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JOURNAL OF INTERACTIVE NARRATIVE

Editorial: Building a Home for Advanced Interactive Scholarship

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It has been quite a journey from the first idea for this journal to the first issue of the Journal of Interactive Narrative, which you are reading now. In 2018, I presented a paper at ICIDS (International Conference for Interactive Digital Storytelling), reflecting on the status of the study of Interactive Digital Narratives as a discipline (Koenitz, 2018). I concluded that much progress had been made since the first doctoral thesis on the topic (Buckles, 1985), yet a journal dedicated to the topic was a key missing element. ARDIN, the Association for Research in Digital Interactive Narratives (<https://ardin.online>), had just been founded, and I saw one of the future roles of ARDIN in the publication of a journal. More than five years later, I am overjoyed that this vision has been fulfilled.

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What took so long? It turns out that it takes quite a while to understand the realities of journal publication and to figure out the logistics. Every step of the way was a learning process. Discussions with several established publishing houses dragged on for a very long time – also because the landscape of academic publishing is shifting from print-based journals to online-first and from closed-access to open-access. Our priorities as the lead publishing team shifted during this process, which included discussions

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with ARDIN members and many established scholars. Open access became central, as did the integration of interactive works. Ultimately, the partnership with ETC Press gave the whole team the confidence that we could do this and effectively make ARDIN an academic publisher. Ever since, I have been working with Frank Nack, Lissa Holloway-Attaway, Rebecca Rouse, and Alex Michell to put the necessary infrastructure in place. This meant assembling an editorial board and an advisory board and deciding on a review process (for which Mads Haahr and Marcos Eduardo Figueiredo provided crucial input) and technical functions such as downloadable citations and PDFs. Regarding design and technical implementation, Josh Fisher joined the team and became our managing editor. He did an incredible job creating an aesthetically pleasing but highly functional experience. You can read more about his work in this essay. A key element was added only recently – ARDIN has joined CrossRef and can now issue DOIs for publications and research items such as datasets.

We have assembled two very strong boards that include some of the most influential scholars in interactive narrative in the advisory board (Janet Murray, Ruth Aylett, Lindsay Grace, Michael Mateas, and Nick Montfort). The editorial board lives the principle of diversity, attempting to balance gender, seniority level, and work location. The journal is committed to increasing diversity, which means we will invite more scholars from underrepresented groups. The statistics for the current editorial board are shown below (figure 1). More work is still needed (e.g., representing scholars from the Global South), but I feel we are progressing in the right direction. We are also not standing still in technical development and plan to move to a more integrated platform for reviewing soon.

A hallmark of JIN is the integration of interactive works in scholarly articles, something Josh Fisher and I discuss – and more importantly demonstrate – in the introductory article of this issue: “The Importance of Representative Likeness: Why we should Represent Interactive Digital Narrative with interaction” (Koenitz & Fisher, 2024). We argue that it is high time to integrate interactivity into scholarship about interactivity. Providing the analyzed interactive experience within an article will improve understanding and facilitate better scrutiny by fellow scholars. We see this as an essential advancement in scholarship.

Realizing this vision fully will take time. The first issue of this journal is a starting point in this regard, as not all necessary parts are available yet. For example, more work is needed to make “interactive slices” a reality, playable parts of interactive artifacts that represent the described situation. Beyond this technical issue, there is also the question of what novel types of scholarly engagement might emerge from this type of academic representation. Will we see a novel kind of scholarly approach mixing reading with reflective interaction? Will this playing/performing become an integral part of inquiry like reading? These are exciting questions and opportunities for future work. For now, another feature of JIN, embedded videos, while not interactive, still offers an improvement over the dominant practice of scholarly publishing, e.g., the representation of VR artifacts since VR headsets are not available to everyone. The first issue of JIN

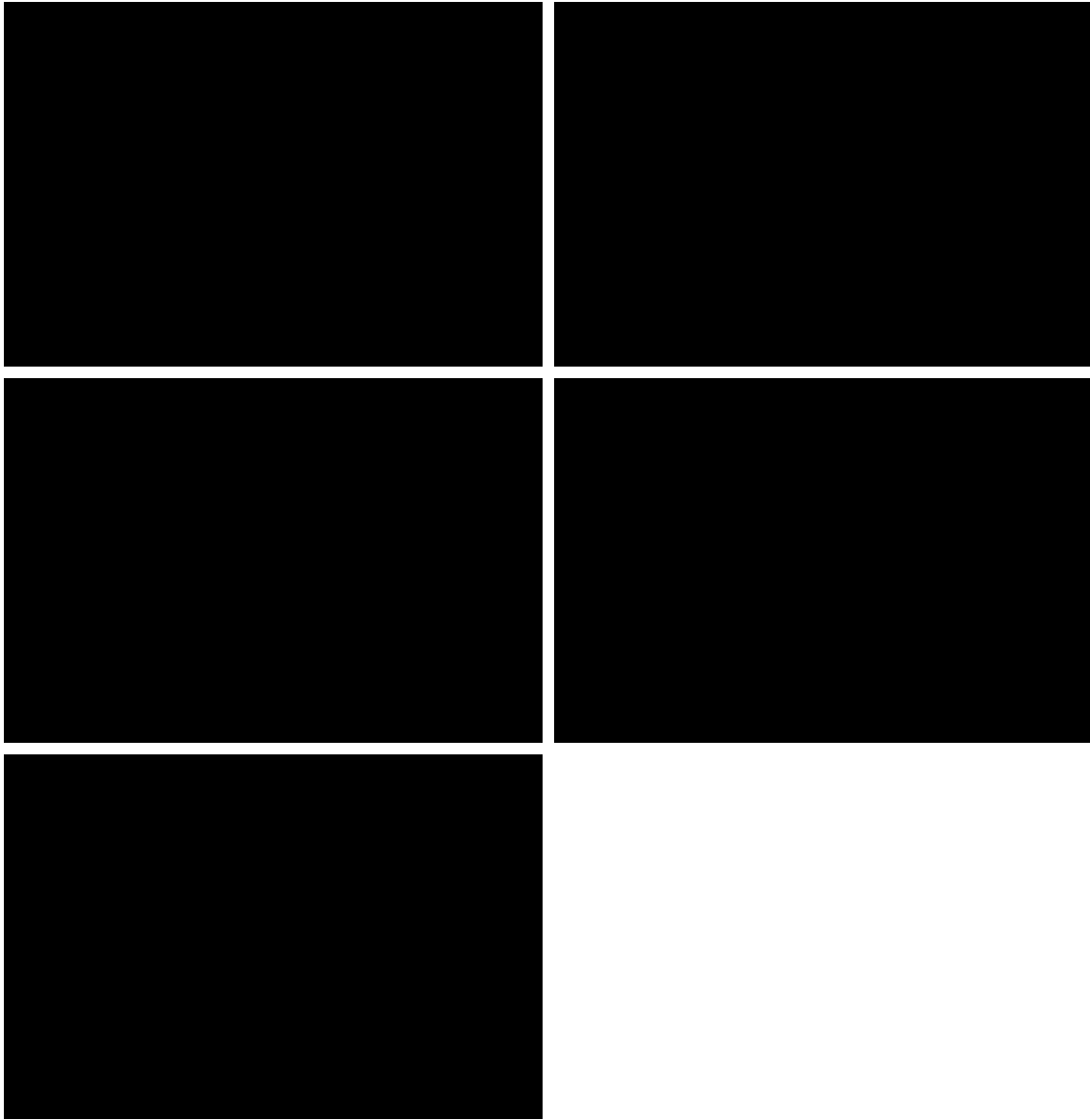


Figure 1: Distribution of JIN editorial board:

represents this point in time with a mixture of integrated interactive works, linked external resources, and video clips.

Another important aspect of the field of interactive narrative research is its inter- and multidisciplinary nature and the journal explicitly provides a home for this type of work. Many endeavors in this area combine theoretical inquiry with practical implementation and cover aspects of several more traditional disciplines, e.g. human-computer interaction (HCI), narrative and IDN-specific theory, user experience (UX) research, education research, as well as artistic approaches. Accordingly, the articles in this issue cover the range from

theoretical considerations to practical applications in design and education, curriculum development and artistic expression.

Jonathan Barbara and Mads Haahr's article draws attention to the critical role of voice in creating compelling Virtual Reality Interactive Narratives and in helping the interactor to self-identify (Barbara and Haahr, 2024). Applying and further developing established concepts in literary theory, they analyze several examples, which are also featured in the article as integrated video clips and call for future work to consider second-person voice and interaction. In addition, the authors provide an embedded IDN created in Twine to demonstrate their analysis, enabling audiences to experience the results themselves. This aspect is a concrete example of advanced interactive scholarship this journal is facilitating.

A team from Delft University (Erik Blokland, Caroline Cullinan, Doreen Mulder, Willie Overman, Marin Visscher, Amir Zaidi, and Rafael Bidarra) discuss the development and evaluation of a narrative and role-playing video game for teaching respect toward different opinions in citizenship education (Blokland et. al, 2024). Their positive results in term of insights provide a basis for further work in the crucial area of education. The article contains links to the game and instructions on how to run it.

Joshua A. Fisher and Janíce Tisha Samuels discuss the general approach, concrete curriculum, and outcome of teaching a course on Virtual Reality Interactive Digital Narratives in their article (Fisher and Samuels, 2024). The authors show the outcome in video clips integrated into the article. In addition, they provide concrete advice for educators as well as resources in the form of a GitHub repo. The work on the article provided the starting point for the project of collecting IDN-related syllabi from all over the globe, which will be published as an edited collection later this year.

Kirsty Dunlop's fascinating exploration of interactive essaying is the fifth article in the first issue. Dunlop merges the concept of emergent gameplay and essaying to describe an "act of playful reimagining from both writer/designer and reader/player." (Dunlop, 2024) This article demonstrates interactive scholarship through links to predecessors' works as well as her own piece for direct, interactive engagement.

We want to showcase IDN works in the journal, in a space curated by the editors. We are very happy to present a work by Richard Holteon's *Figurski at Findhorn on Acid* in this issue (Holteon, 2024). This combinatorial fiction explores the combination of three characters on the hunt for a rare and valuable 18th-century mechanical pig. The presented version is a re-creation of the original 2001 version but offers the possibility to change to the original look.

Finally, I want to thank everyone involved in this project—especially the lead editors, Lissa Holloway-Attaway, Frank Nack, Rebecca Rouse, and Alex Mitchell. Brad King from ETC Press provided much-needed and generous advice and copyediting. Most of all, Josh Fisher, for the many hours of great teamwork in getting this issue over the line.

Now read and experience the first issue of the Journal of Interactive Narrative!

HARTMUT KOENITZ, PH.D.

Editor-in-Chief

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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