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"Click = Kill": Textual *You* in Ludic Digital Fiction

Astrid Ensslin and Alice Bell

Introduction

Since the early days of hypertext criticism, the study of digital fiction has undergone a significant paradigm shift.¹ Recent research has moved from a first wave of mostly theoretical and philosophical debate to a second wave of close stylistic and semiotic analysis. While the theoretical intricacies of second-wave digital fiction theory have been much discussed (e.g. Ciccoricco 2007; Ensslin 2007; Ensslin and Bell 2007; Bell 2010), the discipline and practice of close-reading digital fiction require a more systematic engagement with the possibilities and limitations of the form. Similarly, the narratological tools and terminologies inherited from print scholarship need to be adapted to the medial, material and discursive qualities of digital fiction.²

In seeking to exemplify this research agenda, this article offers a close-reading of geniwate's and Deena Larsen's satirical, ludic Flash fiction *The Princess Murderer* (2003),³ with a specific focus on how the text implements second person narration and other forms of the textual *you* (Herman 1994, 2002) in juxtaposition with other narrational stances. *The [somewhat disturbing but highly improbable] Princess Murderer* (henceforth abbreviated to "TPM") mixes thematic elements of the Romantic Fairytale, the crime mystery (both suggested by its title), pornographic magazines (suggested by the disclaimer, "References to sex and violence"), and discursive-interactive elements of digital genres such as hypertext, hypermedia, and videogame. A digital remediation of Charles Perrault "La Barbe bleue" (1697), the text places itself in mythological canon and transforms elements of Perrault's source text ludically, diegetically, and multimodally. TPM represents Bluebeard as a stereotypical Manichean villain, thus conforming with the ludic convention of othering any animate obstacle that comes in the way of the player-character. In the original fairy tale, Bluebeard is significantly more rounded. The original tale characterizes him almost sympathetically, as a "poor fellow" with a "blue beard" whose many riches could not help the fact that his looks "made him so ugly and frightful that there was not a woman or girl who did not run away at sight of him" (Perrault 1961: 70; *sic*). Indeed, the original story takes a moral position in shifting the blame for the murders onto the princesses themselves, who all disobey Bluebeard's order not to enter the "forbidden room." This aspect of Perrault's text, by valorizing Bluebeard's conduct, also underscores the distinctive patriarchal if not misogynist tone of the Enlightenment story.

Narratologically, TPM situates itself in a tradition of second person address, which is often found in digital narratives such as interactive fictions (Montfort 2003, 2007), videogames, and some hypertext fictions. We aim to explore the extent to which print-based narratological theories of the textual *you* apply to the text under investigation, and to outline new directions for research arising from TPM's distinct (inter-)medial, literary/reflexive, and ludic qualities. Of particular interest will be the ways in which the reader and his/her role in the cybernetic feedback loop are constructed textually and interactionally. Specifically, we argue that current approaches to the *you* in digital fiction need to be expanded, particularly with respect to its metafictional potential.

The *You* in Contemporary Narratology

Especially in English, where one grammatical form homonymically references male and female, singular and plural addressees, but can also be used as a generalized pronoun replacing "one," textual *you* has inspired a diversity of aesthetic uses, and writers--in particular, pioneers of modernist and postmodernist fiction--have explored the narrative effects of this technique (see Fludernik 1994 and Richardson 2006 for comprehensive enumerations of second person narratives). Theoretical interest in second person narration did not emerge until Bruce Morrissette's groundbreaking essay, "Narrative 'You' in Contemporary Literature" (1965), following Michel Butor's second person novel *La Modification* (1957); and this interest did not grow into a systematic field of narratological investigation until the early 1990s (McHale 1985; Margolin 1990; Richardson 1991, 2006; Kacandes 1993; Fludernik 1994; Herman 1994, 2002). As Richardson (2006) reminds us, "second person narration is an artificial mode that does not normally occur in natural narrative or in most texts in the history of literature before 1919" (19). In fact, the first full-length novel employing the technique is widely considered to be Rex Stout's *How Like A God* (1929).

The second person has been identified as "one of the most important technical advances in fictional narration since the introduction of the stream of consciousness" (Richardson 2006: 35). Its inherent referential ambiguity as a special case of person deixis (Herman 2002: 332) causes readers to reposition the referent of the *you* flexibly between virtual and actual worlds, between intra- and extradiegetic levels, and between protagonist, characters, narrator, narratee, implied reader, and actual reader. Italo Calvino's novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1992), epitomizes this form. The opening sentence, "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*" (3), invokes the actual reader as the person reading the book, but it quickly switches to a more specific and therefore fictional addressee as the defining attributes of *you* become more particular.

The fact that the textual *you* may refer to either the reader, the narratee, the protagonist or another character in the narrative, or indeed to several of them at the same time, makes it an "epistemologically [...] more dubious pronoun than the traditional 'I' or 'she'." After all, its "deep [or inherent] ambiguity," which always "carries with it an *invitation* to the reader" (Capecci 1989: 47) as well as the possibility of referring to a generalized "you," challenges the reader's frames of reference, thereby "threaten[ing] the stability of the fictional world" (Richardson 2006: 20). As David Herman (1994) succinctly puts it, "narrative you produces an ontological hesitation between the virtual and the actual by constantly repositioning readers, to a fundamentally indeterminate degree, within the emergent spatiotemporal parameters of one or more alternative possible worlds" (378). This hesitation is enacted physically in users' interactions with digital texts via mouseclick or keyboard; such interactions break the traditional ontological boundary between fictional and actual world.

Figure 1 shows an expanded typology of the functional uses of the textual *you*, combining typologies and/or terminological distinctions offered by Herman (1994, 2002), Richardson (2006) and Kacandes (1993) with regard to print fiction, as well as Walker (2000) and Montfort (2003) in relation to digital forms of narrative. The fact that the graph exhibits a drift towards the bottom right corner of the display reflects the importance of apostrophic (direct reader) address - or specific forms thereof - in digital narratives.

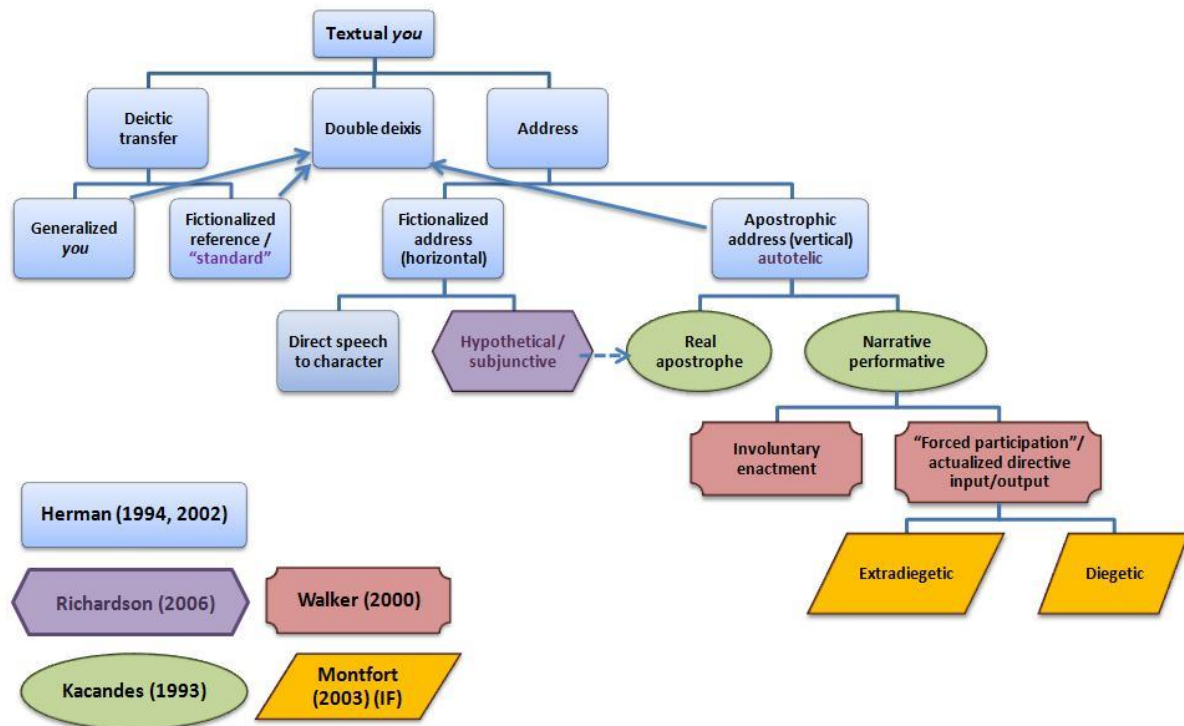


Figure 1: Functional Types of Textual You

The top three layers of the graph represent Herman's (1994, 2002) five-fold distinction between forms of deictic transfer (where the pragmatic meaning of *you* is shifted onto the protagonist or a general collective audience); modes of address, which can be fictionalized, i.e. directed intradiegetically at other characters, or nonfictional, i.e. directed apostrophically at the narratee and/or reader; and a combined type, which Herman calls "double deixis" as it superimposes the actual (or even the generalized) addressee onto the virtual "you." This last mode can create referential ambiguity and foster reader identification without, however, leaving the ontological frame of the narrative proper.

The most typical or "standard" (Richardson 2006) form of second person narration is the fictionalized reference, which focalizes events through the protagonist much as in first or third person narrative--as in a passage such as "It had already occurred to you that the names didn't sound particularly Polish: Brigd, Gritzvi" (Calvino 1992: 43). That said, due to the semantic and referential openness of *you*, the technique invites experimentation with other, more overtly rhetorical uses, such as fictionalized and apostrophic address with its many variations. Fictionalized address, which is directed at and/or uttered by fictional characters, is most typically represented by direct speech between characters, e.g. "'Then you'd better speak with our Mr. Cavedagna,' they concluded" (Calvino 1992: 95).

A specific type of fictionalized address is "hypothetical" address. Through its use of the conditional and imperative moods and the future tense, it resembles the discourse of a manual and/or self-help book, yet is aimed at a narratee too specific to be the actual reader: "(You will find it again at an art show: the latest work of the sculptor Irnerio [...])" (Calvino 1992: 157). Intriguingly, hypothetical address follows the grammatical standards of popular non-fiction such as cook books, fix-it and videogame manuals, which encode a mostly gendered, ideal reader, such as the male users typically targeted by videogame manuals. In fictional narratives, however, hypothetical address often serves to debunk the capitalist undertone of such commercial text genres by preventing readers from identifying with the fictionalized addressee.⁴

Apostrophic reader address offers itself most aptly to interactive texts the enactment of which relies on the reader-user's response to directives embedded aurally or visually (or both) in the interface. In drawing on Austin's speech act theory, Kacandes (1993) distinguishes between real apostrophic address and narrative or literary *performatives*, which are rare in print narratives yet form an important conceptual basis to digital instantiations of the *you* address. In reading a literary performative, readers involuntarily actualize what the text suggests (e.g. "you are reading this sentence"). In Kacandes' account, this technique differs significantly from more standard apostrophic forms (e.g. "Reader, I married him"), which solicit the reader's attention yet do not trigger the performance of a metafictional act.

From this point of departure, Walker (2000) subdivides such narrative performatives into involuntary enactments, typically found in print narrative, and texts that embed "forced participation" by making it impossible for the reader-user to continue without physically performing the actions suggested by the text. Narrative performatives involving forced participation are typically found in interactive, digital narratives. Michael Joyce's (1987) *afternoon*, for instance, begins with the famous apostrophe, "Do you want to hear about it?" and asks readers to click certain links rather than others or to key in either "Y" or "N" in response to a question on screen. Without participating physically, readers cannot move on to the next lexia.

In another important study of reader address in digital narratives, Montfort (2003) outlines a framework for analyzing interactive fiction (IF) into forms of input and output situated at diegetic (or storyworld-internal) and extradiegetic (or storyworld-external) levels. He distinguishes between extradiegetic directive input (e.g. the reader entering "quit" in the command line to leave the IF), diegetic command input (e.g. "pick up key" used to gain new information about the storyworld or plot), extradiegetic output (e.g. the system answering "Are you sure you want to quit?") and diegetic output (i.e. pre-coded system replies such as "You find nothing of interest there"). Montfort's division between diegetic and extradiegetic addresses to users is of prime importance to the language of videogames more generally, although, of course, in graphical (as opposed to text-based) adventures readers tend to input commands via controller moves, by pressing buttons and entering key strokes rather than by inserting fully-fledged textual commands.

Drawing on Montfort's (2003) account, we suggest the term "actualized (directive) input/output" as a replacement for Walker's (2000) term "forced participation," whose negative connotations are reinforced by Walker's (2000) description of this mode of reader engagement as a "ritual of submission." "Actualized (directive) input/output" emphasizes the physical interaction that happens between the user and the machine code as the user inputs electronic data directly through hardware interaction in alternation with software output displayed on screen in the form of multimodal information. The "directive" nature of this cybernetic feedback can be either explicit - through actual linguistic and semiotic imperatives or conditionals - or implicit - through suggestive clues interpreted by the reader as action prompts.

Clearly, reader-players of interactive narratives have to "submit" (cf. Walker 2000) to the mechanics of the text to read or play successfully. What is more important to a *literary* analyst, however, is the extent to which a digital text facilitates deep attention rather than hyperattention in the reader. According to Hayles (2007), deep attention allows subjects to focus on an artifact like a print novel for an extended period of time without, however, losing a sense of the actual world surrounding them. Hyperattention, on the other hand, is based on natural or artificial primary needs (such as food, drink and sleep in actual life and the "artificial" basic need to finish a videogame level or quest before being able to focus on any other activity) and occurs frequently with young people immersed in game worlds. It commonly results in the prioritization of virtual world over actual world needs or concerns

and "is characterized by switching focus rapidly between different tasks, preferring multiple information streams, seeking a high level of stimulation, and having a low tolerance for boredom" (Hayles 2007: 187). At first glance, such hyperattentive modes of engagement would seem to be incompatible with the kind of close reading that literary-poetic texts require. That said, "critical interpretation is not above or outside the generational shift of cognitive modes but necessarily located within it, increasingly drawn into the matrix by engaging with works that instantiate the cognitive shift within their aesthetic strategies" (Hayles 2007: 197). We are therefore concerned with digital works that thematize and problematize the relationship between deep attention and hyperattention. We would argue that, linguistically and pragmatically, uses of diegetic and extradiegetic *you*, combined with the directive and responsive mechanisms embedded in the text/machine (Aarseth 1997) and represented multimodally on screen, have a major role to play in digital fictions' reflexive exploration of modes of reader engagement.

As our reading of TPM will show, digital fictions can employ textual *you* in ways that debunk the standards and mechanisms of narratives distributed by purveyors of popular entertainment, mostly by combining actualized directive output with fictionalized reference. This combined mode of address blurs the boundaries between game and fiction while simultaneously subverting the subjective, uncritical behavior and attitudes exhibited by users prone to hyperattentive modes of engagement. In developing our analysis, we shall demonstrate how, in a modified form, Montfort's IF-based framework provides a basis for exploring selected hypertext fictions and in particular TPM. Before doing so, however, let us first consider how the *you* features in interactive digital narratives more generally.

The *You* in Interactive Digital Narratives

Textual *you* features widely across digital, interactive texts, which allow *you* to bring about a species of ontological violation that is not possible in printed texts. The difference is that reader-players are involved in the ongoing, material construction of the text as they traverse the story or gameworld. For instance, creators of IF use textual *you* to inform readers about the basic building blocks of the game world in question (e.g. *Zork's* "You are standing in an open field..."), and allow them to co-construct the game world by inputting text commands in the hope of receiving more textual information (cf. Walker 2000). By contrast, print texts typically do not allow readers to interfere physically with the text-on-page in such a way as to change or shape the course of the scripted narrative. Similarly, readers addressed by *you* in digital fictions are much more likely than print readers to enact their responses to apostrophic interpellations, for instance by clicking on action buttons or keying text into on-screen lines or boxes.

Interactive fictions is the mode of digital fiction that employs the second person in perhaps the most explicit, most sustained way. Using present tense verbs and imperatives, IF creates the illusion of being present in a storyworld that is constructed by the reader in creative interaction with the programmed text. In IFs, the textual *you* is the main character, role-played by the reader (Douglass 2007: 129), as exemplified in the following passage from *Zork I* (Infocom 1980). The arrow symbols show where the player has entered text commands ('east' is short for 'go east') in response to text yielded by the system.

You are in a dimly lit forest, with large trees all around. To the east, there appears to be sunlight.

> east

You are in a clearing, with a forest surrounding you on the west and south.
There is a grating securely fastened into the ground.

> open grating

The grating is locked.

As Ryan (2005) puts it, "IF is one of the rare narrative forms where the use of 'you' enters into a truly dialogical rather than merely rhetorical relation with an Other, and where 'present' denotes narrow coincidence between the time of the narrated events and the time of the narration" (519).

The vertical form of second person address (i.e. direct apostrophe to an extradiegetic narratee or indeed the reader him/herself) is used extensively in videogame discourse and the paratexts surrounding the primary artifacts (such as manuals, discussion fora, blogs and magazines). For their part, Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin (2007) define the textual *you* used in videogames in terms of player choice and responsibility, with the player being considered as a singular entity rather than collective audience: "*you* are the person for whom the story is being told" (xiv), and the *you* fills the role(s) enabled by any chosen game's avatar selection or customization mechanism. As Douglass emphasizes, "even the most 'first person' of game experiences--the 3D virtual reality that reaches its apotheosis in room-sized CAVE displays--serves the same function as the textual second person: simulated immediacy" (Douglass 2007, quoted in Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin 2007: xiv). In other words, what is experienced by players as highly individualized and immediate immersion in a virtual game world is based on textual mechanisms directed quasi-apostrophically at a general audience of gamers who are allowed to traverse the game world freely--within the boundaries dictated by the code. Furthermore, players see their alter egos embodied in the shape of an avatar, an object, vehicle or simply a cursor, which may be compared to I-cum-you internal dialogues or self communication (Margolin 1990: 428). However, in the case of the avatar as embodied alter-ego, *you* in a game does not tend to be indicative of self-alienation, in contrast with some of the postmodern narratives discussed by Margolin (1990). On the contrary: the fact that most players narrate their own gaming experiences in the first person suggests that they identify with the player-character or avatar representing them in the game world.

Textual *you* is embedded multimodally and verbally in most videogame interfaces (Ensslin 2011). The variety of elements sensitive to player input can be seen as directive prompts for player action and interaction. Some games (e.g. Lionhead's *Fable* [2004] and *Black and White 2* [2005], henceforth "BW2") make indexical use of strong colors to signal that an object or non-player character will, when activated, convey important ludic and/or diegetic information. This information is then usually conveyed dialogically, either by means of character voice-over or through the display of written text. Other games make diegetic use of light and shade, noise and sound to direct player action. Manuals, on the other hand, encode the reader-player verbally in terms of a strongly apostrophic and directive textual *you*. In English-language manuals, such modes of address typically occur in the syntactic form of imperatives ("To view what your Creature has learned, select the Creature Learning icon on the Toolbar [...]", BW2 Manual: 16), conditionals using modal verbs ("If you have enough Tribute, you can buy toys for your Creature to play with," BW2 Manual: 17), and explanatory indicatives in the present and future tense, pertaining to the overarching storyworld ("Although your Creature is intelligent, he will only learn your will if he's nudged in the right direction," BW2 Manual: 17). Interestingly, as these examples from the *Black and White 2* Manual show, the participants encoded in paratextual gaming discourse are often gendered in

line with the game's intended target group (in the case of manuals) and the audience of actual players (in the case of game reviews and other bottom-up genres).

Employed in more literary contexts, textual *you* invites yet other types of reader engagement. Many hypertext fictions employ second-person narration as a means of drawing attention to and harnessing the reader's unique function in the text (Bell 2007, 2010, Bell and Ensslin 2011). That said, unlike interactive fiction, hypertext fiction foregrounds the importance of the authored text and limits reader agency to varying degrees of navigational freedom rather than allowing readers to enter into co-productive, dialogic text construction characteristic of IF. In Shelley Jackson's (1995) *Patchwork Girl*, the protagonist tells the reader "I am buried here. You can resurrect me, but only piecemeal," with readers then required to choose links which provide information about the patchwork girl. The reader must move a mouse and click a button or type a response on a keyboard in order to learn more about the fictional world and its inhabitants--in parallel with Montfort's (2003) diegetic command input, albeit in a syntactically reduced, non-linguistically-creative form. The second person here draws attention to the corporeal role that readers play in hypertext fiction.

Having outlined some dominant uses of textual *you* across digital texts, we shall now move on to the main concern of this article: an analysis of the multiperspectival *The Princess Murderer* and of the ways in which its distinctive uses of *you* can help extend existing theories of apostrophic forms in digital interactive narratives.

Textual *You* in *The Princess Murderer*

Taking misogyny and patriarchal discourse as a starting point, TPM satirizes sublimic misogynist teleology:⁵ the stereotypical melodramatic trajectory of adventure games, where typically male heroes have to save typically female victims from typically male monsters (think of *Donkey Kong*, *The Legend of Zelda*, or the *Mario* series). More than this, however, the text satirizes preconceptions of interactivity itself (Picot 2003); it parodies the hyperattentive, high-speed hardware and software interaction often observed in Generation M gamers (cf. Hayles 2007). As Picot (2003) observes, despite its title, TPM is not a murder mystery, because we already know that Bluebeard is the murderer. The real mystery, the real subject of the piece, is to do with the relationship between the cool blue text [a trope that recurs throughout the narrative] and us, its viewers/readers.

TPM's metafictional, self-reflexive and media-critical dimensions are confirmed by the authors themselves, who explain that

[w]e want the readers to straddle both worlds--to be aware that this is a game, this is a screen, and yet to enter into the play and world view of the characters. [...] *The Princess Murderer* constrains readers as much as possible ... We wanted to create this frustration of power and powerlessness as a response to early hypertext works that placed readers as co-author merely because readers must participate in creating meaning and story. (geniwate and Larsen in Picot [2003]: n.p.)

Thus, TPM acts interdiscursively, in a way designed to criticize other forms of digital narrative and their accompanying critical theories, many of which have overemphasized the degree of freedom and agency possessed by users in their interactions with digital works.

Semiotically, TPM transcodes and remediates key symbolic elements of the ur-story: the interface is kept blue for most of the time, and the door leading to the infamous forbidden room features schematically on the entry page of the narrative as a pictographic link transporting users into the storyworld. The narrative employs such interactivity, however, in the service of a broader literary (or metanarrative) purpose. Thus, the framing of the interface

itself foregrounds written text in small blue print displayed in rhomboid-shaped windows, suggesting TPM's critical, reflexive relation to the larger tradition of Bluebeard stories that it seeks to renarrate--and recontextualize--via user participation (see fig.2).

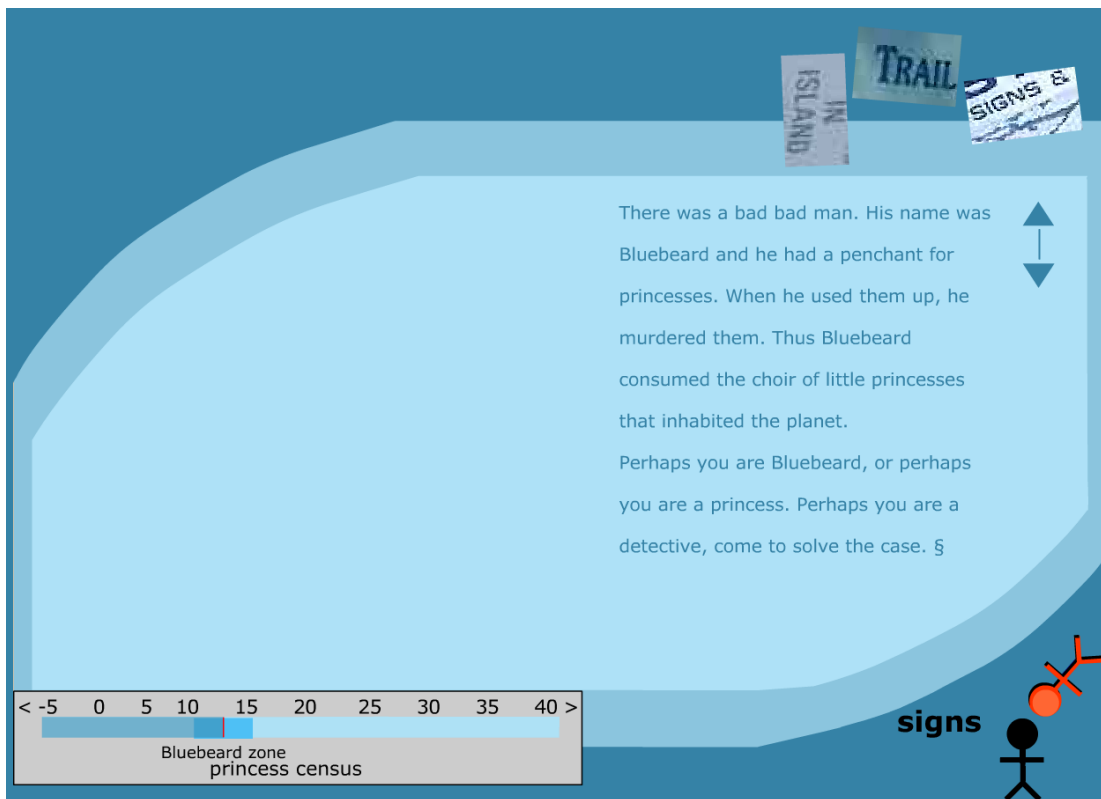


Fig.2: *The Princess Murderer* Interface

As with every adaptation, certain elements of the source story have been deleted and others added. Whereas, for example, the brothers of the main female protagonist of Perrault's story are deleted in TPM, the digital narrative features distinctive ludic and interactive elements that facilitate reader participation. For instance, the princess census across the lower left-hand side of the interface displays how many princesses are in the castle at any given time. It rises and falls bit by bit with every click performed by the reader-player, and each click symbolizes--with a downward move--the murder of a princess or--with an upward move--the addition of a princess to the existing group. Yet the princess census only superficially serves as a performance meter, or progress bar. As Picot (2003) notes, "Resembling as it does the fuel-gauge in a conventional driving-and-shooting video-game, it introduces an element of game-play into the work: but it's a game which can't be won. There is no end-point. There are certain limits beyond which further text is unavailable" (n.p.).

Even more importantly, upward ticks in the census are accompanied by a pornographic narrative about a first person narrator (Bluebeard, or indeed the player) raping princesses in disturbing detail. The princesses thus serve as mere object counts, or commodity audits. Moreover, the lexias displayed in each frame literally flesh out a hypermasculine version of the constant Freudian struggle between eros and thanatos by alluding to the reader-player's pleasure in or nonchalance toward click-rape and click-murder.⁶ In this same vein, the hyper-sensual female sigh audible with each click can be read as a symptom either of suffering (cf. thanatos) or of masochistic orgasmic pleasure (cf. eros).

Having outlined the main themes, intertextual frames of reference, and interactive features of the narrative, we now turn to the main focus of this article: the multifarious ways

in which TPM employs textual *you* in relation to other narrative points of view expressed in this digital fiction. In experimenting with the effects of person deixis, and the second person pronoun in particular, TPM enacts the "protean" nature of textual *you*, given that "its very essence [is] to eschew a fixed essence" (Richardson 2006: 19). More precisely, TPM uses second person narration to combine postmodernist tenets about unfixable identities with neoliberalist discourses inherent in the popular apostrophic discourses of advertising, self-help books, and game manuals. TPM employs a centrifugal version of multiperson narrative; in other words, it juxtaposes first, second and third person narration to create a sense of "an irreducible galaxy of different, heterogenous or antithetical, perspectives" (Richardson 2006: 62), without having them converge within any one person at any point during the narrative. For the present paper, we focus on how the text's use of the second person contributes to this dynamic--since it not only shows "the shifting relationships that the second person has with its most established and conventional neighbors, the first and third person" (Richardson 2006: 18), but also encodes and simulates reader participation by virtue of textual *you*'s referential functions (cf. Herman 1994, 2002). TPM's lack of control over the multilinear reading path that it invites readers to pursue, coupled with changing narrative perspectives associated with varying uses of textual *you*, complicates the contextual anchoring necessary to understand the changing frames of reference. Similarly, the multitude of fictional genres, narrative styles, and registers evoked by the narrative, ranging from detective fiction to pornography, create a polyphony of voices, thus underscoring the subversive stance of the text vis-à-vis other digital genres.

Once the reader-player has stepped through the infamous door into the narrative, a mostly pictorial display welcomes her. The center of the page depicts a signpost pointing in three directions, representing the three main strands of the narrative. In the top right corner, three interactive image buttons contain the words "stay," "trail," and "signs," which both indicate and obscure the navigational options they seem to represent. In the bottom right corner, the first instance of Kacandes' (1993) literary performative documents the reader's action and suggests what he/she needs to do--but without using the imperative mode: "You are reading the signs / Scattered images contain clues" (fig.3). Much like a detective, readers are thus left to find out for themselves how to "read the signs" and the "clues" hidden in "scattered images." Clicking on one of the three image buttons at the top plunges the reader into the narrative proper.

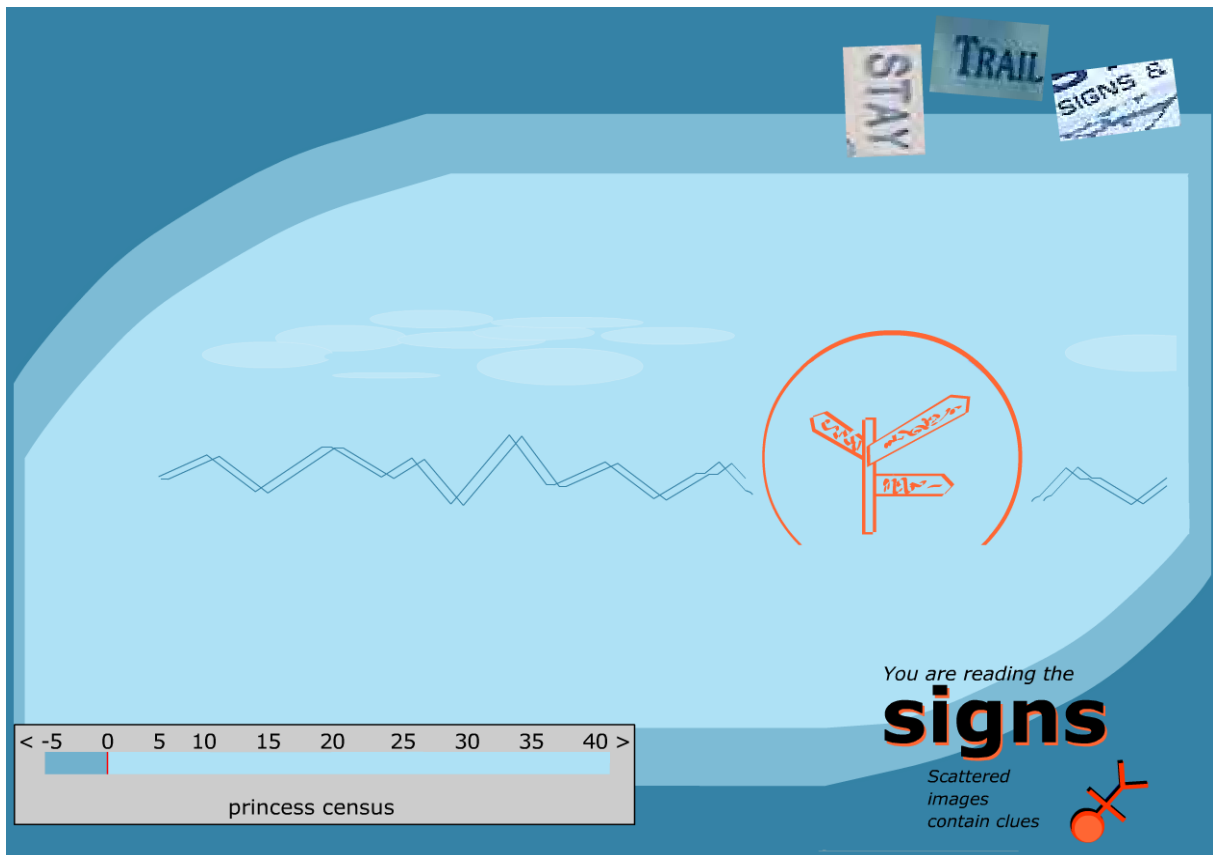


Figure 3: Literary Performatives in TPM

One of the two possible entries into the narrative is afforded by a standard third person fairy-tale narrative: "There was a bad bad man. His name was Bluebeard and he had a penchant for princesses. When he used them up, he murdered them [...]." Having thus established the Manichean storyworld and its main protagonists, the narration changes into second person hypothetical address, where the reader is drawn into the diegesis by being confronted with the choice of adopting the perspective of one of the participants in the narrative: "Perhaps you are Bluebeard, or perhaps you are a princess. Perhaps you are a detective, come to solve the case" (fig.2). But whereas in a game that choice would have to be actualized, TPM leaves it open, thus enabling a more speculative and reflexive mode of engagement with the text.

The text following the introductory lexia is divided into three major narrative strands. We describe each of these strands in the subsections that follow.

First Narrative Strand: Click = Kill

The first strand sees the princess census falling to the point of disappearance. It thematizes the reader-player's sadistic tendencies, implied in the action of repeated clicking: each click, in effect, adds to the suffering of the women. This strand of the story appeals to the reader's sympathy for the victims by using second person involuntary enactment throughout, and by simultaneously questioning these same (brutal) instances of enactment. Similarly, the reader's increasing guilt is reflected in the text at a moral or ethical level ("the conjunction between you and Bluebeard grows stronger. / Your innocence drifts away with each sign you select and starting again won't change that"); a criminological level ("Now there are only 5 [princesses]./ Their disappearance has been noted. You are a suspect"); a metamedial level

("the princesses you slaughter convert to data on your conscience"); a gender-critical, humanistic level ("Nor are the princesses unfeeling ciphers: they inherit emotions and even sensuality from your hotworld"); and a metafictional (or metadiscursive) level ("just...one...final...chunk of text; text in the sky, under the bed, text to consume other texts, texts consume..."). This metafictional level is reinforced by increasing perspectival multivocality. The dying princesses' first person monologic cries of suffering ("I beg you, no more clicks. U-gggghhh! I'm dying, you sadomasochistic torturer!") seem to be directed at the reader, whereas the second person fictional reference such as "You look at your hands, dripping in blood" can--at least on a literal level--only refer to entities located within the fictional world. On the whole, readers experiencing TPM are inadvertently confronted with the oscillating tension between fictionalized and apostrophic address, which leaves them wavering between different readings of *you* and anchoring events, by turns, in contexts associated both with the virtual and with the actual world.

Other second person pronouns are more ambiguous. For example, a quasi-apostrophic address resembling court-room or penal discourse--"Don't you believe in their pain? That is the only interpretation that saves you from being a psychopath"--simultaneously implicates the actual reader and a fictional addressee. Herman (2002) defines this kind of structure as a "doubly deictic" form of address, in which "*you* can induce hesitation between reference to entities, situations, and events internal to the storyworld and...[those] external to the storyworld" (338). Clearly, the reader knows that he/she is not actually involved in a legal trial and that the *you* must therefore refer to a fictional/hypothetical addressee. However, he/she will have inevitably killed and/or raped several princesses within the fictional world to get to this point. The referential dexterity of the second-person pronoun thus forces readers to assume a level of responsibility.

Having warned the reader apostrophically (via directive textual output) and metafictionally that "[y]ou've extirpated all the princesses. You must find ways to breed them up before you deserve any more text," this first narrative strand of TPM finally trails off into a series of text-less lexias representing the disappearance of the princesses. These lexias are reinforced by the warning "too few princesses" flashing up hectically on the princess census. If no further clicking is performed, the text will automatically return to the title page of the narrative, thus evoking videogame cyclicity.

Second Narrative Strand: Click = Breed

In the second narrative strand, the census rises to the point where too many princesses are in the castle. Instead of featuring any type of textual *you*, this strand is dominated by first person narration instantiating the villainous voice of Bluebeard, who sets out to convey his sado-masochistic pornographic account thus: "My name is Bluebeard. I sit in my castle like a spider in its lair. The minor female royals are drawn to me, despite their terror [...] After I have consumed their virginity, I consume their liver." Again, diegetic or world-creating statements are coupled with metadiscursive and metamedial statements ("I keep their vocabulary for my secret princess census"; "My cock my code. Killing princesses is a matter of changing their visibility setting. I will slaughter her with logic").

The second person is not used in this second narrative strand until "limbo" has been reached. Readers are told by directive textual output that "[t]he crowd of princesses obscure the text. Destroy some before venturing on," much as in an adventure game, where a full repository of items sometimes forces players to replace individual objects strategically. Additional clicking on the same images will result in an endless series of text-free lexias, which underscore the impression of a narrative stalemate reached by the reader-player's monotonous click-action.

An interim strand, which sits ontologically between the fictional and the actual world, is reached when the reader clicks "castle" in an attempt to escape the inevitable endings of either of the two first strands. In a true deconstructivist fashion, however, this strand addresses the reader extradiegetically via a literary performative (Kacandes 1993), thematizing the aporia of the user's navigational endeavors: "Where do you think you are going? What do you think you are doing? Why do you think you are doing it? You are lost in the castle." The reader has no other option than to shift from involuntary enactment to actualized directive input, by leaving this strand through the "escape" route, which will lead them on to the third major narrative strand--the police investigation.

Third Narrative Strand: The Interrogation

This third strand transcends the ontological boundaries of the fairy tale world without, however, altogether leaving the level of diegesis. The ontological confusion is reinforced by quasi-critical header phrases (plus colon) opening each lexia, which create seemingly random intertextual, metafictional, metamedial, spatial, and situational frames of reference, some of which refer to parts of the castle and its inhabitants ("Discarded letters in the castle vestibule disclose information about:"; "Erstwhile castle virgins eating their own words eventually vomit this:"), whereas others are borrowed from other fictional narratives (e.g. "Tattooed onto Ophelia's stomach is the following:"), as well as nonfictional genres (e.g. "Insinuated subliminally by the TV advertising is:"). These examples show that deliberate anachronisms and illogical pairings in the header phrases are used to evoke the idea of random story and text generators, which add to the ontological hesitation caused by different uses of textual *you* and the ontological transgression made between different fictional worlds (the fairy tale and the police interrogation room).

The narrative setting of this third strand of TPM is a police interrogation, in which second person narration adopts the function mainly of fictionalized reference ("The handcuffs chaff your wrists. In the interrogation room the police shove photos before you, mocking you with illusions of (cool, blue) freedom") and (meta-)fictionalized address between convict and police ("Let me construct my own texts and you'll see"). The discourse of guilt suggested by the narrative frame (strand 1) renders the reader a metatextual accomplice in the alleged crime (of killing "the princess"). Hence the exposed reader is made to relate personally to the accusations directed at a seemingly intradiegetic or storyworld-internal *you*, which gives a doubly deictic feel to the textual *you*. Depending on the path chosen by the reader, their inscribed role will alternate between that of suspect, witness, and victim. The interrogation becomes increasingly abusive, with the hypertextual lack of closure being projected onto the fictional level through a suggestion of never-ending torture and imprisonment: "The psychologist inserts into your mind: *There is no escape; only (en)closure*" (italics in original). Again, this third strand can be left by clicking "escape" in the bottom right corner of the display, thus returning the reader to the triadic signpost shown in figure 3.

In a very few instances of readerly engagement with TPM, an additional narrative strand emerges--a fourth strand that does not materialize with every re-reading. This ghostly strand is narrated from the point of view of an Amazon queen, who has come to take revenge on Bluebeard. This feminist anti-narrative is hidden in such a subtle way that it may allude to hacker culture, which opens up non-pre-inscribed narratives only to the most adamant and creative modders, few of whom tend to be female and even fewer of whom are likely to be interested in seeing a female get revenge on the phallogocentric storyworld, unless she is a scantily clad, hypersexualized Lara Croft-like sheroe.

In sum, it can be argued that TPM features nearly all functional types of textual *you* as outlined in Section 1, with the exception of generalized *you*. This omission may suggest that

the authors of TPM intended to refer interdiscursively to the textual *you* typically found in videogame discourse, which avoids collectivization and, instead, textually creates a highly personalizable player experience. It is also worth noting that what Montfort (2003) describes as (extra)diegetic input is here limited to clicking (rather than inputting text). This feature of TPM can be read as a subtextual hint at the limitations on reader or player agency imposed by hypertext and videogame discourse. Hence, as hinted before, a first step towards a more developed typology of digital textual *you*'s, based on the reading experience of TPM, would involve an extension of Montfort's model. To Montfort's categories of "diegetic" and "extradiegetic" directive input/output (fig.4), a third category of "metafictional" directive input/output would need to be added, in order to capture reader-players' physical engagement with such textual material as "[y]ou must find ways to breed them [the princesses] up before you deserve any more text."

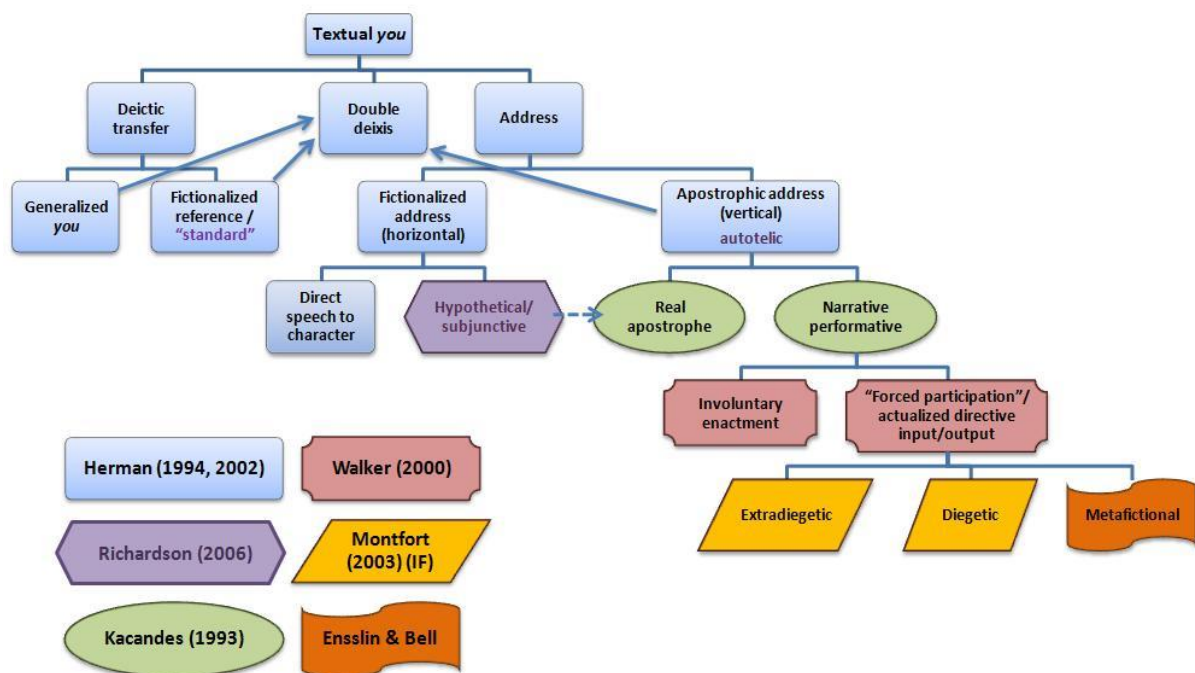


Figure 4: Functional Types of Textual You, Expanded

5. Concluding Thoughts

As insinuated by its parenthesized intra-title, "[somewhat disturbing but highly improbable]," *The Princess Murderer* sets out to disrupt the reader-player's horizons of expectation by deconstructing the seemingly straightforward logic of killing (or saving) by clicking--a logic reminiscent of videogame interaction. Similarly, the concessively juxtaposed phrase "highly improbable" might seem to be designed to comfort readers who may be disturbed by the pornographic material, the enacted violence, or indeed the lack of closure and direction exhibited by the text, assuring them that "this is only a fairy tale," or expressing the sentiment of "don't worry, it's just a game." On this reading, the variety of textual *you*'s that seem to draw the reader into the text are deliberately made to fail. Indeed, rather than feeling immersed, readers are reminded of their pronounced lack of agency in the anti-murder mystery facing them. All they can do is click, and a logical path to winning the game, or reading the text to the point of closure, is ruled out categorically. Similarly, the process of

choosing between the three perspectives of Bluebeard, princess, and detective is driven not by the reader but by the underlying text machine itself, which reveals only to its most adamant, persistent "readers" (rather than players) its distinctly literary and self-reflexive elements.

Further, by experimenting with multiperson narration and various forms of textual *you*, TPM allows for a reframing of the terms in which the somewhat caustic debate regarding the literariness of digital narrative has been waged up to now. Richardson (2006) suggests that "second person narrative is an exclusively and distinctively literary phenomenon, its only nonfictional analogues being the pseudo-narrative forms of the cookbook, the travel guide, and the self-help manual" (35). Likewise, although popular digital media, such as game manuals and walkthroughs, profusely implement second person apostrophe, the literary and subversive uses of textual *you* in TPM critically undermine the role of the second person in videogame texts and paratexts. As TPM never commits to any of its potential protagonists, it radicalizes what Richardson (2006) describes as a "continuous dialectic of identification and distancing [...], as the reader is alternately drawn closer to and further away from the protagonist" (21). Readers of TPM enact, in the manner specified in Kacandes' account of literary performatives, a range of ontological and perspectival oscillations, which ultimately expose the reader-player's role as an accomplice in videogames' misogynist teleological trajectory.

In representing the digital reader-player's "mind in flux" (Richardson 2006: 35), textual *you* in TPM draws the reader-player's awareness to the cognitive processes at play when submitting to a videogame's immersive qualities. It enacts, in the reader's mind, the complex, multi-faceted and ever-shifting hyperidentities (Filiciak 2003) lived and enacted effortlessly and often uncritically by hyperattentive digital natives. By the same token, the assumption that the overall target of the game must be reached the reader-player to have a successful gaming experience is subverted by the text's bipolar arrangement (either too many or too few princesses), cyclicity, and non-closure. Further, TPM's gender-critical stance is underscored by its juxtaposition of stereotyped opposites, the (default male) perpetrator vis-à-vis the (default female) victims--an opposition that is deconstructed only rarely in the text, through a serendipitous sub-strand that reveals a female perpetrator, the Amazon queen.

Finally, by turning textual *you* upside down and making readers reflect on their willing commitment to popular media discourses, TPM problematizes neoliberalist subjection to commodity capitalism. Second person apostrophe, coupled syntactically with present tense indicatives and imperatives, occurs ubiquitously in journalism, advertising and other PR materials, cook books, travel guides and, of course, software and hardware manuals. It thus serves as a powerful, thought-provoking device in TPM, which challenges the advertising industry's monopoly of the *you* and the fact that most of their uses of the pronoun are gendered (cf. Richardson 2006: 30). In the same way as cook books are written for an implicit female and fix-it manuals for an implicit male *you*, videogame manuals are often patronizingly "pinked up" if pitched at an ideal young, female audience, or indeed pronominally male-gendered if directed at male players.

As Morrissette (1965) observes, the second person can be put to powerful aesthetic use in interrogations and other asymmetrical power relations that don't allow the narratee or addressee to talk back. The reader and/or narratee is thus cornered and disempowered by both apostrophic and doubly deictic *you*, rather than being granted the freedom and agency that have been attributed across the board to readers' engagements with interactive digital texts (see, e.g., MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler 2007). The text-inflicted reader subjection to the underlying code therefore counteracts the "liberty" alleged to be inherent in "libertarian," *you*-oriented creationist capitalism. In contrast, TPM calls for a different kind of readerly creativity and agency: one that defies the subjection to the code and the drive to "click faster

and faster, ignoring the text completely" (Picot 2003) and that, instead, invites readers to exert as well as reflect on the "non-trivial effort" (Aarseth 1997) needed to close-read digital fiction.

Notes

¹ Digital fiction is fiction that is written for and read on a computer screen, whose semiotic and/or conceptual complexity depends in a fundamental way on features of the digital medium (Bell, Ensslin, Ciccoricco, Laccetti, Pressman and Rustad 2010).

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³ The term "Flash fiction" (spelt with a capital "F") stands for digital fictions based on the animation software Macromedia Flash. The term ludic refers to mechanisms that are based on the conventions, rules, and practices associated with the playing of games.

⁴ The dotted arrow pointing from hypothetical address to real apostrophe in fig.1 shows the fluid boundaries between fictionalized and actual addressee.

⁵ Much like its counterpart term *subtextual*, *subludic* refers to meanings suggested implicitly by a game's ludic mechanisms without being overtly expressed as such.

⁶ This feature of the text can be seen as a metadiscursive reference to the moral panic surrounding the *Grand Theft Auto* game series, which has targeted in particular the game's near-photorealistic enactment of on-screen violence and its alleged underlying affirmation of criminal behavior.

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