

GLS Symposium Proposal

TITLE: EXTENDING THE REACH OF GAMES

Moderator: John Seely Brown

Respondent: Connie Yowell, MacArthur Foundation

Panelists:

Douglas Thomas, USC Annenberg School for Communication

Joshua S. Fouts, USC Center on Public Diplomacy

Stephen Gillett, Yahoo! Inc.

Overview

This panel examines the ways in which both the content of games and activity of gaming can be seen to extend beyond the traditional boundaries of play or entertainment. Each of these papers, from different perspectives, provides as illustration of the ways in which the reach of games has been extended into the classroom, into management, and into government.

In each of these venues, massively multiplayer online games can be seen to exemplify, often times with the added benefit of time compression, many of the real world dynamics that affect and influence behavior and social interaction. In that sense, we contend, games are serving an educational function. They are, in essence, first and foremost, learning environments.

The argument we want to advance is not one which suggests that gaming or play provide a process or means for education or to enhance understanding. We accept both of these premises as foundational. Instead, we want to examine the ways in which current games themselves, particularly MMOGs, already contain valuable and transferable dynamics which have applications within the spheres of education, management (especially pertaining to not-for-profits), and government.

Our primary interest is to detail the manner in which games are already teaching and learning environments and to identify both how and what people are learning within various game worlds. Accordingly, we believe that by extending the reach of games, we can find uses for these game dynamics with the classroom, with situated learning, and within government, especially in the realm of public diplomacy.

To that end, each of these papers explores a case study or illustration of the basic functions operating within game-space that provide valuable insights into education, social and group dynamics, and conflict and resolution. Moreover, we examine the ways that games create action points and boundary objects that tend to ground conversation around the edge of the game. In such cases, it is not just the game play per se but the

social life around the edge of the game that in general carries much of the richness in terms of the game's meaning, its value, and its social and cultural impact.

Examining how games function within a broader socio-cultural economy of meaning, identity, and action, we demonstrate the value of gaming both by looking inward to detail how the dynamics of play mirror real-life social interaction, as well as by projecting outward toward the possibilities of using games to solve real-world social and political problems and provide tools for education.

In each case, our conclusions call for an effort to further extend the reach of games, suggesting ways in which dynamics of play, virtual interaction and problem solving, and task negotiation can form the basis for problem solving and community building.

Panelist A

Teaching (not so long ago) in a Galaxy Far, Far Away: Using Star Wars Galaxies (in/as) the Classroom

Douglas Thomas
Annenberg School for Communication
University of Southern California

In the fall of 2005, I taught a class titled "Massive Multiplayer Online Games." SOE/LucasArts provided copies of Star Wars Galaxies and free subscriptions to 11 students in the class and the game served as an "object to think with," in relation to game design, cultural and critical analysis, and the impact of games on social networking.

This talk will describe the process of immersion that took place in the classroom setting and will examine a number of effects which emerged from the experience of incorporating an MMOG into a classroom environment.

In doing so, examine the various stages of the evolution of the class, mapping them against the students' levels of interaction with the game and their levels of immersion. Accordingly, the talk will examine the following questions:

- How did the dynamics of gameplay create a new space for student interaction and learning?
- What were the effects of student interaction within the new virtual space/game space?
- How did the integration of an MMOG change the course dynamics and facilitate/hinder learning?

By using this class as a case study, I will explore how the lessons learned within the Galaxies game space became an essential part of the learning experience for the students and how, as they became increasingly immersed in the game world, the class developed its own norms, rules, mores, and language.

While the intention of the integration of the game into the class was originally to provide an object of study for student reflection, the actual function of the game transcended the subject/object dichotomy. As such, a subtle, yet striking, transformation took place. The class was transformed from being a class about games to a class that, literally, became a game, blurring many traditional boundary distinctions which often define education interaction.

In an effort to better understand how we might “extend the reach of games” into the classroom, I will offer speculation as to how and why this transformation occurred, as well as how the phenomenon might be best translated into educational practice.

Panelist B

"Public Diplomacy and MMOGs: Rethinking Foreign Policy, Cultural Understanding, and Peace through Play"

Joshua S. Fouts
Executive Director
USC Center on Public Diplomacy

Transformation of the global information culture has deep and fundamental implications for politics and public diplomacy – dampening (or reversing) the effectiveness of traditional public diplomacy campaigns while opening up new opportunities that are not on the radar of public affairs people doing “business as usual.” For example, relationships formed in the virtual gaming world transcend traditional geopolitical and geosocial boundaries; weblogs played a key role in the last Korean election, and text messages sparked rallies during the recent Spanish elections. Radical movements of every political stripe, from left-wing antiglobalists to religious fundamentalists (Christian, Muslim, Hindu), are fully conversant with the dynamics of these technologies, while their governments are not. The bureaucratic obesity of national governments, including our own, often precludes awareness of, much well informed less response to, these emergent phenomena as they happen.

These changes present new research challenges, as well as new opportunities for developing and projects with long-term, real world social impact.

We are attempting to understand the relationships between many-to-many technologies – networked interaction on a mass scale – and public diplomacy. Our goal in this

presentation will be to describe how massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) can facilitate intercultural dialogue among various groups and serve as a venue and opportunity for rethinking public diplomacy. Early research has confirmed that within these spaces, there is a unique opportunity to create, foster and sustain intercultural dialogue and that perception of national values, ideals, and character are both reinforced and altered by the real time interactions that occur in these spaces.

We believe MMOGs function as communication networks in at least three different ways:

- As one-to-many networks (developer to community). Virtual worlds, in other words, are created by a team of developers and include assumptions, values and beliefs in the structure, design, and art of the game.
- As many-to-many networks. Virtual worlds are networked communication systems, which allow for interactive chat, internal email, and private and public messaging. Communication can occur among and between any of the online participants in a multitude of configurations.
- As one-to-many networks (player to community). Virtual worlds also offer individual players increasing access to a new form of "broadcast." from things as basic as avatar appearance and selection to the ability to create and display objects or messages in public forums or virtual space.

What is Public Diplomacy?

Traditional definitions of public diplomacy include government-sponsored cultural, educational and informational programs, citizen exchanges and broadcasts used to promote the national interest of a country through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign audiences.

The USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) views the field much more broadly. In addition to government sponsored programs, the Center is equally concerned with aspects of what CPD board member, Joseph Nye has labeled "soft power." The Center studies the impact of private activities - from popular culture to fashion to sports to news to the Internet - that inevitably, if not purposefully, have an impact on foreign policy and national security as well as on trade, tourism and other national interests. Moreover, the Center's points of inquiry are not limited to U.S. governmental activities, but examine public diplomacy as it pertains to a wide range of institutions and governments around the globe.

Unlike standard diplomacy, which might be described as the ways in which government leaders communicate with each other at the highest levels, public diplomacy focuses on the ways in which a country (or multi-lateral organization such as the United Nations), acting deliberately or inadvertently, through both official and private individuals and

institutions, communicates with citizens in other societies. But like standard diplomacy, it starts from the premise that dialogue, rather than a sales pitch, is often central to achieving the goals of foreign policy. To be effective, public diplomacy must be seen as a two-way street. It involves not only shaping the message(s) that a country wishes to present abroad, but also analyzing and understanding the ways that the message is interpreted by diverse societies and developing the tools of listening and conversation as well as the tools of persuasion.

Panelist C

Guild Building is Skill Building: How guild building leadership and management skills learned in MMPORPG's transcend into the real world of a startup company.

Stephen Gillett

Senior Director

Yahoo! Inc <http://www.yahoo.com>

Guild Master: Ultima Online, 1997-2001 <http://www.uo.com>

Guild Officer: World of Warcraft, 2004-Present <http://worldofwarcraft.com>

An introspective look at leadership and managerial skills needed for building successful online guilds, and how those skills transcend the virtual world to have real-life practical application for startup companies and/or employment in established organization.

This talk will describe this authors experience as a guild master and draw parallels to experience in the start-up world as an early member of a successful startup. This will set to define how Guild building is real Skill building that the MMPORPG's offers a realm never before available to evolve leadership and social skills.

Accordingly, the talk will examine the following questions:

- What are the skills needed to build and sustain a successful Guild?
- What are the challenges needed to recruit and retain Guild Talent?
- The role of the Guild Master (GM) and the CEO, are they so different?
- How did this author learn and adapt skills learned online to the real world?

By introducing first hand accounts of his role as a GM and experience in the startup world, the author will explore these dynamics and lead the audience on a personal journey through this experience of guild building.

