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As an introduction to the emerging field of new media studies, the essays in this issue chart the changes underway in the reception of new media and interactive narrative. These changes are similar to the reactions to Continental theory in earlier decades. Terms like frictions, misadventure, hacking, tension, and even death may help form accurate descriptions of the new media’s potential. The titles of the essays in this issue use these terms to point to new, paradoxically positive conceptions of new media as well as impasses and apprehensions. These articles argue that there is no single form or list of attributes for new media precisely because terms like interactivity point to paraformal and post?structural attributes. One way to appreciate this new area is to compare it to previous arts and literature as well as the competing conceptions of the future of this technology. Other ways of appreciating interactivity include comparing it to peculiar types of dialogue, relationships among people, animals, and robots, or to other forms of social interaction. In comparing interactive narrative to literary forms, the essays here argue that it

is a unique type of narrative that has goals and attributes of great aesthetic significance even if exemplary interactive narratives do not achieve literary aesthetic goals. Beyond the specific comparisons to arts, literature, and social interactions, the new media also suggest new types of institutional organization. Essays here explain how the uses of new media create infrastructural problems as well as highlight new organizational possibilities. New media changes the social situation and context of scholarship, academia, and textual style. Among these changes, pedagogy now has a forum for experimentation as list servers and e-mail allow for alternatives to classroom settings. In all of the essays in this special issue, the main question is how to translate narratives and social situations into situations and narratives made possible by interactivity and new media.

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Stuart Moulthrop, “Misadventure: Future Fiction and the New Networks” / 184

Traditional criticism relegates divergent narrative forms—e.g., computer games, hypertext fiction, comics—to anonymous and subcultural status, arguing that narrative must be defined in terms of what lies within the frame, e.g., of cinematic vision or narrative attention. By reflecting on several crucial misreadings of electronic texts, notably of the the adventure game *Riven*, this essay attempts to develop an approach to narrative based not on the hegemony of the frame but on a complex interplay between the focal unit and the margins or interstices that surround it. The author proposes a new conceptual category, interstitial fiction, as a way to think about common properties of narrative forms outside the literary mainstream.

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Beverley Curran, “Re-reading the Desert in Hypertranslation” / 204

Nicole Brossard’s novel, *Le désert mauve*, developed as an interactive discourse, a dialogue between two versions of a story, and between two writers, one of whom is an active reader, a translator. Trajectories of lesbian desire link the translator in Montréal, Quebec, with the Nevada/Arizona desert of cactic and nuclear test sites. The linguistic and cultural contours of media artist Adriene Jenik’s *Mauve Desert*: a CD-ROM translation further complicate the narrative spiral of Brossard’s novel, translating from print to screen; word to image; from North to South; from one generation to another. In re-reading the desert in hypertranslation, the narrative process is interrupted, extending the defiance of linear narrative that Brossard has long been doing in print. Jenik’s hypertranslation conflates the site of the story, allowing the woman writing and her reader to tutoyer in the flickering light of the computer screen.

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Helen Thorington, “Loose Ends/Connections: Interactivity in Networked Space” / 212

Writer, composer, and radio producer Helen Thorington recounts the story of her participation and growing commitment to the digital world both as an artist and as director of the *Turbulence Web* site. Focusing on her lifelong interest in narrative expressions, she writes about the evolution of her own work, from print stories to her 1995 CD-ROM, *North Country*, to *Solitaire* (1998), a narrative exploration that combines a card game with story telling, to her more recent participation as a collaborator in the evolving networked performance event, *Adrift*. Her story is guided by an intense and growing interest in process, collaboration and public participation, and their implications for personal narrative.

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Marsha Kinder, “Doors to the Labyrinth: Designing Interactive Frictions with Nina Menkes, Pat O’Neill, and John Rechy” / 232

Building on Benjamin’s observation that every art form eventually aspires to effects that can only be fully obtained in a new medium and on the concrete examples of Fielding and Eisenstein, who both used their experimentation in the theater to expand the boundaries of the newly emerging novel and cinema respectively, Marsha Kinder describes her collaboration with independent filmmakers Nina Menkes and Pat O’Neill and novelist John Rechy on three electronic fictions designed to stretch the creative boundaries of CD-ROMs. Produced by the Labyrinth Research Initiative on Interactive Narrative (at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg Center

for Communication), these fictions premiered at the “Interactive Frictions” exhibit in June 1999, along with fourteen other pieces by a wide range of artists (including Cindy Bernard, George Legrady, Vibeke Sorensen, Bill Viola, and Norman Yonemoto), all positioning the viewer as a performer of the narrative. Despite very different styles of interactivity, these installations all embraced the Labyrinth’s broad definition of narrative: as a discursive mode of patterning and interpreting the meaning of perceptions, a mode that always carries specific historical, cultural, and generic inflections and that always performs a complex weave of cognitive, ideological, and aesthetic functions.

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Barbara Hayes-Roth, “Getting into the Story” / 246

This essay describes an approach to immersive story experience based on the technique of directed improvisation. It shows first how directed improvisation has been used traditionally by oral storytellers to create immersive experiences for their listeners. These techniques have also been used in important literary production processes. The essay then shows how the technique can be used in combination with artificial characters to create immersive story experiences in electronic media. (C.S.)

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R. L. Rutsky, “Techno-Cultural Interaction and the Fear of Information” / 267

Fears of information and information overload are often figured in terms of fluidity and otherness: as, for example, an ocean of information that threatens to overwhelm or drown us. Interacting with this postmodern ocean of data frequently evokes a sense of being lost, unable to chart a course. In response to this fear of becoming lost, techno?cultural interaction is often figured in terms that stress the importance of mapping and navigation. Yet, the metaphor of navigation, with its emphasis on the human mastery of the world, is as much a metaphor of colonialism and corporate strategy as it is of empowerment and political action. In contrast to the figure of navigation, the often maligned metaphor of surfing, with its non?Western origins and emphasis on performance over instrumentality, offers a different way of thinking about our interactions with the fluidity and otherness of the data ocean. Instead of attempting to maintain a human mastery over the world of information, surfing suggests an interaction with it?an interaction in which human beings are not the sole actors.

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Jon McKenzie, “!nt3rh4ckt!v!ty” / 283

Interactivity on the Web is frequently posed in terms of individual users and their internet?connected PCs, an approach seemingly manifested in “personalized user experiences” and “customizable web pages.” Yet such interactivity actually results from intense market research and technical planning on the part of computer and web site developers. Such interactivity thus has a sociotechnical dimension, which is theorized in terms of “interhacktivity,” hacking that targets technical systems in order to influence the social communities that use them. The author explores interhacktivity through three recent cases of hacking on the web: Dale Hoke’s Pairgain stock hoax, the infiltration of India’s Bhabha Atomic Research Centre by teenage hackers, and the Electronic Disturbance Theater’s online efforts to aid the indigenous peoples of Chiapas, Mexico.

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Mark C. Taylor, “FuturePerfect: Tense” / 300

The tension between perfections anticipated in the future and the imperfections plaguing the present mark the story of history especially in times of transition and instability. Theological fantasies with happy, if apocalyptic, endings proliferate in the stories about a technologically fantastic future where the Promised Land sometimes appears as an aesthetic utopia as in Constructivist and Futurist manifestoes. Information and telematic technologies currently drive the theological fantasies of a perfect future. In its current incarnation, these stories often make the cyber?space into a move toward perfect immateriality as a kind of merger with God.



Disincarnation becomes a new fantasy, described by many important contemporary scientists, of human consciousness surviving without bodies as they evolve into machines. Immortality becomes a real possibility as the distinction between machines and humans fades in these fantastic futures currently under construction. As a corollary to these perfect futures, the tension and worry arises because the technological fantasies seek to expose everything to a connectedness until there is nothing left but disincarnated machines. With the increasing eccentricity of information flows, an uncertainty appears because no one can locate who has access to what information. Transparent systems lead to opaque situations. The inescapability of noise means that the future can never be truly perfect or perfectly transparent. That noise also allows the systems to move and for the fantasies to continue. Any completely perfect future is a dreamless sleep without even the tense noise of speculations and fantasies of perfect futures. (C. S.)

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Becky Bond and José Marquez, “South to the Future’s World Wide Wire Service” / 309

Can a fictional newstory be more “real” than its fictional counterpart? What does an excavation of the present actually look like? South to the Future examines their own World Wide Wire Service, a weekly feed of often fictional, though not entirely untrue, news stories distributed like the Associated Press by independent newspapers across the United States and throughout the rest of the world via the Internet.

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Bill Tomlinson, “Dead Technology” / 316

Humans and other animals have a variety of mental triggers that help us recognize living things. We can tell if something is alive by how it moves, what it does, how it sounds. Since we necessarily make decisions about things based on imperfect information, however, we occasionally miscategorize things. An examination of the way animals decide whether things are alive can help designers of technology make machines that more effectively mimic living creatures. One of the qualities that correlates most strongly with life is death. Everyone dies; we all know that. A machine with an awareness of death may feel more alive. But, machines that sport with death run the risk of becoming abominations, that uneasy category that lies too close to living for most people to be comfortable with it. Terms like alive, dead, and not-alive are human constructs. They make it easier for us to comprehend the gradient from alive to not alive. People are alive, rocks are not. In between the two extremes lie viruses, artificial skin, and life-like technological creations. Traditionally, people have not been forced to confront the gray area between living and non-living. Technology is beginning to chisel away at this artificial dichotomy.

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