

## Online Games

Ever since there have been computers, people have been playing with them, and ever since those computers have been linked up in networks, people have been playing online games. On one hand, networking has enabled digitally-supported play to get back to the very roots of gaming: after all, it's been the advent of network games that has made it possible to play not only against the machine but also against human adversaries and alongside human teammates. What's new, however, is that playing together is no longer tied to a specific locality. Instead, play goes on in a virtual game world that can feature any number of forms, skins and interfaces, which the players can customize pretty much at will. What had initially been restricted to purely textual worlds due to limited bandwidth and processing capacity and assumed a distinct form solely in players' imaginations has subsequently developed into incredibly detailed and globally accessible game universes that thousands of processors are constantly generating anew.

Online games are in the process of morphing from the pastime of a few specialists to a part of everyday life that we take completely for granted. They have long since ceased being "just" games; rather, as communications platforms, they've developed in a wide variety of directions. Today, they serve as our virtual shopping malls in which customers can purchase real merchandise for real money, as well as our online singles bars. They are simultaneously workplace and playground, museum and pub, concert venue and conference room. How one behaves in them and the objectives one pursues are matters left up to the mentality of the individual user.

They confront us with issues that are by no means exclusively germane to the virtual world, but rather assume increasing current relevance in a capitalist society in which the process of globalization is accelerating. These questions have to do with our personal identity and our self-image, with our understanding of society and the possibilities of participation in it, with the relationship between private property and common property and between the private and public spheres, with surveillance mechanisms and the possibilities of evading them, and with questions having to do with access to resources and information, and with equality of opportunity. All these issues are brought forth in online (gaming) platforms with unusually intense clarity—as if in a caricaturist's distorted image—and they've occupied the focal point of discussions that have been going on in and about this domain. Let's take advantage of the opportunity that presents itself here and peer into this crystal ball. What's at stake in this game is nothing less than our mutually amicable coexistence, whereby the virtual level will be increasingly difficult to distinguish from the "real" one.

Translated from German by Mel Greenwald

## Netzspiele

Seit es Computer gibt, wird mit ihnen gespielt, und seit sie vernetzt sind, wird vernetzt gespielt. Einerseits hat das digital gestützte Spiel durch seine Vernetzung zum Ursprung eines jeden Spiels zurückgefunden: Bietet doch erst das Netzspiel die Möglichkeit, nicht nur gegen die Maschine, sondern auch gegen und mit menschlichen Mitspielern zu agieren. Neu jedoch ist, dass das gemeinsame Spiel nicht mehr ortsgebunden, sondern in eine virtuelle Spielwelt eingebunden ist, die beliebige Formen und Oberflächen haben kann, wobei diese prinzipiell von den Spielern beeinflussbar sind. Was Anfangs aufgrund der geringen Bandbreiten und Rechenkapazitäten auf reine Textwelten beschränkt war und sich ausschließlich in der Fantasie der Spieler konkretisierte, hat sich heute zu detailliert gestalteten und global zugänglichen Spiel-

universen entwickelt, die von tausenden Rechnern jeden Augenblick aufs Neue generiert werden. Onlinespiele sind dabei, sich von einem Zeitvertreib einiger weniger Spezialisten zu einem selbstverständlichen Teil unseres Alltags zu entwickeln. Längst kommen sie nicht mehr *nur* als Spiele daher, sondern haben sich als Kommunikationsplattformen in vielfältige Richtungen weiterentwickelt. Sie dienen uns heute ebenso als virtuelle Einkaufspassage, in der man für richtiges Geld richtige Waren kaufen kann, wie als Kontaktbörse. Sie sind gleichzeitig Arbeitsplatz und Spielplatz, Museum und Kneipe, Konzertbühne und Konferenzraum. Wie man in ihnen agiert und welche Ziele man verfolgt, ist der Mentalität des einzelnen Benutzers überlassen.

Sie konfrontieren uns mit Fragen, die keine Exklusivität für die virtuelle Welt besitzen, sondern in einer sich immer schneller globalisierenden kapitalistischen Gesellschaft zunehmend aktuelle Relevanz gewinnen: Es sind Fragen nach unserer persönlichen Identität und unserem Selbstbild, nach unserem Verständnis von Gesellschaft und den Möglichkeiten der Teilhabe daran, nach dem Verhältnis von Privatbesitz und Gemeingut, Privatheit und Öffentlichkeit, nach Überwachungsmechanismen und den Möglichkeiten, diese zu umgehen. Fragen nach Ressourcen- und Informationszugang und nach Chancengleichheit. All diese Fragen treten in Online-(Spiele-) Plattformen fast schon als Zerrbilder überdeutlich hervor und wurden und werden in ihnen und um sie herum diskutiert. Nutzen wir die Chance, die sich hier bietet, und werfen wir einen Blick in diese Glaskugel. Auf dem Spiel steht nichts weniger als ein einvernehmliches Miteinander, wobei die virtuelle Ebene immer weniger von der „realen“ zu trennen sein wird.

## Milestones in the Development of Metaverses Compiled by Andreas Lange

### M.U.D.

**Milestone:** First online game

**Developer:** Roy Trubshaw, Richard Bartle (Essex University, UK)  
**Year:** 1979

**Development:** Externally accessible: 1983; commercial development beginning in 1984 as “MUD1” (for C64 and Compuserve)

```
#*#
Score to date: 102165
Level of experience: Legend
Strength: 100 Stamina: 100 Dexterity: 100 Sex: female
Batman stamina: 100

Height carried: 0g (max. weight: 100000g)
Objects carried: 0 (max. number: 12)
Games played to date: 15

*Averaxix the necromancer has given you a nice kiss!
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Your level of experience is now witch.
The password to witch mode will be revealed when you quit.

*Averaxix the necromancer has given you a nice kiss!
A male voice in the distance shouts "hehe"
*Averaxix the necromancer has given you a nice kiss!
```

M.U.D. (Multi-User Dungeon) recorded on July 24, 1984

```
> monster
Welcome to Monster! Hit return to start:

Welcome back, Faust. Your last play was on 1-JUN-1988 at 10:47pm.

You're in Great Hall
You're in the middle of a vast hall stretching out of sight to the east and west. Strange shadows play across the high vaulted ceiling. The floor is set with smooth rectangular stones. The walls feel slightly cold to the touch, and damp with condensation. A copper plaque, slightly green with age, is set into one wall.

Monster Manager is here.
Monster Manager vanishes in a brilliant burst of multicolored light.
> l
You're in Great Hall
You're in the middle of a vast hall stretching out of sight to the east and west. Strange shadows play across the high vaulted ceiling. The floor is set with smooth rectangular stones. The walls feel slightly cold to the touch, and damp with condensation. A copper plaque, slightly green with age, is set into one wall.

Monster Manager appears in a brilliant burst of multicolored light.
> who
      Monster Status
      1-JUN-1988 10:48pm

Name      Gain Name      Where
-----
Holpher   Monster Manager great hall
skrenta   Faust          great hall
> look plaque
The plaque looks very old and corroded. However, you can still make out the writing:
```

Monster recorded on July 1, 1988

### Monster

**Milestone:** First online game in which users could design the world themselves

**Developer:** Richard Skrenta (Northwestern University, USA)  
**Year:** 1988

**Development:** *Monster* served as the model for “TinyMUD,” which James Aspnes programmed in 1989, and which was, in turn, followed up in the ‘90s by a whole series of mostly non-commercial variants such as “TinyMush,” “TinyMUX” and “TinyMUSE.”





### Project Entropia (now Entropia Universe)

**Milestone:** Metaverse with game elements; first metaverse with ATM card

**Developer:** MindArk PE AB (Sweden)  
Release: 2002 (in development since 1995)

**In-game revenues:** US\$165,000 (2005)  
Number of avatars set up: approximately 580,000 (as of June 2007)

**Access:** free of charge; services fees are charged per in-game action and for cash withdrawal transactions

### Home (Sony/PS3)

**Milestone:** First Metaverse for a video game console

**Timetable:** Announced March 3, 2007 for Fall 2007 (open beta phase beginning April 2007)  
**Use:** Download portal (games, films, music), high-score list, online games, casual games, chat room, advertising portal

**Communication:** Text chat, voice, gestures, segmentation by (language, market) regions probable

**Functions:** Avatar design, item purchase, own apartment, upload own images, videos, music, no 3D CAD



PS3 Home



Bert Freudenberg

Open Croquet

### Croquet

**Milestone:** Open-source 3D online platform

**Developer:** Open Croquet Consortium (including computer pioneer Alan Kay)

**Year:** since 1994, officially since 2001

**Development:** Currently still in beta stage; is being developed further on an ongoing basis for a variety of different uses and applications by various projects and firms.