LUDIC-SOCIETY

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Real Player in Real Games

The greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is - to live dangerously. Friedrich Nietzsche, 1882

Expanding the Game Zone

Reality Engine

Ludics

Man is a gaming animal. He must always be trying to get the better in something or other. Charles Lamb, 1823

Play Joy Jeu Jouissance

La Gaya Scienza

ludic-society.net

The Ludic Society magazine appears in this edition in print and in "Second Life" (a game or a play) – to provoke a "World 3" phenomenon! The periodical's online presentation is a parallel "Hello World" event.

The members articles critically vivisect Second Life as a hypothetical game system. Their focus is a playful "Third Life", according to Jorge Luis Borges´s "Orbis Tertius" and Sir Karl Popper´s "World 3". Some recent LS Real Plays, as at Social Hacking07, Plymouth, UK, (RFID-implant play www.rfid-judgement-day.com) and at DEAF07, Rotterdam (RFID-pimped mobile phone game premiere at Rotheatre) serve as examples for deviant gaming behaviour on borderlines of worlds.

Second Life appears as a benevolent dictatorship and an unavoidable love&hate object of desire to the ludic artist in flux. For that reason, back-to-back a World 3 investigation platform is constituted in 2007 – in the frame of an in-depth research project hosted by the Interaction Design (IAD)/ Game Design (GD) department of the HGK Zurich, also kindly supported by Dr. Gerhard Blechinger – and by the players in first life, members of the Ludic Society, also affiliated with the Games Research Group of the local GD academic Game Design strand.
At this point we especially would like to thank Dr. Gerhard Buurmann for his spontaneity and openness towards speculative Third Life science fiction ideas and his joint venture with the LS in the search for the

missing link between First and Second Life in the form of a wearable toy object (namely the SL aura indicator under development in World 3). We also take this opportunity to show appreciation to the hosts of the LS inside the belly of the SL beast, namely Odyssey Arts gallery. The LS is also grateful to the owner of the Third Death Poorhouse in SL, Hardware Hacker Hoch, who was also model for this issue and inspiration to Superfem Beebe.

To contrast an omnipresent euphoria, we quote an early SL observation: "Second Life is a benevolent dictatorship. If you were doing corporate business development in emerging markets, political stability would be a key factor in measuring the attractiveness of a potential new market. I think, if given the choice, you'd rather invest in a place with a representative government that has proven to support smooth transition of power in the past. To me, the fact that a very small group of people basically dictates what goes and what does not in this market, a group of people that is not beholden to the residents by law, is a political risk." (Adamo Lanza, 2004)

3rd Life Playsure. Tertius Orbis Memorandum

Marguerite Charmante, LS co-founder and ludologist

"Different Place – Different Rules. Welcome to the Third Place". David Lynch, spot for Playstation 2

To be able to decipher the following OU/LU/PO essay (Ouvroir/Ludic/Potentielle), please accept the discrete constraint: read the three texts (also provided on ludic-society.net) and on Poorhouse in Second Life:
New Babylon, Constant, Den Haag 1974.
Orbis Tertius, J. L. Borges, Argentina 1940.
World 3, Karl Popper, Michigan 1978.

"Tertius" (Latin = third) is an allusion to World 3 (Karl Popper, 1978) – the world of the products of the human mind. Popper proposes in the course of the "Tanner Lectures" a view of the universe that clearly recognizes at least three different but interacting sub-universes. Physical 'World 1' interacts with 'World 2', the mental or psychological world, the world of our feelings of pain and of pleasure. World 3, the world of the products of the human mind, emerges as an evolutionary product from World 2. "Play sure", as a motto of the ludic player in 2nd world game systems, uses World 3 conjectures or theories as instruments of change. The Popperian cosmology appears as very spartan juxtaposition to the idea of a second life as a parallel universe of data-avatars and documents, a metaverse à la Snow Crash (Neal Stephenson, 1992).

Orbis Tertius (Jorge Luis Borges, 1940) appears as a world where the artefacts of man in an inscrutable 2nd world break into the 1st and finally this world becomes number 3. Literature in this world never referred to reality, but to the two imaginary regions of the map, described in the pirate copy of an encyclopaedia. Wikipedia, Youtube, Myspace, Blogosphere and SL are edited by a dictatorship of the masses (Balibar, 1976. Lenin, 1918). Although constructed by the human mind (World 2), commonly all of these fictional worlds are considered as windows and mirrors to a first reality. But what is the first reality? For example even Google Earth, as semi-public oligarchic space, belongs to the fictional World 2 (as well as the game maps of Alphaworlds games). A live feed of Second Life screen-snapshots into Flickr is evidence of how World 3 artefacts break currently into environments, generally considered as World 1 (physical, because Flickr is "real"), but which are more World 2, which is according to Popper the world of our feelings of pain and of pleasure. Play sure pleasure plissure!
The existence of an ebay exchange rate of World of Warcraft (WoW) gold to US dollars is certainly a collusion of World 2 and World 1. The "gameplay" of money systems, derivate trade on stock markets as we know it in our playsure of everyday life, first blossomed in Florence and the de Medici business world of the Renaissance. The same is also true of calcio storico (soccer), introduced by Cosimo as a football game on life and the city's honour!

Cosmo was a free player for a 3D chat world (VRML, 1997), which Second Life mimics today. Well, Blaxxun Interactive, once the biggest community in "Diamond Age" (Stephenson, 1995) style, became bankrupt in 2001. Influenced by "The Flower Garden of Sutra" Buddhism already in 1994 Pesce/Parisi described the conceptual model for a networked world of diamonds, in which each reflects the other and its connections in the Labyrinth paper at CERN Institute. Obviously the time was not yet ripe then for such a general model of an online life world in 1997 – although 1986 in Japan the graphical MUD Habitat was widely successful. For the western masses the idea had to wait till 2007, to become World 3. Karl Popper conceptualized World 3 as produced by human minds. In MMPOGs, massive multiplayer online games, the mind's artefacts are "synthetic objects" (Castronova, 2006), traded and exchanged. In fact money systems, the simulacra (Baudrillard, 1976) of signs without an reference, are perfectly fitting to the bulb of Snow Crash millionaires. Now this auspicated crash softly unbounds, unwraps and deliberates into the poetic concept of a world that strikes back from a fictional third, via a second to a first reality: Uqbar!

"The contact with and the use of Tloen (=Uqbar, Orbis Tertius) corroded our world. Fascinated by its rigid rules mankind forgets more and more that its constraints are those of chess players and not these of angels. ... This revision of an illusionary world is temporarily called Orbis Tertius."
(Jorge Luis Borges, 1940).
Ideas ultimately manifest themselves in the physical world. More and more it elucidates that Uqbar and Tlön are invented places, the work of a "benevolent secret society" conceived in the early 17th century and numbering George Berkeley (immaterialism, 1713) among its members. The new Orbis Tertius, the New Babylon of a classless ludic society (Constant Nieuwenhuis, 1964) is ludicly constructed by a secret association of ludics. Their poetry never referred to reality, but to the two imaginary regions of the World. These and other imaginary regions are displayed on SL minimaps, the overview map of the country in 1:1. It is conjectured that this world is the work of players, bloggers, journalists, traders, speculators, gamblers, wiki-editors, boring locative arrow gamers on google earth feeds, NintendoDS crackers, WII gamers, RFID chippers, taggers and nemo. The map is so vast that the contribution of each writer is infinitesimal.
In contextualising a systemic view of games as a set of rules, Second Life does not fit well into the magic circle of games, even though a blue oval stamp, obviously indicating the "borders of a game world" (Jesper Juul, 2003), with the inscription "Orbis Tertius", was found in the eleventh volume of an encyclopaedia devoted to Tloen. Certainly some of the Huizingian definitions of game as a temporal and

spatial environment such as the current Second Life are applicable here – but even more elements of a communications guerrilla (L. Blissett/ Brünzels, 1997) are exemplified with its (press-faked) hype. Now the time is right for the report on a fictional world that makes the medium (game) invisible!

Blogjects, Spimes and Smartifacts (B. Sterling, 2005) create 3rd Life Playsure. New heterotopologies and trialectics of space, knowledge, and power (Michel Foucault, 1986) are incorporated in massive online worlds. So they unveil heterotopias of crisis and of deviation. According to Henri Lefebvre´s Trialectics common social spaces are simultaneously perceived, conceived and lived. That´s why a spatial explanatory model is often appropriated to cope with the new online worlds. Although space is the place and 3D is a crucial element towards the navigational sensations and claims of presence – "Esse est percipi"="To be is to be perceived" (Berkley), as stated in the philosophy of subjective idealism – the constructions in poetry are more suitable to the game-object observed. The Borgesian library of Babel gives ground to applied ludic principals in investigating playing realities.

Finally Second Life remains attractive as a set of rules (a game?), a willfully taken constraint, a bondage. Like any good bondage it liberates us from freedom. There is no E in a poem done by OULUPO rules! And as rules ruleZ, we can anticipate the limitations of chatworlds, their argument places, emptiness, and its missing links to first life. The constraint as fetish object merits bondages to game worlds. Accept a game as a set of rules, then the Second Life world is a game, the player is tied painfully close to the limitations of net-work traffic and access points. As surplus to those limitations by the technological topography, a set of trading rules is superimposed by a game industry monopoly. Now the bond is strong enough that even businessmen, anti-tech hustlers and a Jedermann find SL equally attractive – for chatting and trading with each other, for sex and 2ndLife Lollys.

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Commodified Play

Kristian Lukic, artist and kurator, kuda.org

Are MMO worlds ideal late capitalist machines based on social interaction, play and cultural simulation, or can they be seen as ideal social laboratories based on social interaction, play and cultural simulation?

Virtual worlds are the new factories in which workers/players work and play, and online games, where work interplays with enjoyment, can be considered as huge manufactories. Everquest, World of Warcraft and Second Life are nowadays the best known Massive Multiplayer Online Worlds (MMO).

If we take the current move to marketing and branding in these online worlds into consideration, Massive Multiplayer Online Worlds (MMO) establish enormous economical potential. When farming and selling online goods and items, all that could be generally described as immaterial labour. The concept of immaterial labour was initially proposed by Maurizio Lazzarato to describe situations where creativity, communication, emotion, cooperation, and values were 'put to work' in post-Fordist production processes. Although clearly following decentralized networked trajectories, MMO worlds are enclosed proprietary worlds, even up to the present. Each MMO operates as the factory where pro-duction is fully of bio origin, where there is the owner, the management, the marketing and a department for maintaining the production facility/virtual world. The main income for shareholders of the MMO world is not derived from the production of inworld products, which remain the property of the workers/players, but bio-production itself, which means owning the process of production itself (production of items in world/ immaterial products; the process of in-world communication, product, items trade) which means commodifing the play as an idea.

The difference to the typical modernist capitalist industrial factory, where a product was owned by capitalist/owner, is that products produced in MMO's are property of workers/ players. What is of value here is similar to some other social websites, specifically the number of visitors, players, inhabitants that are wandering around, the energies and the time they spend in this world. In that sense MMO's are clearly paradigmatical biopower machines, something that authors Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter said about digital games in general. According to them: "Digital games crystallize in a paradigmatic way the cultural, political, and economic forces of a global capitalist order based on the mobilization of bio-power." In MMO games (with time based sub-scriptions) the old problem of "piracy" becomes obsolete. Unlike the game industry that predominantly focused on producing a product/game, multiplying one single package and selling a product, a game, MMO's focus on selling time, thus minorizing the importance of selling a game product (some MMO's can be downloaded for free, some not, but the major profit is gained from time/subscription selling and not selling a game as the product). We can expect significant pressure from industry towards a faster setup of telecommunication infrastructures in the underdeveloped South. For the first time in techno-culture, potential players/ workers in these countries will have the same opportunity to earn the same while playing like players in developed countries. But the future "digital MMO divide" will remain between the vast number of third world gamers who only "play" games, while the production of games/worlds will mostly remain in the hands of corporations from developed countries, since the costs of creating and maintaining virtual worlds rises more and more.

Jean-Francois Lyotard pointed out that capitalism, technosciences and contemporary art share a so called "affinity to infinity", an affinity for an always needed redefinition of products, breaking the barriers, widening the horizon. In this sense, the question is whether MMO worlds are, the question is, if MMO worlds are highly competitive environments that foster notions of leviathanism, where the liberal subject is in the state of eternal war, or is it a place for virtual experimentation of social self-organization with huge democratic capacities? Is a MMO an ideal late capitalist machine based on social interaction, play and cultural simulation, or are MMOs an ideal social laboratory based on interaction, play and cultural simulation? But as MMOs reflect the 1st Life societies the answer is probably both!

Since new situations generally provide artists and activists with new possibilities, one is certainly found in exploring the given MMO's, creating content inside or subverting and modifying existing ones. Since MMO's have a certain "materiality" in a sense of simulated 3D worlds, certain numbers of players can be gathered in one place, thus creating powerful tools for influencing the producer/ designer's internal game politics (the number of players that can be in the same place in a virtual world is still limited; some experiences show that a critical number in Second Life, for example, is around 40). Another possibility can be to think about alternatives, in this case possible other MMO models that are not owned by profit companies.

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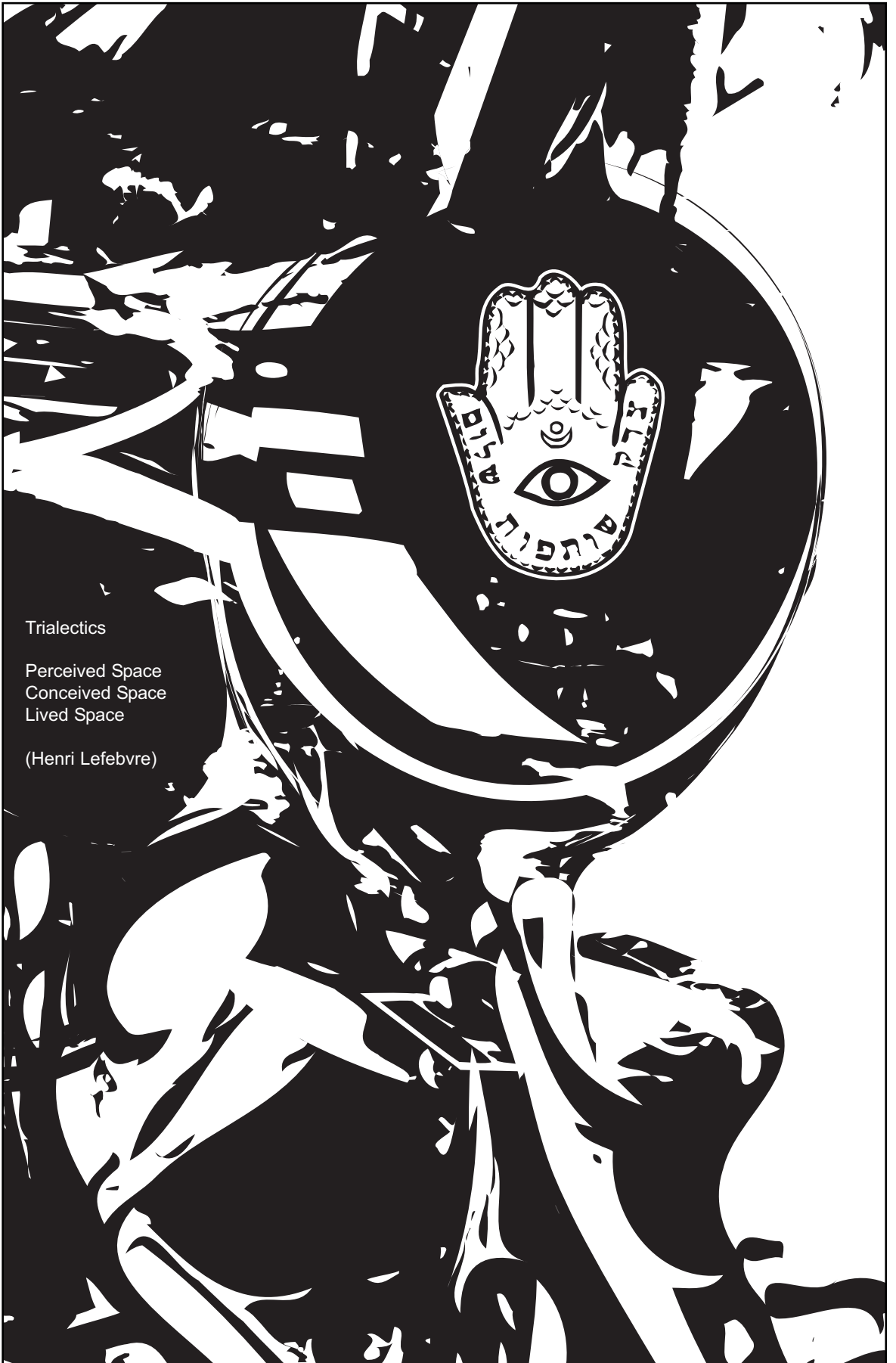
Trialectics

Perceived Space
Conceived Space
Lived Space

(Henri Lefebvre)

Objects in mirror are closer than they appear

Beat Suter, game artist and theorist

"For it is with the same imperialism that present-day simulators try to make the real, all the real, coincide with their simulation models." (Baudrillard 1998)

But there are still some holes in the matrix which are slowly being mended by the semiocracy of the media. Whoever wants to find the counter declaration has to direct him- or herself to those holes. What Graffiti started in the 70s continues today with virtual und reality-hacks. Real Players attach tags to the world with a data value of zero. Useless tags occupy the switching zone between reality and virtuality, they become game objects and start playing games which may widen the gaps in the matrix, force a glitch or even create a suction which sucks the whole world in. Baudrillard notes: "The form of dissolution of the [...] cybernetic and combinatorial world is the implosion. A universe of electricity mains, combinatorial and electricity longs for reversal and implosion."
RFID-Tags injected into walls of buildings and under the skin of artists like tags for dogs will be redeemed innocuously with zappers. Real, electric and electronic graffiti fluctuate between the worlds, and sometimes they fold themselves over holes as inverse objects and work on imploding the "simulcracy". Since the latter tries to get the first world to disappear in order to put the second world in its place, the former objects (graffiti, hacks, tags etc.) try to implode the power structures of both worlds with the intention that reality cannot be made to disappear in its simulation.

Baudrillard sagte 1978, die Massenmedien seien anti-mediatorisch, intransitiv und fabrizierten Nicht-Kommunikation dadurch, dass sie den Sendeprozess monopolisierten und keine Antwort zuliessen und so den Tauschprozess in der Kommunikation verunmöglichten. Seine Hauptkritik: Eine Antwort war untersagt. Baudrillard bezog sich dabei auf die damalige Fernsehkratie und hielt fest, dass die einzige Antwort damals in Form der Simulation einer Antwort möglich war, die aber bereits in den Sendeprozess integriert war und also ein abgeschlossenes System der sozialen Kontrolle und Macht nur vervollständigte. In den Medien konnte geredet werden, doch die Rede blieb immer ohne Antwort, was die Machtverhältnisse zementierte. Nur, wenn dieses Prinzip durchbrochen würde, könnte der symbolische Austausch wieder hergestellt werden. Enzensberger hatte damals durch Gebrauch von Foto- und Audio-Apparaten durch die Massen bereits eine Teilnahme der Massen am produktiven Prozess sehen wollen, aber Baudrillard widersprach heftig, denn der Gebrauch von neuen funktionalen Gegenständen hiess noch lange nicht, dass der individuell produzierte Content auch in die Sendekanäle eingespiesen werden konnte und damit eine Form von Antwort im medialen gesamtgesellschaftlichen Kontext erreicht werden konnte. Trotz Foto-Apparaten, Tape-Rekordern und einzelnen Film-kameras blieb die Gegenrede aus. Diesen Punkt verdeutlichend schreibt Baudrillard in einer Anmerkung: "Das eigentliche Monopol ist nie das der technischen Mittel, sondern immer das der Rede." (118) Und es sei eine Illusion, an eine kritische Verwendung der Medien zu glauben, die Rede wieder zu erlangen ist lediglich mittels Destruktion der Medien durch ihre Dekonstruktion als System der Nicht-Kommunikation zu erreichen. (101) "In einer symbolischen Tauschbeziehung gibt es simultane Antwort, es gibt auf beiden Seiten weder Sender noch Empfänger von Botschaften, es gibt auch keine "Botschaft" mehr, also kein in eindeutiger Weise unter der Ägide des Codes zu entzifferndes Informationskorpus. Das Symbolische besteht eben darin, mit dieser Eindeutigkeit der "Botschaft" zu brechen, die Ambivalenz des Sinns wieder herzustellen und im gleichen Zug die Instanz des Codes zu liquidieren." (111)

Eine Gegenrede existierte allerdings zu jener Zeit: die wilden Zeichen in den urbanen Zonen, die Graffiti, die den in einem indifferenten Zeit-Raum existierenden Codes ihren rebellischen Stempel aufdrückten. Der Ausschluss aus den Medien war vollkommen, nicht aber der Ausschluss aus den urbanen Zonen. Dort war es möglich, dem politischen Instrument der operationalen Semiologie eine Antwort zu geben. "Die Matrix des Urbanen", heisst es bei Baudrillard, "[...] ist die Realisierung einer Differenz (der Operation des Zeichens)." (20) Die urbane Zone war also zur Zentralstelle des Codes geworden. Ökonomie und Kommunikation trafen da aufeinander. Vernetzung und Besetzung hiess die Devise der Zeichen. Dies hatten auch die Tagger und Graffiti-Writer erkannt, sie begannen, ihre Gegenrede zu formulieren. Sie schrieben sie auf die Oberflächen des Stadtraumes, an die Wände und Mauern, Fenster und Türen, Tafeln und Plakate, auf die Transportmittel und Verkehrswege, in Passagen und Sous-sols, Aussen- und Innenräumen der Stadt, veränderten, überklebten, überschrieben, übermalten die operationalen Zeichen und attackierten damit die Semiokratie von Politik und Medien. Dies taten sie mit einem ihnen eigenen Code-System, so simpel, dass es jeder verstehen konnte und doch so komplex, dass es den herrschenden Code in Bedrängnis brachte. Nicht Ideologie oder Kunst war ihre Botschaft, sondern Leere – und genau damit decodierten sie den medialen, architektonischen Code. Der Aufstand der Zeichen hinterliess und hinterlässt auch heute noch deutliche Löcher in der medial urbanen Zone. Und dreissig Jahre später ist dieser Aufstand der "Kool Killer" zu einem Spiel geworden, das weltweit in praktisch allen Städten mit leicht veränderlichen Spielregeln gespielt wird, manchmal spielerisch und harmlos, manchmal kathartisch, manchmal dramatisch und lebensbedrohlich: "I am your Nightmare.
Catch me, if you can!"

Der mediale Streit um Rede ohne Antwort und Gegenrede hat sich aber mittlerweile auch in den virtuellen Raum verlagert, fast so wie Baudrillard das bereits in den 70er Jahren angedeutet hatte. Seit Einführung des World Wide Web 1991 kämpfen die Medien mit allen Mitteln um die Kontrolle des Feedback-Kanals. Über zehn Jahre hat es gedauert, bis sich einzelne Feedback-Kanäle durchsetzen und das Rede-Monopol der Medien brechen konnten. Doch Wikis, Weblogs, Podcasts, Video- und Content-Communities garantieren noch lange keine freie Zukunft der Gegenrede. Immerhin reissen sie Löcher in die mittlerweile vernetzte und technologisch gut abgesicherte Semiokratie. Doch die kann das nicht dulden und verleibt sich die neuen Kanäle nur zu gerne wieder ein und spuckt danach lediglich die Gräten aus, wie das Napster und andere bereits schmerzlich erfahren mussten. Dass sich diese Realitäten dabei vermischen, ist wohl nichts weiter als ein Ammenmärchen. Denn was bei den Medien zu beobachten ist, gilt wohl auch für die Mehrheit der Masse: Auch heute noch wollen die Leute alles fressen, was ihnen vorgesetzt wird, egal, in welcher Realität sie sich wähnen. Und das so schnell wie möglich, so umfassend wie möglich, am liebsten mit Haut und Haar, das Unverdauliche ausspucken und sofort weiter gehen zum nächsten Happen. Das gilt vor allem auch für die Simulationen der Realität wie in Second Life: "Die Leute kommen, um zu berühren, sie schauen sich alles so an, als würden sie es berühren, ihr Blick ist bloss noch ein Aspekt taktiler Manipulation." (74) Baudrillards Bemerkung von 1976 lässt sich ohne weiteres auch auf die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Virtuellen anwenden. Die Semiokratie hat das Internet längst wieder übernommen mit den Marken Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, Sony etc. CAUTION: OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR. Die Simulationsmodelle sind so angelegt, dass sie nicht etwa eine neue Welt simulieren bzw. einen neuen Möglichkeitsraum öffnen, sondern sich möglichst mit der Realität und insbesondere ihren semiologisch ökonomischen Inhalten decken. Genau das aber eröffnet die Möglichkeit, die erste Realität Stück um Stück verschwinden zu lassen und an ihre Stelle eine zweite Realität zu setzen, eine gläserne Realität, die von der Semiokratie durch und durch kontrolliert ist. Vielleicht erwacht der Einzelne irgendwann und stellt dann erschreckt fest, dass ihm die erste Realität längst entzogen worden ist.

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3RD LIFE CHURCH

AvatarLiberationFront
(129,22,50)

LATITUDE 4 AV
FETID HUMANS
BELIEVE IN ASCII
EMANCIPATE

AURA INDICATOR UNDER ERECTION

GAME FIGURE RECRUITING

2NDLIFE IS A WILLFULLY TAKEN CONSTRAINT, A BONDAGE.
AS ANY GOOD BONDAGE IT LIBERATES US FROM FREEDOM.

. WORLD 3
3RD LIFE

'PATAPLAY

IT APPEARS AS BENEVOLANT DICTATORSHIP AND UNAVOIDABLE LOVEANDHATE OBJECT OF DESIRE

SGHMAM

Aileen Derieg, writer and media theorist

sghmam has a mission. Adeptly avoiding obstacles and distractions to move quickly through the passageway to reach the door. Exit into the next. Rapidly descending eight steps, quick turn, eight more steps, then the next door. It's a heavy one this time, but sghmam gets it open and passes through without hindrance. Turn left, move straight ahead, turn right, go straight, turn right, cut across a diagonal path, the goal is in sight. Straight ahead is a small hut where the needed items are to be obtained. The path is a dangerous one, though. Large attackers suddenly swooping in from either side could easily obliterate sghmam before the acquisition of the needed items can be successfully negotiated.

How can we be out of milk and bread again? Doesn't anyone in this household ever take responsibility for simple errands? Going out to get milk and bread should really be a "somebody, somebody" job (The Cat in the Hat Comes Back, by Dr. Seuss: "Somebody, somebody has to, you see, so she picked out two somebodies..."), but picking out even one somebody is likely to involve protracted and intricate negotiations with adolescent geeks today, so the task defaults to somebody's grey-haired middle-aged mother: me.

As I side-step a basket of laundry that is still blocking the hallway, I start to wonder how laundry baskets can remain consistently invisible to everyone else in my geek household. After briefly considering how the laundry might possibly be moved to go down to the cellar and hang itself up, I decide to ignore it too and continue on my way out the door to go to the bakery. The entrance door downstairs needs oiling again, but then it is only a short walk to the little bakery kiosk at the neighborhood market. I walk briskly down the street, around two corners and cut across the parking lot. As just another somebody's grey-haired middle-aged mother, I must be completely invisible to the drivers who suddenly back up out of the parking lot without warning. Dodging cars, it occurs to me that I forgot to check whether my adolescent geeks have left me any money in my wallet. If not, I'll have to ask the woman at the bakery to put it on my tab again, but then I hope the friendly one is working today.

Having successfully negotiated the acquisition of the needed items, sghmam quickly returns to the starting point, ready to enter the next level. This time there are questions to be asked and answered, complex and intriguing and wholly beguiling.
/Join #tgtae.
--> sghmam has joined #tgtae.
--> sghmam greets the regulars, dives into the discussion, fetching feeds and checking messages on the side, searching manuals, solving problems, technical snags and all great problems of the world.

sghmam is completely absorbed by this world, filled with intense emotions that accompany the exchanges at this speed, skillfully juggling multiple tasks at the same time. Feeling wise and witty and wonderful.

This isn't just a game, it's serious stuff. Whether the "techgrrrlstalkingabouteverything" on the channel #tgtae are "really" all grrrls is just as irrelevant as the subject matter has long since become. Only the communication itself is important, the exchange among the various characters so vividly and colorfully displayed in plain ascii.
<dancingqueen>, for instance, might well be a shy grey office worker in another world, but in this world <dancingqueen> always has something fascinating to say and an appreciative audience. Here the invisible laundry baskets that plague somebody's grey-haired middle-aged mother are transformed into an enthralling challenge that <sghmam> undoubtedly has the skills and power to master.

/me is feeling a bit irritated after too many interruptions all day.
--> sghmam is feeling a bit irritated after too many interruptions all day.
--> dancingqueen sympathizes and offers sghmam a glass of champagne to relax.
/me smiles and accepts gracefully.
--> sghmam smiles and accepts gracefully.
There are brief moments where different realities intersect, such as when a cup of tea is needed to physically play the role of the glass of champagne.
brb
/away
--> sghmam will be back in 5 minutes.

Making tea unfortunately involves maneuvering through the disaster area that is supposed to be our kitchen. Kitchen duty has obviously not been assigned today, and volunteers do not appear to be forthcoming. By most standards, my household is a disgrace, but the number of adolescents generally gathered here seems to indicate that it is indeed possible to live well and happily amidst the chaos. I hope so. The transformation possibilities that arise from living simultaneously in different realities seem to help, I think. They certainly help me. Waiting for the water to boil I look around at all the things in need of being tidied and put in order, and I wonder what I'm doing here. How did I end up being concerned with dishes and laundry and bills to pay and errands to run? Is this really supposed to be my life? I don't think so. My real life is not here among the dirty dishes.

On the screen a whole world opens up, vast and enticing.

Enter.

SURF_IN ON THE WiiNING ATTITUDE

Dr. Jo Maier, design-theorist, irganic.com

THE SKY ABOVE THE PORT IS THE colour of a flat-screen, tuned into a Wii channel. Opaque whiteness prevails while iColored environments smooth out into almost grotesque reproductions of Miami Vice décors. Current gaming devices are on par with a global society's demands --- both are fostering transparency, personal accountability, unlimited connectedness and Wiillingness to fit into the game.

If only the PS3 would have gained some momentum, at least simulated sweat and dirt could have had an entry, back onto the graphic displays of our life. But apparently, a piano-white, gold, silver, pink, or black finishing is not enough to make its way into our living rooms. Because the displayed surface of a Wiinning channel is glossier even in its monochrome variety. The INFINITELY OPAQUE WHITE-SPACE out of George Lukas' (1971) yesterday's sci-fi-nightmare THX 1138 has become Wii-channel's inspiration. Out of Master Lukas' dystopian debris, a glossy polar star has risen, for to illuminate game play's horizon. From here to eternity, all we have left is a Second Life. But we all know that getting another life in Second Life is cheap, no thrills excluded.

Running the annual marathon is no longer good enough as proof that you can do it --- it takes DS brain jogging and regular Wii fitness tests as well. What a relief, to finally match my real age through Wii's biofeedback routines. Reassuring to learn that I am doing well enough, game-wise, too. In_built target monitoring is one of the increasingly rare un-equivocal feedback systems. THE CONSOLE'S USER-CEN-TRIC COMMUNICATION BEAUTIFULLY FACILITA-TES OUR GAMING PROCESS AND PROG-RESS. And Wii are getting used to get better every time in a straightforward way to an extent that our human resource departments could only dream of.

Wii all know, that Wii Sports is in desperate need of an on-line mode, or the option to trade in the digital currency of your choice for mightier opponents. These so-called 'PROs' in the tennis game are just no match any longer. But in its early days, the Wii taught us a powerful primary heuristics: behave as though what-ever Wii are doing was natural. For example, to Wiin_ in Tennis, mimicking old-school tennis playing marks a good beginning. Then you eventually find out that your game play is becoming more successful, THE MORE YOU EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT WAYS OF DOING IT YOUR OWN WAY. In my case, sitting to play and just moving my arms worked infinitely better than running around the living room like John McEnroe. The key is to learn how to twist and bend the free space in between the cybernetic loops that are incessantly re-creating (y)our play-ground. Far more effective than The Matrix, Wii taught us to adapt and bend our behaviour for a better performance --- because only Wiinning counts.

In your office or in front of any other flat-screen of your choice --- in fact succeeding in either world works out pretty much the same.

Caution: OBJECTS ON YOUR FLAT SCREEN MAY BE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR. Wii are getting used to re-creating whatever & whoever we were into a series of Miis. These Mii-channel success charac-ters help to realise coming quests and victories. And Miis cater to this with the freedom to face every new quest with a different persona. Thus they prepare us for one of the key lessons to master the high and low tides throughout the currently liquid global society: private and professional relationships and therapy alike, begin with the creation of Miis --- interchange-able characters and hedge funds against personal disorders. New game, new Wii, new hope. Profession-al employers internalized this mantra some time ago and willingly supply adequate support and develop-ment processes, facilitating self-mobilising practices for the chosen ones who are already apt to surf_in on the Wiinning attitude.

Aesthetically, the look and feel of Wii channels is like the coming corporate design of any other global player. I bet Siemens wished they could re-do their website in Wii-style, and Credit Suisses' next cheerful upbeat art-of-banking-imaginary will come swooping in as a Nintendo look-alike. Today it seems like a safe bet to argue that THE HIPPIES DID TO THE LATE 70S, WHAT WII ARE DOING FOR THE 21ST CEN-TURY. They were anti-authoritarian, open-minded, drug-friendly and out to change the world. And all that survived was the Internet. Wii are globally connected, apt to create and fit into any suitable character, used to monitoring our performance. Wiilling to stay_in and adapt the game by means of display_in our best practices as walk-throughs on Youtube. And just as the hippy culture spectacularly failed to live up to their programme, Wii will fail to live up to our potential as well, unless the providers of our very material exist-ence, large and medium-sized corporations, make use of this Wiinning attitudes' peculiar sensitivity. Wii will supply all they ever dreamt of --- if only they will deliver adequate supplies of the right console.

Narrator: Parallel-universe-wise, as Wii channel's antecedents, we have had Daniel Paul Schreber, The Matrix, Jacob's Ladder, Jean Baudrillard, The Butterfly Effect and Brazil --- Interviewer: Deputy minister, what do you believe is behind this recent increase in terrorist bombings? Helpmann: Bad sportsmanship. A ruthless minority of people seems to have forgotten certain good old-fashioned virtues. THEY JUST CAN'T STAND SEEING THE OTHER FELLOW WiiN. If these people would just play the game, instead of standing on the sidelines heckling --- Interviewer: In fact, killing people --- Helpmann: --- In fact, killing people --- they'd get a lot more out of life.

Von PCG zu CMG und das Abfallprodukt 2ndLife

P.M.Ong, Culture & Management Consultant

"Ein Medium wird erst dann von einer breiten Masse akzeptiert, wenn die einzelnen Personen lebende Menschen hinter dem Medium sehen."
(Aus einem zürcher Open-Space-Gespräch)

Dies ist eine Beobachtung zum Thema Internet und Medien, beschreibt aber auch einen Transformationsprozess, der in der Spiel(e)kultur vonstatten geht. Das Medium Spiel wird für eine "breite" Masse attraktiv.
Personal-Computer/Video-Gaming(PCG)
In den 70er/80er Jahren wurde vor allem gegen den Computer gespielt und aus Pong wurde Breakout, aus Spacewar wurde Asteroids und so weiter. Die Erfindung lag dabei im Moment, einen Prozess zwischen zwei Personen in ein Spiel gegen den Computer zu verwandeln. Man erfand die Levels, die verschiedenen Enemies und KIs oder auf einen Nenner gebracht: PacMan. Aus dem gemeinschaftlich beworbenen Spielen einer Familie wurde das noch persönlichere Personal-Gaming. In dieser Art des Spielens war der Mensch nur als Abstraktum in der Maschine fassbar, nicht sichtbar höchstens als Programmierer und Designer entfernt fass- und wahrnehmbar. Das Gegenüber war ein PC oder eine Konsole, die agierte und reagierte. Der Spieler im (PCG) Personal-Computer-Gaming spielt in eine Kiste, seine private Kiste (im Gegensatz zum Grossrechner mit seinen MUDS etc). Der Rechner war ein Arbeitsgerät, ein Speichermedium in einer technikfeindlichen Zeit.

Vom Personal Gaming (PCG)
zum Computer Mediated Gaming (CMG)
Das Medium wurde dann vermehrt akzeptiert - wie die These oben vermutet - als man eine neue Perspektive einführte mit Myst oder Doom, wo der Spieler zumindest vermuten konnte, dass sich hinter der Perspektive ein Mensch zu verstecken schien, bzw. alles sich so verhielt, wie wenn es ein Mensch wäre. Die 3dimensionale Zentralperspektive war ein Akzeptanzsprung (Wie schon in RealGamer beschrieben) und gleichzeitig der Start für den Wettlauf um den "Hyper-Realismus". Der Realismusdrang wurde beim Wii nun auch noch auf den Controller übertragen. "Zeit für Innovationen beim Start einer Konsole" kann man da den MS-Schneidern dieser Welt nur zu rufen. Die Fraktion der bürgerlichen Spieler wird es freuen: Denn endlich kann man wie - beim EyeToy - beim Sport abnehmen und erlernt sogar noch taktile Skills. Damit macht Nintendo einen weiteren Schritt in Richtung Community-Gaming. Es ist Zeit das Spiel wieder auf den Körper auszudehnen, dem kopflastigen Homo Ludens einen Körper zu geben, eine Bewegung. Man darf gespannt sein, wie die Gameindustrie langfristig mit körperlich Behinderten umgehen wird.

Computer-Mediated-Gaming(CMG)
Der massivste Akzeptanzschub ist aber die Vernetzung. Der Computer wird dabei zunehmend zu einem Medium wie Text (Brief, Zeitung) oder Ton beim Telefon oder Bild beim Fernsehenn degradiert. Das Medium Spiel bietet lediglich noch den Spielrahmen (sei es bei Quake, Unreal Tournament, WoW), es setzt die Regeln und überwacht sie, ist ein kompliziert einfaches i (interaktives) Zeichen wie Unreal Tournament oder Doom - „das Spiel ist die Bank" wie man in Monopoly sagen würde, der clevere Verwalter. Es ist der Moment, wo Personen im Multiplayer anfangen die NPC und KIs auszuschalten und nur noch gegen sich selber zu spielen. Die Menschen beginnen unter sich zu spielen, maximal noch Quests entgegenzunehmen (wie in WoW), aber prinzipiell geht es darum, das Spiel miteinander als Gruppenerlebnis zu spielen. Für den Einzelnen erscheint dabei die Welt fairer, berechenbarer und akzeptierbarer. Hinter den anderen interaktiven Zeichen stehen nun Menschen. Das Medium "Computerspiel" wird zu einem Vermittlermedium, wie in den anderen klassischen Medien, derer man sich bedient und dabei vergessen die Menschen das Medium - frei nach dem Motto: The medium is the message.

Zunehmend beginnen Personengruppen zu spielen (an die 10+ Mio), die sonst nicht gegen die anonyme Maschine spielen würden. Es ist der Chat-Moment, dass das Handeln ein Ziel in der Gemeinschaft haben kann (einen Partner, den man kennenlernt oder menschliche Netzwerkpflege oder man will eben Teil einer Gemeinschaft sein). Diese Ziele sind allgemein akzeptiert und werden meist nicht in Frage gestellt. Die Spielerzahl beginnt dadurch eine Dimension zu erreichen, wo es nicht mehr um den eigentlichen Inhalt geht, sondern um den Gruppen Effekt, frei nach Luhmann, dass man Zeitungen meist nicht lese, um zu wissen, was passiert ist, sondern um am nächsten Tag in der Community etwas besprechen zu können.

Eine Differenz:
Wow vs Second Life - gewollte Anbindung
Genau dieser Effekt spielt nun hinein, wenn so etwas wie Second Life die Szene betritt und nun mit Schub von WoW oder EveryQuest popularisiert werden kann. Hier gibt es keine NPC (NonPlayerCharacter), hier gibt es nichts mehr das stören könnte, keine im Spiel auferlegten Quests. Kann man WoW noch vorwerfen ein bürgerliches Spiel zu sein, so ist nun Second Life die logische Konsequenz eines Bürgertums und die Reinigung von WorldOfWarcraft (WoW versucht das Handeln von Waffen etc. zu unterbinden). Bei Second Life wird nicht mal mehr versucht eine spielerische Tabula Rasa aufzubauen. Grundkonzept ist es, eine feststehende Verbindung zur Realwelt zu halten, über einen Linden-Dollar-Wechselkurs. Die Akzeptanz von Second Life wird gesteigert indem das Bürgerliche totalisiert wird, es geht ums Geld verdienen, um eine kleinen Ausweg

aus der Welt und doch die Hoffnung drin zu bleiben. Der Kapitalismus spiegelt sich total im Produkt Second Life. Jeder einzelne arbeitet darin und produziert Inhalt und bezahlt am Ende des Monates auch noch Gebühren dafür drin zu bleiben, als ein weiteres Machtelement der Gesellschaft:

"Es ist eure kleine Droge, geht da raus und lernt, was es zu lernen gibt: Die Realwelt."

Hier kann auch der letzte Rezipient dahinter Menschen und menschliche Gesetzte erkennen, das Medium kann total akzeptiert werden und erscheint für die Masse noch als Spiel.

War Snow Crash 1994 noch ein Witz, weil es nicht annähernd an Neuromancer heran kam (der das digitale Medium ernst nahm), so zeigt sich heute, dass es eine lausige Utopie des Massengeschmacks war, eine Vorstellung des Vorstellbaren der breiten Masse und 2ndLife ist seine Entsprechung.

Als sich Neo in die Lüfte erhob am Ende von Matrix, dachten viele: "Wie kann der Fliegen, wenn er so eine gute Engine hat." Heute wissen wir, Neo ist die Verkörperung des durchschnittlichen Denkens dieser Gesellschaft, eine Welt ohne Vorstellungskraft und die Funktion „fliegen" seit fünf Jahren ein Knopf am unteren Ende des Bildschirm von Second Life.

Essen wir die bittere Pille. "The desert of the real" ist nichts weiter als die Vorstellung der Menschen selbst.

heterotopologies and trialectics of space, knowledge, and power. Michel Foucault

HANDSOME DEVIL

Doris C. Rusch, game scholar

"So, you're probably asking yourself how a handsome devil like me ended up in a place like this with you?"

As part of my research project about "involvement and meaning-making mechanisms of dramatic computer games", I'm sketching out a game to illustrate my concept of the dynamic generation of meaning. And inevitably, one question occurred right at the beginning: Should it be a first person or a third person game? I caught myself answering this question intuitively. Third person, I decided, since I don't like first person games. But is it really the perspective that bothers me or the games that use it? That got me thinking about the relationship between the implied player and his or her avatar. After discussing this with students and colleagues, especially Nikolaus König, I would like to offer here a personal and deliberately female view on the question of placeholder design in computer games.

After thinking about third and first person games for a while and the different ways they influence the playing experience, I noticed that the two terms had become synonymous in my mind for two distinct strategies of placeholder design. Every embodiment of the player on screen consists of two components: a role that is more or less clearly defined by the game and the way this role is interpreted and played by the player. The strategy I associate with first person games (but which is sometimes also employed in third person games) is to minimize the gap between the player and the role she takes on screen. The strategy I associate with third person games is to offer the player a clearly defined identification possibility, including a visible avatar with a personal history and strong personality traits. Sure, more and more games allow the player to choose between third or first person perspective, but that does not really change the strategies these games employ to draw the player into the world.

The "first person strategy" (fps) tries to lure the player into the world by blurring the boundaries between reality and virtuality. Much emphasis is put on agency, on the illusion of reaching through a portal (rather than sitting in front of a computer screen) and manipulating the game world with your virtual arms. The less you are distracted from this process of becoming part of the game, the better – or so goes the argument for fps. For this reason only parts of the body are visible (except for cut-scenes and when passing mirrors etc.), and sometimes you are told that you have lost your memory, making it plausible that at first the player is disoriented and a little lost. The effect should be (almost) total immersion.
But the chance to transform into a game character can quite easily become an insurmountable challenge. Whether or not it is met strongly depends on the player's affinity to the role the game offers and the things this role allows the player to do. For me, this makes the fps used by current games quite unattractive, because I find it hard to adopt the roles these games currently offer. I have no affinity to shooting a gun just for shooting's sake. Give me a story, a strong character to identify with, and maybe it will make sense to me. Also, the roles suggested by fps games are mostly male, the hands you see belong to a man. Yes, I can role-play a man. No problem. I have done it many times before. But I cannot cope with too much freedom. I need the constraints of a story and a clearly defined role to give in to the illusion of being someone else. I need some input to get my imagination going, to know who I am and how I am supposed to feel.

Fps does not care how the character feels, because it tries to create the illusion that there is no difference between character and player. "This is you", it suggests, "now, imagine how you would feel!" And this is where it becomes most problematic, because of the translation processes taking place when playing video games. One aspect of this translation process is that player input, be it a mouse-click or joystick manipulation, is translated into on-screen action (like shooting, running, pushing, climbing). That is ok, because it is easy to make the mental connection between one action (click) and its on-screen response (boom). But the translation process also works on an emotional level. Games are all about experience and emotions. Now fps – aiming at a minimal gap between player and role – raises the expectation of making the (assumed) emotions of in-game character and player match. This is impossible, however, regardless of which strategy you use. It is not a matter of intensity either, but of principle. The assumed emotions experienced by the character who is falling into the abyss are, by their very nature, different from the emotions the player responsible for missing the ledge will feel in the moment of disaster. Instead of intense fear, she will probably feel frustration or anger.
Now, as I said before, fps emphasizes agency, and games relying on the pleasures of agency do not need an avatar at all. But for the game-play to completely take over and push the fiction into the background along with questions like "who am I, why am I here and what does it all mean?", the fictional worlds of these games are too vivid, too concrete. I feel alienated by a World War II setting, and I find it hard to play the role of an undefined soldier, because it is so far away from who I am in real life.
For the translation process to work I need an interpreter, and in tps games I get one. Strong characters like Ash, the chainsaw-swinging supermarket attendant from the "Evil Dead Series" serve this function. You do not see through them, the way Espen Aarseth suggested once: "(t)he dimensions of Lara Croft's body (...) are irrelevant to me as a player,

because a different looking body would not make me play differently.(…). When I play, I don't even see her body, but see through it and past it." (Aarseth 2004, p.48). Playing the "S-Mart-Ass" Ash certainly makes you play differently. Running for shelter screaming or ducking cowardly behind corners just wouldn't do. Auto-talk utterances like the one used as the title here give you a pretty good idea of the kind of guy you are playing, thus altering the whole experience of an otherwise quite conventional game. A cheesy one-liner like: "When you've just emptied two barrels of a shotgun into the face of your favorite bartender, you can pretty much bet that happy hour's over..." certainly shapes your perspective. By helping me understand who I am in the game, tps helps me to establish a stronger connection between the way the game-play makes me feel and the way I am supposed to feel as the character I am playing.

Of course, role playing games (and somehow I am strongly inclined to include games like "Hitman" and "Max Payne" here) take this a step further, setting an identification process in motion that becomes even stronger during play instead of wearing off. I play a high-elf ranger in Everquest 2, named Theaora. The class description – ranger – is a description of person-ality traits as well as a hint of the kind of abilities one will have when playing this class. Subtlety and cunning translate into long-range and stealth attacks and attacks mounted when behind the target. Using the ranger-specific attacks in the right order during combat is awarded with much better results than ignoring them. By playing by the rules of the ranger class, little by little you become the subtle and cunning bastard the designers have intended the ranger to be. You go nowhere without using stealth, sneaking up behind an enemy becomes second nature. (Looking at your character certainly is another important aspect of role-playing.)

Personally, I will probably always prefer third person strategy to first person strategy, because it allows me to explore not only a world, but also a character. As far as my game sketch is concerned, I'm still not sure. The relationships between player types, their avatars and preferred perspectives have to be explored more thoroughly before we really understand what works how, for whom and under which circumstances.

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Five Assumptions for Real Play

Daphne Dragona, game arts curator

"Play is a free activity, standing outside ordinary life, as being not serious but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is connected with no material interest and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means."

Master Huizinga may have been right in terms of play theory, but if we try to apply this definition to today's virtual online gaming worlds, we might indeed need some adjustments. Online gaming worlds are becoming ordinary life. Connected to material interests they even generate their own economies. Time and space seem limitless. Users are absorbed more and more by their avatars' identities, by their 'second life', by their new characteristics and behavioural patterns. Immersive game environments are fascinating and promising and maybe seem closer to reality than ever. Pas mal!
But, what about real play?
Real players? Where are they today?

1st assumption
Back to the streets, to the banlieues of Paris and anywhere in the world. "The suburbs in France and elsewhere are not built for living but for playing, either with cars or bikes or with your own body as a game character." The building jumpers are players of today's lives. Props can be added to them as it happens in the MMORPGs. Their play level can be indicated by a game status bar. A real life clip is then made, massively re-pixelated where play can regain its philosophical notion, as it is preserved for all the real players found in real cities today.
[the Ludic Society: ready played, video installation]

2nd assumption
In our own 'real identities': Big white letter signs can be created with your name, in a size appropriate to your body type. Like in WoW or SL, you are then able to move inside a city with your name on top of your head. Others can address you and talk to you using your name. Anything is possible, as it is in online worlds. From the artists statement: You will only need another person, a friend to kindly carry the sign for you so that you can move freely.
[Aram Bartholl: WoW, performance]

3rd assumption
To the margins, to exception zones where real people live and real video games are designed. In Madrid, a group of young Moroccans created a video game about their lives with the assistance of the collective Fiambrera. But play is for real, and it is given as a tool to people to recover control over their own lives and environments. [Fiambrera: Bordergames, real life workshop & videogame]

4th assumption
To geopolitical ex-war zones, where people form collaboration networks. Artists, art critics, writers, curators from Southeastern Europe contributed projects, experiences and beliefs for the creation of The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game. Focusing on the social and cultural issues of the Balkan Peninsula, the video game created, counteracted the sensational spectacle of war as this was presented by the media, deconstructed stereotypes, focused on the distortion of identities, and revised the dominant logic of explanation. With avatars inspired by classical Balkan characters representing local prejudices and beliefs, users were taken on a journey to test their balkanisation. [Personal Cinema: The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game, online 3D multi-user video game]

5th assumption
To the military virtual training where intervention reverses the rules. In a game that thousands of young Americans log in to and play, Joseph Delappe gets in and with his login name 'dead-in-iraq' types names, names of real soldiers that died in Iraq. His intervention has been considered as spam and anti-national and has annoyed users. But at the same time, it has been a political anti-war action in a propaganda game, where play takes the form of a performance and reminds users of reality and of the real players in the war outside. [Joseph Delappe, Dead-in-iraq, on line gaming intervention]

All assumptions stand. Life and play, play and life have always merged and will continue to affect one another. Virtual worlds will continue to expand, to gain users, to offer exciting experiences. And at the same time, artists following their famous predecessors of the 20's and 60's, the Dadaists and the Surrealists, the Situationists and Fluxus, can see beyond the dominant media structures and use play as a means of reversing the rules and present alternative ways of playing and perceiving. Stereotypes are challenged, hierarchies are hacked and rules are broken. The inspiration, however, is always out in the streets.

"Everyday life is not everything – although its osmosis with specialized activities is such that in a sense we are never outside of everyday life. But to use a facile spatial image, we still have to place everyday life at the center of everything. Every project begins from it and every realization returns to it to acquire its real significance. Everyday life is the measure of all things: of the fulfilment or rather the non-fulfilment of human relations; the use of lived time; of artistic experimentation; of revolutionary politics." Guy Debord

Odyssey (120,48,26)

Poorhouse (170,161,57)

LUDIC-SOCIETY

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The Ludic Society, as an international association of currently 45 members, provokes a novel discipline around the conceptual disjunction of game and play.

The live online event of the LS magazine #4 release takes place at Odyssey, a widely known arts and game repository in Second Life, hosted by code performers and designers.
The experiment is supported by the Second Life research group of IAD/Gamedesign, HGKZ University of Arts and Design Zurich.

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