later belief in the “natural” status of monocular perspective has done much to denigrate the concrete scientific and technical use and usability of these drawings in which other types of representation were dominant). Lefèvre and the various contributors to this volume demonstrate very convincingly the necessity of exceeding this double stereotype. Technical drawings of the early modern period are not hidden or involuntary works of art but devices for thinking and for designing and producing tools and environments. Yet this technological and scientific value can only be acknowledged if one accepts or manages to understand how these images were used: who made them, for whom they were made, how the maker and the reader of the images communicated, what was the role played by other instances of knowledge transmission, which other types of images were used: who made them, for what purpose, etc. In order to complete the technical discussions crystallizes into exactly what the baseline of the theories and artistic potential, and it is analytically useful to maintain a conceptual terminology that distinguishes between the two” (p. 45). Aarseth concludes, among other things, that “games and stories have distinct teleologies and artistic potential, and it is analytically useful to maintain a conceptual terminology that distinguishes between the two” (p. 54). Celia Pearce slightly disagrees with this view in her contribution “Towards a Game Theory of Game,” concluding that computer games are really the first medium that blurs this boundary between author and audience so completely.…. With the computer as a two-way, dynamic medium, those engaged in game design are creating an entirely and radically new ideology about narrative (p. 153).

In First Person the sum is more than the accumulation of its parts. This book is a collection of writings by a selection of the most competent thinkers (creators, artists, theorists, critics and researchers) in the field of new media. The contributions draw a coherent picture of the questions raised, the state of the theory as it has evolved, the experiments conducted and possible interpretations.

The sections of this book are: “Cyberdrama,” “Ludology,” “Critical Simulation,” “Game Theories,” “Hypertexts and Interactives,” “The Pixel/The Line,” “Beyond Chat” and “New Readings.” Each section contains three essays. Each essay comes with two responses, one of them an on-line response from the book’s dynamic web site, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/> , and the other a further response from the author of the essay. This enhances the book’s aim of representing an ongoing discourse. The authors of the responses add interesting points or take the chance to utter criticism. It can be puzzling at times—as a reader, one has to listen to almost 50 different voices, sometimes contradicting, sometimes focusing, sometimes expanding and sometimes destroying the issue at hand.

Different readers will certainly have different favorites among the contributions in this book, especially in regard to the essays that represent one of the extreme standpoints, for example, regarding games and ludology versus narratology. I would nonetheless like to point out some ideas and essays that I found particularly substantial. Espen Aarseth’s essay “Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation,” addresses the question of whether games belong to the genre of text or not, in his words: “The political question of genre trouble” (p. 45). Aarseth concludes, among other things, that “games and stories have distinct teleologies and artistic potential, and it is analytically useful to maintain a conceptual terminology that distinguishes between the two” (p. 54). Celia Pearce slightly disagrees with this view in her contribution “Towards a Game Theory of Game,” concluding that computer games are really the first medium that blurs this boundary between author and audience so completely.…. With the computer as a two-way, dynamic medium, those engaged in game design are creating an entirely and radically new ideology about narrative (p. 153).
Bill Seaman, in his text “Interactive Text and Recombinant Technologies,” demands that “text should be observed as one media-element within a network of other forms of media elements and processes” (p. 231). He asks us to look at “the exploration of operational neighboring or interpenetrated configurations of time-based language-vehicles and processes” (p. 231) and concludes: “Central is the exploration of a continuum that bridges body, environment and technology” (p. 234). N. Katherine Hayles contributes an impressive analysis of “Lexia to Perplexia,” by Talan Memmott. Using the text “as a tutor,” she explains and enacts new processes of reading, emergent forms of language, the shared productive role of human and machine and the necessity of materiality for the existence of works as well as bodies to receive them. She concludes: “Scary and exhilarating, these connections perform human subjects who cannot be thought without the intelligent machines that produce us even as we produce them” (p. 300).

First Person is a rich and inspiring book. The editors were courageous in conceptualizing such a broad view onto the theme of first-person experiences of new media. My experience of reading the book from page 1 to page 317 was comparable to a journey through varying landscapes where multiple aspects add up to a final, multifaceted impression of a whole that cannot be depicted in a single image.

First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game

Reviewed by Jan Baetens. E-mail: <jan.baetens@arts.kuleuven.ac.be>.

First Person is not (only) a book in the traditional or narrow sense of the word: It is part of a multimedia research program that combines a hard-copy publication form (the volume I shall review here) and a website “in progress” that defines itself as a “remediation” of the book. This website is not run by the publisher of the book, although MIT Press now has solid experience in this type of bi-media enterprise, but by the e-journal electronic book review <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/>.

where one will find part of the editorial material of the book, color versions of the printed black-and-white illustrations and a whole series of debates, controversies and discussions that were already opened, albeit in very inchoate way, in the different sections of First Person. It is important to take into account this double structure when evaluating the form and content of First Person, first, because most of the dialectical and dialogical opportunities of the book only reach real maturity in combination with the web site, and second, because the structure of the book itself is in many ways an anticipation of the argumentative and scholarly network constructed by ebr.

What strikes the reader at the very first contact with the book is its wonderful balance of closure and openness. Closure, indeed, since the attempt to define and organize a new field (roughly speaking, the intersection of games and stories, of new media theory and narrative theory) is organized here around eight topics or issues, all of them obeying the same format. We find an editorial introduction of one or two pages presenting the history of the research in the field, its most important scholars and literatures, and the essential current debates; then three, or occasionally four, often very personalized essays reflecting upon the major interrogations of the field; finally a number of responses, generally one or two per essay, some of them already hinting at the ongoing discussions on the ebr site. This exemplary composition, reinforced by a very clear layout, helps readers not only to find their way in a book that might have become a labyrinth but also to familiarize themselves with a kind of intellectual map of the emerging field. One could, of course, always discuss the relevance of the structure adopted by the editors, but it would be unfair not to thank them for their distinction of the following eight fields: “Cyberdrama,” a section exploring in detail the implications of the “Aristotelian” approach of, for instance, Janet Murray, marked by the importance of the notions of plot, character and catharsis; “Ludology,” which makes a claim for the absolute-medium-specificity of gaming; “Critical Simulation,” with more politically or cultural studies-oriented texts on issues of representation; “Game Theories,” inevitably focusing on themes such as interactivity, but also, more surprisingly, paying great attention to temporality; “Hypertexts & Interactives,” reactivating discussions on literature on-line or literature on and for the Web; “The Pixel/The Line,” a chapter mainly devoted to matters of design and visual/visible literature; “Beyond Chat,” a section gathering studies on the visual representation of online community conversations, on strategies of collaboration and on voice chips; and finally “New Readings,” emphasizing the role of the interactive reader and repurposing questions of reader-response criticism.

Closure, however, is balanced by openness, thanks to the presence of systematic debate, although the critical aspects of many responses and replies are rather judicious: Some readers might have preferred harsher discussions in some sections of the book. This openness is due also from the rightly eclectic choice of collaborators—of course, readers will remark that one of their fetish authors is missing, but in general the range of contributors reflects nicely the status questionis. This openness is thanks finally to the many cross-sectional links and discussions—and this is, of course, to the credit of the editors, who have managed to create a book in which the reader is eager to circulate from one text to another.

In order to evaluate the interest of a book, it is always useful to ask a preliminary question: Does the reader welcome this book as necessary? The answer to this question is here undoubtedly positive. There has recently been such an explosion of work and cultural practices—on the one hand, theory and criticism; on the other hand, the related but not identical fields of games, gaming, narrative, performance, etc.—that the time has come now to attempt a first institutionalization. First Person does this job in a very clever way, although one may regret the under-representation of some recent evolutions in narrative theory. Marie-Laure Ryan’s work, for example, is mentioned only once; David Herman’s is completely ignored. There is also a relative absence of more culturally inspired authors—I insist here on the word “relative.” The most important remark to make in this regard, however, is to compliment the editors for their remarkable achievement.

What, however, is the value of the different sections and of the different contributions within each section? It will not come as a surprise that the quality of the texts is unequal. Personally, I found the section on ludology