

Summary in English

Title: *Storytelling and Identity in Online Gaming Communities. Exploring Online Culture and Communication as Narrative Practices.*

This dissertation offers a study of computer games as aesthetical objects and aesthetical experience, and focuses on the user-creativity in online gaming communities. Having studied *World of Warcraft* player communities in particular, I have found that storytelling on these sites is an important part of a process of making sense of experiences in and surrounding the activity of gaming, and that the stories told within player communities contribute to create and sustain meaningful identities for the individual player as well as groups of players. The dissertation is based on papers published during the Ph.D. period and consists of two parts: In Part I, I introduce and position the topic, present my methodological approach, and proceed to establish and operationalize my theoretical framework in analyses of the forum writings of a *World of Warcraft* guild. Part II consists of four papers produced and published during the Ph.D., and they all reflect the topic in different ways (see list of papers below).

My approach to the subject is shaped by literary hermeneutics and narrative theory. In the dissertation, I argue that in order to understand why, how and to what effect people tell stories to each other online, we can benefit from applying the theoretical concept *mimesis*, which concerns the relationship between the aesthetical representation of reality and the experience of that reality. In this I am especially inspired by Paul Ricoeur's understanding of *mimesis* (developed in *Time and Narrative (Temps et récit) I-III*) as designating an activity by which we construct meaning out of our experience of reality by resignifying it through narratives.

In accordance with this theoretical framework, my investigation is primarily based on textual analysis of narrative texts written by players and posted on their community websites. My study concerns the kind of narrative texts users themselves define or present as stories, thus focusing on the deliberate practice of storytelling. This focus allows for a closer analysis of typical narrative configurations on player community websites. Of special interest in this project is how the storytelling of players show how

fiction comes to play a role in the interaction in an online group and how the imaginative creations of these players significantly contribute to identity formation for the community as well as its individual members.

List of papers included in the dissertation:

1. "Gender Values in Simulation Games: Sex and The Sims", *Proceedings of CEPE (Computer Ethics Philosophical Enquiry)*, University of San Diego, 2007.
2. "Gender and the Player Cyborg: Ideological Representation and Construction in Online Games", *Proceedings of Internet Research 8.0: Let's Play*, Vancouver, 2007.
3. "Gamers Telling Stories: Understanding Narrative Practices in an Online Community", *Convergence. The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. 16, 1, pp. 112-124, 2010.
4. "Online Identity Crisis: Real ID on the World of Warcraft forums", *First Monday. Peer-Reviewed Journal on the Internet*. 16, 7. 2011.