

Narrative
Infrastructures:
Architecture
Media
Fiction



Kate Marshall
University of Notre Dame



My chambers were up stairs at No. — Wall-street. At one end they looked upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom. This view might have been considered rather tame than otherwise, deficient in what landscape painters call 'life.'

Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener"

Publicity it seems to me is as necessary as ventilation. . . . It lets in fresh air.

John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*



“Arm and Ventilator, New York,” 1937
Estate of André Kertész

Clogged Pipelines,

Blocked Airways

Saying that this system includes the telephone, the telegraph, television, the highway system, maritime pathways and shipping lanes, the orbits of satellites, the circulation of messages and of raw materials, of language and foodstuffs, money and philosophical theory, is a way of speaking clearly and calmly.

Michel Serres, *The Parasite*

Standing before the kitchen sink and regarding the bright brass faucets that gleamed so far away, each with a bead of water at its nose, slowly swelling, falling, David again became aware that this world had been created without thought of him. He was thirsty, but the iron hip of the sink rested on legs tall almost as his own body, and by no stretch of arm, no leap, could he ever reach the distant tap. Where did the water come from that lurked so secretly in the curve of the brass? Where did it go, gurgling in the drain? What a strange world must be hidden behind the walls of the house! But he was thirsty.

Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep*

In an age when other fantastically speedy, widespread media are triumphing, and running the risk of flattening all communication into a single, homogeneous surface, the function of literature is communication between things that are different simply because they are different, not blunting but even sharpening the differences between them, following the true bent of written language.

Italo Calvino, "speed"

“These convergent endeavors made predictable a situation which Paul Valéry pointed up in this sentence: ‘Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign.’”

Walter Benjamin

“Under all the nickelplated, goldplated streets enameled with May, uneasily she could feel the huddling smell, spreading in dark slow crouching masses like corruption oozing from broken sewers, like a mob. She walked briskly down the cross-street.”

John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*



Vincenzo Volt, "Deretani di case"
© 2007 The J. Paul Getty Trust.

**The Corridor
Underground,**

or Continuous Transit

(As if on hinges, blank, enormous mirrors arose, swung slowly upward face to face. Within the facing glass, vast panels deployed, lifted a steady wink of opaque pages until an endless corridor dwindled into night.)

Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep*



No. 766,107.

PATENTED JULY 26, 1904.

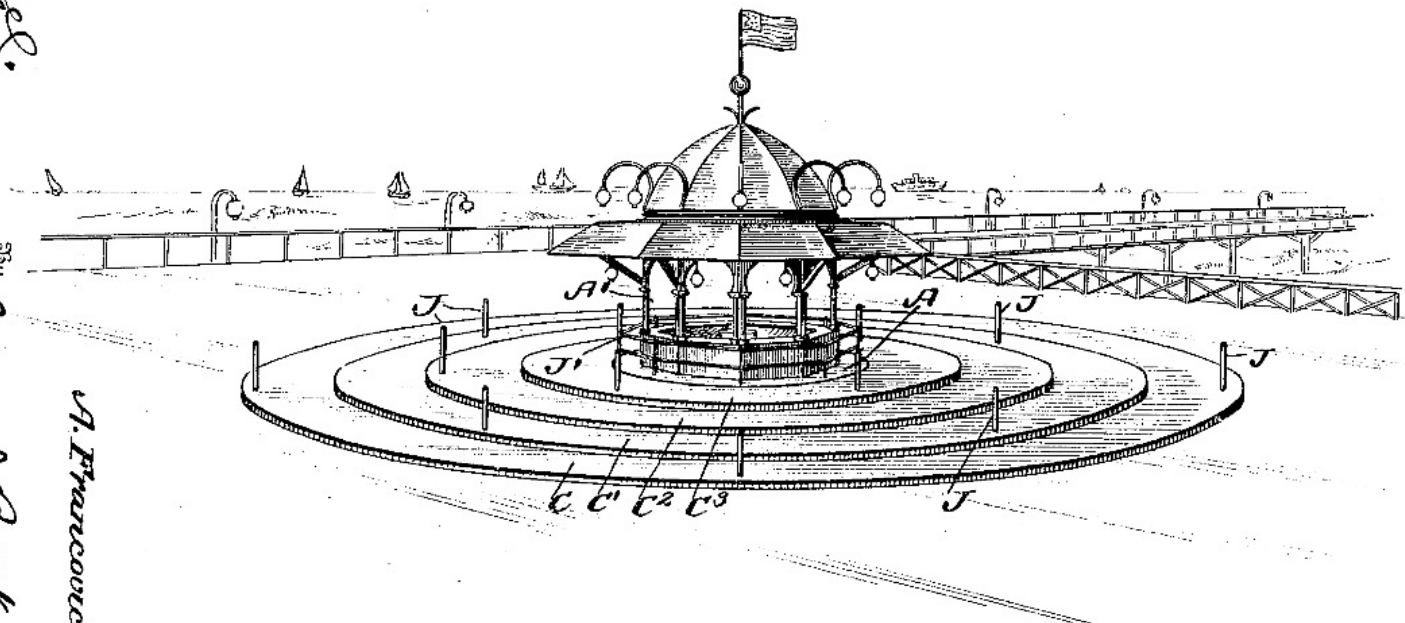
A. FRANGOVICH,
MOVING PLATFORM.

APPLICATION FILED OCT. 22, 1903.

NO MODEL.

3 SHEETS-SHEET 1.

Fig. 1.



Witnesses
M. D. Blomquist,
Thomas O'Hair

254
Charles Brock
Attorney

A. Frangovich,
Inventor

“Gates fold upwards, feet step out across the crack, men and women press through the manuresmelling wooden tunnel of the ferryhouse, crushed and jostling like apples fed down a chute into a press.”

John Dos Passos, Manhattan Transfer

Questions? Comments?

kmarshall@nd.edu