The End of Books—or Books without End?
The End of Books—Or Books without End?
Reading Interactive Narratives

J. Yellowlees Douglas

Ann Arbor
The University of Michigan Press
In 1986 John McDaid, then a fellow graduate student at New York University, suggested I meet Jay Bolter, who arrived bearing a 1.0 beta copy of Storyspace. When he opened the Storyspace demo document to show McDaid and I a cognitive map of the *Iliad* represented as a hypertext, my fate was clinched in under sixty seconds. I had seen the future, and it consisted of places, paths, links, cognitive maps, and a copy of *afternoon, a story*, which Jay also gave us.

Within a week, I had upgraded my Macintosh, changed disciplines, and begun work on a dissertation proposal using the same 1.0 beta version of Storyspace, the equivalent of volunteering as a crash-test dummy to check the safety of cars during head-on collision.

After weeks of alternately immersing myself in *afternoon* and losing data to system crashes every ten minutes, I admitted I needed some direction and began frantically trying to locate Michael Joyce, listed on the Storyspace startup dialogue box along with Bolter and William Smith as the authors and developers of Storyspace. The third Michael Joyce in the Jackson, Michigan, white pages answered the phone with a deep, resonant voice.

"I'm looking for the Michael Joyce who wrote *afternoon,“* I said quickly.

"Yes, but you can't know that," he said, first, not realizing I had a copy of *afternoon*, then: "And who are you?"

The rest, as they say, is history—and also the beginning of this book.

Even the most haphazard reader of this book will recognize that, without Jay Bolter, Michael Joyce, and Stuart Moulthrop, my work would not exist. Their ideas, interactive texts, critical writings, and work on interface design have long provided me with both rich fodder for my research and an abundance of ideas, methods, and critical and theoret-
Acknowledgments

ical approaches to interactivity in general. Together they have inspired me in every sense of the word.

To Gordon Pradl I also owe several debts: for his insights on the distinctions between “inner-” versus “other-directed,” for introductions to many of the sources that have informed my entire outlook on reading and interactivity, and for giving me the right shove at exactly the right time.
Contents

An Interactive Narrative Timeline
  viii

1. Introduction:
The Book Is Dead, Long Live the Book!
  1

2. Books without Pages—Novels without Endings
  11

3. What Interactive Narratives Do That Print Narratives Cannot
  37

4. Charting Maps and Raising the Dead: Readers' Encounters
   with Hypertext Fiction
  63

5. Just Tell Me When to Stop: Hypertext and the
   Displacement of Closure
  89

6. The Intentional Network
  123

7. Millennium Stories: Interactive Narratives
   and the New Realism
  149

Notes
  173

Bibliography
  185

Index
  199
An Interactive Narrative Timeline

1759  Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* first appears in print.

1776  Samuel Johnson declares, “Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last.”

1914  James Joyce’s *Ulysses* first appears in print.

1915  Ford Madox Ford publishes *The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion*.

1938  Louise Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration* argues for the importance of the transactions between readers and texts.

1939  Roosevelt’s science adviser, Vannevar Bush, describes a hypertext-like device, the Memex, in “Mechanization and the Record.”

1949  Jean Paul Sartre’s *What Is Literature?* introduces readers to the central tenets of what later becomes known as reader-response theory or reader-centered criticism.

1960  Marc Saporta publishes *Composition No. 1*, a novel on cards.

1962  Douglas Engelbart’s paper “Augmenting Human Intellect: A Conceptual Framework” describes the document libraries, multiple windows, and links between texts that later become parts of the AUGMENT system.

1963  Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*) includes alternative orders for reading its segmented text.

1965  Ted Nelson coins the term *hypertext*.

1967  The *Atlantic Monthly* prints John Barth’s “The Literature of Exhaustion,” which suggests that “intellectual and literary history . . . has pretty well exhausted the possibilities of novelty.”

1990  Michael Joyce publishes *afternoon, a story*, the first hypertext novel.


1997  W. W. Norton Company includes two hypertext fictions in its *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology* alongside works by Barth, Burroughs, Gass, and Pynchon.