

CYBERTEXT YEARBOOK 2000

*Edited by
Markku Eskelinen & Raine Koskimaa*

CYBERTEXT YEARBOOK 2000

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DO YOU THINK YOU'RE PART OF THIS? DIGITAL TEXTS AND THE SECOND PERSON ADDRESS

Jill Walker

"Look straight in my eyes. Talk to me." These aren't words between lovers, or from a parent to an errant child. They're guidelines for good customer service, tacked up behind the counter in a Texan bakery. Americans know that you need to be seen, that you need to be acknowledged as an important person, as *you*. That need is institutionalised and commercially exploited. You see it in the service agendas on bakery walls. You feel it in the soft dollar bill you're supposed to tip the bellboy, but that you keep tightly clenched in your palm, still sweating from the Texan heat, though the air-conditioning is cold, too cold for a Northern European like you, used to harsh climates but not to these contrasts. The dollar bill lies damp in your hand. You know you're supposed to smile. You should say thank you and calmly give the dollar to the man standing smiling as he's been taught, looking you straight in the eyes. You've been told the rules of this game. He looks you in the eye to make you feel important, an individual, and you're supposed to pay him for it. You know what you're supposed to do. But you don't do it. You can't play the part.

Maybe you've never really been in a Texan bakery and never stood tongue-tied, too caught in Northern European pseudo-egalitarianism to tip a bellboy. But you've met that "you" before, haven't you? The "you" that writers use when they want to make the reader feel seen. The "you" you read at the end of *The Cat in a Hat*: "What would *you* do if your mother asked you?" (Seuss 1957, 61). You hear it when a character in a film turns to look straight into the camera, straight at *you*, speaking straight to you. You answer that "you" with a click of your mouse in *afternoon*: "Do you want to hear about it?" (Joyce 1990, 'begin'); leap into it at the invitation of an adventure game: "You are standing in an open field west

of a white house, with a boarded front door” (Blank and Lebling 1981); pay for it in excitement after reading the ads for the newest game: ”It’s up to you to stop the conspirators from achieving their goals.” (*Deus Ex Official Web Site* 2000)

All these ”you”s are different. But they have a common ancestor. You, the reader or listener, have been addressed since ancient times. The ways you’ve been addressed have names: *apostrophes* (”breaking off the discourse to address some person or personified thing either present or absent” (Lanham 1991)) and *interrogatios* (popularly known as rhetorical questions: questions directed to the reader or the audience without any answer being expected). Both these figures are rhetorical in the sense that they are elements of style and don’t exceed the text or speech. You’re not expected to answer. I’ve been apostrophising you, my reader, and asking you rhetorical questions. But when you read this essay, you’re supposed to read and stay quiet. There’s no space within the text for you to respond. You can write me an email if you like (jill.walker@uib.no), but your email response will be outside of the text: neither necessary to your reading, nor changing the text that you read.

In hypertexts, games and certain other electronic texts, an apostrophe to the reader can and often does require a response. The reader’s answer is inscribed in the text, and enacted by the reader. That is what this essay is about. It’s about how you seem to be part of the texts you read and the games you play, and how, in electronic texts, your scripted response is necessary to the very act of reading or playing.

Narratees and readers

Addressing the reader, talking to *you*, ”the reader”, explicitly writes a narratee into the text (and I mean text in the broadest sense: words, images, whatever). The narratologist Seymour Chatman maps the narrative communication situation as follows:

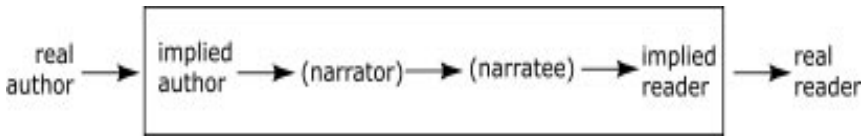


Figure 1. Chatman's model of the narrative communication situation (1978, 151).

Outside the box are the elements that are outside of the text itself. On one side is the real author. The real author of *this* essay is a woman notionally called Jill Walker, who doesn't necessarily always identify with the "I" or "me" in this text – although the conventions of this genre¹ probably lead you to expect a reasonable degree of identification between the real author and the narrating "I". On the receiving end of all those arrows is the real reader. That's you. Not the "you" that "I" think I'm writing to, but the actual living person reading these words. According to Chatman (and most other theorists around) it's extremely important that you remember that there's a difference between the "you" addressed by the text and the flesh and blood individual who's actually reading these words.

The next element in the model is the implied author, who is not a person or a character, but the implied set of principles organising the narrative, or in other words the reader's reconstruction of the designer of the text. The narrator is the text's "I", the voice speaking or writing, (that's me, not the flesh and blood Jill Walker) and the narratee is the character to whom the narrator is telling the story (you must be a character to me, because how could I possibly know who you really are?) Chatman doesn't think a narrator and narratee are necessary in narrative communication, that's why he's put brackets around them in the figure. Other theorists disagree with him, arguing that there is *always* a narrating voice, though it may not call itself "I" as I do (Prince 1987, 65). The implied reader, the final element in the model, is the counterpart to the implied author; it is the reader presupposed by the entire text. This means that the implied reader is not explicitly inscribed in the text, so is not referred to as "you". Likewise the implied author, being merely an idea rather than a person or character, has no textual voice and cannot narrate. Rather, these two textual functions are the "implicit image" of author and reader in the text (Prince 1987, 42).

By now you may be wondering what on earth I think I'm doing, saying that "I" am the narrator of this essay. How can an essay have a narrator? An essay isn't a narrative, and probably most electronic texts aren't either, so why bother with all this, you complain. No, this essay isn't a narrative, not according to any narratological definition I've heard anyway. But there's plenty of narrating in it. Lots of telling, some events of a kind, some description and at least two fairly clear characters: the narrator, which refers to itself as "I" and sometimes "me", and the narratee, referred to as "you". The same goes for electronic texts. Though computer games or hypertext fictions probably aren't narratives as such, there is certainly narration in these texts (Aarseth 1997, 94–5). Chatman's discussion of the positions of the narrator, narratee, real author and real reader are very relevant for any textual communication, whether fictional or non-fictional, narrative or merely containing traces of narration.

"Wonderfully stirring"

Directly addressing the reader (listener, viewer, player) is an "irresistible invitation", writes Irene Kacandes (1993, 139). You're walking down the street, when someone calls out "Hey, you!" How can you help but turn? Of course you assume that you're the "you", for an instant at least. You turn because the word YOU is empty in itself. The vacuum inside it sucks you in, filling itself with you, and it will take a moment before you realise that you may not belong there.

The word "you" is ready to be filled by anyone. It is empty: it doesn't refer outside of the situation in which it is uttered. There's a word for this emptiness: *deixis*. Deictic words like "you", "I", "she", "this", "that", "there" have no meaning except in relation to other words and to a context. Their power lies in this emptiness. Filling the empty space of a "you" can be "wonderfully stirring" (Quintilian 1953, 38–39; bk. 9, ch. 22) for a reader, as writers and rhetoricians have known since ancient times.

In his treatise on the sublime, the Greek-Roman rhetorician Longinus both uses and recommends this kind of direct address to the reader. His treatise is styled as a letter to a friend who has asked him to write about the sublime:

You will remember, my dear Postimius Terentianus, that when we examined together the treatise of Caecilius on the Sublime, we found that it fell below the dignity of the whole subject, while it failed signally to grasp the essential points, and conveyed to its readers but little of that practical help which it should be a writer's principal aim to give. . . . Since you have urged me, in my turn, to write a brief essay on the sublime for your special gratification, let us consider whether the views I have formed contain anything which will be of use to public men. (1935, 41)

Discussing how rhetorical figures can be used to transport the hearer into the sublime, Longinus frequently returns to various forms of direct address:

All such cases of direct personal address place the hearer on the very scene of action... You will make your hearer more excited and more attentive, and full of active participation, if you keep him on the alert by words addressed to himself. (ibid., 111)

"Active participation"; that sounds familiar, don't you think? The active participation of the reader, player, listener, viewer is one of the highest goals of anyone claiming cyber-credibility these days. Go to an exhibition of electronic art and you'll doubtlessly find the catalogue full of the curator's enthusiastic writings about participation and interaction (Stenslie 2000, 17), though the art pieces themselves probably don't permit much more than the occasional click of a button. Web sites, entertainment, games, education: they all scream to proclaim their interactive content, usually meaning little more than a scattering of animations and sound effects. And quite often, all that reader/user/player participation means is that they talk to "you". "You" is used in excess in electronic texts. It's present in films, advertising and journalism too. The rhetoric of participation is all around us.

But today's electronic "you" is expected to answer, unlike its non-electronic counterparts. This "active participation" has become more literal. The identification is external and physical, and not just emotional. So you answer. But what exactly is the nature of that answer? What are you expected to do?

Role-playing: filling the "you"

In computer games, your answer usually lies in playing the role that is offered to you. This role corresponds to the text's construction of "you" as both narratee and a protagonist of sorts. In the game *Deus Ex*, "you are J.D. Denton"; in a MUD you create your own "character" but still according to strict rules.

Since the first text adventure game, *Adventure* (Crowther and Woods 1976), the use of the second person and the expectation that you should *be* the protagonist have been standard in computer games, though there are exceptions here as to every rule. Only some computer games are marketed as "role-playing games", but it's a rare game that doesn't have an element of role-playing in it. Perhaps role-playing is fundamental to all games at a theoretical level; in the same way as all narratives theoretically can be argued to have a narrator function, though the narrator may not be explicit in the text. Narration is part of role-playing. When you play a role-playing game, you don't just play the role of your *avatar*, you also accept the roles of narrator and narratee.

Did you play those first text adventure games? Did you sit at your computer trying to figure out how to find the treasure, trick the trolls and discover the words that the program would understand? Remember what it's like: you change positions constantly, back and forth, narrator and narratee. You are the narratee as the program's narrating voice displays words glowing on your screen: "A nasty-looking troll, brandishing a bloody axe, blocks all passages out of the room. Your sword has begun to glow very brightly." You respond, pressing the keys faster though you know that time here only exists in the enter key. You are the narrator now; you need a simple sentence that the program can parse. "Kill troll with sword" you write, and the program, narratee for a moment, interprets it instantly, then narrates the results back to you. You reply, and the narration moves back and forth, back and forth until the battle is won or the battle is lost.

You may have nearly forgotten *Adventure* by now. You play *Riven* or *Deus Ex*, or multi-player games on the net, textual or graphical. Perhaps you play role-playing games without computers, with a human game leader, your friends on the sofa and the sounds of dice against a table, pencils

against paper. All these games are role-playing games. Some highlight the roles more than others, but in each you play a role. You recognise this conversational narrative in all of them; the constant exchange of positions: narratee, narrator, narratee, narrator, narratee.

Sometimes you feel as though you're the protagonist in these worlds you travel through as you play different roles. Perhaps you are. Perhaps your character is. You narrate your own actions. Some games give you a lot of freedom to choose your own way. But you're always restricted.

Role-playing games have a fixed textual foundation. These games are built in or around a fictional world with an internal logic of its own. It has rules that determine and limit your character's actions: the length of each day, the kinds of magic and technology that exist, the game mechanics of fighting and casting spells, social structures, physical characteristics of the species you belong to and so on. The rules in the rulebook or the constraints of the program and the interface become part of this fictional foundation. You can't be an elven magic-caster in a cyberpunk role-playing game and you can't create new objects unless you're a powerful magic-user, a builder or a programmer. Role-playing games are imbalanced conversations. One side dominates the other: the pre-constructed world, the program and the game master have more control over the story than you do as a player. Do they control you, too?

In these games you're offered more than the role of narratee or reader that you would receive in most traditional stories. The role of the narrator is yours to fill as well as that of the narratee. You're still within a clear framework of a fictional world with limitations and expectations, but you have a voice of your own, albeit for limited periods. You're on the producing end of the communication model and not just a recipient. This is one of the fêted differences between electronic texts and traditional texts. But even when you seem to be a narrator in an electronic text, you are playing a role determined by the program and the fictional world. In *Adventure* your voice is limited to the words the program can understand. Though parsers are improving, you still aren't free to narrate as you like in a computer game. Interaction between humans is free, but to change the game world, you must address the program, making the program your narratee. But this narratee is dim-witted, understanding only clicks of a mouse on certain areas of the screen, or only particular words and commands. To take the role of the narrator in an electronic role-playing game you accept a limited vocabulary, a vocabulary determined by your narratee. Are you sure you're narrating at all?

If you don't play along, the punishment is clear: death. The troll will kill you. Your computer will go to sleep, tired of your lack of response. You literally can't play if you don't submit to the code.

Voyeurism or performance

When you read a text (any text: words, images, whatever) you're cast in one or several roles. One role is what Chatman calls the implied reader; it's the set of values the text assumes in the reader. Chatman writes that you take this role as a second self when you enter the fictional contract (1978, 150). There may also be a clear narratee in the text, as when the story is told to a "you", but this narratee doesn't have to coincide with the implied reader. In *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, for instance, the narratees (and narrators) of most letters are much more cynical than the implied reader, who is expected to see through the narrators' and narratees' cruelty (150). Similarly, there may be computer games where the character you play does things that the implied reader is not supposed to approve of.

This all gets rather complicated when the "you" in the text, the narratee, seems to refer to the real reader. Often these seeming addresses to the reader are ironic reflections about the main story, from an extradiegetic narrator to an extradiegetic narratee². Comments like these often highlight the act of narration or of reading. This can be seen in 19th century novels:

If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations, reduce them to a lowly standard. (Brontë 1902, 1)

And you can find a similarly ironic voice in hypertext essays:

Nice story, you say? Here's *the point*. (Kaplan 1995)

Reading passages like these, you share in an ironic detachment from the act of narration or argument itself that can make you feel included; you feel *seen* by the text. It's pleasurable to feel that acknowledgment. In the same way as it feels good when your waiter looks you in the eyes and

seems to really see you. Just so long as he doesn't look too long or too hard, or demand too much in return.

You've read stories you've not been able to stop reading, where you've hungrily read page after page, needing to know what happens next. That's a different pleasure to the enjoyment of being "seen" by the text, of sharing inside jokes with the narrator. It's known as narrative desire or narrative pleasure, and is an easy pleasure that is often found in non-reflexive texts that don't problematise things like the relationship between the reader, the implied reader and the narratee. You happily allow yourself a "willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge 1973, 2:6)³ and see what the text wants to do with you, letting yourself slip into the shell of the "you" in the text you're reading and enjoying the way you're sucked into the story. You love being seduced by the narrative.

Texts that have an explicit "you" can often make this seduction more visible and more self-reflexive. The tension between the safely voyeuristic pleasures of narrative desire and the presence of a "you" that draws (or forces) you into the story can be an extra source of pleasure. See how you like reading John Barth's apostrophe to a reader: "The reader! You, dogged, uninsultable, print-oriented bastard, it's you I'm addressing, who else, from inside this monstrous fiction." (1988, 127)

There are some narratives, though, that blur the line between voyeuristic reader and protagonist in a different way, by making the textual "you" the protagonist of the story; similarly to role-playing games, but without the conversational turn taking of narrator and narratee. This kind of "you" has been termed *narrative "you"* and is discussed by Bruce Morrissette (1965), among others. According to Morrissette, the true narrative "you" requires a singular past or present action to be ascribed to the "you", because narratives deal with events rather than with generalised observations. If the use of "you" is truly narrative in this sense, it often seems a disguised 'I', "a 'first person' narrator talking to himself" (Bal 1997, 37). A "you" that is tied to specific, singular events usually accumulates so many clear characteristics that *you* the real reader can't fit into this very tightly defined subject position. Italo Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* uses this narrative "you". Here the "you" position remains open for the first pages, allowing room for most readers:

You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the

TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, "No, I don't want to watch TV!" Raise your voice—they won't hear you otherwise—"I'm reading! I don't want to be disturbed!" (Calvino 1981, 5)

This "you" doesn't remain empty for long though, it becomes more and more limited. As a real reader, you may well feel excluded from the offered position. Being told to "tell the others" is already exclusive; what if you live alone and have no others to tell? Yes, the "you" in the text is like you the real reader in that he is a reader and seemingly reading the very same book as you are. But he is male, he has personality traits you may not have, he falls in love with a female reader – these things may not fit you, the real reader. As you read, you find more and more that the "you" addressed in the text is *not* you, the real reader. Your identification with the textual you becomes more and more uneasy, and you become more aware of the impossibility of really participating in the text. Or perhaps it merely adds some spice to your voyeuristic narrative desire, some of that excitement you feel when you read a letter meant for somebody else.

There's another kind of "you" in printed texts, as well, an address that you enact merely by reading it. Irene Kacandes calls this use of "you" the "literary performative". They're fairly rare, and seem to limit themselves to statements of the reader's activity in reading, as in Barth's "You've read me this far then? Even this far?" The act of reading these words is an involuntary performative, Kacandes argues, because "one can't help doing what one is told, as long as one keeps reading. . . [A]ffirmative 'answers' are generated . . . as soon as the questions are read by someone – by anyone!" (1993, 142)

The *narrative* "you" as we see it in stories by Calvino, Butor and Barth, among others, is not performative in Kacandes' sense. These address to a "you" do not "offer statements which will be actualised by any reader". Instead they exclude the reader from the "you" position. The literary performative however, has a lot in common with the function of "you" in electronic texts.

Identification: the willing suspension of disbelief

In many digital texts, identification is pushed as far as possible. This is most explicit in computer games, where you will usually have some control over the protagonist of the game. In the rhetoric surrounding computer games, both from game makers and players, the difference between *playing* and *being* the protagonist is blurred. There is a brand of total identification that appears to be a mark of excellence, an essential criterion of quality among gamers, as you can see in this argumentation for *Doom*'s inclusion among the "top 50 games of all time":

Unquestionably, the most appealing aspect of *Doom* was its sheer fun factor; each of the editors had to admit to spending countless hours roaming about its virtual halls. But what was so fun about it? What made this so much more fun than anything else? (. . .) [I]ts because these graphics did more to suspend disbelief – crucial to a compelling gameplay experience – than any game to come before it (and some would say, than any game to come after it). Before you were even out of the first level, you felt as if you WERE in those halls, battling those demons. (qtd. by Juul 1999, 77)

Notice how this game reviewer uses Coleridge's phrase, emphasizing that the reason the game was so good was that it "did more to suspend disbelief". Here the suspension of disbelief is not about Coleridge's "poetic faith" but about allowing yourself to be someone else for a time. It's about letting yourself believe that you're really in the halls you see displayed on your screen. You can see this mode of identification in the marketing announcements for *Deus Ex*, a more recent game that combines *Doom*'s 3D interface of guns and monsters with elements of role-playing:

To succeed, you must travel the globe in a quest for knowledge, develop your character's strengths as you see fit, build a network of allies to assist you, determine when stealth and strategy are more important than action. And each time you think you've got the mystery solved, the game figured out, there's another, deeper mystery to be unraveled. You will never know who to trust, who your friends are, who's in on the conspiracy and who's innocent. Maybe no one is. (*Deus Ex Official Web Site*)

You'll have noticed how frequently "you" is used in this excerpt. Now look at how the meaning of this "you" slips backwards and forwards, rhythmically, between *you* the real reader (or player) and "you", the protagonist of the game. "You", the fictional character travels the globe while *you* the real player plan which of *your* character's strengths to develop. By the last two sentences of the excerpt, these two different "you"s have merged. You (and now I mean you, the reader of this essay and the potential player of *Deus Ex*) are supposed to suspend your belief in yourself, rather than in the unrealism of the game-world, so you can *be* the character you're playing. You're supposed to forget all about Chatman's careful separation of real reader, implied reader and narratee. This extreme identification is different from the voyeuristic, bleak identification we know from reading novels or watching films. It's Kacandes' narrative performative, but swollen almost past recognition. You have to enact the text's performative in order to play.

Forced participation

Michel Butor has described second person narration as a didactic or interrogatory situation in which a character is told her *own* story by someone else, because she is either unable or unwilling to tell it herself. She may lack the language, the self-awareness or the memories; or she may refuse to tell, perhaps because her story would incriminate her or because she doesn't trust the person who wants to hear it. Butor uses the example of a detective interrogating a suspect to illustrate a case where the protagonist "you" refuses to speak herself, and he connects this to force. This narrative is *forced* upon the "you" (1964, 80–81).

Do you feel violated, forced by the way I talk to you in this essay? As you read, how do you feel about the way I use "you"? Are you offended, confused, flattered, seduced, violated? Maybe the "you" position offered to you is open enough that you slip into it hardly noticing that it's forced upon you? If using the word "you" is an "irresistible invitation" (Kacandes 1993, 139) then it can also be felt as a forced invitation, close to an act of violence. It is an involuntary performative.

Often when you come across "you" in texts, you'll suspect that the "you" is a hidden "I" in a concealed autobiographical story – as with the

story of the Texan bellboy and the tipper. The "you" there was actually me, it was I who felt my nervous fingers wrinkling the dollar bill, unable to follow the script I knew was intended for me. To give the bellboy – a grown man, my father's age – a dollar bill or even two or three felt impossible. I felt I would humiliate him, bruise his self-esteem and make a fool out of myself. Yet I knew it was expected of me. I felt forced into a situation I wasn't truly a part of; forced into a role that wasn't mine and that I didn't want.

I often feel the same way when I'm confronted with a "you" in a text I'm reading. I know I'm supposed to feel an "irresistible invitation" at this direct address, and sometimes I do delight in it, seeing the role the text invites me to enter and enjoying the thrill of an identification that is grammatical and physical as well as emotional. I return the waiter's open smile, listen to his recommendations with interest and leave him a tip, enjoying playing my part in this scripted ritual. Other times I resist the irresistible. In Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* I can see that I'm supposed to be the male "you", the male reader who falls in love with a female reader, but I refuse to play along. In Jordan Mechner's graphical adventure game *The Last Express* I'm supposed to play the young American man who's expected to figure out why his friend has been murdered and why that friend asked him to be on this train – but I'd rather play the mysterious woman that "I" (well, the young American man) is obviously supposed to be attracted to, or I'd like to jump off the train, maybe rifle through "my" own pockets to see who this creature I'm supposed to be is. When I'm the young American, every other character in the game calls me "you", and the help files, where they exist, always tell me "You are..." But I don't like playing the role of that "you". I quit the game. I didn't give the bellboy in Texas the dollar bill I should have tipped him either. Direct address in these cases attempts to forcibly break down the differences between the real reader, the implied reader and the narratee. I am forced into a script, forced into participation. Sometimes that feels good. Sometimes I run away.

There is a qualitative difference between the identification you may feel with the "you" in this essay or Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night* and the identification you are forced to enact with a "you" in an electronic text. You are free to resist my addresses to you in this essay. But in many electronic texts, this freedom is gone. When you are asked, "Do you want to hear about it?" in *afternoon*, it's almost impossible to keep your dis-

tance to that address. If you click your mouse in answer to the question posed to you, you accept your role; you become "you". You perform an involuntary performative. *afternoon* still allows you to stop reading, or to follow another path and ignore the address. But if you answer the question posed to "you", you let the text force you into a role.

A game like *The Last Express* doesn't allow you any freedom to choose another path. If you don't accept that you are the very specific "you" offered, the game will not move on, there will be no story. By continuing to play you "execute an involuntary performative." (Kacandes 1993, 142)

The ritual of submission

When you perform your part in this gaming performative, or whatever you would prefer to call it, you take part in a ritual, much as you do when you complete a complicated task in your word processor by following steps explained in the manual: "we are like participants in a square dance, repeating formulaic sequences, with the relevant manual page [for the word processor] acting as the caller of the dance" (Murray 1997, 128). Janet Murray calls this formulaic performance of a fixed repertoire *participatory*, but stresses that the human participant (yes, that's you) has no agency:

Agency is the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices . . . But activity alone is not agency. For instance, in a tabletop game of chance, players may be kept very busy spinning dials, moving game pieces, and exchanging money, but they may not have any real agency. The players' actions have effect, but the actions are not chosen and the effects are not related to the players' intentions. (126–8)

These are rituals of seduction or of force, where every citizen, every customer, every reader, even you, must be individually seen and acknowledged, seduced. We live in a world where every voter must be made to think she is important. Where looking into your eyes, pretending to see *you* rather than yet another customer is the way to ensure a shop's (or a book's or a game's) existence. Where stories, whether in tabloids, hyper-text fictions or games, must seem to be about *you*.

You feel pleasure in playing a role. It's a pleasure that is related but not identical to narrative pleasure. When you read a narrative you enjoy being a voyeur. You are driven by a desire to read it all, and reading all, the story ends: your desire is dead. When you play a game, or enact the involuntary performatives of responding to a link in a hypertext, you are more than a voyeur. You enjoy that feeling of being part of the text, part of the machine. Do you enjoy the limitations of your participation: the feeling of being forced, of submitting? Is this the pleasure of ritual? In games, and even in some hypertext fiction, death (of your character or your reading) is your punishment when you stray from the path.

Working with a machine the operator becomes most efficient when she stops thinking about what she's doing, and begins to operate in a semi-automatic mode.

This feels good. (Thomas 1993, 20)

Do you think that is why we play games? Do you enjoy submitting to the code?

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NOTES

1. The essay's placement in a book with other essays, the two-part title (the first a frivolous attempt to catch your attention and the second a pallid explanation) and the footnotes and a bibliography suggest this is an academic essay, but can you be sure?
2. But theoretically never from the implied author to the implied reader, and certainly not from the real author to the real reader. None of these positions can be inscribed in the text; they can only be inferred from it.
3. It's worth reminding you that this isn't quite what Coleridge meant when he wrote about a "willing suspension of disbelief". He was talking about why we can read and enjoy romantic or supernatural stories despite their lack of realism. As you'll see later, the phrase has taken on different meanings since Coleridge first used it, and the way we identify with textual positions is one of these meanings.

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