



# Virtual Exploratories

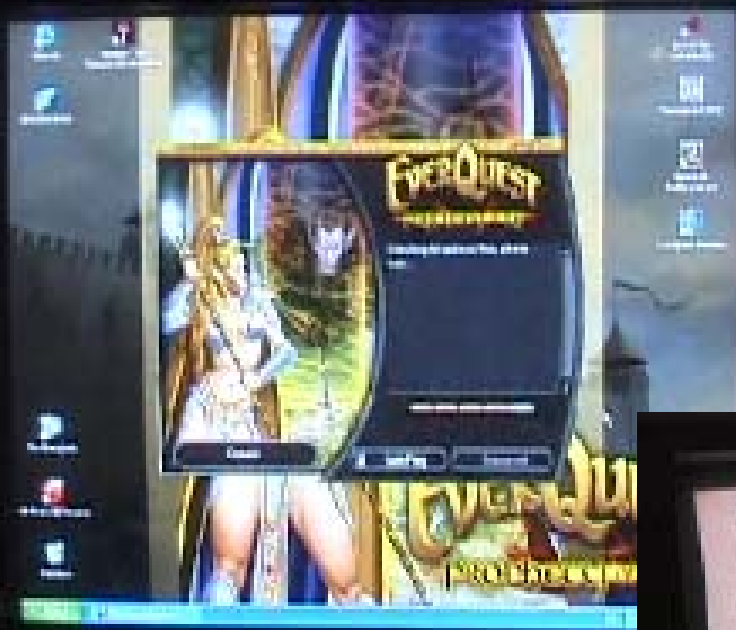
*Designing for Reflective Practices and Social  
Innovation*

**'Actors and Avatars Communicating in Virtual Worlds'**

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# Actors and Avatars

- The research project:
  - ‘Actors and Avatars Communicating in Virtual Worlds (VW)’
    - An empirical analysis of actors’ sense-making strategies seen from the perspective of communication theory’
  - *Supported by the Danish Research Council for Culture and Communication*



# Questions



- Virtual Exploratory
  - *What is the background*
  - *What is the idea?*
  - *What difference does it make?*
- Actors and Avatars
  - *Who do I study?*
  - *Which are the questions?*
  - *How do I intent to use the findings?*
- Videoviews
  - *How do I study the actors and avatars?*

# Vitual Exploratory



## *What is the background?*

- Networked learning in higher education: project-organized and experience-based (12 years) (Siggaard Jensen & Heilesen 2005)
- 'Lessons learnt' (Siggaard Jensen & Heilesen 2006)
- Knowledge sharing: creating something new rather than 'multiplying' existing knowledge (empirical in-depth study of 'knowing in action' in an IT firm) (Siggaard Jensen 2006)
- Knowledge sharing in the 3D Agora-world (Siggaard Jensen 2006)
- Sharing ideology ~ action, provoking and challenging; disturbances, discrepancies, inference (Dewey 1933)
- Activity-systems or action-oriented systems

# Virtual Exploratory



*What is the idea?*

‘A virtual exploratory is a reflective digital design, framing (Goffman, 1959, 1974/86) and mediating (Latour, 2005) the actors’ sense-making strategies (Dervin et al., 2003) in social interaction and communication with avatars[1] in virtual worlds, provoking a process of reflective practices (Dewey, 1933) and social innovation; either in a collaborative or in a competitive way, or in a combination of both’.

[1] *Avatars, or characters, are the figurative ‘presentations of self’ in advanced virtual worlds.*

**Situations**  
Practices

**Use(s)**  
Outcomes

**Actors:** the making of sense in  
social interaction and  
*communication*

**Gaps**

Gaps faced  
Blocks faced  
Barriers faced

**Bridgings**

Questions answered  
Ideas formed  
Resources obtained

# ‘Gapiness’

- Situation movement states (SMS):
  - *decision* - being at a point where you need to chose between two or more roads that lie ahead;
  - *problematic* - being dragged down a road not of your own choosing;
  - *spin out* - not having a road;
  - *wash-out* - being on a road suddenly having it disappear;
  - *barrier* - knowing where you want to go but someone or something is blocking the way;
  - *being led* - following another on the road because he or she knows more and can show you the way;
  - *waiting* - spending time waiting for something in particular;
  - *passing time* - spending time without waiting for something in particular;
  - *out to lunch* - tuning out;
  - *observing* - watching without being concerned with movement’.

(Dervin et al., 2003:262)





# Actors and Avatars



*Who do I follow?*

- **Active worlds (AW)**
  - Developing the world
  - Group of researcher (4 EU countries, 12 sessions)  
(Siggaard Jensen, 2006; Heilesen, S & Siggaard Jensen, S: Designing for Networked Communications: Strategies and Development, 2006)
- **Massively multi-user online role-playing games: EverQuest (classic)**
  - Developing the avatars
  - Student (high school), unemployed social security claimant, young disabled student, student (teacher education)

# EverQuest (EQ)





# Actors and Avatars



*Which are the questions?*

- **Five research foci:**
  1. the perception and conception of the virtual worlds,
  2. the actors' choice of mediating avatars,
  3. the diversity of social interactions while acting in mutual action,
  4. the self-perceptions experienced and expressed while reflecting on action and communication,
  5. the interplay between the virtual worlds and the actors' life worlds.



# Gnossiz the Gnome



# Gelino - a Favourite Avatar



# Gelino - Plane of Knowledge



# Khrongh – a Favourite Avatar





# Designing Triangle



*How do I intent to use the findings?*

- To transform the sense-making triangle into a designing triangle
- To transform the intermediaries into mediators
  - ‘An intermediary, in my vocabulary, is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs [...] Mediators, on the other hand [...] Their input is never a good predictor of their output; their specificity has to be taken into account every time. Mediators transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry’.

(Latour, 2005:39)

## Scenarios

Quests:  
Challenging,  
action-provoking



## Innovating

Enacting new  
bridgings and  
paths created

**Avatars:** the mediators of  
the making of sense in social  
interaction and  
*communication*



## Gaps/Choices

Scenario movement  
stops: Reflecting on  
quests, and choices

## Bridging the gaps

Evaluating well-known  
strategies: Creating new  
bridgings and paths