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Reading and Listening

Comprehension

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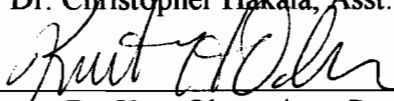
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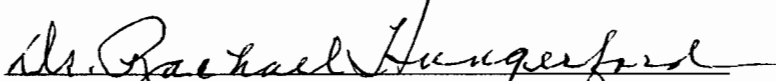
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Reading and Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

An experiment was conducted to determine if there is similar comprehension processes in reading and listening. Two groups of participants were presented with a narrative in one of two ways; audio tape, and in book form. Results from a pilot study suggested that those who listened to a narrative recalled more gist or meaning after presentation, while those who read the same story recalled more specific details from the text. Significant variability was found between the groups in amount recalled. There was also significant variability between proportion of text recalled for temporal and spatial shifts. This study suggests that the two channels have different properties even though their initial processes may be quite similar.

Reading and Listening Comprehension

There have been many debates about the similarities and differences between reading and listening. Since the main goal of both reading and listening is comprehension, one important issue is the idea that these two channels use the same basic processes when a person is trying to comprehend something. This is supported by the fact that 'normal' people with working senses can respond to information in any form, regardless of how it is acquired (Crowder & Wagner, 1992). For example, if a person were to read a question off of a piece of paper, he or she could reply to it orally. Another factor that supports the idea that the processes behind reading and listening are similar is the notion that most people, if they have enough vocabulary experience, are able to understand the same word by listening to it being said or by reading it (Crowder & Wagner, 1992).

Kintch and van Dijk (1978) proposed a global theory of comprehension used while understanding discourse. According to Kintch and van Dijk (1978), language is represented as a set of propositions. Propositions are abstract representations of ideas which guide comprehension of discourse. This type of representation works with concepts. A proposition is composed of two main parts : a predicate and a series of arguments (Kintch & van Dijk, 1978). An example of how a sentence is divided into propositions is seen in appendix I. The first part of the proposition is the predicate, or the abstract representation of the relational term of that proposition. The second part is the argument. This describes the concepts related by the predicate (Kintch & van Dijk, 1978). By using propositions instead of words in comprehension, the reader is left with a much more conceptually refined representation of the text.

Kintch and van Dijk (1978) also developed the idea that discourse is processed in cycles, due to the small capacity of short-term memory. As a reader or listener proceeds through a text, the content is divided into propositions which are organized in short-term memory. During the first cycle, several propositions are input into short-term memory. From these first few, a superordinate proposition is chosen to represent the theme of the text (Kintch & van Dijk, 1978). The remaining propositions are then connected to either the superordinate proposition or a proposition that is closely related to the superordinate proposition. These links are referred to as referential connections (Kintch & van Dijk, 1978) and must be made for comprehension to continue. Propositions are organized in short-term memory hierarchically, with the most important one, usually the most recent, on top. The proposition in the highest position is the superordinate proposition and all other propositions are connected to it either directly or through referential coherence (Kintch & van Dijk, 1978). After completion of the first cycle, a subset of propositions is chosen to remain in the buffer to allow for connections with incoming information. If a proposition is input into the system that cannot be connected to the existing representation, the reader can do one of two things; either search the representation stored in long-term memory for a similar proposition, or he or she can try to 'skip over' the particular representation by inferring certain things about the text (Kintch & Vipond, 1979). This model of comprehension works well for both reading and listening as it incorporates the idea that information is stored in memory as propositions, not as words, and allows for flexibility when trying to comprehend written or spoken text.

Kintch also developed other studies based on similar ideas. For example, Kintch and Kozminsky (1977) have argued that there is very little difference in the resulting representation developed from reading versus listening to narrative text. They argue that recall is similar as participants in their study remembered equal amounts of details after being presented with a text in oral or written form. These results were supported by Simpson and Thomas (1984) who examined the relationship between varying levels of reading competency and mode of presentation. They found that there were no significant differences due to mode of presentation for immediate learning and that all participants recalled similar details after reading or listening to the text.

Contrary to this earlier research, Danks and End (1987) did find differences in recall after presenting text through the two channels. These researchers had several theories to explain this discrepancy. They stated that those who listen to a text have no control over the speed of presentation. These participants do not have the convenience, as readers do, of looking back to the text to re-read and clarify missed or misunderstood ideas. Danks and End (1987) also argued that people have different levels of vocabulary knowledge, reading, and listening skills which affected their study as well. In addition, Halliday (1987) argues that listeners process narratives at the meaning level of the text, indicating the gist or intention of the account and that readers process text at the word level (Halliday, 1987). This presents the idea that listening and reading have different features, but their initial operations are comparable.

This interest in processing discourse extends into other research as well. Zwaan (1996) and Zwaan, Magliano, & Graesser (1995) have conducted studies on how readers

process narrative shifts in texts. These studies, like those previously mentioned, can be related to listening as well. Zwaan and his colleagues used Kintch and van Dijk's (1978) model of comprehension as their guide and realized that none of the previous studies had focused on how people simultaneously keep track of the three main shifts that occur in most situations; temporal, spatial and causal. These shifts are linked when episodes occur in real life, but narrative structures are not bound by the laws of nature, and the shifts can occur by themselves quite frequently. Temporal discontinuity occurs when two sentences do not occur in the same time period (Zwaan et al., 1995). An example of this is a jump back in time such as : 'just the summer before..' These researchers state that there is evidence that these temporal shifts impede comprehension and slow down reading time. A spatial shift occurs when the narrative switches from 'here' to a new 'here.' An example of a spatial discontinuity is : 'He took the coffee from the inside of the hotel room, onto the balcony.' The third type of discontinuity discussed is the causal shift. This results when there is a break in causal events. This type of shift requires extra processing time as well, as the reader must infer a causal link between two sentences. If an inference can be made, comprehension continues. If not, understanding of the narrative wanes. At the end of two studies, Zwaan et al.(1995) found that readers normally monitor multiple dimensions of the evolving situation. They found that temporal and spatial discontinuities led to significant elevations of reading time and that the two dimensions were monitored separately of each other in most cases. They also hypothesized that as a reader builds a framework for comprehending a story through the cycles of propositions, he or she also

builds a substructure to keep track of the temporal and spatial changes occurring within a narrative situation.

The purpose of the current study is to extend the past research on reading and listening and to explore the idea that there is a common core of comprehension between them. I began by presenting a narrative two ways; in book form, and on an audio tape. After presentation, the participants were asked to recall the story. I decided to present the narrative in these two ways to see if my results would mirror Danks and End's (1987) ideas that participants who have access to a narrative in book form would recall more details due to the fact that they have time to re-read and slow down to comprehend any discontinuities that might occur in the text. For the listening section, I decided to produce an audio tape that recreated the vocal tones and intonations of a 'book tape,' making it more interesting and converting the text to a more convenient form due to the emphasis on specific words within the narrative. I thought that by doing this, participants listening to the text would recall more information than readers after presentation. According to a pilot study involving reading or listening to a 'book tape,' results showed that those who read a narrative recall more specific details of a story, such as names and activities, while those who listen to the same story in 'book tape' form recall more of the gist, or the underlying meaning of a text, congruent with Halliday's (1987) findings. I wanted to see if I could replicate these results in this study. This time, I utilized a longer narrative and added conversation elements to see if they would have an effect on the results as well.

For this study, I also wanted to incorporate the research of Zwaan and his associates (1995, 1996). If people, when processing text, use Kintch and van Dijk's

(1978) model of reading comprehension to understand the situation, then they should be constructing a framework of temporal and situational changes at the same time (Zwaan et al., 1995). The present study extends this concept in recall scoring by dividing the employed narrative by its temporal and spatial discontinuities and recording the number of shifts cited. If, in fact, these shifts take more time to discern and impede comprehension, then those participants who read the narrative at their own pace should mention more temporal and spatial discontinuities in recall than those listening to the story.

Method

Participants

Forty students participated in this study. These participants were divided into two groups of twenty.

Materials

A short story from the book Spies in the Blue Smoke (Hawkes, 1992) was utilized in this study. This narrative was presented to participants one of two ways; on an audio tape (book tape) and in book form (see appendix II).

Procedure

Participants were run individually in an experimental session that lasted approximately 40 to 60 minutes depending on presentation mode, reading speed, and the number of details recalled. Those who heard the story in 'book tape' form were brought into a room where they were asked to listen to the story as they normally would. They were not notified of the memory task following presentation. The 'play' button was pressed and the participant was left alone in the room while listening to the narrative.

When complete, the researcher would return and ask that the participant recall as much as possible from the text. They were given unlimited time to complete the task. A participant who was presented with the narrative in book form was given a copy of the short story and asked to read it as they normally would. There was no time constraint associated with this task. Afterwards, the book was taken, and the participant was asked to recall as much as possible from the text in an unlimited amount of time.

Scoring

The story was divided up into 533 idea units based on the research of Trabasso and Sperry (1985) (see appendix III). It was also divided up into 39 temporal shifts (see appendix III) and 42 spatial shifts (see appendix III) based on Zwaan, Magliano, and Graesser (1995). When one idea unit (detail) was presented in recall, a 'point' was given. Additionally, a 'point' was given for recall of a shift if a participant remembered and recorded the idea unit (detail) directly after the shift occurred in the narrative.

Results

Number of overall details, temporal, and spatial shifts recalled were recorded.

There was significant variability found between the two groups for overall recalled idea units or details. $t(38)=-3.177$ (see appendix IV). Those who read the narrative in book form recalled more specific details.

There was also significant variability between proportion of text recalled for temporal shifts. $t(38)=-3.269$ (see appendix IV). Those who read the book recalled more temporal shifts.

Significant variability was also demonstrated between proportion of text recalled for spatial shifts. $t(38)=-3.208$ (see appendix IV). Those who read the narrative in book form recalled more spatial shifts.

The added length of the narrative contributed positively, but not significantly to the amount of details recalled, and the added conversation did not affect results. Also, it was noted that the added intonation of voice and word emphasis on the 'book tape' had no significant effect on results.

Discussion

The focus of this study was to try to understand if there are similarities between our two main language systems, spoken and written. The main goal of both reading and listening is comprehension. This fact alone gives us reason to believe that there are at least similar initial processes utilized in both modalities. The Kintch and van Dijk (1978) model of comprehension proposes that the same propositions in memory are accessed when coming in contact with text presented in oral or written form. Because propositions are abstract representations, they allow for flexibility during comprehension of information in both forms.

The research of Kintch and van Dijk (1978) also states that propositions are organized in short-term memory in a hierarchical form and that text is processed in cycles. If a proposition is input into the system that cannot be connected with the representation, the reader or listener can access long-term memory or 'skip over' the particular representation and infer certain things about the text (Kintch & Vipond, 1979). If this works, comprehension continues, if not, it fails. This information can be readily applied to

this study. When the listening group was presented with the story, they could not process the information at their own rate and therefore, could have had trouble processing a few propositions. Because they were not able to slow down the rate of presentation to process a proposition that could not be connected with the representation, they probably 'skipped over' a few parts by inferring things about the text and perhaps, by doing this, hindered comprehension.

This research is consistent with the results of Danks and End (1987) because they too found differences in the recall for their two groups. I believe the differences in the present study can be accounted for with the similar explanations to Danks and End (1987). In this study, those who listened to the audio version of the story recalled significantly fewer overall details as well as fewer temporal and spatial details than the book group. According to Danks and End (1987) this is because they did not have control over the speed of presentation. Because they were not able to process the information at their own rate, I believe that they were not able to adequately process the story, let alone the temporal and spatial shifts, which, according to Zwaan et al. (1995), take more time to process and impede comprehension. It was also noted that those in the listening group recalled more of the gist or the overall intention of the text. This is consistent with Halliday's (1987) research in that listeners process a text at the meaning level.

By designing the audio tape to be more like a 'book tape' with word emphasis and interesting voice intonations, I was trying to see if text in this more convenient form would enhance recall. However, this hypothesis was not demonstrated in this study as those who listened to the narrative presented in this fashion actually recalled the least amount from

the text. Perhaps there is another level or way of measuring comprehension, other than recalled details and narrative shifts, that would produce results that would support this hypothesis. I feel that this would be something for future researchers to develop.

A significant difference was also found between the mean number of recalled spatial and temporal shifts between the audio group and the book group. Again, this is consistent with Danks and End (1987). These researchers stated that people reading a text in 'normal' form have the option of re-reading any missed information to help continue comprehension. Participants without this option have a harder time 'catching' the shifts, as they take more time to process (Zwaan et al, 1995). I believe this describes the significant difference between these two groups in terms of recalling the temporal and spatial discontinuities.

Those who read the story recalled more specific details of the story than the listening group. That is, they wrote down more names, places and times of occurrences in the narrative. This conforms to Halliday's research that suggests that readers process text at the word level (1987). This could also be because those who read the narrative took a longer time over all to process it than those who heard it. From this fact, I feel that perhaps a measure of time taken to discern the text could be an aspect of a future study.

The added length of the narrative did have slight effects on the results as both groups recalled more details than in the pilot study. I feel that this could be due to the added propositions that were needed to process and comprehend the text. Kintch and van Dijk's (1978) model notes that because more cycles stayed near the top of the hierarchy in short-term memory, more was remembered in recall.

The added conversation which I felt might add an extra dimension to the story and perhaps show itself in recall, did not have any affect on results. I believe that this occurred because people lumped all the words spoken during a conversation into a few words that basically stated that a discussion was had between two characters. They wrote down the basic substance of the conversation, but not the actual words spoken. Perhaps this is because the participants felt the whole conversation would take too long to write, or conceivably they could have not paid attention to the entire conversation elements as well as they did the rest of the narrative. I feel that more research could be done on this topic as well.

I chose to conduct this study in order to see if reading a narrative is in any way similar to listening to the same text. Many organizations today are pushing the idea that listening to a text is virtually the same as reading it. One association I have received literature about is trying gather funds for a certain program for the blind and dyslexic (Loeb, 1997). This organization promotes the idea that students without 'normal' eyesight can learn and pursue their studies by being supplied with the textbooks they need, recorded onto audio tape. One of their claims is that a user of this product is now actually outperforming his seeing associates in the classroom. This organization also claims that it persuades dyslexic people who are frustrated with reading to go back to school and start anew. One of their clients is even pursuing his Master's degree in vocational rehabilitation through the help of these tapes.

Also, professionals, such as doctors and dentists, wonder if reading and listening produce similar comprehension in patients as they speculate about different methods of

presenting information about illnesses and medications to their patients. Additionally, some college professors have asked if providing text books on audio tape would help students to better comprehend material. According to this study, written text is the best way to convey information to 'normal' people, demonstrated by recall of specific details, spatial, and temporal shifts.

By listening to a narrative, persons mainly get the gist of the story and recall only the substance of the story afterwards. Those who read the text however, incorporate much information and probably have a better understanding of the material, as they are able to return to vague information when reading and use the propositions in their long-term memory to help the continuous understanding necessary for comprehension. I feel that this study has suggested that these two modes have different features, as demonstrated in the recall for temporal and spatial shifts and the recall for gist versus specific details within the groups. This is evidence against ideas proposing the use of audio tapes to present information to 'normal' people mentioned above. Because the rate of presentation is controllable when reading, but not when listening, a listener is less likely to realize completely all of the various layers of the narrative, including the structure keeping track of the narrative shifts in time and space. Research has shown that these take longer to process and if processing time is not allowed, then understanding and comprehension decrease. I also feel that those who listen to a narrative have the option of paying attention to something else at the same time as the narrative. For example, when a person is reading, he or she must regard the written words and look only to them if he or she is to understand anything of the text. However, a listener has the option of looking around the

room, taking in the surroundings, and perhaps having their thoughts drift from the narrative to something else in the room. They are still hearing the story, but not fully paying attention to it. I think this could also be a reason why those participants assigned to the book form of the text recalled more details and shifts from the text after presentation.

I feel that this study demonstrated the similarities in processing and differences in features between reading and listening and helps in understanding which mode is best for presenting information. This study supports some of the previous research and sets the stage for more studies in the future in terms of narrative length, vocal intonation in audio form, and added conversation elements within the text.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX I

Turbulence forms at the edge of a wing and grows in strength over its surface, contributing to the lift of a supersonic aircraft.

Propositions formed :

- 1) (FORM, TURBULENCE)
- 2) (AT, EDGE)
- 3) (PART OF, WING, EDGE)
- 4) (GROW, TURBULENCE, STRENGTH)
- 5) (OVER, SURFACE)
- 6) (PART OF, WING, SURFACE)
- 7) (CONTRIBUTE, TURBULENCE, LIFT, AIRCRAFT)
- 8) (SUPERSONIC, AIRCRAFT)

From : Kintch, W. & van Dijk, T. A. (1978). Toward a model of text comprehension and production. Psychological Review, 85, 363-394.

The gods had smiled on Julie and Howard Grover, or at least-if not smiling-they had never, in boredom or jealousy, invented ways to make their lives difficult. Julie danced through a sunny childhood without weight problems, awkwardness, or pimples; Howard won his few playground fistfights and raced his bicycle down hills without breaking any bones. They fell in love their junior year in college and were married the week after graduation. Howard was made assistant vice-president and then vice-president and then senior vice-president in a firm so large that nobody knew precisely what any other body was charged to do and, though not exactly a sinecure, his position carried no real responsibility. While he was busy with this, Julie bore (and mostly raised) three lovely children, dabbled in community charities, and kept the house in order. They lived snug in the heart of American morality, in the very bosom of hope and happiness.

Howard Grover was a year from retirement. His three children had college diplomas, good jobs, and children of their own. His Subaru and station wagon were paid for, and just the summer before, Julie and Howard had hosted a barbecue for twenty close friends, who watched them, while a band played, light the mortgage and claim the deed to their home. Howard, a month at a time, began accumulating the new toys he would need for his old age: in January, a split-bamboo fly-casting rod; in February, a set of Ping irons; in March, a fourteen-foot sailboat. (Julie loved the lake so). In seventeen weeks, in August, the company president would give him a dinner, a gold watch, and a handful of stock. Howard would make a short, tearful speech, accept the best wishes of people he hardly knew, and spend the last twenty or (God willing) thirty years of his life fishing, playing golf, and sailing with Julie on the lake that lapped at their backlawn. On the weekends, the kids would drop by, and he'd dandle his grandchildren- straight-limbed, clear-eyed, happy children!-on his knee.

He had only one task left to perform for the firm: oversee (in a casual way) the new complex in Brownsville, Texas. Go down a week or two a month. Decide on the colors for the carpets; chose the wood for the conference table. Buy some works of art, and spread them around the top two floors.

The president had told him to look at it as a transition from the working life to the leisure life. "Have fun with it," he'd told Howard. "Let your imagination go to work." They had a much younger man grinning and waiting in the hall for his office.

Well, okay, Howard would have fun with it.

"I'm off to Texas," he told Julie on Monday morning.

"Have a good time, dear," she said, and kissed his cheek. "Hurry home."

The company jet drove up though the dark April clouds and Howard looked out at the rain on the wing. Howard, protected by the gods since birth, had no experience with omens; he wouldn't know a portent if it shook his hand. The jet leveled off at twenty-nine thousand feet and Howard looked down at a bumpy, white mattress of a cloud that hid the earth. The plane turned southwest, the sun glanced off its tail, and Howard pulled *The New Yorker* from his briefcase and began to read.

Howard was a good reader. The poetry made him thoughtful. He laughed aloud when a story suggested he should. He considered carefully the full-page, four-color ads and imagined that item- the bottle of vodka, the BMW- in his possession. He smiled at the

cartoons knowingly. The essays and articles brought *Hmms* from him. The plane, when it yawed, nearly spilled him from his seat.

He righted himself, blinking, caught between worlds. The plane yawed again and then dropped, crowding his organs up under his lungs. Light flashed through the starboard windows. His testicles tingled and he remembered it, without knowing he remembered it, racing his bike down long hills. Howard cinched his seat belt tighter and waited.

The plane's left wing dipped and they rode that wing down in a gentle corkscrew spiral into the clouds. The first officer came back, tugging his cap down, and took the seat across from Howard.

"Sorry about that, Mr. Grover," he said.

"Is something wrong?"

"Not any more, no, sir."

"Rough air?" Howard asked.

The first officer paused and appeared to consider that. He and the pilot had debated whether or not to tell a lie of that sort, and the pilot had finally said, "Say what you think's best. We're going to report this one, anyway." "Tell, him the truth then?" the first officer had asked. "The truth? Well, if that's the way it comes out." Now, looking into Howard Grover's calm gray eyes, the first officer thought something close to the truth- but not quite the truth -was the best way to go about things. "Not rough air, sir," he said. "Not exactly."

"Oh?"

They both waited on the other.

"Nothing mechanical, I hope?" Howard asked.

"Oh, no, sir. The plane's fine."

"Physical then." Howard said. "Something wrong with the pilot?" In which case, he thought, what are *you* doing back here?

"No, sir," the first officer said. "The pilot's fine. I'm fine."

"Good," Howard said, having exhausted the possibilities he could think of. "That's good."

Another long pause dragged by.

"We almost collided with... another aircraft," the first officer said.

"Oh?" Radar, Howard thought. Clear skies.

"It shouldn't have been up here with us," the first officer said. "We'll file a complaint in Brownsville."

"Get his number, did you?"

How do I answer that? The first officer thought. "Yes, sir," he said. "Pretty much."

The aircraft they'd nearly hit had no number, and no wings or tail to put a number on. They'd fill out a report and provide a sketch (it's getting to the point, the first officer thought, when they should provide pictures to choose from, like airlines do for lost luggage) and ask the FAA to keep it confidential.

They chatted for a few more minutes and then the first officer climbed back into the cockpit. An hour later they were in Brownsville and Howard had already forgotten the

incident. Danger and darkness and the assortment of vague evils apparently loose in the world had nothing to do with him.

A limo picked him up at the airport and carried him away.

The construction superintendent was a Texan. When he reached out and nearly collapsed Howard's hand, he called him "Hard."

"Welcome to Texas, Hard," he said. "Ain't this buildin' beautiful?"

"Beautiful," Howard agreed. It was if you like black glass.

"I'll take you through it."

Howard followed the red plaid shirt and baggy blue jeans of the construction superintendent into elevators and down long hallways and into large and larger rooms. They stepped over or around curls of aluminum, piles of full and empty boxes, spools of fine, colored wire.

"If you want to pick out an office," the superintendent said, "I'll make sure you have it waitin' for you just the way you want it."

"I won't have an office here," Howard said.

"No, office?"

"I'm going to retire."

"Shoot."

That seemed to Howard to be more full of envy than the disappointment the word called up. Or maybe just surprise.

"I'm just down for a couple of days to get some things ready," he said. "Pictures, and carpets and such."

'Y'all doin' the decoratin'?"

"Some of it."

"Maybe a big ol' sculpture for the front hall," the super said. "Lotta space there needs fillin' up."

"Maybe," Howard agreed.

"Somethin' in *bronze*." *Gold* couldn't have come out of his mouth any more smoothly. "Somethin' with some *heft*." He winked at Howard. "Somethin' *fe*-male and nude."

"Maybe," Howard said again and had to smile.

"Large," the super said. "Art should be large. A tit the size of the front doors."

"Well, we don't want to put our customers off," Howard said.

"My thought exactly," said the super. "I go back into the buildin's I've put up- a year or so later, you know?- and they've wrecked 'em. Assholes don't know nothin' 'bout decoratin'." He shook his head, unaware of the pun. Howard thought about explaining it- rectum, asshole- sure the super would enjoy it, and Howard wanting one good laugh on this trip. But he decided it would take too long, it was undignified, and he didn't want to make a friend of this man.

He politely turned down the offer of a late lunch in the job trailer and a "sip of good stuff" and tried to get away without shaking hands again, but couldn't.

"You have any problems, Hard, any at all, you come and see me. That's what I'm here for, to fix things up the way you want 'em. That's why I get the big money."

Howard said he would, and left, flexing his hand to get the feeling back into it.

He avoided the superintendent the next two days by staying at the hotel, having his lunches served at the pool and his dinners in the bar. He had long morning meetings with the manager, who was fairly jumping to be put in place, a small, narrow-nosed, dark-eyed man named MacGillicutty. MacGillicutty, even picking his nose, moved with astonishing speed. He ran words together into paragraph-long sentences, and Howard had to sit and decipher its echoes, so there were long gaps in the conversation, which made MacGillicutty talk even faster to make up for lost time. High-speed satellite transmissions must be like this, Howard thought.

“So the thing is Mr. Grover we gotta nail down right away before the contract gets soft the prices quoted to us the first of the year on all that hardware can’t run this place without those computers and then once that’s done we gotta have *installed* and I’m afraid we’re running behind there too because those boys were messin’ with a union there for a couple of months at least talking about it but nothing came of it and all of us are lucky for that but we’re still behind and I think we can make the date okay but we gotta hurry if you see what I mean.”

Then he’d stop and look at Howard, those dark eyes darting.

Two morning meetings like that and he drove back out to the site, dictating a memo on the way that said the firm would have to fire MacGillicutty and listing the reasons. Like a Chevy in mud, he thought: the tires keep spinning and nothing gets done. And the smoke from the tires would choke you. But he didn’t send it. He slipped it on top of the paper-clipped pile in his briefcase that he thought of as “further action.” It was “hold” and he knew it. Howard, in forty-three years, had hired dozens of people, but had gotten out of firing any of them. He left that to someone else.

He spent a long day in the upper reaches of the building, taking notes, drawing small, cramped diagrams, trying to see the place completed in his mind- hiding actually - and he came out to find the day dark. It was impossible to see change happen through that black glass.

“Hello Hard,” the super said, right at his elbow, and Howard jumped. “Workin’ long hours, ain’t you?”

The limousine waited twenty yards away at the curb, its parking lights on, and Howard looked at it longingly before he turned to stare at the superintendent. “Long hours,” he agreed. He began a yawn he didn’t need and then got one for real.

But nothing that subtle would work on the super. “Bet you start early, too, don’cha? Same as me I bet.” The super knocked an hour off: “5:30.”

“Around in there,” Howard said. Five-thirty in Texas was 7:30 in Connecticut, and lopping off that same hour, that was about right.

“Up in time to see the lights?”

“What lights are those?”

“You know,” the super said, a waved a hand at the sky. “Outa the south. Yesterday morning, and again today. At 4:45.”

“Lights?”

The super grinned. “Lights.” He winked. “Wife woke me. Scared to death. First morning, yesterday, I figured the Air Force or something, but when I saw ‘em again today

I took a closer look, and they ain't planes. They're... well... *lights*. Greenish. Whaddya think about that?"

"Greenish?"

"Greenish."

"I don't know," Howard said.

"You know what I think." The super edged closer and lowered his voice. "I think they're runnin' the border to get work." He gave it a minute and then laughed. *Haw Haw Haw*. "Get work." He sobered. "You didn't bring 'em did you?"

Howard shook his head, and while the super waited for an answer to that, Howard walked to his car. He almost had the door closed when the super said, "Look up in the mornin'. Outa the south, 4:45. You tell *me*."

Howard had dinner sent up to his room and ate it watching TV. The limo would pick him up at nine o'clock and take him back to the airport. He had a notepad full of scratchings- impressions, nothing more -that he would put in order on the trip back so it would look as if he'd done something. Blue carpets on one floor. Gray on another. Beige here, rust there. The paintings he'd buy for their size more than anything. He'd have his secretary call some galleries when he got back, and they could have a slide show in his office. Maybe Julie would like to be in on that; she liked art.

He lay in the dark for an hour, trying to sleep, and then sat up and turned on the bedside lamp. "You tell *me*," the super had said, and suddenly that seemed to Howard like a job he could manage. He rang the front desk and arranged a call at four. Then he set his own alarm (he never trusted wake-up calls, though they'd never failed him), and went immediately to sleep.

It was black and windy at four in the morning, but warm. A sleepy bellboy delivered a gold plastic carafe of coffee and a thick white mug. Howard took them both out onto the balcony. The wind was pulling at the pool water, tugging it into shapes in the underwater lights. He realized, looking at it, that he didn't know which way was south.

"Grover, in 214," he said into the phone.

"Yes, Mr. Grover?"

"My room faces the pool. I was wondering, uh"- how was he going to ask this without sounding crazy? -"which direction I'm facing?"

"Which direction?"

"North? East? West? South?" he asked.

"Oh. I'm not sure. Can I call you back?"

Howard said she could and hung up. He wondered, for the first time ever, if working the front desk of a hotel at night was anything like getting crank calls. Who the hell would want to know at four in the morning which direction he was facing?

That was, word for word, the bellboy's response to the girl's question.

"That old guy in 214."

"The one I just woke up?"

"That one."

"Jesus, Is he checking out today?"

The girl said he was.

"Embezzler," the boy decided. "Taking money into *May-he-co*. Wants to know which way to run."

The girl shrugged.

"The hotel faces south," he said, and slumped down in the lobby to sleep.

"The hotel faces south, Mr. Grover," she said into the phone.

"Thank you." Embarrassed, he hung up.

Feeling stupid, he shaved and got dressed and looked at his watch: 4:30.

Connecticut felt like a long way away. He'd never in his life been shaved and dressed at 4:30 in the morning. Six-thirty in Connecticut, he reminded himself, but that was little comfort. He had never in his life considered there was anything in the sky but stars and planes and satellites. He owed to himself this once, he argued, to find out. A silly waste of time though.

He took an outside door and walked through the parking lot so he wouldn't have to parade through the lobby and past the front desk. The wind, out here, had a bit of a bite to it. He stood at the corner of the building, almost in shrubbery, and stared without trying to at the darkness that was Mexico.

The lights drifted down. He'd had a picture in his mind of them racing toward him at treetop level, small and fast, but these lights were huge and slow. And green as alligators. They spun and then formed up in an arrow that pointed at him. They hovered at about a thousand feet or so and then moved slowly over the hotel, crawling in three small orbits like a cloverleaf. And then they were gone, as quickly as he'd thought they would come.

He stood rooted, digging his heels in as if he could stop the spin of the world.

He stayed another week. He called the office, and his wife, and said he thought he'd do some of the buying locally; anchor the new complex in Texas, that sort of thing. Everybody thought it was a good idea. What he wanted, of course, was to watch those lights.

He bought a few dozen paintings and had them hung, and then spent two days moving them around, and ended up taking half of them back and buying replacements. He watched the carpets being laid down on the top floor, and he changed the order when it was almost completed, and had them rip up the ones in the offices and put down new ones. He'd decided that the colors needed to be graduated, that each office should have another shade of blue. The large, L-shaped conference room, a corner, got a blue so deep it was purple. He bought a large canvas in black and white (but pinks in the white, purples in the black) from a gallery that said the artist worked in the South Pacific, and he hung it behind the director's chair where it would command attention.

The superintendent caught him in the lobby. "Where's my girl?" he asked, looking around at all the space.

"She's coming," Howard said. He'd decided just that morning that he would commission a sculptor in New York or Boston to make him something soft and round and green in soapstone.

"Top floor looks good," the super said.

"Eight more to do," Howard said. "Come back in a year or so."

He flew home, finally, at the end of the week, and when the plane yawed violently somewhere over Arkansas, he gripped a little tighter his copy of Architectural Digest and then turned the page.

He was over budget in two months (and he hadn't paid the sculptor yet), but when he flew down with the chairman of the board to look at what he'd done, the argument that was coming died unspoken. "Finish up," he told Howard, "and then do the offices in Connecticut."

"I'm retiring," Howard said.

"Then we'll bring you back as a consultant."

"I'm looking forward to my retirement."

"To what? The boredom of not working? The jealousy of those who have something to fill up their days?"

Howard couldn't answer that. He hadn't given it much thought. He had his toys.

"The man who put this together," the chairman said, spreading his hands to take in the conference room, "likes what he does."

"Wait till you see the table," Howard said. "South American."

"Big?"

"Huge."

The chairman nodded, satisfied.

When the plane slipped left and dropped like a rock and then leveled off and climbed a bit, and then leveled off again, the chairman said, "I'm going to fire that pilot." Howard didn't say anything.

Howard retired in August with all the small fanfares he'd expected, but he didn't golf or go fishing or sail around the lake with Julie. He studied art books, and splashed some paint around on canvas board in meaningless ways, and sat up until a quarter to five in the morning and waited for those soft green lights to hover over the lake. Julie got edgy, and then bitchy, and then finally started arguments over nothing at the breakfast table.

"I thought it might be like this," he said.

"What?"

"My retirement."

"Why would you think that?"

"I'm underfoot."

"You're not," she said, but he was, and she didn't understand that the discomfort she was feeling was only a reflection of his, and that it had nothing to do with retirement.

In March of the next year the company flew him down to Brownsville for the unveiling of the lobby sculpture. It was a kind gesture, one that brought tears to his eyes. He tracked down the superintendent with two phone calls and asked him to come too. It surprised Howard a little that he did it; he didn't like the man much. He asked Julie if she'd like to see it but she said no. "There isn't a piece of soapstone in the world worth a hundred thousand dollars," she said.

But there was. The ex-super and the chairman and Howard and fifty or sixty other people looked on as the gray cloths were pulled from it, and the sculptor stood proudly in front of the shape he called *Other*. It wasn't bronze, or female, or nude, but it was big and round and soft and beautiful. "You've got it, Hard," the super said. The chairman nodded and said, "That's all right."

Howard thought so too. The soapstone glowed softly with the same color that had hovered for the last seven months at five in the morning over his lake. It was the color of boredom, he thought. The color of jealousy. His childhood rushed up: the color of Kryponite. He smiled, feeling good, even though he knew that when he went home again the plane wouldn't yaw, and the lake would be dark, and would stay dark, and there was nothing left in his life to look forward to.

APPENDIX III

_____ The gods had smiled
_____ on Julie
_____ and Howard Grover,
_____ or at least-if not smiling-
_____ they had never, in boredom or jealousy,
_____ invented ways to make their lives difficult.

thick line : spatial shifts (42)
thin line : temporal shifts (39)

_____ Julie danced through a sunny childhood
_____ without weight problems,
_____ awkwardness,
_____ or pimples;
_____ Howard won his few playground fistfights
_____ and raced his bicycle down hills
_____ without breaking any bones.

_____ They fell in love their junior year
_____ in college
_____ and were married
_____ the week after graduation.

_____ Howard was made assistant vice-president
_____ and then vice-president
_____ and then senior vice-president
_____ in a firm so large
_____ that nobody knew precisely what any other body was charged to do
_____ and, though not exactly a sinecure, his position carried no real responsibility.

_____ While he was busy with this, Julie bore (and mostly raised)
_____ three lovely children,
_____ dabbled in community charities,
_____ and kept the house in order.
_____ They lived snug in the heart of American morality,
_____ in the very bosom of hope and happiness.

_____ Howard Grover was a year from retirement.
_____ His three children had college diplomas,
_____ good jobs,
_____ and children of their own.

_____ His Subaru
_____ and station wagon were paid for,

_____ and just the summer before
_____ Julie and Howard had hosted a barbecue
_____ for twenty close friends,
_____ who watched them,
_____ while a band played,
_____ light the mortgage
_____ and claim the deed to their home.

_____ Howard, a month at a time,
_____ began accumulating the new toys
_____ he would need for his old age:

_____ in January,
_____ a split-bamboo fly-casting rod;

_____ in February,
_____ a set of Ping irons;

_____ in March,
_____ a fourteen-foot sailboat.
_____ (Julie loved the lake so).

_____ In seventeen weeks,
_____ in August,
_____ the company president
_____ would give him a dinner,
_____ a gold watch,
_____ and a handful of stock.
_____ Howard would make a short, tearful speech,
_____ accept the best wishes
_____ of people he hardly knew,

_____ and spend the last twenty

_____ or (God willing) thirty years of his life
_____ fishing,
_____ playing golf,
_____ and sailing
_____ with Julie
_____ on the lake
_____ that lapped at their backlawn.

_____ On the weekends,
_____ the kids would drop by,
_____ and he'd dandle his grandchildren-
_____ straight-limbed,
_____ clear-eyed,
_____ happy children!-
_____ on his knee.

_____ He had only one task left to perform for the firm:
_____ oversee (in a casual way)
_____ the new complex
_____ in Brownsville,
_____ Texas.

_____ Go down a week or two a month.
_____ Decide on the colors for the carpets;
_____ chose the wood for the conference table.
_____ Buy some works of art,
_____ and spread them around
_____ the top two floors.
_____ The president had told him
_____ to look at it as a transition
_____ from the working life to the leisure life.
_____ "Have fun with it," he'd told Howard.
_____ "Let your imagination go to work."
_____ They had a much younger man
_____ grinning and waiting in the hall
_____ for his office.
_____ Well, okay, Howard would have fun with it

_____ "I'm off to Texas,"
_____ he told Julie
_____ on Monday morning.
_____ "Have a good time, dear," she said,
_____ and kissed his cheek.
_____ "Hurry home."

_____ The company jet
_____ drove up though the dark
_____ April clouds
_____ and Howard looked out at the rain on the wing.
_____ Howard, protected by the gods since birth,
_____ had no experience with omens;
_____ he wouldn't know a portent if it shook his hand.
_____ The jet leveled off at twenty-nine thousand feet
_____ and Howard looked down
_____ at a bumpy, white mattress of a cloud
_____ that hid the earth.
_____ The plane turned southwest,
_____ the sun glanced off its tail,
_____ and Howard pulled *The New Yorker*
_____ from his briefcase
_____ and began to read.
_____ Howard was a good reader.
_____ The poetry made him thoughtful.
_____ He laughed aloud
_____ when a story suggested he should.
_____ He considered carefully the full-page, four-color ads
_____ and imagined that item-
_____ the bottle of vodka,
_____ the BMW-
_____ in his possession.
_____ He smiled at the cartoons knowingly.
_____ The essays and articles brought *Hmms* from him.
_____ The plane, when it yawed,
_____ nearly spilled him from his seat.
_____ He righted himself, blinking,
_____ caught between worlds.
_____ The plane yawed again
_____ and then dropped,

_____ crowding his organs up under his lungs.
_____ Light flashed
_____ through the starboard windows.
_____ His testicles tingled
_____ and he remembered it,
_____ without knowing he remembered it
_____ racing his bike down long hills.
_____ Howard cinched his seat belt tighter
_____ and waited.
_____ The plane's left wing dipped
_____ and they rode that wing down
_____ in a gentle corkscrew spiral
_____ into the clouds.
_____ The first officer came back,
_____ tugging his cap down,
_____ and took the seat
_____ across from Howard.
_____ "Sorry about that, Mr. Grover," he said.
_____ "Is something wrong?"
_____ "Not any more, no, sir."
_____ "Rough air?" Howard asked.
_____ The first officer paused
_____ and appeared to consider that.
_____ He and the pilot
_____ had debated whether or not to tell a lie of that sort,
_____ and the pilot had finally said, "Say what you think's best.
_____ We're going to report this one, anyway."
_____ "Tell, him the truth then?" the first officer had asked.
_____ "The truth? Well, if that's the way it comes out."
_____ Now, looking into Howard Grover's calm gray eyes,
_____ the first officer thought something close to the truth-
_____ but not quite the truth
_____ -was the best way to go about things.
_____ "Not rough air, sir," he said.
_____ "Not exactly."
_____ "Oh?"
_____ They both waited on the other.
_____ "Nothing mechanical, I hope?" Howard asked.
_____ "Oh, no, sir. The plane's fine."

_____ “Something wrong with the pilot?”
_____ In which case, he thought, what are *you* doing back here?
_____ “No, sir,” the first officer said.
_____ “The pilot’s fine. I’m fine.”
_____ “Good,” Howard said,
_____ having exhausted the possibilities he could think of. “That’s good.”
_____ Another long pause dragged by.
_____ “We almost collided with... another aircraft,” the first officer said.
_____ “Oh?” Radar, Howard thought.
_____ Clear skies.
_____ “It shouldn’t have been up here with us,” the first officer said.
_____ “We’ll file a complaint in Brownsville.”
_____ “Get his number, did you?”
_____ How do I answer that? The first officer thought.
_____ “Yes, sir,” he said. “Pretty much.”
_____ The aircraft they’d nearly hit
_____ had no number,
_____ and no wings or tail
_____ to put a number on.

_____ They’d fill out a report
_____ and provide a sketch
_____ (it’s getting to the point, the first officer thought,
_____ when they should provide pictures to choose from,
_____ like airlines do for lost luggage)
_____ and ask the FAA
_____ to keep it confidential.
_____ They chatted for a few more minutes
_____ and then the first officer climbed back into the cockpit.

_____ An hour later
_____ they were in Brownsville
_____ and Howard had already forgotten the incident.
_____ Danger and darkness
_____ and the assortment of vague evils
_____ apparently loose in the world
_____ had nothing to do with him.

_____ A limo

_____ picked him up at the airport
_____ and carried him away.

_____ The construction superintendent
_____ was a Texan.

_____ When he reached out and nearly collapsed Howard's hand,
_____ he called him "Hard."

_____ "Welcome to Texas, Hard," he said.

_____ "Ain't this buildin' beautiful?"

_____ "Beautiful," Howard agreed.

_____ It was if you like black glass.

_____ "I'll take you through it."

_____ Howard followed the red plaid shirt
_____ and baggy blue jeans

_____ of the construction superintendent

_____ into elevators

_____ and down long hallways

_____ and into large and larger rooms.

_____ They stepped over or around curls of aluminum,

_____ piles of full and empty boxes,

_____ spools of fine,

_____ colored wire.

_____ "If you want to pick out an office," the superintendent said,

_____ "I'll make sure you have it waitin' for you just the way you want it."

_____ "I won't have an office here," Howard said.

_____ "No, office?"

_____ "I'm going to retire."

_____ "Shoot."

_____ That seemed to Howard to be more full of envy

_____ than the disappointment

_____ the word called up.

_____ Or maybe just surprise.

_____ "I'm just down for a couple of days

_____ to get some things ready," he said.

_____ "Pictures, and carpets and such."

_____ "Y'all doin' the decoratin'?"

_____ "Some of it."

_____ “Maybe a big ol’ sculpture

_____ for the front hall,” the super said.

_____ “Lotta space there needs fillin’ up.”

_____ “Maybe,” Howard agreed.

_____ “Somethin’ in *bronze*.”

_____ *Gold* couldn’t have come out of his mouth any more smoothly.

_____ “Somethin’ with some *heft*.”

_____ He winked at Howard.

_____ “Somethin’ *fe-male*

_____ and nude.”

_____ “Maybe,” Howard said again

_____ and had to smile.

_____ “Large,” the super said.

_____ “Art should be large.

_____ A tit the size

_____ of the front doors.”

_____ “Well, we don’t want to put our customers off,” Howard said.

_____ “My thought exactly,” said the super.

_____ “I go back into the buildin’s I’ve put up-

_____ a year or so later, you know?-

_____ and they’ve wrecked ‘em.

_____ Assholes don’t know nothin’ ‘bout decoratin’.”

_____ He shook his head,

_____ unaware of the pun.

_____ Howard thought about explaining it

_____ - rectum, asshole-

_____ sure the super would enjoy it,

_____ and Howard wanting one good laugh on this trip

_____ But he decided it would take too long,

_____ it was undignified,

_____ and he didn’t want to make a friend of this man.

_____ He politely turned down the offer of a late lunch

_____ in the job trailer

_____ and a “sip of good stuff”

_____ and tried to get away without shaking hands again,

_____ but couldn’t.

_____ “You have any problems, Hard, any at all, you come and see me.

_____ That’s what I’m here for, to fix things up the way you want ‘em.

_____ That's why I get the big money."
_____ Howard said he would, and left,
_____ flexing his hand to get the feeling back into it.

_____ He avoided the superintendent
_____ the next two days
_____ by staying at the hotel,
_____ having his lunches served at the pool
_____ and his dinners in the bar.
_____ He had long morning meetings
_____ with the manager,
_____ who was fairly jumping to be put in place,
_____ a small, narrow-nosed,
_____ dark-eyed man
_____ named MacGillicutty
_____ MacGillicutty, even picking his nose,
_____ moved with astonishing speed.
_____ He ran words together into paragraph-long sentences,
_____ and Howard had to sit and decipher its echoes,
_____ so there were long gaps in the conversation,
_____ which made MacGillicutty talk even faster
_____ to make up for lost time.
_____ High-speed satellite transmissions
_____ must be like this, Howard thought.
_____ "So the thing is Mr. Grover we gotta nail down right away
_____ before the contract gets soft
_____ the prices quoted to us the first of the year on all that hardware
_____ can't run this place without those computers
_____ and then once that's done we gotta have *installed*
_____ and I'm afraid we're running behind there too
_____ because those boys were messin' with a union
_____ there for a couple of months
_____ at least talking about it
_____ but nothing came of it
_____ and all of us are lucky for that
_____ but we're still behind
_____ and I think we can make the date okay

_____ but we gotta hurry if you see what I mean.”
_____ Then he'd stop and look at Howard,
_____ those dark eyes darting.

_____ Two morning meetings like that and he drove back out to the site,
_____ dictating a memo on the way
_____ that said the firm would have to fire MacGillicutty
_____ and listing the reasons.
_____ Like a Chevy in mud, he thought:
_____ the tires keep spinning and nothing gets done.
_____ And the smoke from the tires would choke you.
_____ But he didn't send it.
_____ He slipped it on top of the paper-clipped pile
_____ in his briefcase
_____ that he thought of as “further action.”
_____ It was “hold” and he knew it.
_____ Howard, in forty-three years,
_____ had hired dozens of people,
_____ but had gotten out of firing any of them.
_____ He left that to someone else.

_____ He spent a long day in the upper reaches of the building
_____ taking notes,
_____ drawing small, cramped diagrams,
_____ trying to see the place completed in his mind-
_____ hiding actually

_____ -and he came out to find the day dark.
_____ It was impossible to see change happen
_____ through that black glass.
_____ “Hello Hard,” the super said,
_____ right at his elbow,
_____ and Howard jumped.
_____ “Workin' long hours, ain't you?”
_____ The limousine waited twenty yards away

_____ at the curb,
_____ its parking lights on,
_____ and Howard looked at it longingly
_____ before he turned to stare at the superintendent.
_____ "Long hours," he agreed.
_____ He began a yawn he didn't need
_____ and then got one for real.
_____ But nothing that subtle would work on the super.
_____ "Bet you start early, too, don'cha? Same as me I bet."
_____ The super knocked an hour off: "5:30."
_____ "Around in there," Howard said.
_____ Five-thirty in Texas was 7:30 in Connecticut,
_____ and lopping off that same hour, that was about right.
_____ "Up in time to see the lights?"
_____ "What lights are those?"
_____ "You know," the super said, a waved a hand at the sky.
_____ "Outa the south.
_____ Yesterday morning,
_____ and again today.
_____ At 4:45."
_____ "Lights?"
_____ The super grinned. "Lights."
_____ He winked.
_____ "Wife woke me.
_____ Scared to death.
_____ First morning, yesterday, I figured the Air Force or something,
_____ but when I saw 'em again today I took a closer look,
_____ and they ain't planes.
_____ They're... well... *lights*. Greenish. Whaddya think about that?"
_____ "Greenish?"
_____ "Greenish."
_____ "I don't know," Howard said.
_____ "You know what I think." The super edged closer
_____ and lowered his voice.
_____ "I think they're runnin' the border to get work."
_____ He gave it a minute and then laughed. *Haw Haw Haw*.
_____ "Get *work*." He sobered.
_____ "You didn't bring 'em did you?"
_____ Howard shook his head,
_____ and while the super waited for an answer to that,

_____ Howard walked to his car.
_____ He almost had the door closed
_____ when the super said, "Look up in the mornin'.
_____ Outa the south,
_____ 4:45.
_____ You tell *me*."

_____ Howard had dinner sent up to his room
_____ and ate it watching TV.
_____ The limo would pick him up
_____ at nine o'clock
_____ and take him back to the airport.
_____ He had a notepad full of scratchings-
_____ impressions, nothing more -
_____ that he would put in order on the trip back
_____ so it would look as if he'd done something.

_____ Blue carpets on one floor
_____ Gray on another.
_____ Beige here,
_____ rust there.
_____ The paintings he'd buy for their size more than anything.
_____ He'd have his secretary call some galleries when he got back,
_____ and they could have a slide show
_____ in his office.
_____ Maybe Julie would like to be in on that;
_____ she liked art.
_____ He lay in the dark for an hour,
_____ trying to sleep,
_____ and then sat up and turned on the bedside lamp.
_____ "You tell *me*," the super had said,
_____ and suddenly that seemed to Howard like a job he could manage.
_____ He rang the front desk
_____ and arranged a call at four.
_____ Then he set his own alarm
_____ (he never trusted wake-up calls,

_____ though they'd never failed him),
 _____ and went immediately to sleep.

_____ It was black
 _____ and windy at four in the morning,
 _____ but warm.
 _____ A sleepy bellboy
 _____ delivered a gold plastic carafe
 _____ of coffee
 _____ and a thick white mug.

_____ Howard took them both out onto the balcony.
 _____ The wind was pulling at the pool water,
 _____ tugging it into shapes
 _____ in the underwater lights.
 _____ He realized, looking at it, that he didn't know which way was south.

_____ "Grover, in 214," he said into the phone.
 _____ "Yes, Mr. Grover?"
 _____ "My room faces the pool. I was wondering, uh"
 _____ - how was he going to ask this without sounding crazy?
 _____ -"which direction I'm facing?"
 _____ "Which direction?"
 _____ "North? East? West? South?" he asked.
 _____ "Oh. I'm not sure. Can I call you back?"
 _____ Howard said she could and hung up.
 _____ He wondered, for the first time ever, if working the front desk of a hotel at night
 _____ was anything like getting crank calls.
 _____ Who the hell would want to know at four in the morning which direction he was
 _____ facing?

_____ That was, word for word, the bellboy's response to the girl's question.
 _____ "That old guy in 214."
 _____ "The one I just woke up?"
 _____ "That one."
 _____ "Jesus, Is he checking out today?"
 _____ The girl said he was.
 _____ "Embezzler," the boy decided.
 _____ "Taking money into *May-he-co*."

_____ Wants to know which way to run.”
_____ The girl shrugged.
_____ “The hotel faces south,” he said, and slumped down in the lobby to sleep.
_____ “The hotel faces south, Mr. Grover,” she said into the phone.

_____ “Thank you.” Embarrassed, he hung up.
_____ Feeling stupid,
_____ he shaved
_____ and got dressed
_____ and looked at his watch: 4:30.
_____ Connecticut felt like a long way away.
_____ He’d never in his life been shaved and dressed at 4:30 in the morning.
_____ Six-thirty in Connecticut, he reminded himself,
_____ but that was little comfort.
_____ He had never in his life considered there was anything in the sky but stars
_____ and planes
_____ and satellites.
_____ He owed to himself this once, he argued, to find out.
_____ A silly waste of time though.

_____ He took an outside door
_____ and walked through the parking lot
_____ so he wouldn’t have to parade through the lobby
_____ and past the front desk.
_____ The wind, out here, had a bit of a bite to it.
_____ He stood at the corner of the building,
_____ almost in shrubbery,
_____ and stared without trying to
_____ at the darkness that was Mexico.
_____ The lights drifted down.
_____ He’d had a picture in his mind
_____ of them racing toward him
_____ at treetop level,
_____ small and fast,
_____ but these lights were huge and slow.
_____ And green as alligators.
_____ They spun
_____ and then formed up in an arrow

_____ that pointed at him.

_____ They hovered

_____ at about a thousand feet or so

_____ and then moved slowly

_____ over the hotel,

_____ crawling in three small orbits

_____ like a cloverleaf.

_____ And then they were gone, as quickly as he'd thought they would come.

_____ He stood rooted,

_____ digging his heels in

_____ as if he could stop the spin of the world.

_____ He stayed another week.

_____ He called the office,

_____ and his wife,

_____ and said he thought he'd do some of the buying locally

_____ anchor the new complex in Texas, that sort of thing.

_____ Everybody thought it was a good idea.

_____ What he wanted, of course, was to watch those lights.

_____ He bought a few dozen paintings

_____ and had them hung,

_____ and then spent two days moving them around,

_____ and ended up taking half of them back

_____ and buying replacements.

_____ He watched the carpets being laid down

_____ on the top floor,

_____ and he changed the order

_____ when it was almost completed

_____ and had them rip up the ones in the offices

_____ and put down new ones.

_____ He'd decided that the colors needed to be graduated,

_____ that each office should have another

_____ shade of blue.

_____ The large, L-shaped conference room, a corner,

_____ got a blue so deep it was purple.

_____ He bought a large canvas

_____ in black and white
_____ (but pinks in the white, purples in the black)
_____ from a gallery
_____ that said the artist worked in the South Pacific,
_____ and he hung it behind the director's chair
_____ where it would command attention.
_____ The superintendent caught him in the lobby.
_____ "Where's my girl?" he asked, looking around at all the space.
_____ "She's coming," Howard said.

_____ He'd decided just that morning
_____ that he would commission a sculptor
_____ in New York
_____ or Boston
_____ to make him something soft and round
_____ and green
_____ in soapstone.

_____ "Top floor looks good," the super said.
_____ "Eight more to do," Howard said. "Come back in a year or so."

_____ He flew home, finally, at the end of the week,
_____ and when the plane yawed violently
_____ somewhere over Arkansas,
_____ he gripped a little tighter
_____ his copy of Architectural Digest
_____ and then turned the page.
_____ He was over budget
_____ in two months
_____ (and he hadn't paid the sculptor yet),

_____ but when he flew down with the chairman of the board to look at what he'd done,
_____ the argument that was coming died unspoken.

_____ "Finish up," he told Howard,
_____ "and then do the offices in Connecticut."
_____ "I'm retiring," Howard said.
_____ "Then we'll bring you back as a consultant."

_____ "I'm looking forward to my retirement."

_____ "To what? The boredom of not working?

_____ The jealousy of those who have something to fill up their days?"

_____ Howard couldn't answer that. He hadn't given it much thought. He had his toys.

_____ "The man who put this together," the chairman said,

_____ spreading his hands to take in the conference room,

_____ "likes what he does."

_____ "Wait till you see the table," Howard said.

_____ "South American."

_____ "Big?"

_____ "Huge."

_____ The chairman nodded, satisfied.

_____ When the plane slipped left

_____ and dropped like a rock

_____ and then leveled off and climbed a bit,

_____ and then leveled off again,

_____ the chairman said, "I'm going to fire that pilot."

_____ Howard didn't say anything.

_____ Howard retired in August

_____ with all the small fanfares he'd expected,

_____ but he didn't golf

_____ or go fishing

_____ or sail around

_____ the lake

_____ with Julie.

_____ He studied art books,

_____ and splashed some paint around on

_____ canvas board

_____ in meaningless ways,

_____ and sat up until a quarter to five

_____ in the morning
_____ and waited for those soft green lights
_____ to hover over the lake.

_____ Julie got edgy, and then bitchy,
_____ and then finally started arguments over nothing
_____ at the breakfast table.
_____ "I thought it might be like this," he said.
_____ "What?"
_____ "My retirement."
_____ "Why would you think that?"
_____ "I'm underfoot."
_____ "You're not," she said,
_____ but he was,
_____ and she didn't understand that the discomfort she was feeling
_____ was only a reflection of his,
_____ and that it had nothing to do with retirement.

_____ In March of the next year
_____ the company flew him down to Brownsville
_____ for the unveiling of the lobby sculpture.
_____ It was a kind gesture,
_____ one that brought tears to his eyes.
_____ He tracked down the superintendent
_____ with two phone calls
_____ and asked him to come too.
_____ It surprised Howard a little that he did it;
_____ he didn't like the man much.
_____ He asked Julie if she'd like to see it but
_____ she said no.
_____ "There isn't a piece of soapstone in the world worth a hundred thousand dollars,"
she said.
_____ But there was.

_____ The ex-super
_____ and the chairman
_____ and Howard
_____ and fifty or sixty other people

_____ looked on as the gray cloths were pulled from it,
_____ and the sculptor stood proudly in front of the shape
_____ he called *Other*.
_____ It wasn't bronze,
_____ or female,
_____ or nude,
_____ but it was big and round
_____ and soft and beautiful.
_____ "You've got it, Hard," the super said.
_____ The chairman nodded and said, "That's all right."
_____ Howard thought so too.
_____ The soapstone glowed softly
_____ with the same color that had hovered
_____ for the last seven months

_____ at five in the morning
_____ over his lake.
_____ It was the color of boredom, he thought.
_____ The color of jealousy.
_____ His childhood rushed up:
_____ the color of Kryponite.
_____ He smiled, feeling good,

_____ even though he knew that when he went home again
_____ the plane wouldn't yaw,
_____ and the lake would be dark,
_____ and would stay dark,
_____ and there was nothing left in his life to look forward to.

	t	df	sig(2-tailed)	mean difference	std. error difference	95% conf. int. of the mean	
						lower	upper
Overall details recalled	-3.177	38	0.003	-47	14.8	-77.03	-17.06
Spatial shifts recalled	-3.208	38	0.003	-5.75	1.79	-9.37	-2.12
Temporal shifts recalled	-3.269	38	0.002	-5.7	1.74	-9.22	-2.17

equal variances assumed