

Technologies of the Imagination

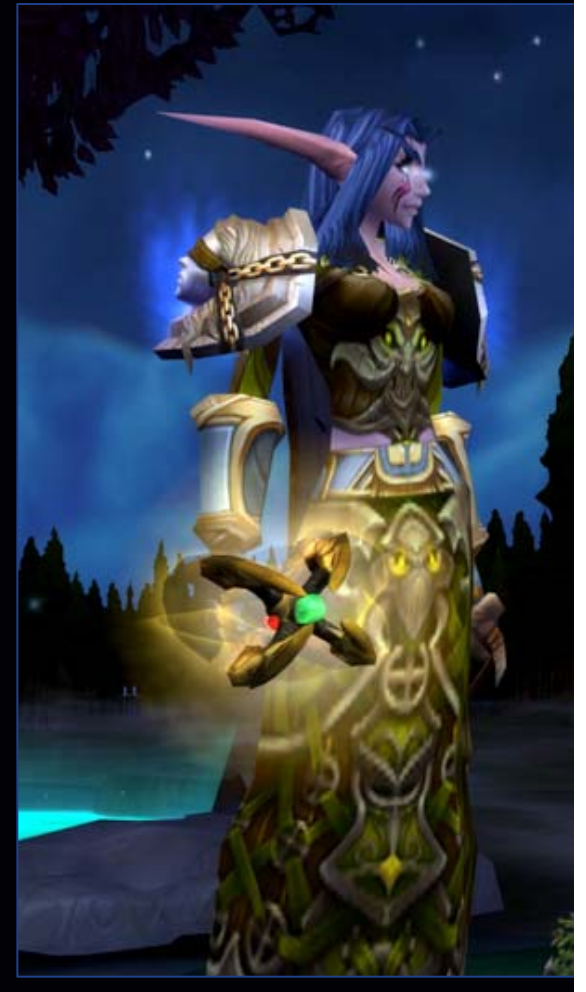
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To explore sociomateriality, we can examine each of the terms in this construct.

MATERIAL

Orlikowski (2007):

Materiality is not “pre-formed substances”; it is performed relations.

Citing Barad (2003):

There are no independently existing entities with existing characteristics.

But “pre-form” is characteristic of natural and designed materials;
they inherently offer resistances to human action.



*“here is my handle,
here is my spout”*

SOCIAL

The “social” of sociomateriality is, at least in part, the human encounter with varied pre-forms in the natural world and in designed objects.

A relational argument, and one about possible performances, but it includes “existing entities” with “existing characteristics.”

Pre-form ----> perform

Explore these ideas through study of online video games and virtual worlds such as *Second Life*, examining the experiences they afford through their pre-formed capacities.

These are “technologies of the imagination” in permitting a partial release from the heavy, resistant materiality of our own bodies, the physical geographies in which we move, and the other people with whom we are surrounded.

They allow experiences in which resistances of everyday reality, to which we are all accustomed, are relaxed to a degree felt, noticed, and remarked on, by participants in the worlds.

They allow a wide range of performances; their characteristic pre-form is to provide this scope.

Virtual Worlds

persistent systems that record state

3D geography

characters (avatars)

digital objects

text/voice chat

games

(*World of Warcraft*)

Second Life

(user-created
content using SL
tools)

a character in the forest





Interviewed VW innovators promoting the technology at IBM

Doug giving talks →

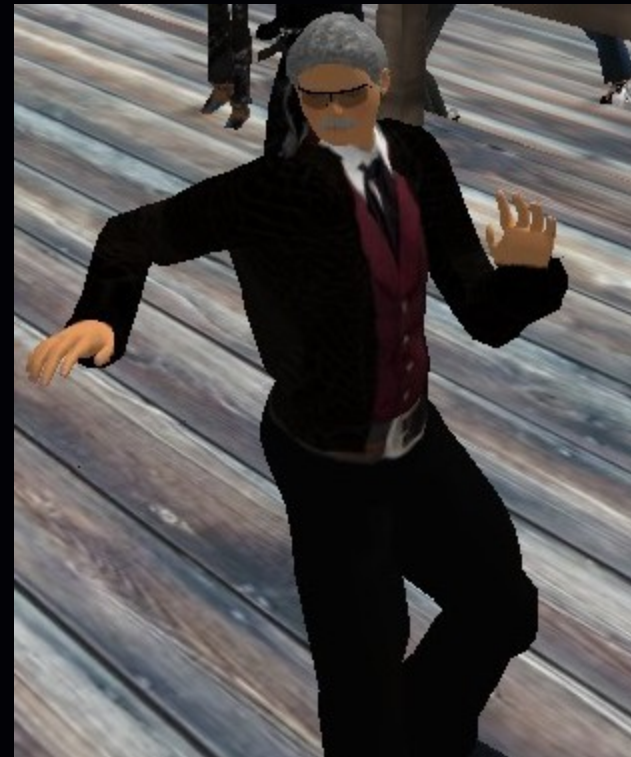


Virtual worlds provide a release from, or radical rearrangement of, certain kinds of resistant materiality -- such as one's *appearance*, *surroundings*, and *people*.



Doug steps out

An imagined Doug



dancin' Doug

*“The connection was really with the people...and kind of a surprise to me...
And soon, pretty soon, I actually found myself living in Second Life.”*

A powerful digital technology came to rearrange Doug's life

appearance

surroundings

people

a new place to live

A new subject is created



In a study of three VWs, Ducheneaut et al. 2009 observed that few people created very short, very tall, or very fat avatars.

“People tended to create thinner, younger, more fashionable versions of themselves.”

“[A]vatars can be used to escape the constraints of our physical bodies.”
(Ducheneaut et al. 2009)

Dave from IBM, now at
Linden Lab



Release from physical constraints may be more extreme.

“Jessica” is the avatar of the employee who helped write the virtual worlds business conduct guidelines for IBM.

I love the ability to not be Greg and to be able to change my appearance to whatever I feel like at the spur of the moment.

She is his work and non-work avatar and he insists on being called Jessica when in-world (even when on voice chat).



Q: How about Jessica? Why did you decide that you wanted to not be Greg and have this very different avatar?

Greg: *OK, there's a number of reasons, none of which involves me being gay...*

I tried three male avatars and couldn't make them look very good. There really weren't very many, like, design options, and like accessories and cloth and stuff for male avatars. There's really vastly more for females...And so I found that working with the sliders and making the shapes and the faces.. and stuff it was very easy for me to figure out what worked to make an attractive [avatar].

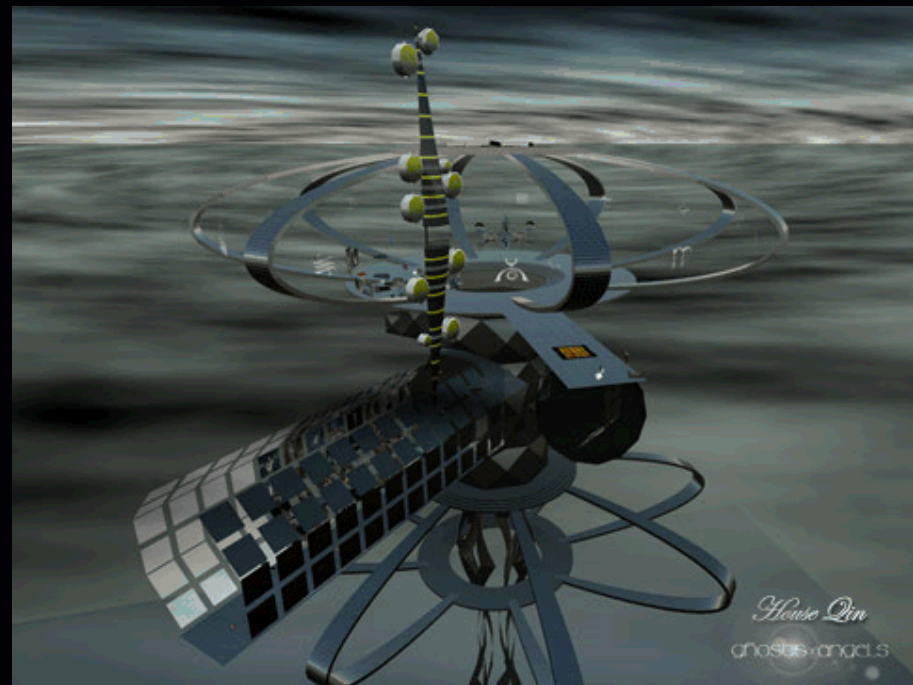
Pre-form of the code restricts options.

[Jessica] has the freedom to do things that I can't do, simply because I'm a 49-year old male living in suburbia.

Surroundings and people

Greg/Jessica: *This [SL] was kind of a nice way to hobnob with, you know, people. So, like, people in my [real life] neighborhood, they want to talk about cars and golf. I get along much better with people in Second Life who want to talk about building a starship.*

Jessica's starship →



Technologies of the imagination afford the creation of new subjects, with their own performances, not merely imagined worlds such as those of books or film.



I love it [SL]. I was talking to somebody the other night, and I said, “I want to log in and never log out... I want to go live in the server, and I don’t ever want to come out again.” And it sounds kind of silly, but, you know, some days I feel like that: Just upload me, and, you know, unplug the computer at this end, and let me stay there. (IBM Global Business Services employee).

On email, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook →
as Grey Beam, the avatar



Theorycrafting

First the formula and what it means

Proc = $1 - (1 - C/2)^n$. - This is for 2/2 Surge of Light

Proc = $1 - (1 - C/4)^n$. - This is for 1/2 Surge of Light

Proc = Chance of SoL proc

C = Crit Percentage (where 1.0 = 100%)

n = number of chances to proc (n = 2 for Binding Heal, n = 5 for CoH, n = 6 for glyphed COH, PoH with a group that has 2 hunters n = 7!)

Example #4: Manipulating the formula to figure out what crit percentage you would need for the desired chance of getting a Surge of Light proc.

Proc = 0.75 or 75%, meaning you want your CoH to give you a 75% chance to generate a SoL proc.

C = ??? - unknown

n = 6

Proc = $1 - (1 - C/2)^n$. (isolate C, gets ugly)

$$C = -2 * [(-P+1)^{1/n} - 1]$$

$$C = -2 * [(-0.75+1)^{1/6} - 1]$$

$$C = -2 * [(0.25)^{1/6} - 1]$$

$$C = -2 * [0.7937 - 1]$$

$$C = -2 * -0.20629$$

$$C = 0.41259 \text{ or } 41.3\% \text{ crit needed.}$$

(from ElitistJerks.com)

Technologies of the imagination may generate new worlds of performance. WoW players conduct experiments using math and logic to discover game mechanics (rules and outcomes) that cannot be discovered in ordinary play.

← forum discussions

It's not just "life on the screen." Different realities join for new kinds of performances.

Jessica's activities span
IBM and non-work *Second Life*
venues



A friend points at action in
World of Warcraft
in an Internet café in Beijing
Summer 2007



Technologies of the imagination are perhaps not new.

Rock art:

Hallucinogenic drugs:



[Shamans] take a hallucinogenic drink, whose Jívaro name is natema, in order to enter the supernatural world. This brew...is prepared from segments of a species of the vine *Banisteriopsis*. The Jívaro boil it with the leaves of a similar vine, which probably is also a species of *Banisteriopsis*, to produce the cooled tea that contains powerful hallucinogenic alkaloids...

(Michael Harner, *The Jívaro*)



Are these precisely technologies?

They seem to have the same capacity as video games and virtual worlds to summon complex realities, to rearrange fundamental relations with people, places, and things.

Technologies of the imagination are pre-formed to:

1. act as complex mediating systems, not merely instruments or tools
2. afford some release from certain ordinary, pervasive materialities
3. be generative of new activities of the imagination

They are grounded in materials of computers, wires, screens, or rocks or herbal tea, but at the same time transcend them, allowing us to resist certain materialities and to act as subjects with new relations to dream worlds or imagined universes.

my Night Elf priest in *World of Warcraft* →

