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Technical Innovations in the Interactive Storytelling of Jon Ingold's *All Roads*

Abstract

Digitalization has contributed to all fields of human experience, including narratives and narratology, and Interactive Fiction (IF) is a case in point. Technically, Interactive Fiction has revolutionized readers' roles in narratives by creating an adventure and/or a text game in a narrative literary work via a digitalized platform that allows a live author-reader interaction. This paper approaches Interactive Fiction as a discrete literary genre that revolves around the role of the interactor in developing the storytelling process, by investigating the technical innovations that Jon Ingold has employed in his narrative *All Roads*. By deciphering the main pathways in the selected narrative, the paper aims at defining the parameters of Interactive Fiction as a literary context, through highlighting the role of the interactor as a co-author of the text on evidence of Roland Barthes's theory of "The Death of the Author." Close reading of Ingold's *All Roads* reveals immense descriptions and crucial pathways that need to be conquered through the reader's imagination, which is one of the main ends of fiction, and which provides the reader/interactor with a participatory storytelling experience. Barthes's decentralization of authorship allows the researcher to critically explore *All Roads* as a narrative that resists fixed identity, stable perspective, and singular interpretive control—both for the player and for the implied author. Ingold's clever use of a choice-based narrative, richly detailed setting, branching pathways, tension and suspense, and well-developed characters has created a truly immersive and engaging experience. The use of POV masking is not simply to confuse the player/interactor, but to philosophically stage the crisis of the modern subject: the self as unstable, constructed, and mediated by language and power. It is in this sense one can say that *All Roads* helps in advancing the genre.

Keywords: Interactive Fiction, interactor, innovation, game, *All Roads*, techniques



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الابتكارات التقنية في السرد التفاعلي في عمل جون إنجولد "كل الطرق"

المستخلص

لقد أسهمت الرقمنة في جميع مجالات التجربة الإنسانية، بما في ذلك السرديات وعلم السرد، وتعد القصص التفاعلية مثالاً واضحاً على ذلك. فمن الناحية التقنية، أحدثت القصص التفاعلية ثورة في دور القارئ داخل العمل السرد، إذ جعلت منه جزءاً من مغامرة أو لعبة نصية داخل عمل أدبي رقمي يتيح تفاعلاً حياً بين المؤلف والقارئ. يتناول هذا البحث القصص التفاعلية بوصفها جنساً أدبياً مستقلاً يتمحور حول دور المتفاعل (القارئ/اللاعب) في تطوير عملية السرد، من خلال دراسة الابتكارات التقنية التي استخدمها جون إنجولد في عمله السرد "كل الطرق" من خلال تفكيك المسارات الرئيسية في هذا العمل، يهدف البحث إلى تحديد معالم القصص التفاعلية كإطار أدبي، مسلطاً الضوء على دور المتفاعل بوصفه شريكاً في تأليف النص، استناداً إلى نظرية رولان بارت "موت المؤلف". ويكشف التحليل الدقيق لرواية "كل الطرق" عن أوصاف دقيقة ومسارات حاسمة لا يمكن اجتيازها إلا بخيال القارئ، وهو أحد الأهداف الجوهرية للفن القصصي، إذ يمنح القارئ/المتفاعل تجربة سردية تشاركية. إن تفكيك بارت لمفهوم المؤلف يتيح للباحث استكشاف "كل الطرق" بوصفها سردية تقاوم الهوية الثابتة، والمنظور الأحادي، والهيمنة التفسيرية المطلقة—سواء من جهة اللاعب أو من جهة المؤلف الضمني. لقد أبدع إنجولد من خلال استخدامه الذكي للسرد القائم على الاختيار، مع بيئة سردية غنية بالتفاصيل، ومسارات متفرعة، وتوتر وتشويق، وشخصيات متقنة البناء، تجربة غامرة وجاذبة بحق. أما استخدامه لتقنية حجب وجهة النظر فليس لمجرد إرباك القارئ/اللاعب، بل لتجسيد الأزمة الفلسفية للذات الحديثة: الذات بوصفها كياناً غير مستقر، ومبنيًا، ومتوسطاً عبر اللغة والسلطة. ومن هذا المنطلق يمكن القول إن "كل الطرق" تسهم بوضوح في تطوير هذا الجنس الأدبي.

الكلمات الرئيسية: القصص التفاعلية، المتفاعل، رولان بارت، "كل الطرق"، تقنيات

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Technical Innovations in the Interactive Storytelling of Jon Ingold's *All Roads*

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Technical Innovations in the Interactive Fiction of Jon Ingold's *All Roads***Introduction**

Technological advances in the digital age have been largely expanded in each field to include narrative territory. Creative writers resort to electronic machines like computers to be a medium of their storytelling with the help of the reader/interactor. Literature delivered via software rather than printed books is interactive, according to Ziegfeld (341). Interactive Fiction, usually abbreviated as (IF), is typically represented by an adventure and a text game through a literary piece of work. According to Carolyn Hander Miller, interactive fiction is defined as “[a] work of interactive narrative, usually text based, into which users input their commands via their computer keyboard ... [Such works] are available on the internet and as CD-ROMs and sometimes contain graphics and video. Works of IF resemble text-based adventure games, but are engaged in by a solo user, not multiple players. They also lack a win/lose outcome” (426).

Interactive fiction has a rich and complex history that dates back to the earliest days of computer programming. The genre has evolved over time, reflecting changes in technology, culture, and storytelling conventions. One of the earliest examples of interactive fiction was *Colossal Cave Adventure*, a text-based adventure game developed by Will Crowther and Don Woods in the late 1970s (Montfort *Riddle Machines* 273). This game allowed players to explore a virtual cave system, interacting with the environment through text commands. *Colossal Cave Adventure* inspired a wave of text-based adventure games in the 1980s and 1990s, including classic games like *Zork* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (274). It is noticeable that the early works of Interactive Fiction could only accept two

or three words for responses from the reader. Today, computers are now capable of accepting more verbal responses from the reader such as ‘Get everything on the desk except the matches’ (Niesz and Holland 116). During the 1990s, the rise of graphical user interfaces and multimedia technology led to the development of new forms of interactive fiction, including graphical adventures, visual novels, and interactive movies. These games offered more sophisticated and immersive forms of interactivity, incorporating advanced graphics, sound, and user interfaces to create a more immersive and engaging experience for players.

In the 2000s and 2010s, the rise of digital distribution platforms and the popularity of cell phone devices led to a resurgence of interest in interactive fiction. New tools and technologies, such as Twine and Inform, made it easier for writers and developers to create interactive fiction works, and the genre expanded to include a wider range of styles and formats. Today, interactive fiction continues to evolve and expand, with new forms of technology and software allowing for ever more sophisticated and immersive experiences. According to Duncan Stevens, Interactive Fiction has become an available medium for expressing ideas and telling a story in new ways, not simply for the crafting of puzzles (361). Jon Ingoldⁱ (1981-) uses storytelling principles in a creative way through designing a game. His early proficiency in Infocomⁱⁱ and Inform gives him a way to use his digital tactics and skills in producing interactive fiction. Unlike his former prose works which are based on hypertext, Ingold chooses to present *All Roads* (2001) in a parseⁱⁱⁱ-based system which entails the interactor’s input code of natural language into a computer game to make it easier to follow instructions in order to move the storyline along. The interactor uses text commands to control characters and influence the environment. According to Ingold, to make interactive fiction more understandable, its elements arise from three basic components: (a) a potential description, i.e., a system that produces narration during an interaction, (b) a computer program that reads text, and (c) reproduction of an environment. (Ingold *Thinking into the*

Box 248- 229). There is a real evolution in interactive fiction as developers explore new ways to tell stories and engage readers in this exciting genre. Generally, the history of interactive fiction is a testament to the enduring appeal of reader engagement and interactivity in the world of storytelling.

Literature Review

Despite the claims of many critics who refuse to accept Interactive Fiction as a category or disregard mentioning it at all (Aarseth 1997; Douglass 2000; Chaouli 2005), and despite others' apologies who justify the worth of Interactive Fiction as an engaging experience and determining the literariness of this genre (Randall 1988; Desilets 1989; Atkins 2003; Hawthorn 2005; Mortfort 2008), and while there has been some research on many interactive narratives, *All Roads* is the only game in history to win both the Competition and the Annual awards. It won XZZZY awards to honour non-competition games and 2001 IF Competition. *All Roads* also won Best Setting and Best Story at the XZZZY's (Baf n. d.). In "How Interactive Could Fiction Be", Michel Chaouli interrogates "[h]ow might complex fictional worlds be constructed by means of the networked computer, regardless of whether or not we end up calling that activity or product literature?" (601). He was mainly concerned with the emergence of hypertext fiction in which "the author presents a text with a certain number of built-in links, which, when selected, take the reader to a different node of what is in effect a global textual network, for the selected link may lead to the next paragraph or to a document stored on the other side of the world" (602).

Chaouli failed to find the literariness of computer-based texts as he cannot recognize a "coherent account of interactivity on a level of description useful to textual analysis (for example, technical, aesthetic, phenomenological, or cognitive)" (604). However, there are still some gaps in literature. One area that could benefit from further study is the role of the player in shaping the game's narrative. Little attention so far has been paid to the role of the

interactor in the storytelling process in *All Roads*. While many studies have analyzed the branching paths and multiple endings in different interactive fictional works, there could be further examination of the ways and techniques in which player choices and interactions shape the game's story and characters. While *All Roads* focuses on text-based storytelling and it creates an immersive experience for the player, there could be further exploration of the devices in which *All Roads* draws on or subverts conventions of interactive media, and how it fits into the evolving landscape of digital storytelling.

Theoretical Framework

In analyzing Jon Ingold's *All Roads* (2001), a work of interactive fiction (IF) that deliberately disorients narrative authority and player identity, I propose that Roland Barthes'^{iv} "The Death of the Author" (1967) offers an appropriate theoretical framework. Unlike Espen Aarseth's cybertext theory which emphasizes the structural mechanics of interactivity, this paper proposes that Barthes' work provides a radical literary-philosophical foundation for interrogating the dissolution of authorial control in the reader's experience—a dissolution that is central to *All Roads*.

While Barthes did not specifically address the realm of interactive fiction, his ideas about the relationship between the author and the reader can be applied to this genre and provide a useful framework for understanding the complex relationship between author and reader in [it](#). Barthes' "*The Death of the Author*" challenges traditional literary criticism that places the author at the center of meaning, arguing that the act of writing removes the author's authority over a text — meaning does not originate from the author's intentions or biography but from the interplay of language and the reader's interpretation. He declares the primacy of the reader over the author, arguing that meaning is not something injected into a text by a singular authorial voice, but rather "a tissue of quotations" drawn from multiple cultural and linguistic systems.

Barthes declares the death of the author once the literary work is written and argues that the meaning of a text is created by the reader, not the author, and that the reader is an active participant in constructing the literary work (147-48). In Barthes's case, he is figuratively speaking in so much as the reader constructs the text only in his/her own imagination. In interactive fiction, however, Barthes's decentralization of authorship allows us to critically explore Ingold's *All Roads* as a narrative that resists fixed identity, stable perspective, and singular interpretive control—both for the player and for the implied author.

In interactive fiction the reader becomes a participant in the story, actively making choices that determine the outcome of the narrative. This blurs the line between author and reader, as the reader is no longer a passive recipient of the author's vision, but rather an active co-creator of the story. Here comes the role of the interactor in Interactive Fiction whereby he/she leaves his/her contribution already typed on the screen. This typed word or sentence generates both a new seen text and evokes aesthetic imagination along with it. Hence this paper argues that the role of the interactor in interactive fiction is a producer of a text; he generates the author's storytelling through creating a dialogue between the work of art and the interactor. Barthes' concept of the "death of the author" suggests that once a text (or in this case, interactive fiction) is released, the author's intentions behind a work are no longer the sole determinant of its meaning. Instead, meaning is constructed through the interaction between the text and the reader. This idea can be applied to interactive fiction, where the meaning of the story is determined not only by the author's initial design, but also by the choices made by the reader.

In the light of these concerns, this paper investigates particular narrative devices that are crafted in the story of Jon Ingold's *All Roads*. It defines the parameters of Interactive Fiction as a literary genre through investigating interactivity, nonlinearity (branching pathways), masking point of views & blurred identity, and shifting perspectives. Since

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narrative techniques form the basic structure of any writing, the paper explores the technical innovations that Ingold employed in *All Roads* as a piece of Interactive Fiction to show that authorship is not a metaphysical presence but a function of discourse. Ingold's *All Roads* is an understudied work of art, and the paper aims at providing the basics for those who are overwhelmed in the context of interactive fiction through deciphering the main pathways in the selected narrative.

Ingold's *All Roads* had a significant impact on the development of interactive fiction and the gamebook genre. Unlike many other works of Interactive Fiction, *All Roads* relies solely on text. It has no accompanying sound or graphics. This means that it relies on the interactor's imagination to create a mental picture of the story's setting and characters. The interactor, in this case, creates the soundscape and atmosphere of the story in his imagination. It is notable that the lack of the sound is deliberate as it allows the interactor to focus more fully on the narrative and the choices the interactor is making. Without a pre-determined soundtrack or sound effects, interactors are free to imagine the story's landscape in any way they choose. The absence of sound adds to *All Roads*' unique storytelling experience and allows for greater interactor immersion and interpretation of the story.

Role of the interactor in Ingold's *All Roads*

In Jon Ingold's *All Roads*, the interactor (i.e., the player) plays a central role in shaping the narrative and determining the outcome of the story. *All Roads* is designed to be interactive, with the interactor making choices and taking actions that have a direct impact on the plot, characters, and overall experience of the game. The interactor is responsible for guiding the protagonist through a series of moral dilemmas, making decisions that will ultimately determine the character's fate. The interactor's choices and actions influence the character's personality, relationships, and moral compass, creating a personalized and unique narrative experience. The interactor's role in *All Roads* is essential to the game's success, as

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the game relies on the player's engagement and investment in the story to create a sense of immersion and emotional resonance. By giving the interactor agency and control over the story, *All Roads* creates a dynamic and engaging interactive experience that challenges players/interactors to reflect on their own values and beliefs.

Jon Ingold's *All Roads* utilize various techniques and structures to create engaging and dynamic storytelling experiences. These narratives are characterized by their ability to branch and change based on participant actions, providing a unique and personalized experience for each user (Robertson & Young 2014, 2016). *All Roads* presents several permutations, and it offers much freedom for the interactor/player to explore the map and wander in any direction he likes. The interactor may insert directions that lead him or her to other parts of the text; he may explore new avenues in the story. Overall, Ingold uses a variety of technical devices to create a rich and immersive interactive fiction experience. Some of the key technical devices employed in Ingold's *All Roads* include:

Multiplicity of voices

All Roads is an interactive story which means that the reader is the hero of the story. Unlike Dan Shiovitz's *Bad Machine* (1998) which begins with just a cursor prompt('≤') and it has a null prologue, *All Roads* starts with a fully described initial situation:

Your head is pulled back, held by the rope pressing on your throat. Your toes pivot on a rickety stool, which shakes as your legs shake. The crowd filling the square are chattering like monkeys, but are just flits of colour in the corners of your eyes. You cannot look round- instead your gazes straight across The Square, to the great dial of The Clock. (Ingold 2001)

This is quite an intense opening; this excerpt indicates that you are captive, and you cannot do anything but gaze straight or talk. Using second person narration- instead of the traditional first person and third person- places the reader/interactor in the shoes of the protagonist. Such

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a kind of narration gives the reader the feel that s/he is a participant character. Also, clear and accurate room description helps build a persuasive fictional environment. Unlike other Interactive Fiction works in which the author allows readers\interactor to control the characters in advancing the storyline by using page title, names and offering recommended paths, Ingold's *All Roads* allows readers/interactors to traverse the narrative through typing commands which are considered the main pillars of storytelling in IF. In such a way, the interactor is given a cursor prompt '<' that accepts simple typed commands of a verb and a noun.

Influenced by Mallarmé and linguistic theory, Barthes insists that "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is... to reach that point, where only language acts, performs and not me" (Barthes 119). Writing is not a transmission of personal experience but a performance of language itself. The author is a mere "scriptor," (Barthes 120) born simultaneously with the text, not its source. In Ingold's *All Roads*, the narrator, at several moments, seems to lose control over their own speech: "The words come before the thoughts. I speak, and only then know what I mean" (Ingold 2001). This is an exact dramatization of Barthes' notion that "it is language which speaks, not the author" (119). Ingold's protagonist becomes the embodiment of linguistic determinism — thought following expression, rather than preceding it. Similarly, a later moment describes: "The map folds itself." Here, the *world* — like language in Barthes' essay — performs autonomously. Ingold no longer commands narrative meaning; yet, the system (text, code, or language) does.

In *All Roads*, one notices the use of Point-of-View Masking. The narrative temporally conceals and misdirects the reader about who is speaking or whose perspective the story represents. The game begins in the voice of a condemned prisoner about to be hanged. The player assumes a single identity, but later discovers that different sections may belong to different versions of the same consciousness. The narrative deliberately blurs who "I" is.

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Such perspective creates epistemic instability; blurs identity and agency; reflects themes of surveillance and fragmented subjectivity common in late modern IF. The shifting or hidden point of view forces the player to ask: *Who am I in this story?*, questioning the stability of identity. By masking perspective, Ingold undermines the illusion of a fixed, coherent self — echoing postmodern and existential thought, where identity is constructed, unstable, and contextual. The technique dramatizes the idea that “the self” might be just another narrative we tell ourselves — a central theme in modern philosophy and phenomenology.

Like Derrida who dismantles the notion of a stable, self-present subject, *All Roads* embodies that difference. In the sense that every scene refers to another, every identity points to another possible self. The player’s perspective is a series of sign and traces, never a fixed origin. In Jacques Derrida’s *On Grammatology*, identity- like meaning is always deferred, never fully present. The self is a trace, a product of language and difference; it exists only through signs that point beyond themselves. There is no final, unified “I” — only shifting signifiers. The technique of POV masking turns the self into a textual effect, a flickering between positions — just as Derrida argues that meaning flickers between signifiers. *Identity in the world of All Roads is not something possessed; it is something written, erased, and rewritten.*

Richly detailed setting:

The title of the narrative, *All Roads*, is culturally symbolic. It goes back to 300 BC when the ancient Romans constructed an amazing network of roads that all of them led back to Rome^v. Jon Ingold’s *All Roads* is set in Italian Renaissance with its large cathedrals, and rich palaces.

>LOOK AT THE CLOCK

The great clock is the centerpiece of the dome of the palace. It has twenty-four numbers, written in Roman numerals, and only one long hand, shaped like a sword.. The dial is twisted round, with the VI- the hour of execution- at the bottom.

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From somewhere, at the back of the crowd, you hear a woman's voice, sobbing. (Ingold 2001)

>EXAMINE THE SQUARE

The central square is about a hundred paces each side, with the two pillars and their statues rising from the center. Around three sides runs the great Museum, a line of windows, each dark, all the same, like ripples on a sea. They go down as far as the top of the colonnades, in which people will enjoy the shade and drink from the tavern's and the coffees houses. Your scaffold, your home now, is in the cusp of these walls, with your head pointed to the fourth side, where stands the palace of the Dojo.

A domed building, like a cathedral, its doorway flanked by two green-copper horses reared for the charge and its walls tiled with mosaics. In the center, at the top, is the clock "see!" shouts a voice in the crowd. "He's soaked in blood!" He cannot be talking about you, there must be others ready to hang behind and beside, but you cannot turn your head to check. (Ingold 2001)

In the above excerpt, Ingold tries to set the scene and create a feeling of suspense and danger right from the beginning. *All Roads* has a richly detailed world that is full of interesting characters, locations, and events. The world feels alive and immersive, which helps to draw the reader in and keep them engaged.

Branching pathways:

Like all Interactive Fiction works that have multiple situations, *All Roads* has multiple reading pathways. It features multiple possible paths and outcomes, depending on the reader's choices. This is made possible through the use of branching pathways, which allow the reader to explore different options and see the consequences of their actions. The reader "experience different storylines and endings based on their decisions. This approach enhances engagement and promotes affect and reflection on content 9" (Petousi, Dimitra, et al 2022).

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It does not matter how the interactor does in each step, yet the ending step produces the same result as intended by Ingold. In other words, the interactor does not necessarily follow the author's default pathway to advance the storyline through the text. However, he/she adds in the creations of the events. Having a different medium from prose writing, IF lets the readers/interactors travel across borders of space and time. According to Andrew Glassner, "[in a] computer-based environment, [the interactor] transport[s] to ever more believable and responsive places and times, and that alone makes [the environment] very appealing" (331).

Choice-based narrative:

All Roads is a choice-based narrative that puts the reader/interactor in control of the story. The interactor's choices determine the path of the story and the outcome. The interactor tries through an infinite choice of narratological paths to solve the knot. Ingold used mediation and accommodation, that is "a plan-based process ... is used to generate interactive narratives. Within this process, accommodation creates new story content when a participant deviates from the main storyline, ensuring the narrative remains coherent and engaging" (Robertson 2014). Such a device evokes imaginations and offers new insights in a work of art. For example, while exploring the world, the interactor finds himself in a very quiet church with only a priest whose role is supposed to offer guidance and advice to the interactor, particularly in matters of morality and ethics. The priest is portrayed as a wise and knowledgeable figure, with a deep understanding of the world and its workings. The interactor decides to talk to the priest to get more information about the surroundings. The reader/interactor interacts with the text through typing a command such as "talk to the priest". The latter offers insights into the interactor's quest, and provides clues to help him overcome obstacles or make difficult choices. In addition to his role as an advisor and mentor, the priest may also play a key role in the story's plot.

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The interactive and textual elements affect the way that you can choose what you want to do. Depending on the choices made by the interactor, the priest may become an ally or an enemy, and their actions have significant consequences for the outcome of the story. The role of the priest in *All Roads* is an important one, both in terms of the interactor's personal journey and the larger narrative arc of the story. Their presence adds depth and complexity to the world of the story and provides the interactor with a valuable source of guidance and support. However, if you, as an interactor, skip the prayer after speaking with the priest, it will be difficult for you to remember that your name is William Deliosa. In the narrative, though, you respond to William as if you understand what he entails. Shipping something means that you are over that, and you are lost. Reading this piece is difficult since you must strike a balance in order to know all things you must accomplish without directions. For example, despite my exercise on *All Roads*, as an interactor I did not pray after speaking with the priest, so I was perplexed when I responded to William after Sebastian.

Employing Non-Linearity

One of the most striking examples of *All Roads*' nonlinear plot is how the story starts. Unlike conventional prose texts which follow a linear plot structure, Ingold's *All Roads* follows a non-linear plot structure. Unlike traditional linear stories that have a clear beginning, middle, and end, *All Roads* starts in medias res, right in the middle of the action. The player is presented with a choice that determines the direction of the story, and this choice leads to multiple branching paths that can be taken. The reader can explore different paths and storylines depending on their choices. This creates a sense of agency and personalization that traditional narratives cannot match. The rules that govern the game have some obstacles which create the conflict that is at the heart of every typical narrative. To work this game out, it requires a certain technique for its perfect execution. The interactor is confronted with a problem and takes a series of steps to solve it leading up to a climactic

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conclusion. The interactor has to use his intuition and apply his knowledge of what objects look like in order to solve Ingold's intuitive puzzles.

Another impressive aspect of *All Roads* is the way it handles character development. The interactor meets a range of interesting and well-developed characters, each with their own unique personality and motivations and secrets. These are revealed depending on the interactor's choices. As he interacts with these characters, he can learn more about them, their relationships, and their backgrounds in a non-linear way, discovering their past and present through different playthroughs. *All Roads'* multiple endings illustrate the game's non-linear plot. Depending on the interactor's choices, Ingold's narrative can end in different ways, with different outcomes and consequences. Each ending is unique and can provide different insights into the story and characters. *All Roads'* non-linear plot is an integral part of the game, allowing interactors to explore different paths and experiences, and creating a personalized and engaging narrative.

Dialogue system:

In interactive fiction, the dialogues between the interactor and other characters can vary depending on the choices made by the interactor. The interactor may be presented with different options for what to say or do, and the other characters may respond differently based on those choices. This can lead to a variety of different outcomes and branching paths in the story. The interactor can use different skills and attributes to influence the outcome of his interactions. Ultimately, the dialogues in interactive fiction are designed to give the interactor a sense of agency and immersion in the story. *All Roads* features a sophisticated dialogue system that allows the interactor to interact with the characters in the story. In terms of mechanics, the story holds a simple way on how to steer through this piece. The dialogue system is designed to respond to a wide range of inputs and prompts, creating a more natural and immersive experience. This experience changes from one interactor to another. Ingold

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employs dialogues to dramatize some of the performed actions in the narrative. He creates realistic dialogues that are relevant to the current situation being narrated to the interactor. By allowing the interactor to make choices and see the consequences of those choices in the world around them, Ingold manages to create a highly engaging and personalized experience in *All Roads*.

The interactor interacts with the text by putting simple instructions. According to Infocom, “Through our prose, your imagination makes you part of our stories, in control of what you do and where you go- yet unable to predict or control the course of events” (n.p.). The interpreter (the computer game that executes the instructions written) is extremely versatile. This interpreter or translator accepts full-sentence input or a verb and a noun. It analyses the input and responds to it by a computerized narrator. It is highly developed and thus conserve momentum. With the broader explanation of the given suggestive description in *All Roads*, the narration has improved equally from the beginning till the end of the story. The following room descriptions are rather detailed and give the narration a satisfying context.

You stumble.

Empty Room

The light is dimmer here; the stones are cold.

You're in a large room with rib-like Gothic pillars rising to the reinforced ceiling.

Pigeons fly through the stone cracks, their wing flaps resonating like thunder. The dust spirals in the two slices of light from the roof's broken windows. Possibly the majority of this area is underground, with the slots at ground level.

There is only one solid tarred wood door north of this vast gap, with a hefty lock embedded into the wood.

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It's safe to use. In one area, a little heap of dust and cobwebs has accumulated. Sort your hands, which are still tied behind your back, now. A pigeon's cry reverberates around the stone, sad [sic]. (Ingold 2001)

The explanations above offer sufficient details to enable the parser (syntax analyzer) to fill in the breaches and create a setting and for the interactor to advance the storyline. Ingold uses sensory organs and experiences such as sight, touch, hear that enable the interactor to have strong feelings for the space and setting. The interactor creates a mental image of the surroundings. Parsing or syntax analysis analyzes a string of symbols in a natural language. Ingold employs a figurative language tuned to the use of audio material. For example, he uses crying of the pigeon and the sound of thunder figuratively; these are produced from the flapping of the wings which enhances the experience of the interactor and involves him deeply in the action. The use of visual material such as the dimming of light adds to the effect of the scene. These directives add effects to the action. The various items that are brought to the interactor's notice are all plainly torturous. For example, the interactor mostly wonders: Is the door securely fastened? Is there anyone hiding behind that closed door? What might you find if you look closely at the small pyramid of dust and cobwebs?

>EXAMINE DOOR

The door is heavy, with wide oak planks riveted with black rivets. You hear a noise from behind the door. Footsteps. This followed by scraping in the lock, of a key being removed (Ingold 2001)

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>LISTEN TO DOOR

There are footsteps beyond the door, receding.

Voices can be heard from above; a woman says, 'I'll take care of this.' Now, Antonio, why don't you double-check that the door is locked?'

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'Definitely,' says one of the men. 'I wouldn't want any of those awful birds to fly out,' says the narrator. The difference between 'doing there' and 'being there.' (Ingold 2001)

>EXAMINE COBWEBS

Dust and cobwebs have accumulated over something in one corner; however, it's difficult to identify what it is. Outside the door, you hear footsteps, and at the same moment, one beam of light disappears, reappearing as something hits the floor by the window slot. It's a key, a big iron one! Something smashes down the roadway above, startling a few birds. (Ingold 2001)

Non-interactive Plot Revelations

In addition to his use of interactive devices, Ingold also has noticeably utilized non-interactive plot revelation in *All Roads*. For example, the fact that the key falls into the room while you're investigating the cobwebs — a causally unrelated behaviour — gives the impression that the characters are reacting irrespective of you rather than in response to you as an interactor. It gives a sense of the complementary presence of the player character. Overhearing snippets of conversation provides a sense of mystery. Here you only observe some fragments which you do not know how to comprehend. With mystery and inadequate pieces of evidence, the interactor should initiate to fill in himself creatively. Yet the addition of the light and sound to the setting enhances and enlivens the experience of the interactor. Sometimes he/she gets disoriented and heading towards a direction with no exit. Then the answer comes “You can't go that way” (Ingold *All Roads*). To get more into this mystery and solve the riddle, the interactor tries to find out more. He may want to pick up the key and use it as a means of escape, but as his hands are tied, he cannot reach the key. With these limitations hiding behind the cobwebs and dust, Ingold's *All Roads* looks fascinating and keeps the interactor always in “a state of keen excitement” (Jackson-Mead & Wheeler).

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Like a traditional narrative, *All Roads* gives you pieces of information of where you are and what is going on. However, there are only two occasions upon which the interactor/player is required to proceed in a certain way. In these two occasions, there is actually only one path through the game with little puzzles used in the narrative. If the interactor follows this path, s/he is given hints of what to do next. The hint may be given in a file or a letter or through investigating the virtual world of the story. The game motivates the interactor to go on to the next step. While along the whole ride, the interactor will understand and make sense of these puzzles. Not only are these rides thrilling and unfamiliar, but they also have amazing emotional impacts. Many a time, the interactor/player steers away from the direction Ingold had laid out for him, yet the interactor progresses the storyline of the narrative.

Barthes' theory is uniquely suited to *All Roads* because the game is not just about branching choices or interactive pathways; it is fundamentally about destabilizing narrative authority. The player inhabits a protagonist whose identity shifts, who may not even be a coherent "I", and who experiences a world where narrative causality is oblique. The player is continually forced to question who is speaking, who is acting, and who is being manipulated—a narrative condition that aligns with Barthes' call to "liberate the text" from the author. Drawing on Barthe's work, one cannot ask who speak in the text: is it Ingold? the protagonist? A universal wisdom? *All Roads* is a weave of voices, not a channel of one person's consciousness.

One of the best things about Ingold's *All Roads* is the way it uses storytelling to create a sense of tension and suspense. *All Roads* uses ambiguity and mystery to create a sense of intrigue and suspense. The reader is often left wondering what is really going on, which encourages exploration and experimentation. The interactive narrative starts with a seemingly a tense task - the interactor is held captive and is about to be hanged, but as he progresses

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through the story, he begins to realize that there is much more going on than he initially thought. The narrative uses clever foreshadowing and subtle hints to create a sense of unease and keeps the interactor guessing about what will happen next. *All Roads* offers a glimpse of an adventure game by requiring the entry of basic compass directions to go through its numerous locations—about 25 in total—to reach the conclusion. The interactor inserts directions such as north, south, east, west to be fully aware of his surroundings. This adventure game that the interactor is involved in has some puzzles that need to be solved in order to advance the narration.

At the beginning of Ingold's *All Roads*, the scenes seem disconnected from each other. They are like cinematic techniques. Yet, the protagonist revisits these disconnected scenes from multiple perspectives and the author turns them wisely at the end, which makes *All Roads* an exciting piece of reading. Ingold's *All Roads* has a circular plot, and it all needs the interactor to pay attention and remain connected. It ends where it starts. Like the movie *Usual Suspects of Fight Club*, Ingold's narrative has an interesting plot twist at the end, which makes it so surprising that almost everybody would want to replay it one more time.

Ingold's *All Roads* features several themes that are explored throughout the game. The story of *All Roads* starts in 1661; there is a man named Sebastian Deliosa in the city of Venice. A reader/interactor is supposed to recognize him as the protagonist. The computerized narration starts with second person, you, referring to him when he is surrounded by darkness and decides to look into it. You, instantaneously, move to a city square where you are on the top of a wooden platform, ready to be suspended. Suddenly, all hope is lost, and darkness appears. You find your way into it to get an escape. It's not easy to get redemption in life. You keep thinking about it with your arms tied at the back of your head. The man faces difficulty, and he does his best to get himself free. Salvation is not an easy task; he needs guidance. Since memory helps in shaping our perceptions of reality, the man cannot recall facts and

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information. It seems that he suffers from amnesia, and he finds himself in unfamiliar surroundings. The man tries his best to find information through probing his surroundings. He examines all surrounding objects: there is a dusty corner in this specific location, and suddenly he finds a bottle of wine. He smashes the bottle to use its pieces to cut the rope binding his arms. While the interactor identifies himself with Sebastian, he claims no idea why he is being lynched.

One of the main themes is the concept of choices and consequences. In *All Roads*, the interactor is presented with a series of choices that impact the outcome of the story. These choices are not always easy to make, and the consequences of those choices can be unpredictable. As an interactor identifying with the protagonist, you are completely innocent in this situation. But if you think of yourself as William, you are a killer working for the Resistance against the Roman Government. As the storyline moves forward, you find out that you are next to Giuseppe Florantine, an advisor in the Roman Government. Giuseppe has been working and playing for both parties, the Secret Agencies, and the Government. The Resistance or the authority wants to assassinate him because of the latter reason. It is easier to kill him with bare hands. But this is not Ingold's style of manipulating such situations. He would rather use an elaborative way of narrating this whole situation. He utilizes planned deception as a device; he plans to trick the authorities into thinking that Giuseppe is a notorious person. According to Giuseppe, he is charged with stealing a precious ring, which is actually stolen by one of those in authority. The government is tricked into this deception. It ends up in the hanging up of Giuseppe due to the accusation of theft. The assassin thus walks away successfully. The darkness takes him back to the bed.

Early in *All Roads*, the narrator's voice fractures into multiple identities. In the opening sequence, the protagonist describes their own execution: "I am standing on the

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scaffold again. But this time, I am watching myself” (Ingold 2001). This line encapsulates Barthes’ claim that

writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin.... [It] is that neutral, composite, oblique space where one subject slips a way, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing. (Barthes 118)

The self-splitting narration or the fragmented self erases any stable subject: is the “I” the condemned man, the observer, or the storyteller? Ingold’s design denies us certainty — exactly as Barthes insists that writing is that “oblique” into which every subject escapes.

Later, in Ingold’s *All Roads*, the narrator admits: “I don’t know which me this is.” The text’s unstable first person mirrors Barthes’ notion that language speaks, not the author. Ingold’s protagonist becomes a vessel of linguistic play — a self that only exists in the act of narration.

Forgetting the interactor’s identity is a common plot device in Interactive Fiction. In *All Roads*, the interactor sometimes plays the role of the deceased William DeLosa who has no idea that he is ghostly intelligent, and that he is dead. He believes that he has the ability to teleport. He can truly travel across time, so the tale moves out of a sequential manner, with the interactor struggling to understand where he is and what he’s up to. As you go further, you find more concrete clarification. William Deliosa is a deadly assassin. He captures the minds of innocent people with his deadly work while he is living in the afterlife. The confusion of William’s character makes the interactor confused in several situations. It is unclear whether William is Sebastian’s brother or another relative as they both have the last name-Deliosa. The interactor initially does not know anything about the characters, the surroundings, the background, nor their intentions. That’s why he finds himself in an unfamiliar environment, like the setting in literary genres.

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In addition to the themes of choices and consequences and identity, Jon Ingold also explores several other themes and motifs. One of these is the concept of memory and its role in shaping our perceptions of reality. Throughout *All Roads*, the interactor/player is plagued by memories of a past that he cannot fully recall. As interactor/player progresses through the story, he must piece together their memories in order to uncover the truth about his past and the present situation he finds himself in. For example, as the plot unfolds, you are Sebastian, and you are about to be punished with no idea of why it is happening. Yet, the ice breaks when William saves you from the darkness, and you realize that you are a killer. You sometimes find yourself to be Sebastian or William while being in the same domain. This work demonstrates how Interactive Fiction can go beyond Graham Nelson's funny description of it as a crossword puzzle at war (Nelson 2). Readers need to practice Coleridge's term "the willing suspension of disbelief"^{vi} so that they can be fully immersed in the narrative. The interactor has to suspend his/her disbelief. Another theme that is explored in *All Roads* is the idea of fate and determinism. *All Roads* suggests that some events in our lives may be predetermined, but that we still have the power to shape our own fate through the choices we make.

By fastening the pace of the story, Ingold maintains a consistent tone in the scene description. The scenario explanations in *All Roads* mainly serve as narrative devices:

Scaffold in the City Square

The rope pulling against your throat pulls your head back. Your toes swing on a shaky stool that sways with the movement of your legs. The mob in the square is chattering like monkeys, but it's only a flutter of colour in your eyes. You can't turn around; rather, you stare straight across the Square at the Clock's massive dial. Gradually, the huge dial's hand swings lower. You're going to get hung (Ingold 2001).

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Venetian Streets

You escape the canals, which will be crowded, by walking via streets and winding lanes. The Captain has one hand on the manacles that encircle your hands, and a sharp metal tip protrudes from your back. On either side, tall structures rise impassively, shutting out. (Ingold 2001)

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Mapping the Tale

You look at the sun and wonder if you'll ever see it again. However, no matter how dark it is, it is never black sufficient for you to go. (Ingold 2001)

It is noticeable throughout *All Roads* that Ingold never even mentions the city square or the scaffold in the first section. The interactor faces an obstacle to explain the omission in this case. It's not the best time or place to take in the views. The second section discusses how you might effectively capture the moment by walking against your will through strange backstreets. In both cases, the situation will force the interactor to focus on escaping the crisis at hand, and continuously typing "Look" is unlikely to be his preferred method. Midway through the game, the narrator remarks: "Every path leads back to the gallows" (Ingold 2001). Despite the player's apparent freedom, all routes return to the same scene — execution, imprisonment, or collapse. This circular design literalizes Barthes' claim that "[t]o give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes 121). By refusing the player- interactor a single, definitive ending, Ingold removes his own authority as "Author-God" (Barthes 121). The game resists closure; it can be replayed infinitely, each time producing new textual combinations. Later, when the narrator says: "I have lived this before. Or perhaps I have read it," the line collapses the boundary between author, character, and reader — dramatizing Barthes' assertion that the

true place of writing is reading (Barthes 122). The player experiences the story as déjà vu, as if the act of reading generates reality. Reading the text emphasizes erosion of authorial control.

Conclusion

Within the genre of Interactive Fiction, *All Roads* differs both thematically and structurally from other interactive fiction pieces. For instance, though Andrew Plotkin's *Spider and Web* (1998) is celebrated for its innovative structure and clever use of unreliable perspective, the POV and temporal order were deceptive. The player thinks they are an ordinary person interrogated by an officer, but later realizes the interrogation reconstructs actions of a spy. On the other hand, in *Slouching Towards Bedlam* (2003), co-authored by Daniel Ravipinto and Star Foster, the narrator's "I" is shared between human and parasitic entity and the voice gradually becomes dual. Set in a 19th-century asylum, this piece of interactive fiction combines mystery, philosophy, and metaphysics; and explores themes of language as infection, madness, and the fragmentation of identity. However, Ingold's *All Roads* does not rely on deception or a parasitic duality. On the contrary, as investigated in the paper, it explores nonlinear time, shifting identity, and multiple realities existing simultaneously. The paper proves that *All Roads* is basically about destabilizing narrative authority. The player inhabits a protagonist whose identity shifts, who may not even be a coherent "I", and who experiences a world where narrative causality is oblique. The protagonist experiences temporal and spatial overlap, seeing events from different moments and places as if they coexist — all "roads" lead to the same inevitable fate. The story's structure embodies circularity and simultaneity, not revelation. Unlike *Spider and Web*, where the twist clarifies everything at the end, *All Roads* maintains ambiguity; the mystery is not solved but becomes the core of the experience.

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While *Spider and Web* and *Slouching Towards Bedlam* rely on deception or divided consciousness to surprise and unsettle the player, Ingold's *All Roads* goes further — it dissolves the boundaries between past and present, self and other, fate and choice. It's not about solving a mystery, but about experiencing the coexistence of many possible realities, making it a more philosophical and structurally complex piece of Interactive Fiction. The player/interactor suddenly moves from the perspective of a condemned man on the scaffold to that of a mysterious observer — without transition. This uncertainty mirrors how subjectivity is fragmented and never whole. The self is employed as narrative illusion. The use of POV masking is not simply to confuse the player/interactor, but to philosophically stage the crisis of the modern subject: the self as unstable, constructed, and mediated by language and power. It is in this sense one can say that Ingold's *All Roads* helps in advancing the genre.

Ingold incorporates a narrative into an active game play experience. He has selected the parse-based system, namely the interactor's input code into the component parts of a computer game to facilitate executing instructions in an attempt to advance the storyline of the narrative. In *All Roads*' IF setting, room descriptions present platforms for the game but do not stay constant; there are some modifications when one returns to the same location later. The variable nature of the scenario explanations keeps them distinctive and enigmatic. This is one of the narrative's primary themes which is change. Unlike what happens in other electronic literary works, Ingold's *All Roads* does not have graphical texts nor awfully deafening noises to divert the reader/interactor. Instead, there is an entire textual description. The paper reveals the technical devices employed by Ingold such as the use of parse-based system, the use of reactive environment, planned deception, POV masking, subtle light, and effectively soft sound along with non-interactive plot revelations as technical tools to enliven the experience of the interactor who progresses the storyline of the narrative. Ingold uses

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branching to achieve an “individualized experience” for every interactor (Ziegfeld 348).

Following a non-linear plot structure and employing dramatic or cinematic scenes are some of Ingold’s innovative techniques in his narrative.

In creating a dialogue between the narrative and the interactor, the interactor becomes engaged in the interactive process of producing a text, thus gaining aesthetic pleasure which is one end of fiction. Another good aspect is that *All Roads* includes no extended images, so readers could create images in their minds. It is quite suggestive of reading in a conventional scenario. Considering all these things, this piece is full of immense descriptions and crucial pathways that need to be conquered through the reader’s imagination, which is one of the main ends of fiction. Ingold harmonizes traditional storytelling principles with game participatory principles, creating something new and exciting. The piece provides the interactor with a participatory storytelling experience through creating a dialogue between the work of art and the interactor, achieving a more inviting artistic experience. For many years, history has shown that the previous age lacked interactive fiction, but this work stands out as a brilliant narrative model due to the immersive experience of the interactor who proves to be a coauthor in Ingold’s *All Roads*, something which contributes to the development of the field of fiction. Ingold’s innovative approach to storytelling opened up new possibilities for interactive fiction and gamebooks, inspiring other creators to experiment with branching narratives, and non-linear storytelling. *All Roads* also demonstrated the potential of interactive fiction to tackle complex themes and explore philosophical ideas in a way that was both engaging and intellectually stimulating. Jon Ingold's *All Roads* is a masterclass in interactive storytelling that uses diverse techniques to create an engaging and immersive experience for the reader.

Endnotes

ⁱ A middle-aged British author, Jon Ingold has created his theory of interactive fiction with a unique crafting style that keeps it sensitive to its multi-faceted nature. He uses storytelling principles in a creative way through designing a game. He makes use of his study of Mathematics at Cambridge University and his proficiency in infocom. Founding the Inkle company specializing in interactive fiction for cell phone devices with the help of his colleague Joseph Humfrey, Ingold developed his interactive storytelling skills, “writing tales about an array of topics from go-kart racing to alien invasions” (ATD Staff n.p.).

ⁱⁱ Infocom means information and communication technology. Inform is a programming language and design system for interactive fiction and it was the prevalent producer of software adventure games in the 1980s.

ⁱⁱⁱ Parsing means analyzing a string of symbols either in a natural language or computer language. It is the process of converting formatted text into data structure.

^{iv} Roland Barthes (1915-1980) was a French literary critic and philosopher who made significant contributions to the field of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols in language. His famous article “The Death of the Author” was published in 1977, in French 1968.

^v For more information about the origin of this proverb, see *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (Oxford Quick Reference) by J.A Simpson and Jennifer Speake, 1998, p. 275.

^{vi} Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined the term the willing suspension of disbelief in 1817. It means to avoid logic in examining things and to believe the unbelievable.

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