

Still Logged In:

What Social VR and AR Can Learn from MMOs

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These slides are going to be stark.

I usually do lots of pretty design, but I want to go slow and thoughtfully here.

Plus, I've mostly lost my voice.

Social spaces are not just games.

They are places that may happen to have games in
them.

When you take up the tools of online world design, you
are designing societies.

You might design them with intention.

You might design them by accident.

By omission.

Snow Crash is bullshit.

What's coming is far weirder and in most ways, less cool.

It's also dangerous and challenging in a way that Snow Crash never touched.

“What ethical implications?”

Damn.

So let's get real here for a minute.

You may recall there was a harassment incident in a VR world.

The game designers added a stronger “personal bubble” and a gesture that created a force shield.

What should have happened:

The Wrath of God should have manifested.

And turned the offender into a toad.

Followed by lifetime banning.

If you host an online community, you are on the hook.

If you don't have the wherewithal to be on the hook,

don't host an online community.

Do you have a Code of Conduct for players?

Ideally, that they affirmatively sign.

(It increases compliance to sign a contract or take an oath.)

Plain English. With penalties listed.

A circular buffer providing impartial evidence to world
admins.

Adjudicating disputes is crazy expensive and useless.

Consider voice logs, and recording of all gesture data.

The gesture was a nice touch, but no mention was made of bans.

Recidivism is common. The worst offenders can chase away **actual thousands**.

This implies a full persistent identity system.

Block and mute are wholly inadequate.

For one, what about what third parties see?

Please go read “A Rape in Cyberspace” by Julian Dibbell.

Better yet, the entirety of the book **My Tiny Life**.

As social VR pursues UGC, it's likely we will hit the equivalent.

“TTP” is the metric that online world designers use.

In Second Life, a woman was attacked by an actual swarm of flying penises.

Every feature must be looked at as a weapon.

Panopticons are also susceptible to abuse from admins.

Privacy is the most likely initial violation.

Your world must have hardcoded limitations to prevent
abuse.

Admins may trade virtual items for money.

Or for sexual favors.

Avoid giving them in world identities.

Don't open your world without these sets of laws.

Don't do things that circumvent your own laws.

Players will use your space for self-therapy.

Be prepared:

- To call police
- Suicide hotlines
- To track runaways

Remember, you shape this society.

The original MUD was designed as a blow against the
British class system.

It was also designed for identity exploration.

The promise:

Be someone you aren't,

Somewhere you can't be,

With other people.

Voice chat without masking ruins this.

Voice isn't all:

Consider “The Hobbit effect.”

Choice of avatar is effectively a personality test.

Consider what you are offering and what you are saying.

The biggest bias in virtual spaces is against empathy.

Newbies are “virtual sociopaths.”

There **must** be strong and rapid investment into a persistent identity.

Also increase channels for empathy with others:

Interdependent roles.

Strong means of conveying emotion.

Voice cuts both ways:

Terrible at puppeteering,

Players will be bad actors,

And yet still inferior to Skype.

The less emotional content, the worse players behave.

Maybe you could do voice stressor analysis to affect facial expressions?

Natural language processing to detect keywords?

My actual advice would be

Do tiny groups – two?

Of friends only.

That don't move.

With unrealistic avatars.

This all gets worse with social AR.

Let's get dry and boring for a minute.

I'm going to refer you to the Metaverse Roadmap.

Augmented reality

Lifelogging

Mirror worlds

Virtual worlds

Yelp
Pokemon GO

Twitter
Facebook
Instagram
Snapchat

Zillow
Waze

World of Warcraft

Virtual worlds are not defined by
clients

I call this

The Goggles Fallacy

	WoW	Google Maps	Pokemon Go
Simulates space	X	X	X
Map data source	Fiction	Real	Real
Tracks clients	X	X	X
Positions them spatially	X	X	X
Spawns Ais	X		X
Allows interaction	X		

“A ‘virtual reality’ is defined as a real or simulated environment in which a perceiver experiences telepresence.”

- Jonathan Steuer

(this can be, and has been, experienced in plain text)

All of these technologies, and many more, are just a virtual world server.

And as Internet of Things comes online, it too will just be objects in a giant MMO.

I honestly do not think Web companies realize this.

The adage is

“Never trust the client”

But what when YOU (well, your phone) are the client?

UGC in social AR served as the basis for the Pokemon
GO map.

It came out racist and classist.

Game AR data actually affected people's home real
estate value.

Businesses used AR game data to drive traffic;

Would the game operator be liable if they favored one business over another?

Or if they direct traffic somewhere it isn't wanted?

It's not
“stick a little bit of virtual on this real
thing.”

It's
“stick a version of reality in this
virtual thing.”

If you add trade, you'll have real money trade instantly.

You'll also have muggings or worse.

What about stuff like collision? Block access to a Gym?

Or tribalism? Are you sponsoring real world gang membership?

(This isn't fanciful; it has happened).

If you have
location,
circular buffers,
action history,
location history,
reasonable population density...

Are you going to end up
community managing
downtown
San Francisco?

Bluntly, I saw little to no evidence
that the designers of this game
thought much about this.

You have avatars.
Who move. Who trade.
Who talk. Who interact.
Affect the map. Affect the economy.
With profiles. Persistence.
Private data.
Under the rules of entities.

We usually call those entities governments.

And that's why I said this isn't all about fun and games.

I want to read you something.

It's from August of 2000.

It's something in the way of a little Declaration.

“Someday there won’t *be* any admins. Someday it’s gonna be your bank records and your grocery shopping and your credit report and yes, your virtual homepage with data that exists nowhere else. Someday it’s gonna be *Snow Crash* and *Neuromancer* and *Otherland* all wrapped up into one, and it may be a little harder to write to Customer Service. Your avatar profile might be your credit record and your resume and your academic transcript, as well as your XP earned.”

Soon enough, Internet of Things will give important objects individual instance IDs.

Just like Amazon unified UPCs and ISBNs under a master template ID called an ASIN,

We'll unify FedEx tracking, shipping containers, SSNs, LinkedIn identities, flight numbers, and more under "ThingIDs."

We're adding friends lists via well, everything
And bots via robots
and reputations via LinkedIn
and auction houses via eBay
and secure trade via Craigslist
and profiles via Facebook
and virtual currency with Bitcoin
and quests via serious games
and points for meaningless grinding via gamification
and strategy guides via Quora
and guild chat via status updates
And stats to ourselves via 'quantified self' approaches
And classes and skills via the march of specialization in job
roles

And...

Well, I don't know.

Technologists in the room know we can actually build
that server **right now**.

This isn't a hypothetical.

The fact that “AR” or “mixed reality” currently mean

“superimposing 3d graphics on video”

is purely temporary.

And the least important thing about AR.

I am kept up at night by the idea that

we will blindly chase “cool”

or “useful”

and build infrastructure around our lives unwittingly

Because we don't realize that yeah, we are building an
MMO.

On the other hand, this room gives me hope.

Because I don't trust social media companies or web companies to understand people.

But game designers... well, we are mostly about helping others enjoy life.

Given the choice

I know I'd rather have you be the ones to write the
EULA that is going to govern my life.

We are actually the best qualified people on Earth to
build this scary new future.

So let's please take the right first steps.

Cautiously.

Things to please read

- **My Tiny Life**, Julian Dibbell
- **“A Declaration of the Rights of Players,”** Raph Koster
- **Designing Virtual Worlds**, Richard Bartle
- **The Lessons of of LucasFilm’s Habitat**, Chip Morningstar & Randy Farmer
- **The Proteus Effect**, Nick Yee
- **Rainbows End**, Vernor Vinge
- **For the Win**, Cory Doctorow
- **Halting State**, Charles Stross
- <http://www.metaverseroadmap.org/>