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**Realities that matter:
Doings and Makings of an
Online Game**

Shu in Shanghai





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We studied an online game in China:

World of Warcraft

And found:

a space where digital and physical merge & where socio-economic, political agendas, and social values shape the play space



Relative sharp distinction: e.g. Bainbridge, Turkle, Bryce and Rutter

Dynamics across digital and physical space: Castronova, Dibbel, Malaby, Miller and Slater, Wakeford

Agre: "As long as we persist in opposing so-called virtual communities to the face-to-face communities of the mythical opposite extreme, we miss the ways in which real communities of practice employ a whole ecology of media as they think together about the matters that concern them"

Realities...

Virtual Reality

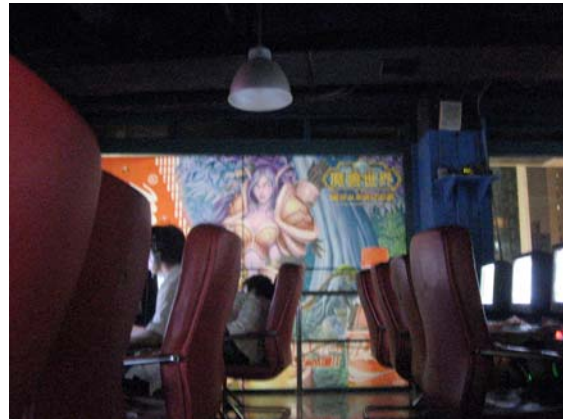
Mixed Realities (e.g. Milgram and Kishino)

Assemblies (Hindmarsh et al.)

Hybrid Reality Spaces (de Souza e Silva)

Hybrid Ecologies (Crabtree and Rodden)

Wang Ba Net Bar Internet Cafe



Wang Ba Net Bar Internet Cafe





"Home has no atmosphere."

"I enjoy playing at the café because there are more people, it's more exciting. Most of the guild activities are at night, so the people all show up late in the Internet café. I enjoy the atmosphere of people playing around me."

"My guild members and I play combat and then we rest and look at the area together. We explore the graphics and wander through different areas. To get equipment is a lot of work. It is very tiring. Looking at the scenery is recreational."



"If there is an empty seat next to a WoW player I go over there to sit next to him—even though it is in a really crowded area. We look at each other's equipment and have a conversation about it. Sometimes we exchange seats with other people so that we [WoW players] can sit closer to each other. If I am playing by myself I am bored and leave the Internet café. The people here are nice, we play together, they all live around here. We know each other from playing the game."

Trust

"They [online friends] believe in me, because they gave me their phone number first. If there is some news, they give me a call. If I give another player my phone number, I must have the feeling I can trust him. I give it to them [other players] if they are trustworthy."

"A few online friends trust me to the extent that they lend their accounts to me to play."

"It took about a year... to exchange characters. We met each other while we were killing a monster. We had some conversations and felt we get along very well. We asked each other to take care of things. Like helped each other with quests."



Ren Yao - Lady Boy

"Picking female as a guy doesn't feel right. We call this person a ren yao."

Peng: "I don't like to be mistaken for a woman. When people think you are a girl, they treat you differently... They talk to you differently. It doesn't feel comfortable."



Socio-political hybrids

Bingwen: *“What’s more, in China I am not quite clear about the reason [for the action], perhaps it’s China’s political situation. In the past when you died [in the game] there were bones and skeletons but now graves are used instead. What we were told is that the skeletons are frustrating and scaring people. But I feel graves are actually scarier.”*

Socio-political hybrids

Chao: "It's a grave, which didn't exist before. You see, there's a corpse dropping items. When you pick up those items, the corpse turns into a grave. Before... there used to be a skeleton. It is a result from the upgrade, which is part of the governmental project to introduce harmony."

Longwei: "We dislike the harmony such as the disappearance of skeletons... It is feudal and introduced as part of the whole cultural environment in China."

Realities...

Virtual Reality

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Hybrid Ecologies (Crabtree and Rodden)

From virtual, hybrid, mixed,... Realities

to

Cultural, social and contextual assemblies and
infrastructures

in

a hybrid **Cultural** Ecology





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Questions?