

# The Anthropology of Virtual Worlds

## Anthropology 3830

Hawai'i Pacific University, Department of Anthropology

<i>Date</i>	Fall 2005
<i>Time</i>	11:50-12:45 Monday, Wednesday, and Friday
<i>Location</i>	TBA
<i>Instructor</i>	Alex Golub
<i>Phone</i>	
<i>Email</i>	agolub@hpu.edu
<i>Office Hours</i>	Monday, Wednesday, 1-2
<i>Course Overview</i>	<p>This course will examine the society and culture of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMOGs) such as Worlds of Warcraft, City of Heroes, Everquest, Second Life, and Ragnarok Online. These games offer immersive, three-dimensional worlds in which hundreds of thousands of players compete and cooperate in everything from university classes to Tolkeinesque heroics. This course will provide a richly ethnographic account of virtual worlds which, although based in anthropology, will be of interest to students of communication, sociology, and information technology. Some major questions to be discussed include: Do virtual worlds offer a space of liberation in which people can be 'more themselves than they ever were before,' or is deep engagement with these virtual worlds an unhealthy addiction? What are the similarities between physical-world and virtual world social networks? How do the structure and design of virtual worlds affect the societies and cultural mores that emerge in them? How do these worlds compare to other forms of computer-mediated communication such as MUDS? How is selfhood shaped on line?</p> <p>Coursework will involve readings and discussions. Grading will be based on class participation and a substantial research project, typically an ethnography of a virtual world based on a set number of hours of on-line play in a MMOG the student is unfamiliar with. Students with an extensive computer science background may propose an alternate, more technically inclined project.</p>
<i>Requirements and Readings</i>	<p><b>Required Texts:</b> In addition to handouts, the following texts are available from the book store. <i>My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World</i>, Julian Dibbel <i>Designing Virtual Worlds</i>, Richard Bartle <i>Communities in Cyberspace</i>, Kollock and Smith</p> <p><b>Grading and Requirements:</b> All students will be graded on the following topics:</p> <p><b>Class assessment</b> (5%) - the anthropology department's in-house evaluation system is an important part of the department's program. Students will receive credit for filling it out.</p> <p><b>Class room participation</b> (15%) - attendance and participation in class are an integral part of the class</p> <p>In addition, students will chose one of two forms of a <b>project</b> (40%) <b>Ethnography of a Virtual World</b> – a twenty to twenty five page paper describing a</p>

virtual world which players are familiar with.

*or*

**Research Paper** – for students who are not familiar with virtual worlds, a research paper on a topic relating to virtual worlds will be assigned.

The project will be a cumulative document based on:

**Short papers** – four three page papers on a topic related to the readings. (10% each)

**Extra Credit?**

Rarely. Some extra credit is available for the truly motivated. If you have an idea for an extra-credit assignment please speak to me about it.

**How to do well in the course**

Because this is a small, upper-level course, it is essential to do the readings before class, discuss them, and keep up with your research project. Because the final project will be built of earlier papers, you will have no problem acing the final project *if* you have been working steadily. If, however, you attempt to do things 'at the last minute', then you will be in trouble. So for this class, slow and steady wins the race.

<b>Week One</b>	<b>Sep 6-9 Introduction to the course: The Power of Videogames</b>
<i>Monday</i>	Holiday
<i>Wednesday</i>	Introduction, hand out syllabus
<i>Friday</i>	The Power of Videogames “Bow Nigger” by always_black “Why Doom Rules” by J.C. Hertz
<b>Week Two</b>	<b>Sep 12-16 video games – a first look</b>
<i>Monday</i>	Everquest: A Virtual World “Virtual Worlds: A First-Hand Account of Market and Society on the Cyberian Frontier ” by Edward Castronova
<i>Wednesday</i>	Do video games make us stupider? Johnson, Everything Bad For You Is Good For You Someone on dumbing down of America
<i>Friday</i>	Do Video Games Make Us Violent? Skylarov, “The Video Game Lightning Rod” Hertz, “Mortal Kombat” Decisions about Papers made
<b>Week Three</b>	<b>Sep 19-23 some history</b>
<i>Monday</i>	“Gendered play spaces”, Henry Jenkins
<i>Wednesday</i>	Movie: Video Game Revolution
<i>Friday</i>	“Introduction to Virtual Worlds” Bartle, 1-38. Paper one handed out
<b>Week Four</b>	<b>Sep 26-30 LambdaMOO</b>

<i>Monday</i>	"A Rape in Cyberspace" in My Tiny Life by Julian Dibbell, 11-33.
<i>Wednesday</i>	"Samantha, Among Others" in My Tiny Life by Julian Dibbell, 125-155 Paper one due
<i>Friday</i>	"S*", in My Tiny Life by Julian Dibbell, 235-267
<b>Week Five</b>	<b>Oct 3-7 Virtual Reality</b>
<i>Monday</i>	<b>President's Day – no class</b>
<i>Wednesday</i>	"Identity and Deception In The Virtual Community" in Kollock and Smith
<i>Friday</i>	"Out of the Body" in Virtual Reality by Howard Rheingold, 255-286
<b>Week Eight</b>	<b>Oct 10-14 'Virtuality' and Its Limits</b>
<i>Monday</i>	"Machines to Think With" in Virtual Reality by Howard Rheingold, 69-93
<i>Wednesday</i>	"Understanding Comics" by Scott McCloud 23-45
<i>Friday</i>	"The Immersive Fallacy" by Eric Zimmerman
<b>Week Nine</b>	<b>Oct 17-21 Players</b>
<i>Monday</i>	Player Types Bartle (128-158, 165-174)
<i>Wednesday</i>	Identity and Role Playing Bartle (158-164, 174-209)
<i>Friday</i>	"Reading Race on Line" in Kollock and Smith Paper two handed out
<b>Week Ten</b>	<b>Oct 24-28 Players</b>
<i>Monday</i>	"Community" and "Influence Through Design" Bartle 212-247
<i>Wednesday</i>	"Problems of Conflict Management in Virtual Communities" in Kollock and Smith. Paper two due
<i>Friday</i>	
<b>Week Eleven</b>	<b>Oct 31 – Nov 4 Economies</b>
<i>Monday</i>	"Population" Bartle ch. 287-316
<i>Wednesday</i>	"Laws of Virtual Worlds", Lastowka and Hunt
<i>Friday</i>	<i>Thanksgiving – don't come to class</i>
<b>Week Twelve</b>	<b>Nov 7 – 11 Aspects of Design</b>

<i>Monday</i>	<i>Character Creation and Abilities</i> “Advancement” Bartle 247-269 “Character Generation” Bartle 369-384 “Crafting” Bartle 445-450 Paper three due
<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Social Design and Biography</i> “Groups” 391-398 “Combat” 398-434
<i>Friday</i>	<i>The Elder Game and Players as Creators</i> “The Elder Game” and “The Whole Picture” 451-473
<b>Week Thirteen</b>	<b>Nov 14 – 18 Identity, Body, Community</b>
<i>Monday</i>	“The Economies of Online Cooperation” in Kollock and Smith
<i>Wednesday</i>	“Maipa Made Me Do It” by Mark Mosko
<i>Friday</i>	“Copyright and Taboo” by Alex Golub
<b>Week Fourteen</b>	<b>Nov 21 – 25 Creativity in Real and Virtual Worlds</b>
<i>Monday</i>	Paper four handed out “Free Culture” by Lawrence Lessig (selections)
<i>Wednesday</i>	“Escaping the Guided Cage: User Created Content and Building the Metaverse” by Cory Ondrejka
<i>Friday</i>	“Commodifying Culture – More than Just a Virtual Sword” by Sal Humphreys
<b>Week Fifteen</b>	<b>Nov 28- 2 Dec Microinteraction in Games</b>
<i>Monday</i>	Paper four due “Playing With Players Potential Methodologies for MUDs” by Toril Mortensen
<i>Wednesday</i>	“A Discourse Analysis of MMOG talk” by Constance Steinkuehler
<i>Friday</i>	“Creative Player Actions in FPS Online Video Games: Playing Counter-Strike” by Talmadge Wright
<b>Week Sixteen</b>	<b>Dec 5 – 9 The Power of Video Games, redux</b>
<i>Monday</i>	“The New Game Journalism” Kieron Gillen “Eve Online” by Jim Rossignol
<i>Wednesday</i>	“Anda's Game” by Cory Doctorow Final project due
<i>Friday</i>	Final thoughts.