

HELLO KITTY

40,000



IN THE GRIM FUTURE OF HELLO KITTY THERE IS ONLY WAR



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
DIPARTIMENTO DI INFORMATICA

OGD Lesson 10.0: Online games & their players



Laura Anna Ripamonti – ay 2021-22

L10.0. Summary

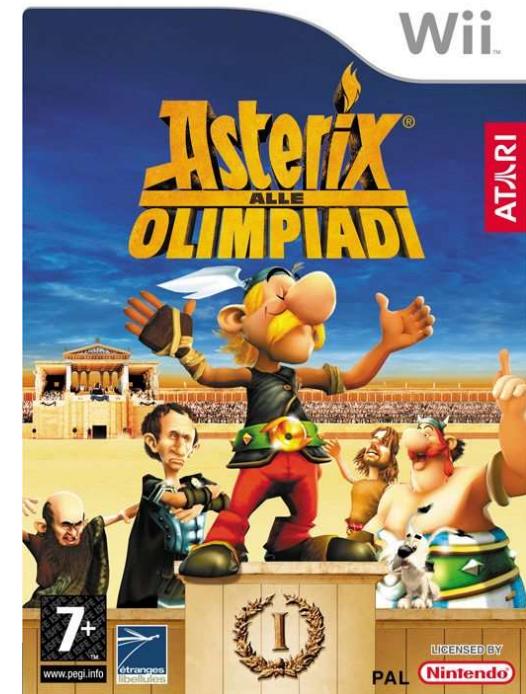
- Why we play games with others?
- Communities of gamers
- Features of online games
- Persistent worlds peculiarities
 - Implication for design
- References:
 - Chapter 3 of “Designing Virtual Worlds” by R.A. Bartle
 - Chapter 21 of “Fundamentals of Game Design” by E. Adams
 - Chapter 23, 24 «The art of Game Design» by J. Schell
- Suggested readings:
 - C. Pearce, Artemesia (2009) *Communities of Play*
 - T.L. Taylor (2006) *Play Between Worlds*



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Some games are played with other players ...

Why we play games with others?



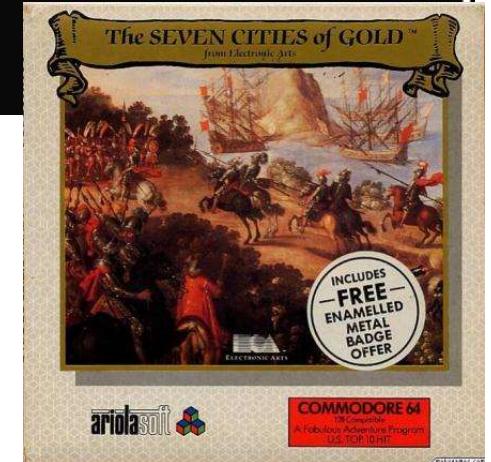
Man is a social animal ...



No one ever said on their deathbed, 'Gee, I wish I had spent more time alone with my computer'.

(Danielle Berry)

- Humans **avoid being alone whenever possible**
 - The history of games reflect this
- Single-player video games is a **temporary abnormality** due to:
 - Novelty
 - Technical limits



Man is a social animal ...

- In fact, each year **more and more video games have a multiplayer or community-component** of some kind:
 - Explosion FB games,
 - Diffusion of asynchronous social mobile games
 - Blossoming of MMOs/MOBAs/...
 - Etc.



Ok, but ... as GDs we need to **understand**
why we play with others

Why we play with others?

1. Competition
2. Collaboration
3. Meeting up
4. Exploring our friends
5. Exploring ourselves



Why we play with others: 1. COMPETITION

- Competition in a multiplayer allows in 1 shot:
 1. Balanced game
 2. Worthy opponent(s)
 3. Interesting problems to solve
 4. Compare our skill level
 5. Complex strategy, choices, psychology (opponent is intelligent)



Why we play with others: 2. COLLABORATION

- Collaborative games are enjoyable ‘cause:
 1. Allows us to **partake** in game actions or strategies impossible with only 1 player
 2. Lets us **enjoy group problem solving**
 3. Let us be part of a **successfull dream**



Why we play with others: 3. MEETING UP, 4. EXPLORING FRIENDS & 5. EXPLORING OURSELVES

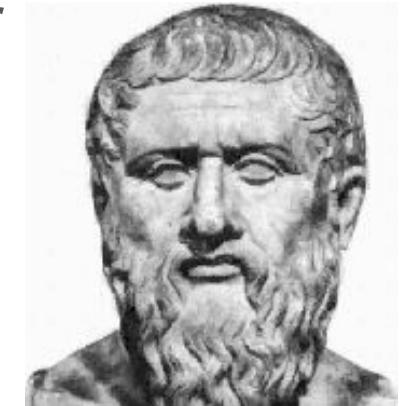
3. Meeting up

- Gives us a **reason** to be together



4. Exploring our friends

- «*U can learn more about a man in an hour of play than a year of conversation*»
(Plato)



5. Exploring ourselves

- Test **our abilities** and how we behave in a complex social situation



DO NOT forget spectators !!!

- It's very important to think about how you design for SPECTATORS:
 - Friends in the **same venue**
 - People watching gameplay **remotely or in videos**



95 

The Lens of Spectation



Illustration by Josh Hendryx



For thousands of years, man has loved to sit and watch others play games - but only if the games are worth watching. To make sure your game is spectator worthy, ask yourself these questions:

- Is my game interesting to watch? Why or why not?
- How can I make it more interesting to watch?

There are also spectators of gamers on YouTube



More than just «other players» ...
Communities of gamers



Communities rise around games ...

- Of **fan**
 - Professional sports
- Of **players**
 - WoW, LoL,
Pokemon Go, ...
- Of **designers**
 - Minecraft, Little Big Planet,
Second Life, ...



What's a «community»?

- Primary elements of the «**sense of community**»
 1. **Membership**: something distinct makes it clear u are part of this group
 2. **Influence**: being part of the group gives you power over something
 3. **Integration and fulfillment of needs**: being part of the group «does something» for you
 4. **Shared emotional connection**



«A group of people with a **shared interest, purpose, or goal** who **get to know each other better** over time»

- Amy Jo Kim

Why having a community?

- As a GD you'd want a community around your game for these reasons (at least):

1. Being part of a community **fills a social need**
2. Longer period of «**contagion**»
3. **More hours of play**



- A game with a community **will get played for a longer time**, no matter how bad it could be ...
- This is important if your **revenues** derive from subscription renewals, selling sequels, microtransactions, etc.

Tips for creating strong communities

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Tips for creating strong communities in games

1. Foster **friendship**
2. Put **conflict** at the heart
3. Use **architecture** to shape your community
4. Create **community property**
5. Let player **express themselves**
6. Support **three levels** (of players)
7. Force players to **depend on each other**
8. **Manage** your community
9. **Obligation** to others is powerful
10. Create community **events**



Tip1: foster friendship



People love to play games with friends. To make sure your game has the right qualities to let people make and keep friendships, ask yourself these questions:

- *What kind of friendships are my players looking for?*
- *How do my players break the ice?*
- *Do my players have enough chance to talk to each other? Do they have enough to talk about?*
- *When is the moment they become friends?*
- *What tools do I give the players to maintain their friendships?*

Tip1: foster friendship

A meaningful online relationship requires:

1. The **ability to talk**

- Players must be able to talk to each other freely

2. **Someone worth talking to** (not all your players will want to talk to each other):

- **Demographics** (adults -> new friends, teens -> opposite sex, kids -> friends in real life)
- **Socialization type** (Competitors? Collaborators? Assistants? Quick chat or long term relationships? Etc.)

3. **Something worth** talking about

- Good online games should have a good balance between community and game



Tip1: foster friendship

What about making new friends?

1. Breaking the ice

- First of all people must meet
(with low social pressure)



2. Becoming friends

- Create friend-making rituals (e.g. friend lists)

3. Staying friends

- People must be able to find each other again
(friend lists, guilds, etc.)

Tip1: foster friendship - example - Pokémon Go

The image consists of four screenshots from the Pokémon Go mobile application, each highlighting a different feature for fostering friendship:

- Adding new friends:** Shows the "Add Friend" screen where users can enter a Trainer Code or scan a QR code to add new friends.
- Friends list:** Shows the main Friends list screen with 25 friends, including recent activity notifications like "BackStabber909 caught Darkrai!" and "copperbottom82 sent you a Gift!".
- Exchanging gifts:** Shows a gift exchange interface where a friend named "Katutaidetta satamassa" has sent a gift, which can be opened.
- Friend's profile:** Shows a detailed profile for a friend named "copperbottom82" from Australia, featuring a photo, a "Lucky Friend" status, and a message indicating the next trade will be lucky.

BUT

Tip2: put conflict at the heart

- Conflict **is at the very heart of community building**
 - Sport teams, parent associations, etc.
- Conflict exploitable in games:
 - **Against other players** (Magic, WoW, Minecraft, etc.)
 - **Against the game** (Left4dead, WoW, etc.)

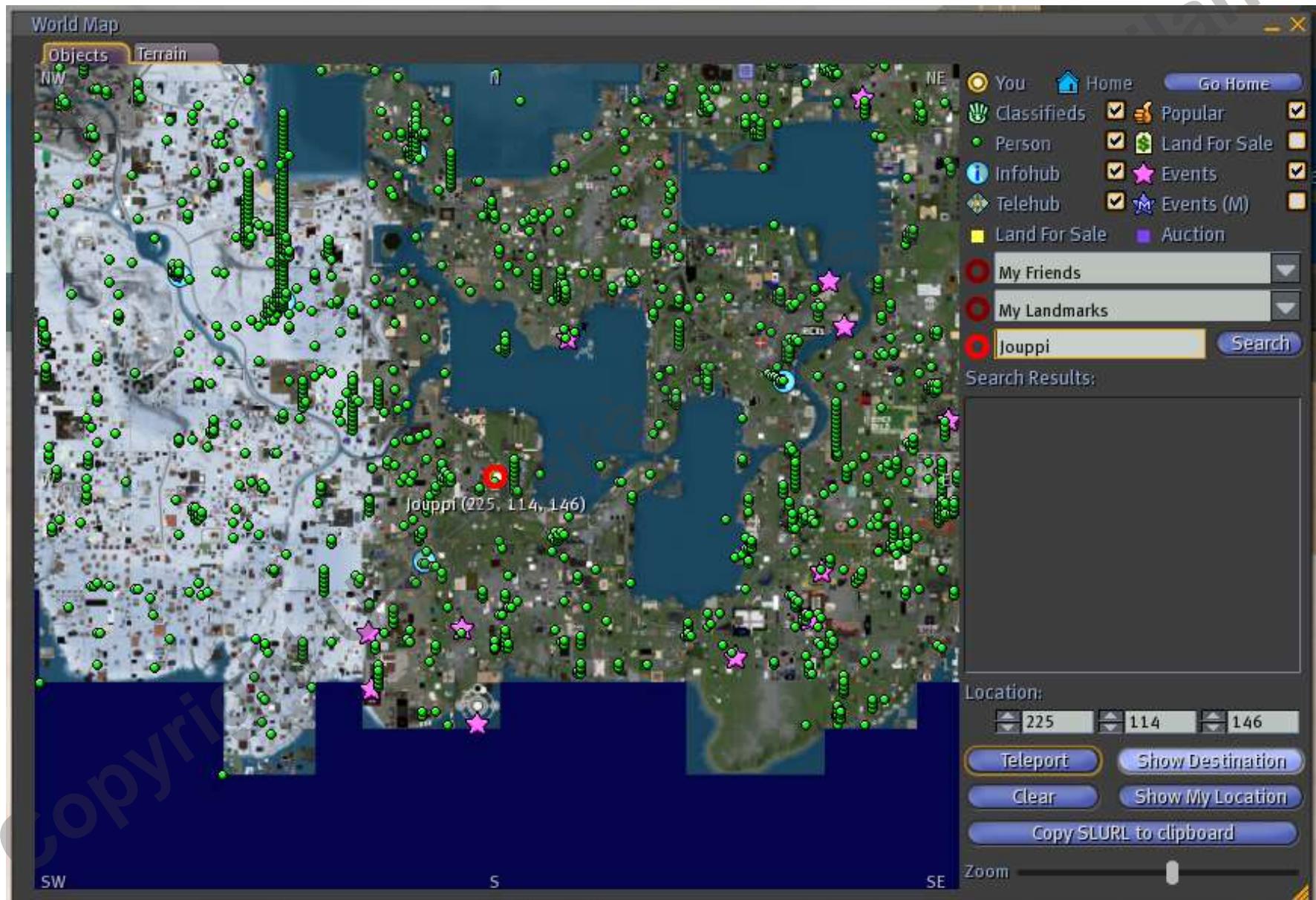


Tip3: use architecture to shape your community

- Not only buddy list & c, but also **places** intended to make people meet, congregate and chat (exploit **social gravity**)



Tip3: use architecture - Supporting social gravity





The image displays three screenshots from the mobile game Pokémon GO:

- Left Screenshot:** Shows a player profile for "Alakazam" with a CP of 22646. The background features a large Alakazam.
- Middle Screenshot:** Shows the lobby screen where the player is "Finding other players." It lists three friends: "Aushzie Level 32", "Jckubas Level 31", and "Protectyaaaneck Level 37". Below this, a grid shows various Pokémons with their CP values: Gengar (CP 2009), Snorlax (CP 2429), Dragonite (CP 2607); Vaporeon (CP 2522), Sporlax (CP 2471), Alakazam (CP 2433).
- Right Screenshot:** Shows a battle screen for a "PRIVATE GROUP". It features a large Alakazam with a CP of 22646. The screen includes buttons for "BATTLE" and "PRIVATE GROUP".

Tip4: create community property

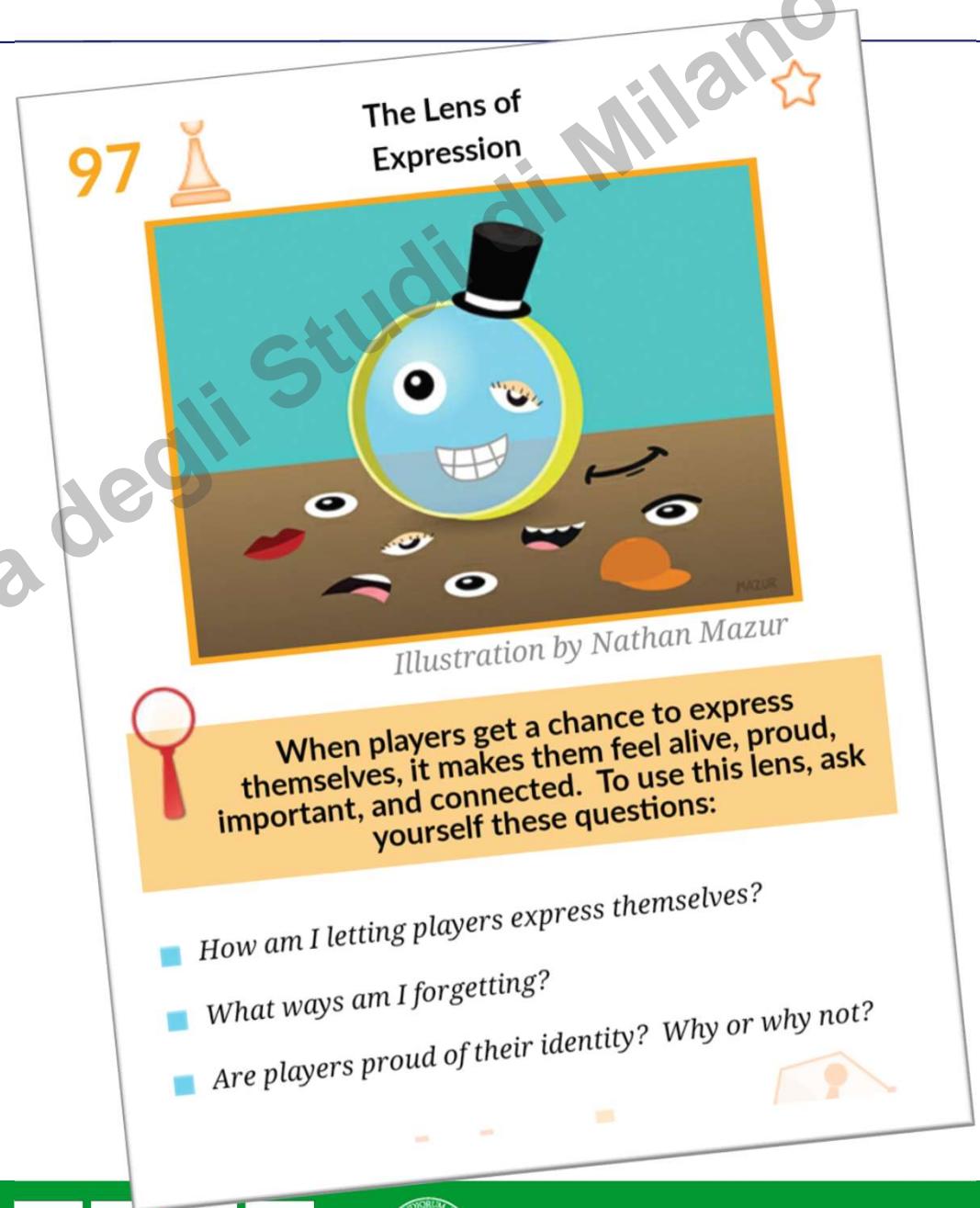
- If people has **to band together to own an in-game property** ...
you automatically have communities
(success of Eve Online)
- PS the property can also be «**intangible**» (e.g.
guild's reputation)



Tip5: let player express themselves

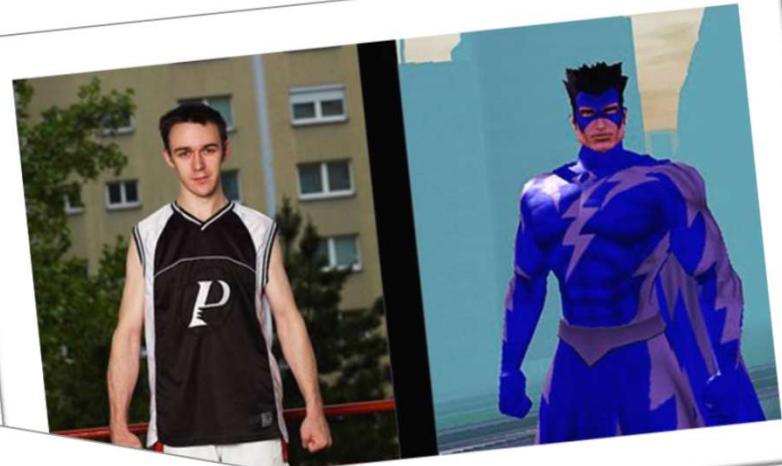
Self-expression is extremely important, but easily overlooked:

- Rich avatar personalization
- Emoticons
- Vanity items
- Etc.
- PS see pawns in Monopoly









Tip6: support three levels (of players)

- When u design an online game, **u have to design AT THE MINIMUM three different games**, for these different classes of players:
- Level 1: newbies
- Level 2: players
- Level 3: elders



Tip6: 3 levels - the importance of the newbies flow

- ALL MMOs/VWs/massive games need a regular flow of newbies to survive:

Average inflow > average outflow

- Collect newbies through:

- Viral mktg (FoFs) & Marketing
 - Newbies hose

- **CHURN:** rate of leaving (e.g.% of user base leaving in 1 month)

- Must be compared to new subscriptions in the same period



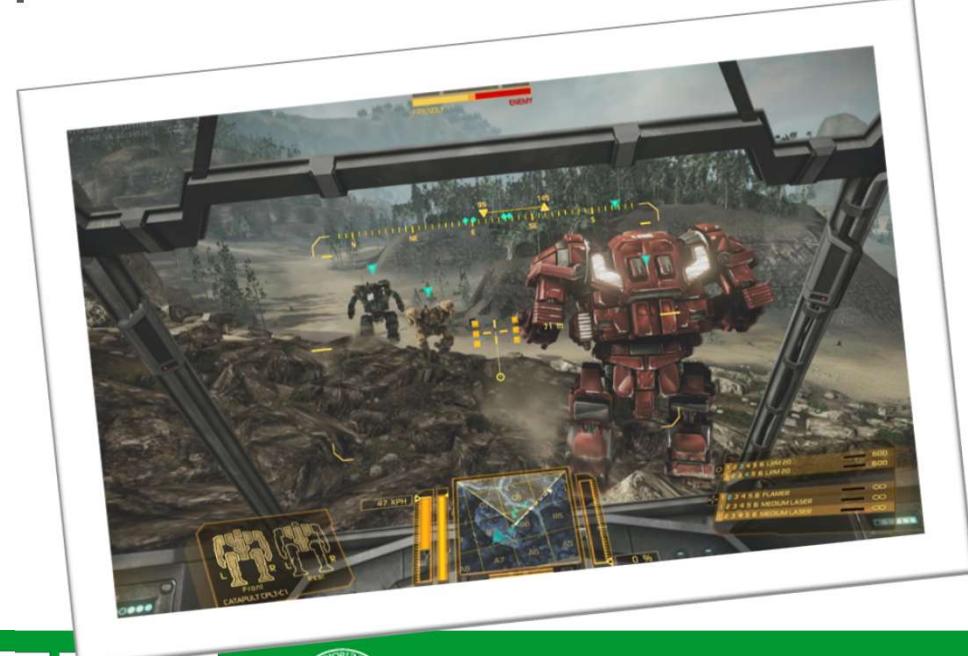
YOUR GAME

- **For the designer: newbie-friendliness should always come before oldbie-friendliness**
 - But newbies and oldbies have antithetic interests...!



Tip6: support three levels (of players): NEWBIES

- Risk to be overwhelmed
- Challenge: **learn how to play the game**
 - Design a rewarding learning process or u'll lose them
 - Create **situations to interact meaningfully with experienced players** (ex. Battletech online)



Tip6: support three levels (of players): PLAYERS

- Its **the main target of the design** of the game
- It's committed to figure out how to master the game



Tip6: support three levels (of players): ELDERS

- At a certain point the game in itself is no longer interesting ... but **elders are important:**
 - Advertisers of your game
 - Experts able to help you to improve it
- to avoid them leaving -> give them a totally different game:
 - **More difficult game**
 - **Governance privileges**
 - **Joy of creation**
 - **Guild management**
 - **A chance to teach** (Entropia Universe, SL -> special status)



Tip7: force players to depend on each other

- Conflict alone do not create community: you must need **to get aid from other players** to resolve the conflict
- Typical approach: **take something away from the players:**
 - Spaceteam (each member has a partial information)
 - Toontown online (you can heal only other players)
 - Etc.



Tip8: manage your community

- Games can be updated based on players' feedback on an ongoing basis:
players EXPECT IT!
- Better hiring a **community manager** to help you ...



Tip9: obligation to others is powerful

- Create situations in which players can **make promises** to or **owe favours** to each other
 - Player want to **avoid low «status»**
- Players of WoW get online regularly for loyalty to their guild
- Gifting is responsible for a huge part of the massive spread of FB games



Candy
Crush

FARMVILLE™
zynga®

Tip10: create community events

- (real) communities are **anchored by events**, ‘cause they:
 - Give players **something to look forward to**
 - Create **shared experience**
 - Punctuate time and give **something to remember**
 - Guarantee opportunity to **meet others**
 - Make players **check back** if something new is coming up ...





Detective Pikachu Event
May 7, 1 pm PDT - May 17, 1 pm PDT

Detective Pikachu can spawn in the wild or encountered once per day via photobomb

Shiny Aipom release

Specially themed Field Research

Double XP for catching Pokémon

Specially themed Raid Bosses

Increased spawns of Pokémons appearing in the movie

Themed avatar items in the Style Shop for free

Detective Pikachu: Catch the Seed Pokémons that is seen walking in a river (Seed Dinosaur)

Treecko CP 417 - 451
Arcanine CP 1239 - 1298
Magikarp CP 99 - 117
Ditto CP 326 - 356



To sum up: the lens of community



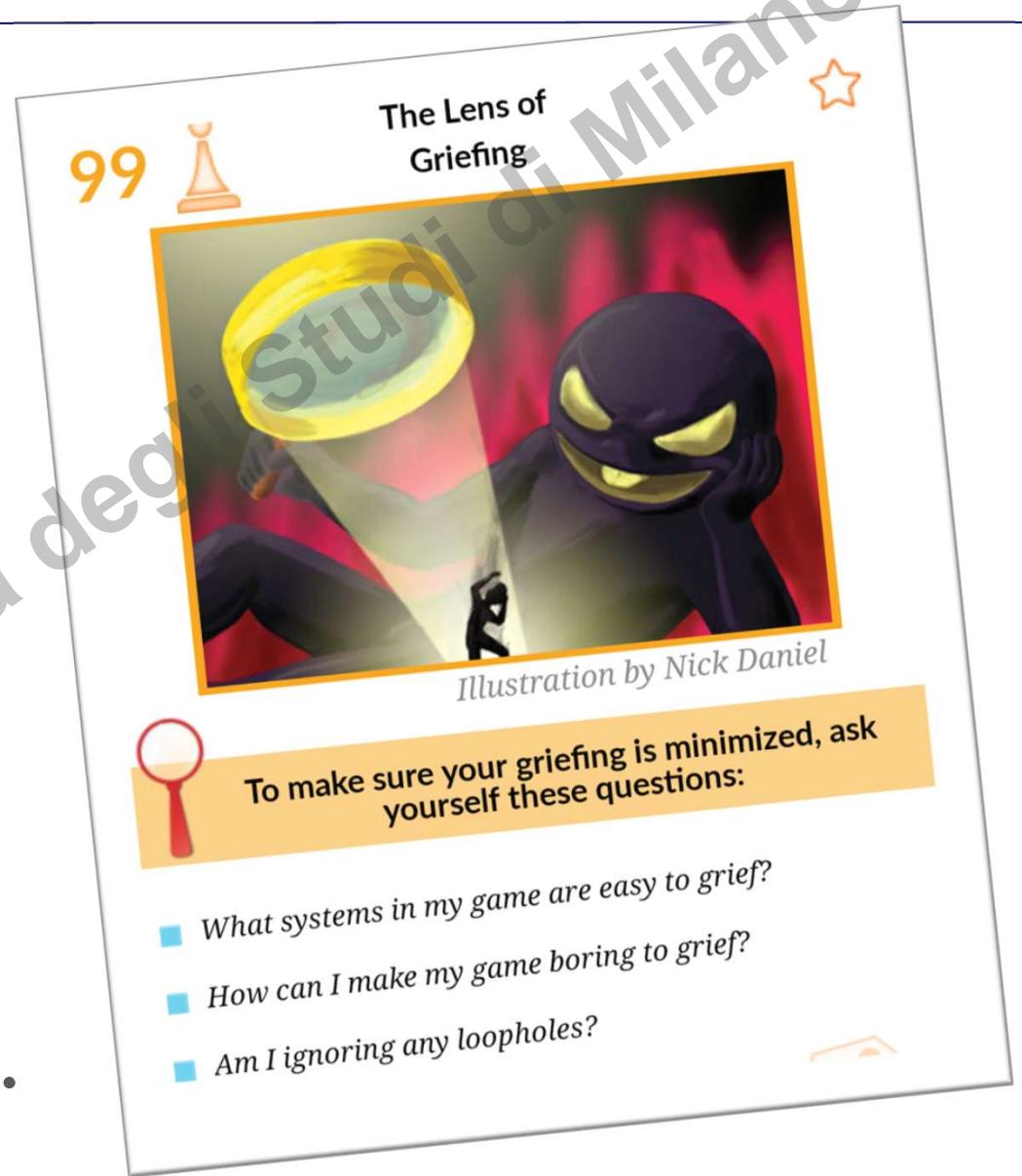
To make sure your game fosters strong community, ask yourself these questions:

- *What conflict is at the heart of my community?*
- *How does architecture shape my community?*
- *Does my game support three levels of experience?*
- *Are there community events?*
- *Why do players need each other?*

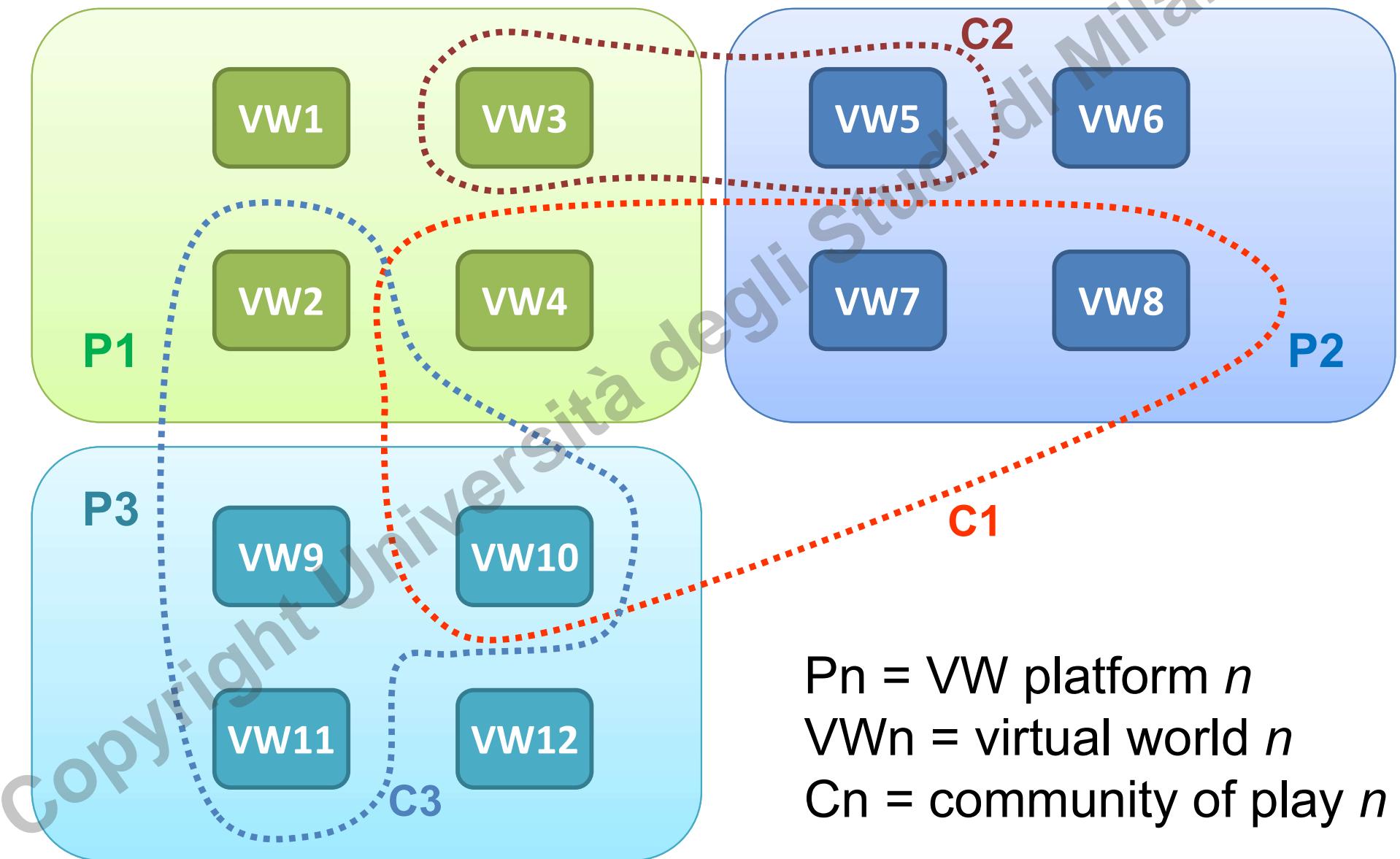
Beware of griefers

Easiest game systems to grief:

- PvP combat
- Items (stealing)
- Trading
- Chat (obscenities)
- Movement (block the way)
- Loopholes of anytype ...



Relations among platforms, VWs and communities of play



GD issues ...
Features of online games

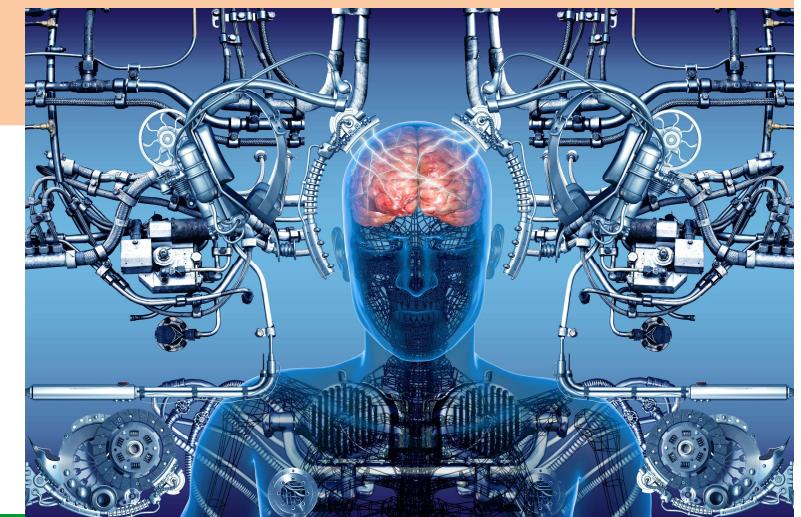
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Online gaming (massive!)

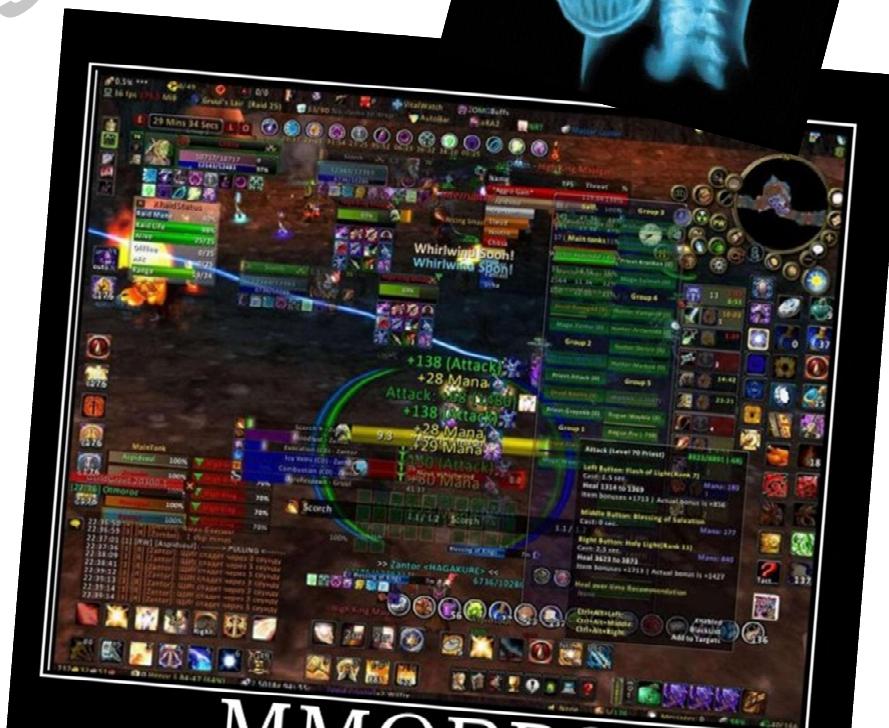
- Online gaming has grown into a major market, but it has peculiarities implying design challenges:

– Online gaming is a technology rather than a genre, a mechanism for connecting players together rather than a particular form of gameplay



Advantages of OGs

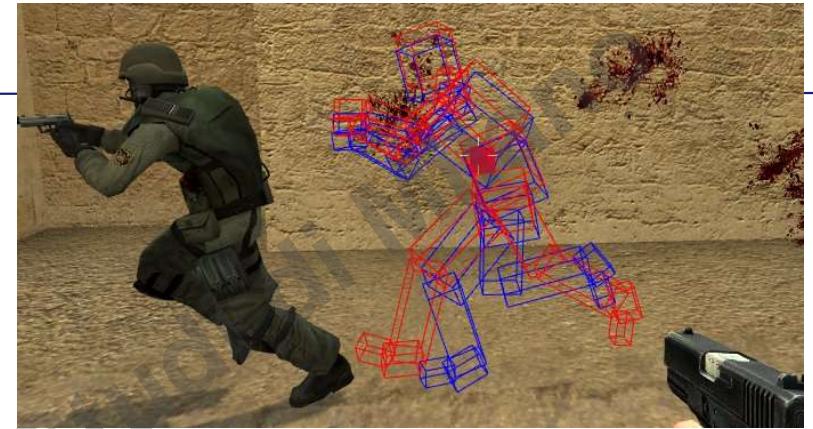
- **Player socializing:**
 - Reach a broader audience, but you need to be a **game designer** AND a **SOCIAL ARCHITECT**
- **Human intelligence** (instead of AI):
 - Less AI => easier to develop
- **Online gameplay vs local multiplayer gameplay:**
 - Each player has her own screen
 - Strategy games possible (ok keeping secrets)
 - No limit to players number



MMORPG
MMORPG - it is clearly and simply !

Disadvantages of OGs

- **Technical issues:**
 - Communication (client/server vs P2P)
 - Latency (lag)
 - Dropped/garbled packets
- **Suspending disbelief:**
 - E.g. staying in character
- **Misbehaviour:**
 - Rudeness/harassment/cheating/etc.
can produce a loss of players
 - Problems if players are kids
- **Content production:**
 - New content on an ongoing basis
(also for “simple” games)
- **Customer service:**
 - Immediate answers
 - Questions on: technical pbs, user interface, game content, enforcing justice, etc. etc. etc.
 - Costs with large number of players ...



Designing games ...



hard to design

Single-player game



Multiplayer game



Online(multiplayer) game



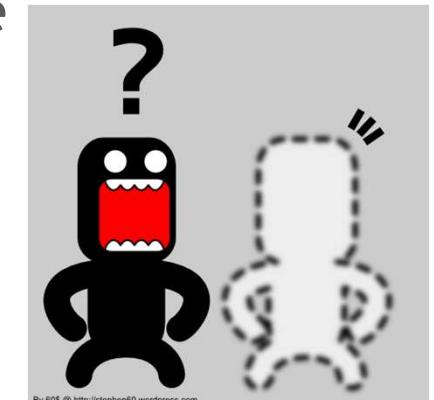
Persistent worlds



But the flexibility & power of OGs allow to create entertainment experiences that CANNOT be produced in other forms ...

OGs Major design issues

- **Arriving players.** (in persistent worlds) newcomers are in disadvantage:
 - Get rid of the victory condition
 - Discourage competition newbies-experienced
 - Direct competition must be consensual
- **Disappearing players.** Logoff should not disrupt the game for other players:
 - The vanishing players forfeits the game
 - Penalty (less severe than forfeit) for disconnections
 - Award victory to the player more ahead in the game
 - Record it as a tie
 - Record it as a “disconnected game”
 - Abandon the game
 - Use referees



OGs Major design issues

- **Real-time vs turn-based games**
 - **Real-time** games characteristics:
 - Max freedom
 - Always something to do
 - More immersive
 - Sometime not so good for strategy games
 - **Turn-based** games needs:
 - Limit players number
 - Limit duration of the turn
 - Define default action when a player runs out of time
 - Player must be able to do other things while waiting for their turn (Civilization IV lets players take turn simultaneously)



OGs Major design issues

- **Chat** (textual/voice, private/group/area/broadcast messages)
 - Limited content (remarks from a predefined list)
 - Profanity filters (but u need a human controller...)
 - Complaint and warning systems
 - Ignoring other players
 - Moderate chat spaces



OGs Major design issues

- **Collusion**
 - Designing to reduce collusion
 - Avoid sharing secret knowledge
 - Avoid «passing cards under the table»
 - ...
 - Beware:
 - Certain forms of collusion simply cannot be detected (info sharing via IMs, physical communication, etc.)



OGs Major design issues

- **Technical security**
 - Use a secure protocol
 - All data should be encrypted
 - Include unique serial no. into each packet
 - Don't store sensitive data on the player's computer
(i.e. data that could affect the status of the player in the game)
 - Don't send the player data she isn't supposed to have
(e.g. fog of war...)
 - Don't let the client perform sensitive operations (e.g. the SERVER and NOT the client performs computation to resolve a fight...)



Taxonomy of virtual worlds



Persistent worlds (MMORPGs / MMOGs)

- Permanent environments in which players can play, retaining the state of their avatar from one session to another

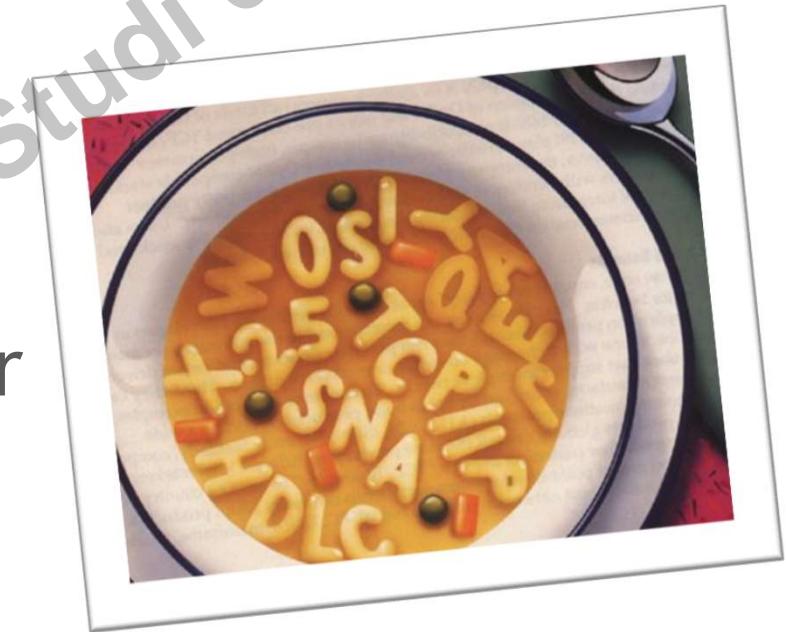


- A number of special problems and design requirements ...
 - Luckily many design problems have already been solved a long ago by the MUD community ...



Persistent online games/worlds acronyms

- **MUD** (Multi-User Dungeon/Domain/Dimension)
- **MOO** (MUD Object Oriented)
- **MMORPG** (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game)
- **MMO(G)** (Massively Multiplayer Online Game)
- **MUVE** (Multi-User Virtual Environment)



MUD - Multi-User Dungeon

- textual multiuser, online, **real-time VW**
 - Combines RPG, chat and interactivity elements: players interact among them, with NPCs and the world by typing commands similar to natural language
 - Generally inspired to D&D, science fiction or books/movies/history, etc.
 - NOT every MUD is a game, several of them have didactical goals (distance learning)
 - could require a fee, or be completely free
 - accessed by Telnet or specific client
 - Many MUDs are still active, and many MMORPGs developer started their career as MUD players
 - *The MUD connector* (www.mudconnect.com)



MOO (MUD Object Oriented)

- MOO has been used to indicate:
 - Programs derived from the original MOO server
 - every **object oriented MUD**, hence they are online multiuser textual environments
- Users may use the object oriented MOO programming language to **modify server behaviour for all players** (eg. by creating new artifacts or rooms, by modifying the interface, etc.).

MMORPG

(Massively Multiplayer Role-Playing Game)

- MMORPGs are online RPGs, with a huge number of players that interact in a persistent VW
 - The term has been coined by Richard Garriott, the creator of Ultima Online (that made the genre famous starting from 1997)
 - In general term, the 2° income source (after subscriptions) for publisher of MMORGs is the in-game item-mall
 - World of Warcraft, had more than 11 millions (paying) users



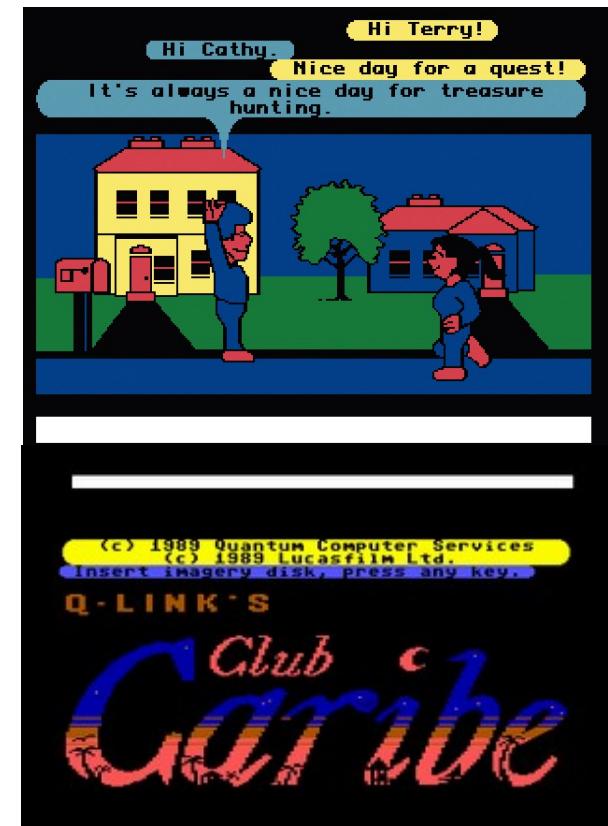
MMOG / MMO (Massively Multiplayer Online Game)

- MMOGs have thousands of concurrent users.
They are played over the Internet and have **persistent** worlds
- not strictly PC games (PSP, PS3, Xbox 360, Nintendo DS, Wii)
- They include a large variety of games genres (not necessarily RPG!)



MUVE (Multi User Virtual Environment)

- (also known as “virtual worlds”) they are: **persistent**, **multiuser**, **interactive**, **online**, generally (but not necessarily) 3D that **NOT necessarily are “games”**
 - Habitat (1987 - LucasArts for Commodore64) and Club Caribe (1988 - for subscribers of Quantum Link) are the first MUVEs with a **graphical interface**
- Several contemporary MUVEs (mainly no longer active...):





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L10.1 Summary

- A bit deeper analysis
- Different types of players
- Immersion & identity
- References:
 - Chapter 3 of “Designing Virtual Worlds” by R.A. Bartle
 - Chapter 21 of “Fundamentals of Game Design” by E. Adams
 - Chapter 23, 24 «The art of Game Design» by J. Schell
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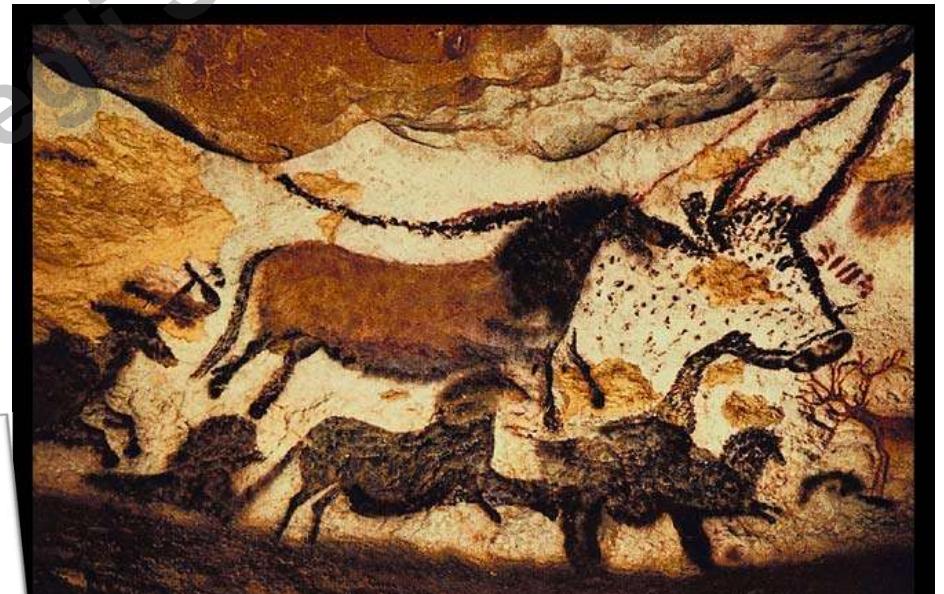
Persistent worlds:
A bit deeper analysis



"Truth becomes fiction when the
fiction's true; real becomes not-real
where the unreal's real"

Humans have always been “virtual” ...

- **Virtual reality is older than sin.** It is the hallucination of heaven, the peyote vision, the dionysiac stupor. It is the play, the novel, the opera, any system devised for losing ourselves in another world. (Schwartz, 1996)



VWs are only another “media”
to experience an alternative
reality



Virtual worlds: a definition



- “A VW is any computer-generated **physical space** that can be experienced by many people at the same time” (Castronova, 2005)
- “VWs are places of **human culture** realized by computer programs through the Internet” (Boellstorff, 2007)



- Hence VWs are (at least):
 1. **Places**
 2. **Inhabited by persons**
 3. **Enabled by online technologies**



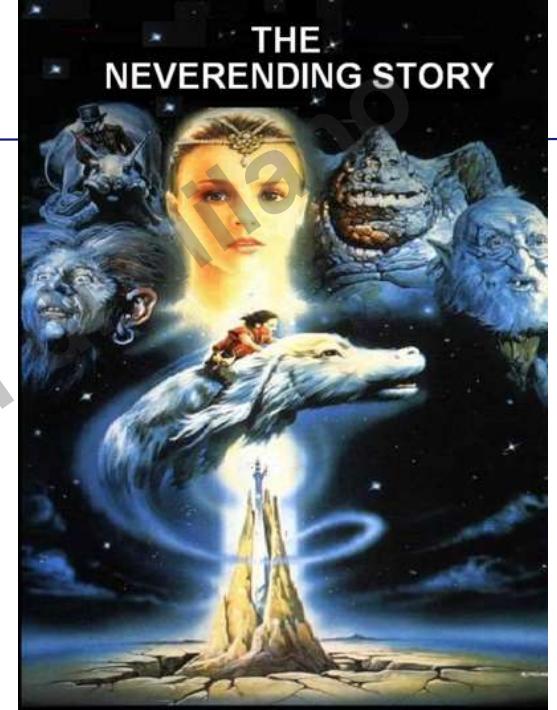
Persistent worlds vs “ordinary” games...

- There are significant differences among what VWs and conventional video games offer, from at least the following points of view:
 1. Story
 2. Player's role
 3. Gameplay
- Other specific issues for the design arise from the following aspects:
 4. Avatars
 5. World models
 6. Avatar death
 7. PK problem
 8. Time
 9. Economies
 10. Different types of players



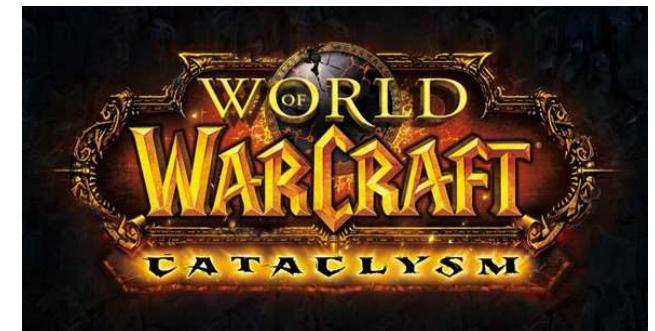
1. Story

- Many players & no end => the narrative arc does not apply
- **Setting:** the world & life conditions
- **Goals:**
 - small/large scale (& in huge quantity)
 - No secret can be kept (players talk to each other)
- **Storytelling:** emergent narrative deriving from players interactions => its quality depends (completely) on the imagination & improvisational theatre skills of players ...



2. Player's role

- Player doesn't follow a defined storyline, but chooses from a variety of things to do
 - Supply a vast assortment of (meaningful) roles
 - Give possibility to change role
- NB: if you do not offer enough thing to do, your game will FAIL (people get bored) => design to be **EXPANSIVE**

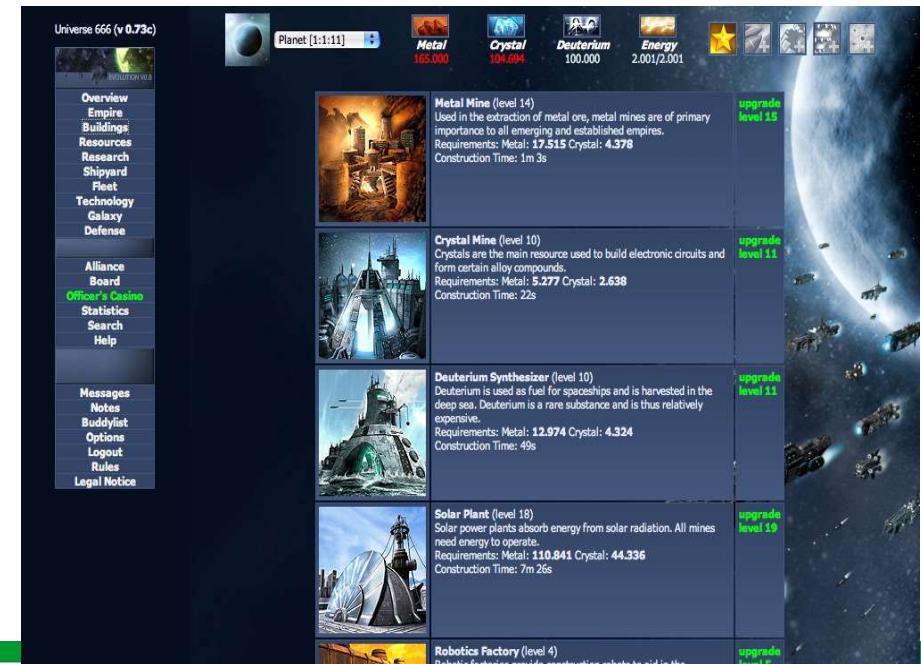


3. Gameplay

- No victory condition \Leftrightarrow difficult to offer a predefined sequence of challenges & achievements
- Ultimate goal (in RPG, but not always) = *advance your character*
- In persistent worlds the experience is NOT active, but EXPRESSIVE (the player decides how to spend her time: quest, crafting, chatting, ...)



**PROFOUND IMPLICATIONS
ON THE DESIGN !!**



4. Avatars

- PWs are an expressive experience:
the creation of the avatar is the most expressive thing the player can do
- AVs have profiles:
 - Unique name to handle
 - Physical appearance (as customizable as u can to increase identification!)
 - History/experience
 - Reputation (beware of collusion if automated)
 - Player autobiography



4. About an avatar ...

- An avatar is an interactive, social representation of a user
 - Usually it is a mix of the real and the imagined
- Socially, an avatar represents the user and allows him/her to interact in the game social space
 - Without a social environment the avatr can't exist (Tetris has no AV)
- An avatar is a *literary device*. It's the protagonist that is used for the interactive narrative:
 - avatars are used to control the story (they are interactive characters)
 - avatars are narrative devices for collaborative fiction
 - In many games where there is no narrative (e.g. Sudoku, Solitaire, etc.) there is no AV at all



.. anyway, psychologically, you are your avatar ...

(Meadows, 2008)

4. About an avatar ...

- Avatars are the modality through which players experience **VIRTUAL SELFHOOD**, central to both (Taylor, 2006; Boellstorff, 2007):
 - immersion and
 - the construction of **community** in virtual spaces



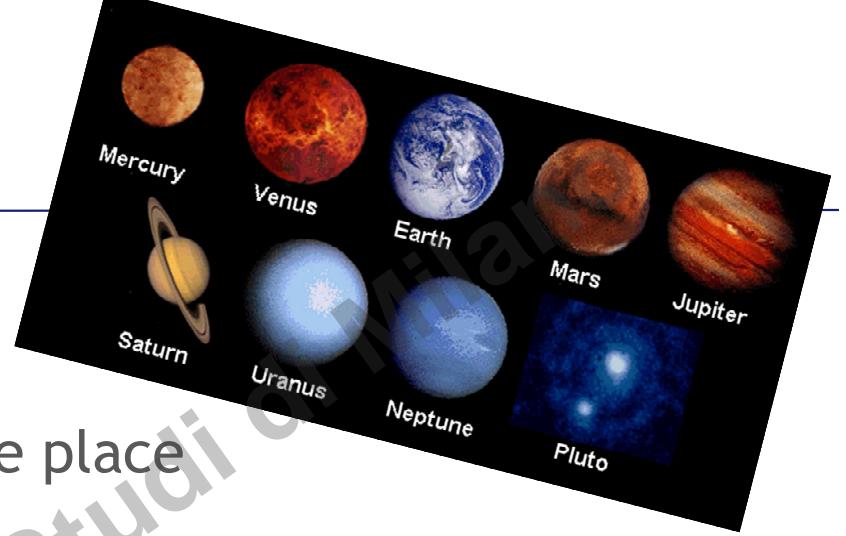
4. Different types of avatars

	Control	Customization	Things to do	Technè
<i>Super Mario Bros</i>	Yes	No	Few	No
<i>The SIMs</i>	Limited	Yes	Several	No
<i>WoW</i>	Yes	Yes	Quite a lot	Limited
<i>Second Life</i>	Huge	Huge	Huge	Huge

+ Narrative & immersivity



5. World models



- **Scavenger:**
 - a large treasure hunt, players collect things and return them to a safe place
- **Social:**
 - expressive space for RP. Goals = social achievements (notoriety, political power, etc.)
- **D&D:**
 - Very diffused. PvE. Includes quests as a form of narrative & challenge
- **PvP:**
 - Beware of balance (newbies should not fight with experienced players)
- **Builder:**
 - Quite rare. Players can build & modify the environment (SL, Minecraft)

6. Avatar death

- If there is combat, AVs may die => u need disincentives to death, that should be related to the probability of dying
 - Permanent death: ok for short games, NOT for PWs
 - Resurrection with reduced attributes
 - Resurrection with some property missing: in this case u should allow a vault to keep extra-equipment



Resurrection with missing properties: example



7. The Player-Killer (PK) problem

- Justice:
 - No automated regulation: 40% of potential audience lost
 - Flagging criminals
 - Reputation systems
 - PvP switch: ok, but creates suspension of disbelief
 - No PvP allowed: u loose player liking PvP
- Faction-based PvP (team play)
- Anyway:
 - U cannot please everybody => taylor around your audience
 - It's a fantasy world (escapism) => people don't like to be bullied, abused, insulted, harassed
 - People pay to play => if they are unsatisfied, they'll leave
 - Players have higher expectations than in the real world => manage their expectation, otherway u won't be able to satisfy it all!



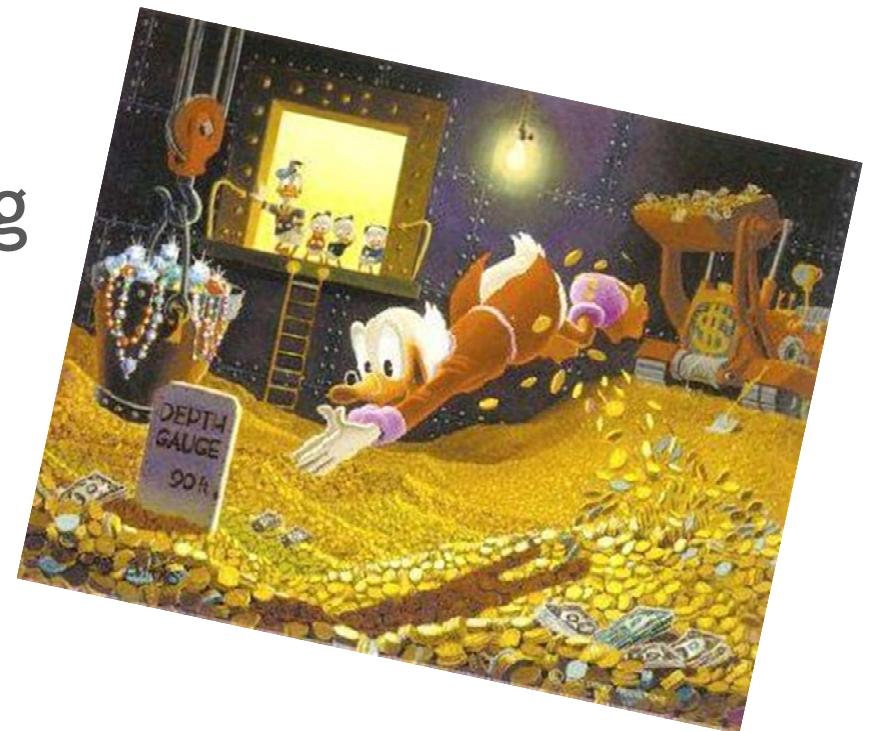
8. About the nature of time ...

- A (big) constraint: **game time MUST proceed at the same (fixed) pace for everyone**, hence:
 - Be careful about designing time-consuming, boring activities (es. *meditation* in EverQuest to regain magic power)
 - Time is irreversible: when something occurs, it's done (forever) and CAN'T be undone ...



9. Economies

- If players are allowed to collect/trade things valuable => u have an **economy**
- People interact in ways you might never dream of
- Essential to avoid players to create something for nothing (they should never sell a resource for more than they paid it!!)



Hints for a (successful) PW

- Customizable avatars
- Multiple paths of advancement
- Easy switch among paths
- Milestones in the paths clear, significant and visible
- Avoid the sense of running out of significant milestones
- **OWNERSHIP is the key:** it's a barrier to the departure
(social bonds exists outside the game, in-world possessions no ...!)





... and point 10 ?

“Different types of players” ?



Discover your audience ... players

- Who they are and what do they want?
 - Demographics: info about real-world (potential) players
-> OK FOR MKTG
 - Play style: info about what players consider fun ->
OK FOR MOOs DESIGNERS



=> u need to know BOTH !

Discover your audience ... playing styles

- Playing styles are defined by what players do
(=> **statistics** can be of help)
- What players do depends on what they consider to be fun
(=> u need **sociological** & **psychological** assessments ...)

... BUT ...

**THESE ANALYSIS WON'T TELL U HOW DIFFERENT
PLAYING STYLES INTERACTS**
(system dynamics ... remeber?)

Discover your audience: players types



player
interest
graph

Achievers

- prefer to gain "points", levels, equipment and other **concrete measurements of succeeding** in a game. They will also go to great lengths to achieve rewards that are merely cosmetic.
- Single-player appeal to the Achiever
 - Every game that can be "beaten" in some way tackles Achievers by giving them something to accomplish. Games that offer a 100% completion rating appeal a lot to Achievers.
- Multi-player appeal to the Achiever
 - they have the opportunity to show off their skill and hold elite status to others.
 - They value (or despise) the competition from other Achievers and look to the Socializers to give them praise.
 - They like to compare themselves to other gamers from around the world.



Explorers

- players who **prefer discovering areas and immerse themselves in the game world**
 - often annoyed by time-restricted missions as that does not allow them to traverse at their own pace
 - enjoy finding glitches or a hidden Easter egg.
-
- Single-player appeal to the Explorer
 - Combat and gaining levels or points is secondary to them, so they flock to games where you find yourself in a strange place, and the objective is to find your way out by paying close attention to detail and solving puzzles.
 - They like back stories or lore about people and places in-game. An Achiever may quickly forget a gaming adventure, but the Explorer will recall fond memories about it
 - Multi-player appeal to the Explorer
 - They will often become bored with any particular MMORPG when they have experienced its content. They will quicker than other gamer types feel it has become a chore to play



Socializers

- **play games for the social aspect**, rather than the actual game itself. They gain the most enjoyment by interacting with other players, and sometimes, NPCs with personality.
- Single-player appeal to the Socializer
 - Since their objective is to be social, there are few games that they enjoy based on their merits. Instead, they play some of the more popular games so that they can use the multi-player features.
 - However, there are some games designed with their play style in mind (Fable, Mass Effect, Knights of the Old Republic, etc.) Additionally, some single-player games have a strong community around them.
- Multi-player appeal to the Socializer
 - The online environment is very appealing to them, as it provides near limitless potential for new relationships. They take full advantage of the ability to join guilds or kinships in many online games.

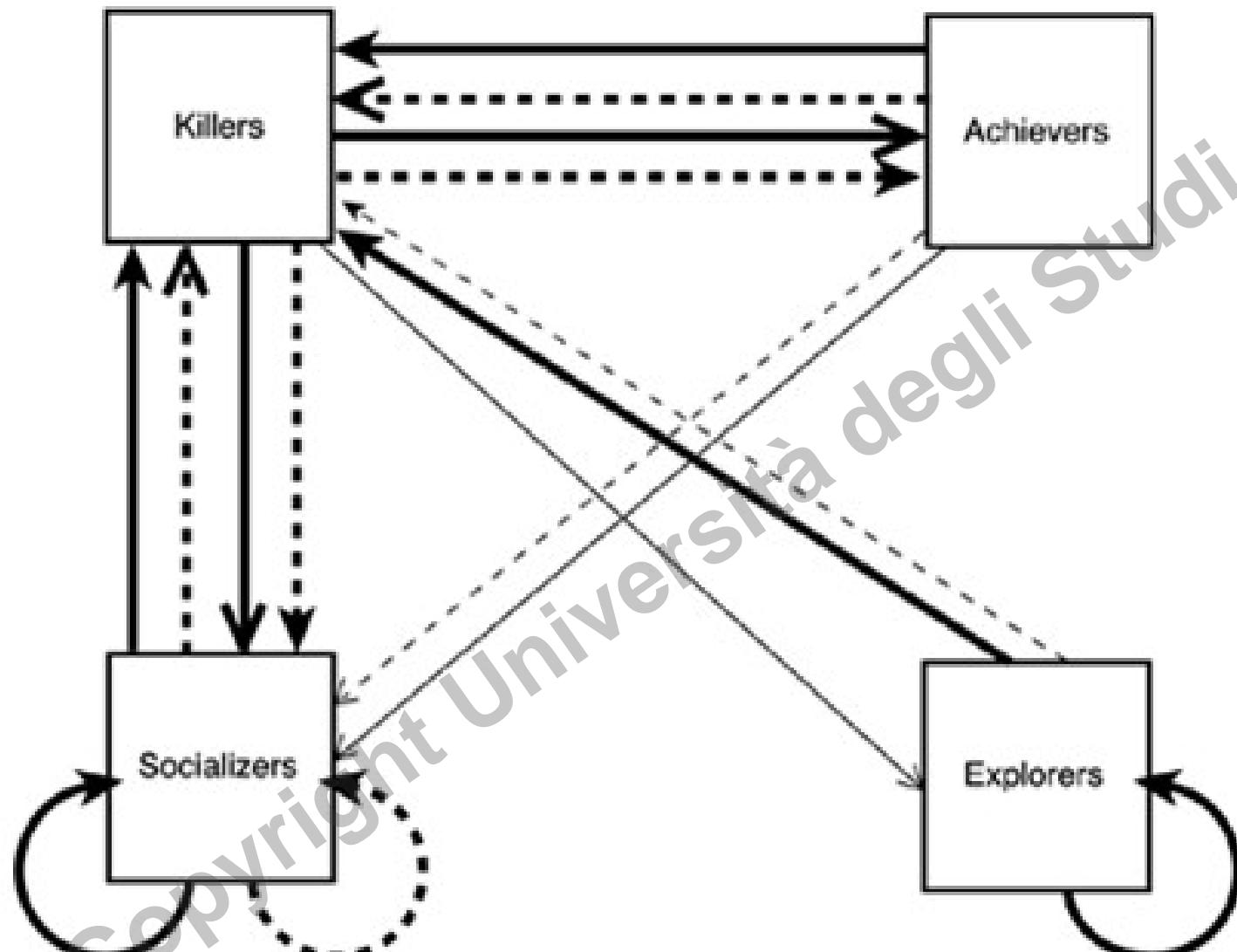


Killers

- They thrive on **competition with other players** and prefer fighting them to scripted computer-controlled opponents.
- Single-player appeal to the Killer
 - Quite none
- Multi-player appeal to the Killer
 - Causing mayhem among computer-controlled people and things may be fun to the Killer, but nothing amounts to the joy of pitting one's skills against an actual player-controlled opponent. For most, the joy of being a Killer results from a friendly competitive spirit.
 - For others, it's more about power and the ability to hurt others or the thrill of the hunt (e.g. they take their strong character to a place where inexperienced or weaker characters reside, and proceeds to kill them repeatedly)



Discover your audience: player type dynamics



INFLUENCE GRAPH

Solid arrow =
increase in the
origin

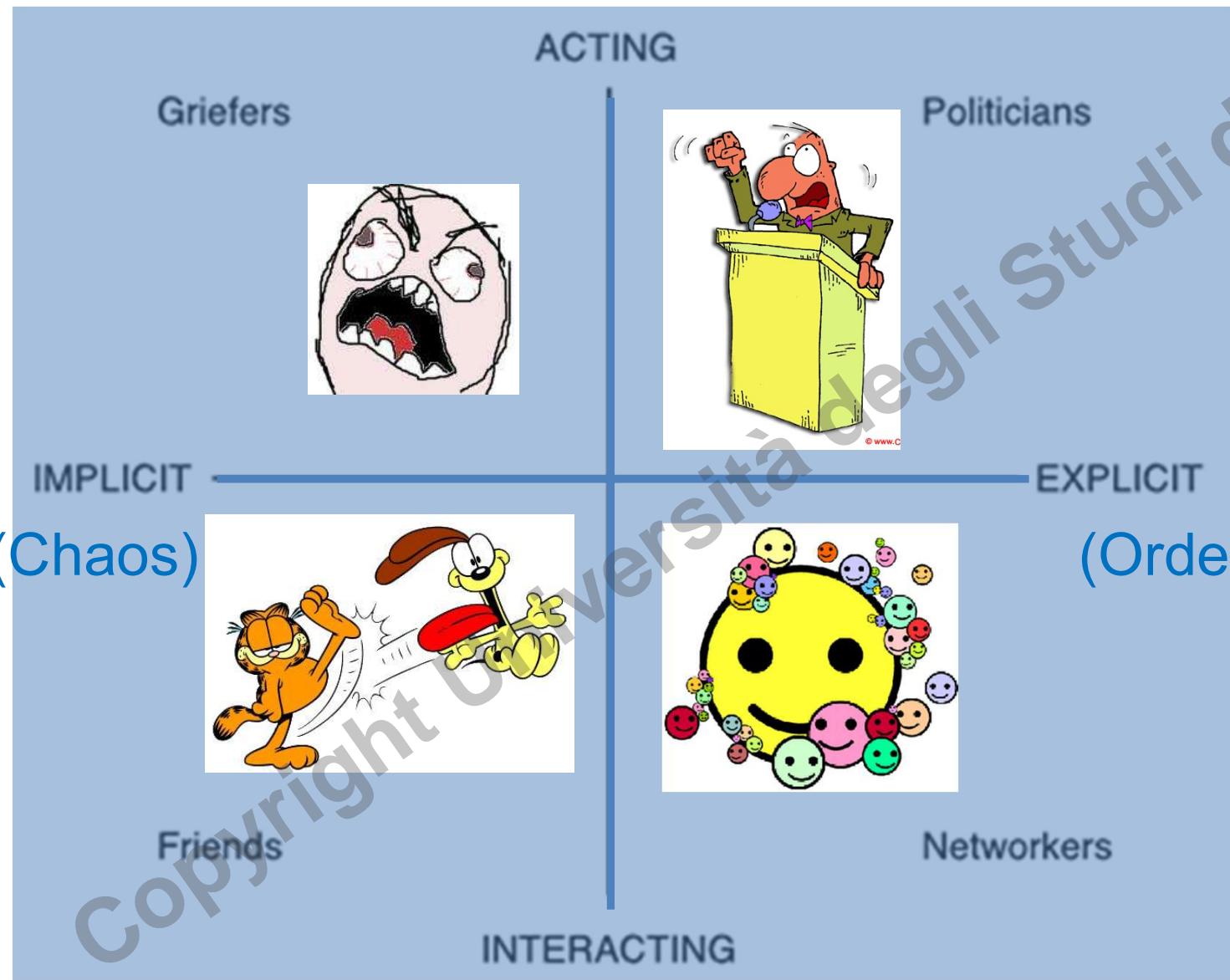
Dashed arrow =
decrease in the
origin

Solid arrowhead =
increase in the
target

Open arrowhead =
decrease in the
target

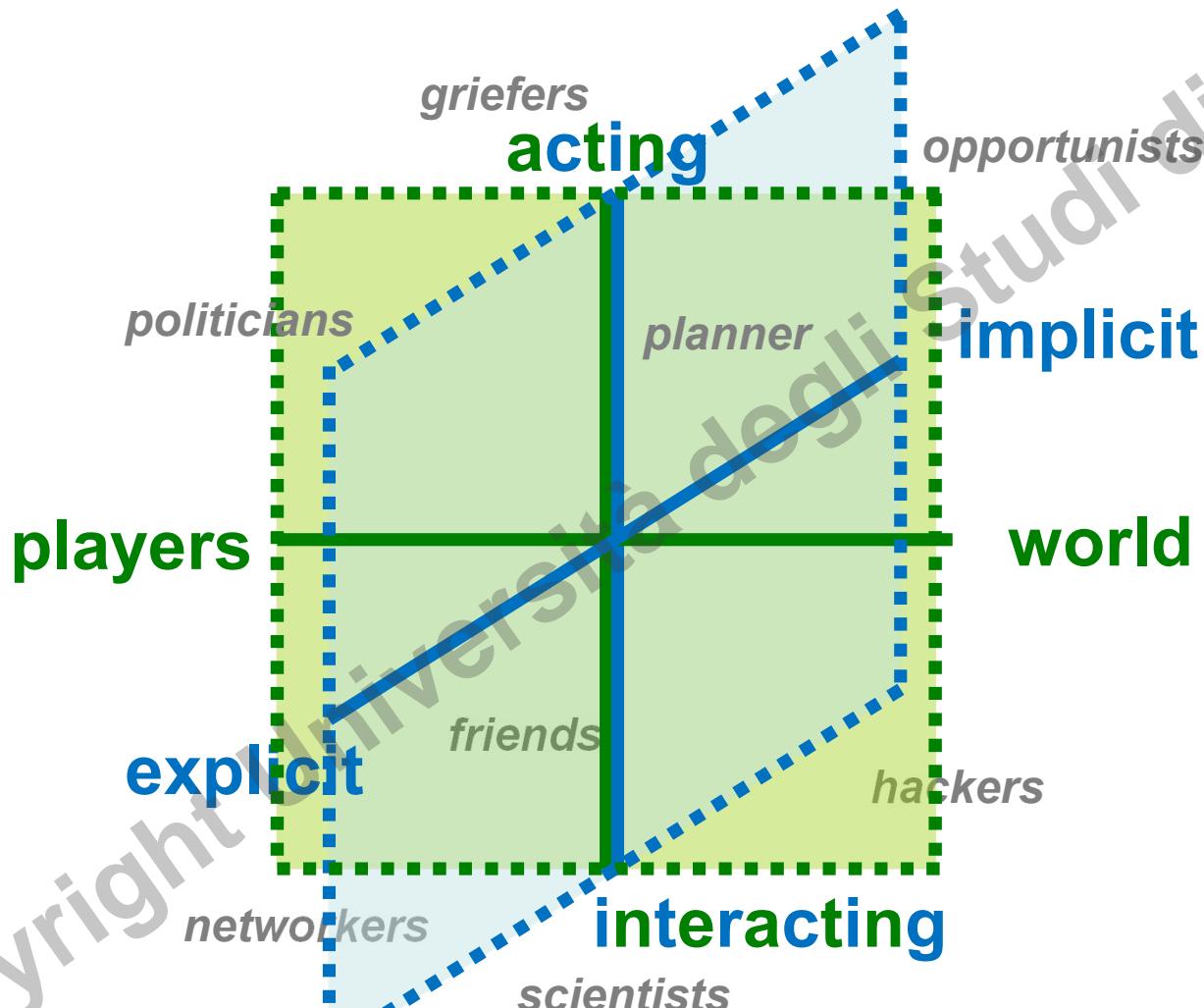
Line thickness =
quantity

Discover your audience: Expanded categories

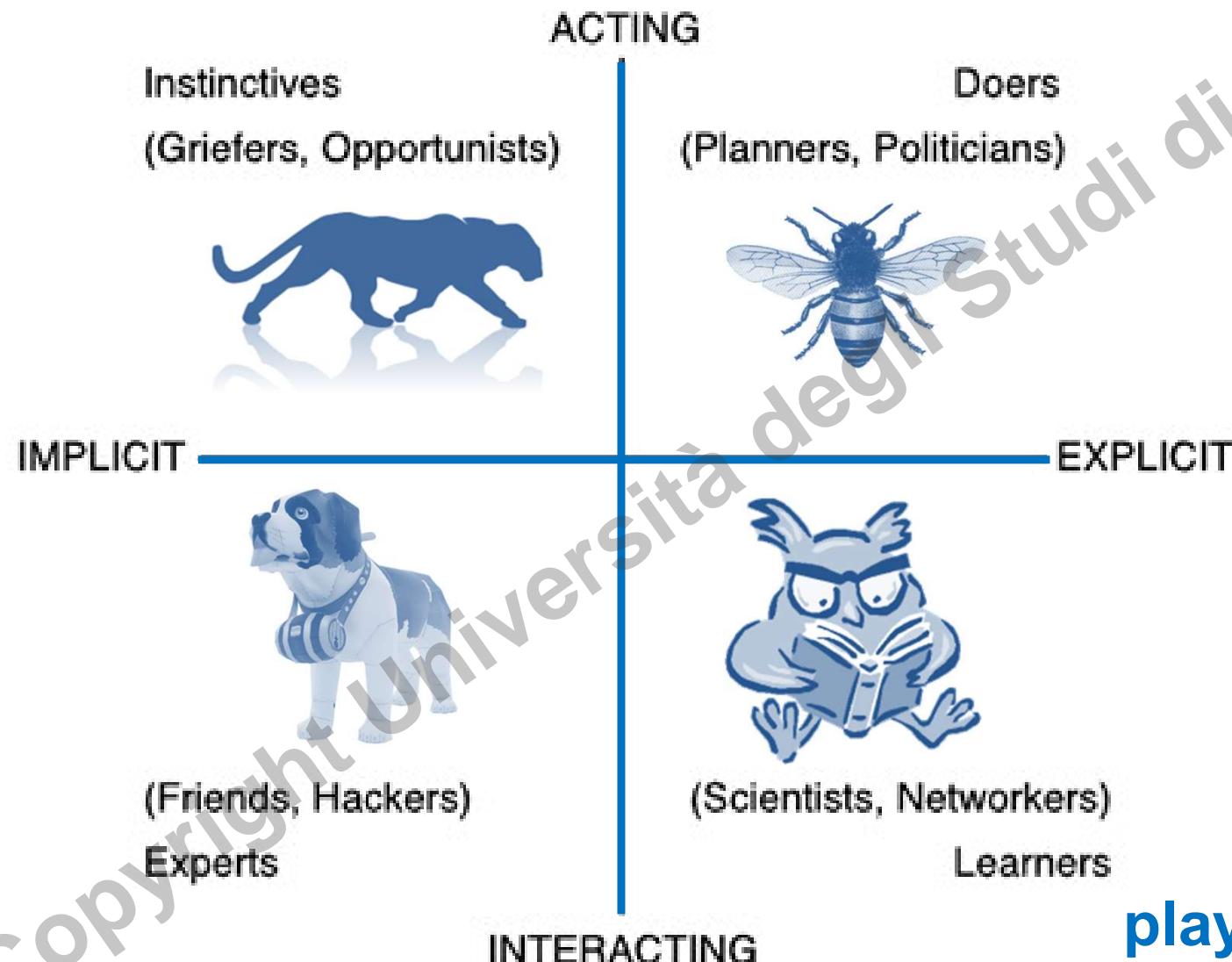


player
interest
graph
(another)

Discover your audience:

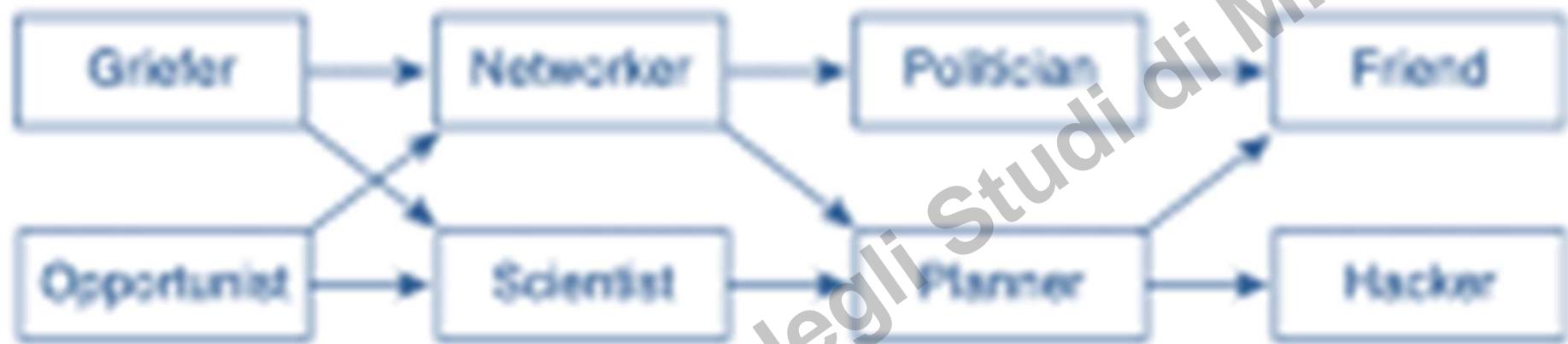


Discover your audience:



**player interest
graph - flattened**

Player development tracks



- Instrumental use of the paths (e.g.):
if u have *politicians* u do not need to worry
about people exploiting your game: they'll
never evolve into hackers ... ;-)

Immersion & identity



Immersion

- immersion is the sense that a player has of **being in a virtual world**.

- The more immersive a virtual world, the greater its ability to immerse its players:

... and to attract and retain them ...



Immersivity, presence, narrative

- **Sense of presence:** it is the sensation of “being there” in a mediated environment. It’s the illusion of not being mediated into which the user no longer perceives the media as a separate entity, to the point of:
 - Remembering the virtual environment as “a place visited” and not simply as “a place seen”
 - Presenting the same behaviours and physical responses that he/she shows in the “actual” world
- The sense of presence in an environment (actual or simulated) implies that individuals are able to perceive themselves, objects and other people not as present into an external space, but as **immersed into a socio-cultural network connected through interactions** taking place among people and objects
 - The **avatar is the interactive agent** in a “virtual” culture
- The sense of presence needs, well before that visual aspects, of **narrative**: a **story or a situation** enough intriguing to “drag us in”

Levels of immersion

- Immersion can be described in terms of “levels”:
1. **Player:**
 - It’s the player. If she doesn’t identifies with the object used to interact with the game, the immersion is zero
 2. **Avatar:**
 - It’s the puppet players use to interact in the world, a convenience to affect the VW. Identification & immersion quite low, the avatar is **REPRESENTATIVE**
 3. **Character:**
 - The player feels the AV is a **REPRESENTATION**: it becomes an extension of the player’s self, a whole personality. High immersion and identification.
 - At this level there is the majority of players ...
 4. **Persona:**
 - Max level of immersion/identification: player and her representation converge. The player **IS** the character **INTO** the game world!

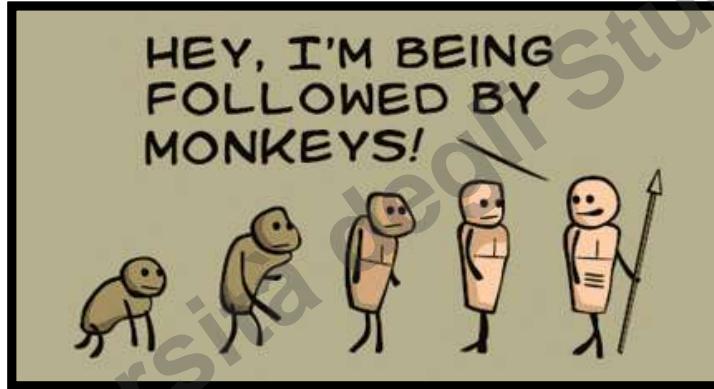
Immersion & identity



- Immersion = when player & character collapse into a persona
 - That's way people plays VWs and find there something that they can't get from anywhere else
 - That's way players stop playing a VW and start living it
- Immersion is connected with:
 - The idea of PRESENCE: the illusion that the mediated experience is NOT mediated
 - The concept of FLOW
- Immersion is:
 - Fundamental for conveying the VW experience (a Critical Success Factor!)
 - Too often misunderstood

Identity evolution

- When character & player collapse, **player's identity evolves according to the skills aquired in the VW**



- Within the VW, the player confronts with a stream of challenges deriving from the environment & fellow players
 - Reaction to challenges => identity development
 - NB: Skills are aquired permanently

Identity evolution

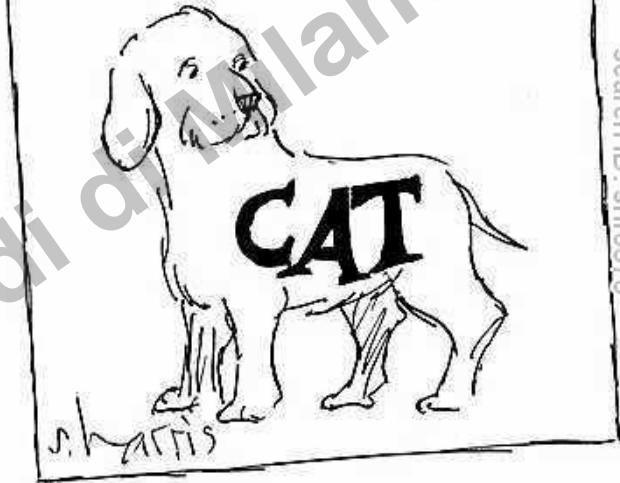
- VWs encourage the > part of players to experience different sides of themselves in a safe environment, into which **challenges** arise
 - Their response to those challenges lead them to a greater self-understanding
 - Over time this implies merging their real and virtual persona
- ↓
- **People play VWs to be themselves (true for those who play for fun!!)**



Identity

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- The celebration of IDENTITY is the CORE point of any VW !!
- Everything a player does is to develop her identity
- Identity flowering is an inherent property of VWs: u can't even dream of suppressing it !



search ID: shh0375

B U T

- U CAN'T «design for it», 'cause EVERYTHING in the VW affects it, nevertheless u CAN'T afford not to deal with this design problem !

Designing to support «identity»

- Several aspects need to be addressed carefully to support the identification between the player and the avatar and the development of an in-game identity, among which :
 - Anonymity
 - Image
 - Role play
 - Social interaction



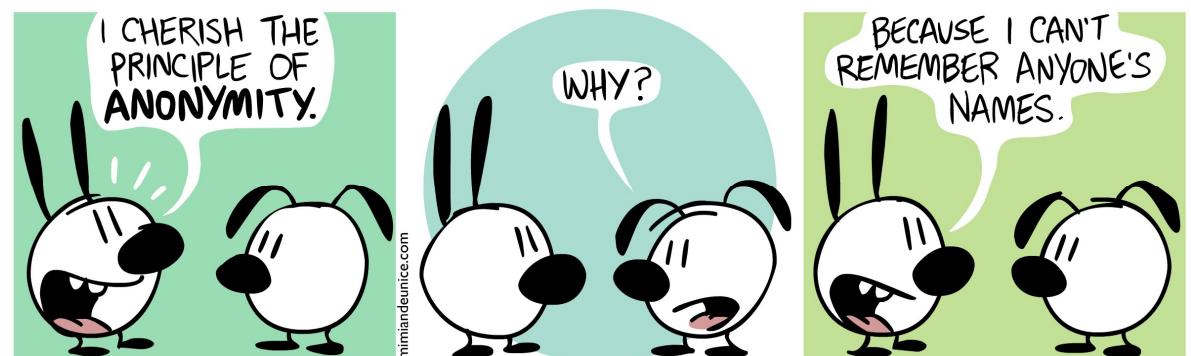
Identity & anonymity

- People like to separate real & virtual life (e.g. to conceal their other “selves” from friends ...)
- Reduced consequences - linked to anonymity - makes for the disinhibition typical of VWs
- Anonymity branches: if u make an error, u can restart with a new character
 - But maintaining separate identities is (very) difficult (your true self seeps through...)

Identity & anonymity: design implications

As a consequence:

1. A **certain degree of anonymity** MUST be guaranteed (at least among players!)
2. **Don't go too far**: it's ok having separate identities, but not having NO identity
3. Creation of a new character should be quite simple, **BUT**:
 - Beware of mules & griefers



Identity & image

- Players have:
 - Stats & other stuff => tangible
 - Knowledge => intangible
- Both are extremely valuable for players!
 - Tangibles attract achievers
 - Intangibles attract socializers and explorers

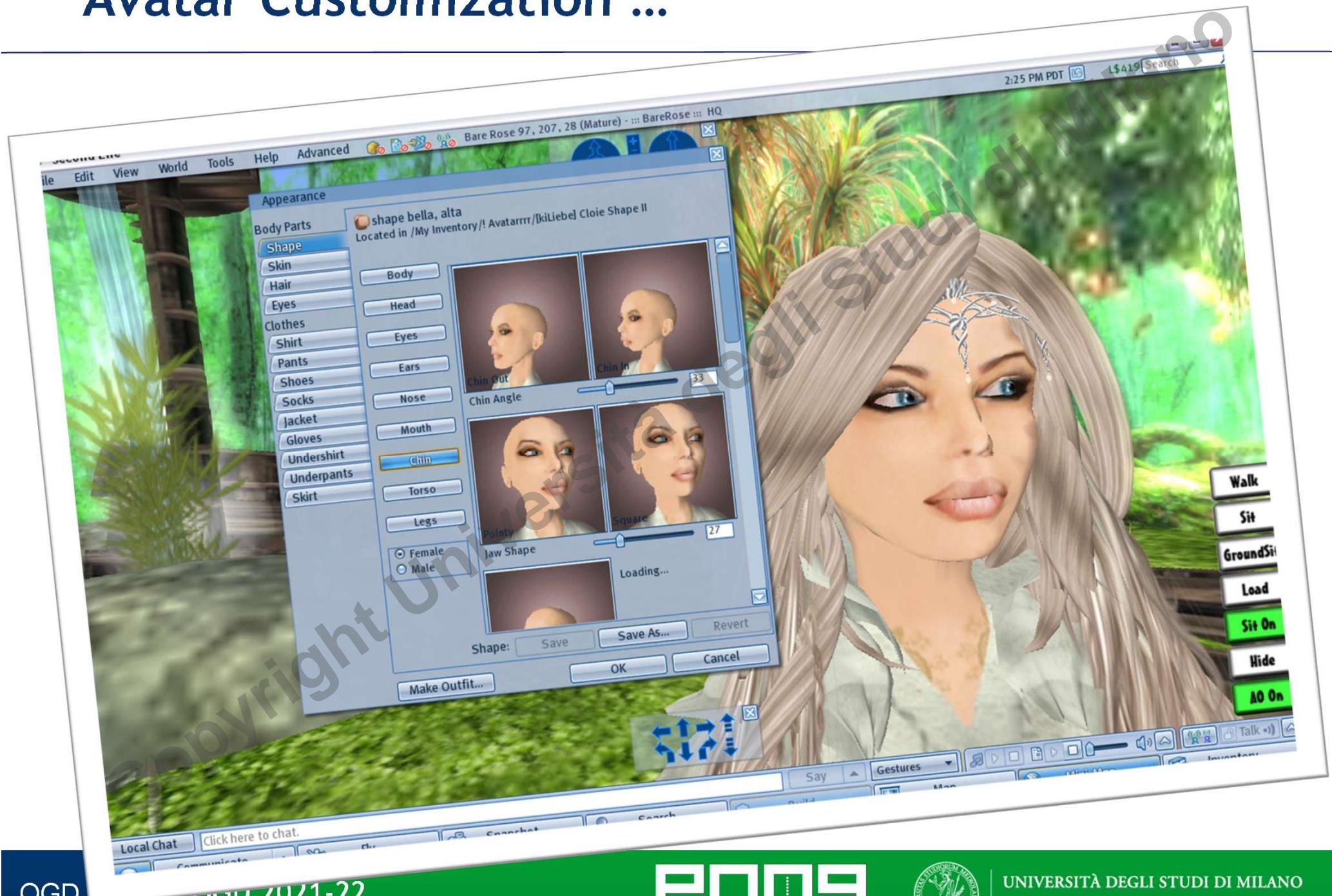


Identity & image

- Since identity is central in VWs, avatar **customization should be made EASY** (creating a character is the player opening statement...)
- True also for textual self-description
 - BTW: if u allow self-portrait beware of self-inflating & stereotypes (i.e. for any RPG there should be a factory producing half-naked, green-eyed, flame-haired female beauties & tall, dark, mysterious guys...)



Avatar Customization ...



Identity & (soft) RP

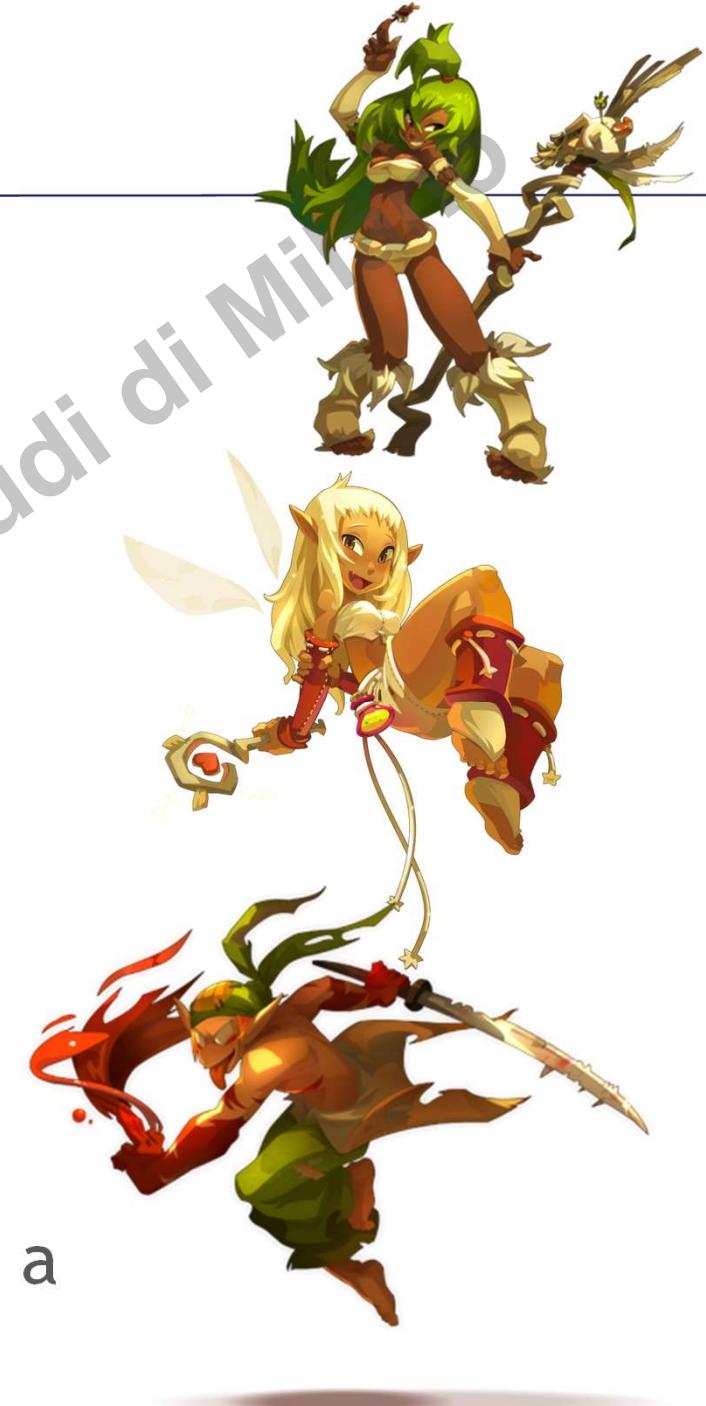
- RP is generally quite “relaxed” in WVs, nevertheless they may have characteristics derived from PRG: **classes & races**
- The **genesis of classes** (i.e. where classes come from?)



Identity & (soft) RP

Why classes in VWs?

1. **Expectation:** VWs designers played D&D ...
2. **Individuality:** player like to feel unique => classes enforces differentiation
3. **Balance:** to diversify playing styles
4. **Direction** (vision of future): not everyone knows exactly who they want to be (in the game), so picking a class could be of help



Class vs Classless VWs

- **Classes** (and races!) constraint the player, her imagination and the possible evolution of the (emerging) narrative ...
... you are on a train:
 - Mysterious, aloof, singular, powerful => mage
 - Quick-witted, spirited, independent yet lovable => rogue
 - Strong, noble, valiant, victorious => warrior
- **Classless** VWs allow the player to go where she wants:
 - U can be something the designers haven't even dreamt of



BTW, class & race may arise deeper questions ...
... e.g. what about racism?

Several observations on MUVEs ...

1. online **identity** is an extension of our actual identity, that is a socio-cultural construct evolving in time (in both worlds: virtual and actual)
2. Online **social networks** emerge in the possibility space offered by the internet, as extension of our actual social networks. In this process online identities are involved as well
3. Online **places** are extensions of “actual” places, both public and private. They augment possibilities for individuals to interact in online social networks and, at the same time, they are influenced and modified by social interactions.
4. online identity, relations and places can interact to augment “actual” social life of individuals. When designing a VW, it is important to keep in mind that features affecting social interactions are of fundamental importance!



Community (relations)

- What makes VWs “worlds” is that they are **PLACES**, but what makes them sites of culture is that **PEOPLE INTERACT** in them
- Every community IS a VIRTUAL community (synchronicity is not a prerequisite), and social relationships are the most relevant aspect of VWs (people goes there for SOCIAL reasons)
 - This implies for example supporting “**social gravity**”
- **Events** (place, time and sociality) are social places for relations building
- **Groups** (sub-communities) that stands between the individual and the society have always been important for VWs (as in the actual!): people gain strength by being in groups, while the whole VW is large and disorienting (BTW: griefers are a community...)

Conclusions ... ?! Implications for design (several)

- When designing a VW, remember that **FUN derives from social interaction** (the game comes second...)



- **AVATARS**: are the social representation of players:
 - customizability, technè,
 - Profiles, ...
- **PLACES**: make VWs what they are
 - Immersivity
 - Economy, ...
- **COMMUNITIES**: interactions among people create sites a culture
 - Social gravity
 - Interaction tools (IMs, chat, etc.), ...



Conclusions ... ?!

Implications for design (several)

- But also remember that:
 1. people tend to play a specific type of game, according to their tastes (i.e. their “learning model”)
 2. People (communities of play!) tend to stretch across several (similar) VWs



Final remark ...



His job is
**TO CREATE
CONSTRUCTS
IN THE MINDS OF
PLAYERS**