. The jasmine loses a leaf. It could have been this place. No it couldn't be this place. Romantically moving through its narrative code the jasmine gets greener. Go no further than modernity, go much further. His own book, the image of his book was the model. Saved code can be destroyed by water so she dissolved a page each day.

He told her that she is public enough. Here and there I run up buildings to catch myself on the return flight. It is cold in ounces.

Anything that can be weighed in air is an open space.

I 'm serious. Can I spend one month in the open.  
A real open without waves without frequencies,  
in a used to be open, a book open.

We already talked about numbers. The four digits of each year look like an address.

Percentages taken from mouse clicks then translated into yes, translated into no.

They reemerge as new digits,  
vertical and infinite they look like  
what it is to run sideways with an open bible.

The movement of a star in a fog.  
I wrote you into a book and held you there.  
The cover is stiff but you opened it anyway. I opened it.



We know how matter is sinking. He told you that tables only  
fold in one direction like curled hair.

A web of sweat lining this poem, your back  
against my ailment-this ailment is your ailment, it's our  
ailment.

She touches letters, touches letters, touches the mind to set  
them in, she settles in and starts over.  
The paper is burning.

I can feel children take my hand  
and dip it in paper then burn it.

The movements of children  
are unintentional, acceptable  
a red tie pinned as if a tail  
to the smeared sun  
burning  
as if light could be added to.

All night, the nailing, something bound,  
a boot through a waterfall

You're there aren't you  
all night  
maybe but what door could be certain of an arrival

from the headlights of cars through the blinds  
all night you think of nothing lonelier than murder.

a pair of alarms hold hands, liquefy.

the chime sounds or doesn't sound  
shadow paper on the closet

She picked up his notebook, opened the image. When she was a girl she owned a board game. The box that held the game showed the following scene:

A boy held the handle of a little red wagon. He held the same game that showed the following scene:

A smaller boy held the handle of a smaller red wagon. He held the same game that showed the following scene:

An even smaller boy held the handle of an even smaller red wagon. He held the same game that showed the following scene:

A boy held the handle of a little red wagon. He held the same board game that showed the following scene:

A boy held the handle of a little red wagon. He held the same board game that showed the above scene. Only much smaller.

Eventually the infinite boy wagon game box was approaching zero. It never stopped but she saw it end in the cardboard.

This might have been the image.

She is holding steam like a torch. He is sitting now, another stack of himself on the desk. When the window (no screen) is open in a building with 10 floors (turn the key) the wind finds the hinges (easy) so look out, there is glass on the glass.

He said, *What does the glass look like through a woman's hands?*

He is his own deadline. Boxes checked-he only knows his age if he does the math. She is unavailable. Aiming the steam toward the window she saw fingerprints revealed in the fogging up. She is unavailable. On the screen, on the window, and she isn't a stack of paperwork on his desk. She's taller.

I scroll down the elevator  
I pass posters for the barbeque  
pizza parties, forced intimacy  
a subtle penetration. Not so subtle.  
I saw a woman in red who saw  
a man as a mailbox. I think she  
knows you, she's resting  
her knuckles on her forehead.  
One foot clicked, the other  
foot clicked. We arrived  
we are comfortable being  
understood as somewhere.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### **Beckett, Samuel**

The dramatic works of Samuel Beckett inspired the strange disorienting spaces that exist in *Interface*. *End Game* and *Act Without Words* were models for strange but honest human behavior as a result of changes in setting and circumstance.

### **Blake, William**

The way Blake orchestrates his illuminated prints has been the foundation of my work with interdisciplinary visual art involving text.

### **Dickinson, Emily**

Dickinson's brevity and extreme density are poetic elements I am always striving for. I want more density in my work, so I keep coming back to Dickinson for assistance. Her complex syntax and ability to go abstract while remaining dense has also been so important to my work.

### **Dubois, Caroline**

I read Cole Swensen's translation of *You are the Business* pretty late in the process of this book but I still felt it's influence. It taught me that parataxis, abstraction, and distance can be grounded through sound play and repetition. It also gave me permission to be more playful with my language.

### **Guest, Barbara**

Guest's *Stripped Tales* was a formal influence for the prose poetry in the project. Also, her subtle deployment of associative strategies that make each word work harder and each image more complicated is a writing strategy I try to always keep in mind.

### **Maso, Carole**

Maso demonstrates that genre distinction is for the publisher and not the writer. Her novel, *The Art Lover*, contains verse within flowery prose and the enthusiastic permission to have female concerns. Because of my work in visual art as well, Maso's book is a great example of how text and image can coexist.

**Robertson, Lisa**

*R's Boat* and *The Weather* are nothing like *Interface* but Robertson reminds me that poetry is language and that language is so flexible. The subtle anger and feminism that permeates her work helped to inform some of the poems in *Screen*.

**Rhys, Jean**

Rhys's vulnerable, almost pathetic narrator in *Good Morning Midnight*, exposes our desire for and fear of human intimacy. Her prose is musical and tonally navigates the line between apathy and intense passion.

**Stonecipher, Donna**

Her book *The Cosmopolitan* was a direct influence on *Interface*. It was very important to the work when the gendered pronoun characters needed development and clarification.

**Turkle, Sherry**

Non fiction author of *Life on the Screen*, Turkle's treatment of the hypermasculinity of the online world was source material and inspiration for many poems in *Interface*.

**Waldrop, Rosemarie**

Waldrop played a large role in influencing this book. In *Curves to the Apple*, her language is gentle, strong, and expresses intimacy through detailed action and image based character development. The male and female voices in *Reluctant Gravities* were the models for the pronoun characters in *Proximity* and *Mediation*.