

Abstract

With the recent development of virtual worlds, human action within cyberspace is rapidly expanding into new media forms such as online interactive gaming. As Internet users created virtual communities anthropologists followed along into these new frontiers and thus the field of virtual ethnography was born in the late 1980s. This paper introduces a new technique for exploring Internet culture – virtual video ethnography – the recording of human interaction from within virtual realms such as online war games, fantasy role-playing games, and virtual social networking games. Virtual video ethnography is used to capture an apparently violent incident within a popular warfare simulation game known as Battlefield 2. This footage is then used to explore violence and hegemonic meanings within video games and demonstrate the utility of virtual video ethnography for cultural analysis. It is argued that action within the virtual realm cannot be collapsed into the same category as action within the ‘real’ world.

Key words: gaming, virtual, ethnography, media, violence, battlefield, Internet, simulation, video, game

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Virtual Video Ethnography: Towards a New Field of Internet Cultural Studies

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There is a widespread tendency to condemn video games as an extension of the militarization of society into leisure time. Yet such accusations overstate the degree to which video games establish a set of preferred meanings for participants. Theorists often overlook the contradictory and polysemic nature of video games and underestimate the interpretive sophistication of the Internet's online gaming community. Here these issues are explored through the lens of virtual ethnography. This paper also briefly describes my experimental work in a new variation within this field, virtual video ethnography.

I approach the subject of violence in video games from the position of the ethnographer, which is to say that I have immersed myself in the culture of online gaming. A study of online culture can be said to be ethnographic when the researcher becomes a participant observer of the daily behaviour of an online community. Over the past two decades the anthropological practice of ethnography has been extended into the virtual realm of online communities. Ethnography helps overcome the excesses of abstract theoretical analysis and the artificial conditions of laboratory experiments by immersing the researcher in the actual experience of new media audiences. *Virtual* ethnography treats the online community as a shared culture that can be explored using the techniques of anthropological inquiry. Bruce Mason aptly describes virtual ethnography as a practice that

fully immerses the ethnographer into the consensual reality experienced by groups of people who use computer-mediated communication as their primary, and often only, means of communication ... As with any ethnography it is the detailed, systematic, and exhaustive participation within the group and building of relationships over time that allow the ethnographer to build with the help of the participants an account of the culture created within that group.¹

The virtual ethnographer seeks to enter into the lifeworld of someone else's virtual persona that has been projected into cyberspace. Thus the object of fieldwork shifts away from the distant individual who is sitting at a keyboard to the online representation of that individual, his 'virtual persona.' Of course, this does not mean that the individual at the keyboard is ignored. Virtual ethnography sees the individual as presenting two selves – the self that exists in the physical ('real') world and the virtual self that is projected into the online environment. Members of virtual communities also recognize the duality of selves and frequently use the abbreviation 'RL', which stands for 'real-life', to indicate which realm of experience they are referring to within conversations.

This paper outlines my use of the computer as a still and video camera to capture action within the virtual realm – a technique referred to herein as virtual *video* ethnography. Virtual video ethnography stands in a long line of tradition that uses communication technologies such as tape recorders, film cameras, and video cameras to explore human action. The movie camera was first used as an ethnographic tool in 1922 for Robert Flaherty's film, *Nanook of the North*, although the use of video recording for exploring human action within the virtual realm is very new. At the time of writing I was unable to locate any concrete examples of video ethnography being used to explore human action *within* Internet-based video game communities. While a recent overview of digital video methodology notes the use of the camera to record a subject using the Internet, the 2005 article made no mention of the possibility of bringing the camera *into* the virtual realm to record human action from within cyberspace.²

Virtual Video Ethnography of Violent Online Games

From 2006 to 2007 I participated in the online gaming community known as Tactical Gamer (tacticalgamer.com). One of the most distinct features of the Tactical Gamer community is the requirement for mature, rule-based game play and a general desire for the close simulation of real-world conditions. The Tactical Gamer community strives to 'create an environment conducive for mature gamers to enjoy the games they play without the everyday interference from the less-than-mature gamers,' promote 'mutual

respect' for fellow gamers, and support game play 'in a near-simulation environment ... utilizing real-world combat strategy and tactics.'³ Tactical Gamer also represents a fairly unique instance of the successful creation and perpetuation of normative rules governing online behaviour in what is an otherwise anarchic online culture of warfare simulation. Established in 2001, Tactical Gamer has created one of the oldest and most mature online gaming environments.

Within the Tactical Gamer community I immersed myself in a warfare simulation game known as Battlefield 2 (BF2). BF2 is a genre of video game known as a first-person shooter, wherein the individual experiences a virtual world from the first person point of view, which means he does not see himself within the game. The only part of the 'self' that is seen in the game is one's own weapon and hands. The following is a typical in-game screenshot (an image, or 'photograph') of what I might see on my computer screen while playing:



The first person point of view within Battlefield 2.

Within Battlefield 2, the individual plays as a member of a six-person squad and compete against other squads for the control of key locations or flags. Two armies face off against

each other on various terrains. Each army consists of 32 people, with a total of 64 individuals participating in a shared virtual environment. Players (also referred to as *gamers*) can talk to other members of their squad if they have a microphone. All players can use typed text (known as 'chat') to communicate via writing with others while playing.

Death within the game is for the most part bloodless, although sometimes blood can be seen when shooting another individual nearby. As a military simulation, the goal is to kill the enemy, defeat the other army, and conquer a geographical region. The enemy can be killed by using a knife (which takes great stealth and skill), a variety of guns, grenades, molotov cocktails (fire bombs), land mines, artillery fire, and claymores. Battlefield 2 is an ideal environment for exploring issues of violence, the militarization of leisure time, and the relationship between the virtual and the 'real' world.

To highlight the confusion that exists between reality and virtuality within the analysis of violent video games, I recorded a violent incident within an online game and made a video called [[url= http://www.tacticalgamer.com/battlefield-2-general-discussion/88310-art-war-aesthetics-virtual-killing.html](http://www.tacticalgamer.com/battlefield-2-general-discussion/88310-art-war-aesthetics-virtual-killing.html)]*The Art of War*.[/url] In this brief video I used simple editing techniques to explore the moment of a kill. Implicit in this study is a challenge to those who make a simple equation between real-life violence and virtual violence enacted within a video game. This video represents a rare instance (thus far) of recorded action within a simulated online environment being used as a research tool for the ethnographic analysis of a virtual community.

The Art of War is a two minute video that captures action from my own participation in a modified version of Battlefield 2 known as Project Reality. In it the action is seen from my point of view (first person point of view) as I 'kill' an enemy player, 'blood' spills from his head, and he falls to his 'death'. This brief instance of virtual video ethnography provides an example of how seemingly violent video games can be appropriated and remade into a form of art. It is also intended to challenge the conception that video games are inherently aligned with the celebration of war, imperialism, violence, and murder.

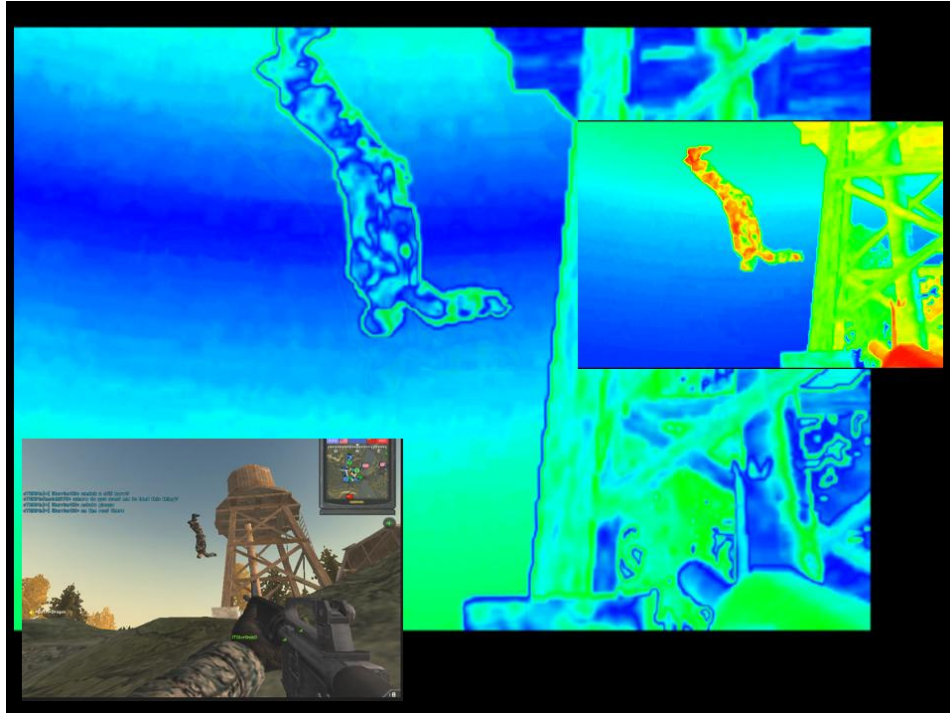


A still image from the video *The Art of War*.

As an exercise in virtual video ethnography, *The Art of War* provides an occasion for interrogating the relationship between the real and the virtual. My action within the virtual world of the online video game would normally be described in terms derived from the real world – kill, blood, death. Within the analysis of video games the behaviour I engaged in, using a ‘gun’ to ‘kill’ the ‘enemy’ would also generally be described as aggression. Yet my emotional state at the time was hardly comparable to aggression. Indeed, my response to the ‘kill’ is captured within the video as one of awe at the drama of the simulation – whereas in life I would have been overwhelmed by the horror of the event.

The Art of War challenges the simplistic equation of video game violence with real violence or aggression. By editing the moment of the ‘kill’ I transformed it into a montage of images reminiscent of Andy Warhol’s work with celebrity photographs. Virtual violence that is not violence is transformed into digital art. As other researchers

have noted, artistic statements are emerging from game players.⁴ Interactive entertainment, online gaming culture, is evolving into a new mode of cultural production.



Violent online games as a source of art.

In another virtual video I combined a brief clip of a helicopter landing to pick up other squad members and me (an ‘extraction’ in military jargon) with appropriated (pirated) footage from a bangra music video. This is edited into the form of a fake movie trailer which I called [<http://www.tacticalgamer.com/battlefield-2-project-reality-mod/87764-trailer-new-pr-movie-insurgents.html?highlight=movie+trailer>]*The Insurgents*[/url] and acts as a playful challenge to the official discourse of the so-called ‘War on Terror’. In Battlefield 2 individuals can play as members of the American military or as members of the ‘Insurgents’. Insurgents have access to truck bombs and other improvised explosive devices in the game and are clearly modelled on the concept of resistance fighters and terrorists.



Appropriation and cultural critique within virtual worlds.

The Insurgents is intended to show how gamers do not automatically accept the official definition of the War on Terror or the agenda of imperialism. In the tradition of fan cultural production the video illegally uses copyrighted music and video material.⁵ By playing with the notion of a dehumanized enemy *The Insurgents* seeks to challenge the absolute authority of presidential discourse which claims that we must either stand for or against the military agenda of the United States. 'Illegal' thoughts combine with 'illegal' images to create a moment of subversive cultural production through the use of in-game video footage. Thus the game of war is transformed into a moment of war-resistance.

Another technique of virtual video ethnography combines multiple camera angles and points of view (first- and third-person). This technique delivers a multiperspective style that is commonly seen in cinema. Action is seen from both my own eyes and from an omniscient third-person perspective. To demonstrate this technique I recorded a helicopter journey from an airport to a mosque within the Project Reality game.⁶ Then I used a master record of the game and videotaped the same trip from the third-person

point of view. Using a movie editing program (Adobe Premiere) I edited the two points of view into one seamless record of the trip.



Evolving methods of virtual videography combine first- and third-person perspectives.

Recording human action within virtual environments from multiple angles (perspectives) is adding a whole new layer of reflexivity to the ethnographic process. Not only can the ethnographer capture multiple perspectives of the same event, but those involved (other in-game players) have the ability to produce their own version of the event. This will further challenge the authority of any one point of view or interpretation. Adding an omniscient perspective to our actions within the virtual realm also brings a new dimension to the way we experience the self and construct our identities.

What happens to identity and the self when individuals gain the ability to see their actions from both the inside (first-person) and the outside (third-person)? While this has been possible for some time due to the proliferation of video cameras, very few individuals

experience their world from anything other than the first-person point of view. What if it becomes common to combine first- and third-person points of view within cyberspace? As more time is spent within virtual realms the sociological and psychological impact of the third-person point of view may be significant indeed. The day is soon coming when hundreds of millions of people will most certainly spend as much time inside virtual online realms as was once spent in front of the television. Virtual video ethnography will prove to be a useful tool for exploring the new type of worlds and the new type of selves that are emerging within these hyperreal playgrounds.

The brief moments captured in these videos provide an example of what is sure to become a significant area of Internet cultural studies, the use of video recording to explore human action within the virtual worlds of cyberspace. Online virtual worlds, arenas such as SimCity, Battlefield 2, Second Life, and World of Warcraft represent a form of human experience shared by more than 10 million individuals. This number will certainly grow to over 100 million in a few short years. These forms of entertainment, while not without their dangers, are fields of enormous pedagogical significance and hold tremendous potential as forms of creative expression, personal development, and cultural production.

Research into violent video games that is conducted from the normative (public policy-oriented) perspective overwhelmingly concludes that violent video games contribute to aggression and violence.⁷ Players are said to imitate the action of game characters and the effects of the violent video games are usually described as increased aggression, increased hostility, negative emotions or 'bad moods,' a decrease in tendencies toward positive behaviours, and reduced empathy. The normative study of violent video games argues that this new media form increases the risk that the player will become a more antisocial, violent individual. This type of research tends to equate the simulation (the virtual), with the real without adequate consideration of how the context of play affects the individual's experience and emotional states.

The ethnographic study of violent video games suggests that, under certain conditions, there may be a weak correlation between the real and the virtual. Oddly enough, the failure by feminist legal theorist, Catharine A. MacKinnon, to maintain distinct categories of experience sheds light on this weak correlation. MacKinnon erred when she equated representation with reality and proposed an almost biblical unity between word and deed. To turn MacKinnon's highly controversial linguistic theorem 'speech becomes sex' on its head, I propose that the virtual does not become the real.⁸

There is a distinction between a representation and an event that must be maintained or we risk a confusion of categories wherein all things become equally real. This confusion is apparent in MacKinnon's theory of pornographic speech, which equates a representation such as speech about sex (pornography) with the actual thing itself – sex. Thus for the fundamentalist theorist, speech about sex is sex. Mark Cousins and Parveen Adams' comment on a curious fundamentalism seen among intellectuals such as MacKinnon has relevance here. They accuse MacKinnon of taking a fundamentalist stand when she equates the representation of a thing (in this case, pornographic speech) with the thing itself – sex. This type of representational theory 'seeks to abolish the difference between a representation and an event.'⁹ A fundamentalist theory of communication does not recognize that there is a difference between domains, and thus collapses the representation of sex into the same category as the act itself. Likewise we see in the moral terror around violent video games a tendency to deny the difference between the representation of a thing and the thing itself.

My purpose here is not to dismiss every negative effect that may arise from video games. It would be remarkable if there were absolutely no connection between our media consumption, a culture of gun violence, and an increasingly militarized social order. Yet the study of violent video games is at best a methodologically unsophisticated field filled with research projects that move from highly artificial laboratory observations to grossly over-generalized conclusions about the gamer's real-world psychological state.¹⁰ Studies thus far have delivered numerous contradictory conclusions and repeat basic methodological and theoretical errors that were identified thirty years ago within the

communications, media, and anthropology fields. As Jonathan L. Freedman notes, the research into violent video games ‘is not only extremely limited in terms of the number of relevant studies, but also suffers from many methodological problems.’¹¹ Freedman’s own survey of the literature concludes that

1. There is substantial, though far from overwhelming or definitive evidence that people who like and play violent video games tend to be more aggressive than those who like and play them less. This is, of course, a purely correlational finding and tells us nothing about whether playing violent video games causes aggression. 2. There is some slight evidence that immediately after playing violent video games there is an increase in aggressiveness. As discussed above, the evidence for this is minimal and is greatly weakened by limitations in the research, which provide alternative explanations of the effect. 3. There is not the slightest evidence that playing violent video games causes any long-term or lasting increase in aggressiveness or violence. There is very little relevant research, and no longitudinal studies that might show such effects. It may well be that further research will indicate that playing violent video games is harmful. For the moment, however, there is no such work and no scientific reason to believe that violent video games have bad effects on children or on adults, and certainly none to indicate that such games constitute a public health risk.¹²

It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a definitive answer to this question (if indeed one is at all possible).

There are indeed studies on violent video games which conclude that there is a correspondence between virtual acts of violence and real-world violence. Nonetheless, my own ethnographic study of the Tactical Gamer community has led me to question the validity of any substantial correlation between violent video games and degenerative psychological effects. Both the acts and emotional states I observed among players of Battlefield 2 may be more comparable to those of an enthusiastic chess player removing an opponent’s pawn from the chess board. From the outside, a violent video game such as

Battlefield 2 looks like an extreme form of aggression. Yet a careful study of the Tactical Gamer community delivers a different story.

The Tactical Gamer community is populated by individuals who have established consensual rules and mechanisms for dispute resolution. This is a community that has successfully created a virtual environment for learning teamwork, managing groups, and solving problems. This community functions as a sophisticated training environment where individuals learn to play by community norms, debate over those norms, and work in teams to accomplish complex tasks. While players with fast reflexes are respected for their high kill scores, individuals who are good team players and those with good leadership skills are also highly sought after as team mates. The game is premised on competition, yet game play rewards self-sacrifice and cooperation.

It is significant that this community of mature gamers (with an average age of approximately 30) rejects many of the conclusions found within research that paints violent video games as inherently anti-social and psychologically degenerative. Their own experience of playing one of the most advanced warfare simulation games gives them many reasons for rejecting overstated generalizations made by researchers who often lack an intimate knowledge of the gamer's own experience.

Whose Preferred Meaning?

We return now to the primary question before us, to what extent can it be said that video games are an extension of the militarization of society into leisure time? Consider the answer provided by David Leonard in his article, [\[url=http://www.utpjournals.com/simile/issue16/leonard1.html\]](http://www.utpjournals.com/simile/issue16/leonard1.html) 'Unsettling the Military Entertainment Complex: Video Games and a Pedagogy of Peace.' [\[/url\]](#) For Leonard, the preferred meaning of video games is a complete accommodation to the logic of imperialism and the military industrial complex. Consider the claims he makes about how individuals respond to the gaming experience:

‘the bloodlessness [within video games] contributes to an increasing acceptance of war.’

‘Although war may seem harmless on the computer screen, this very harmlessness ironically elicits consent for U.S. foreign policy.’

‘[video] games teach ... citizens to support murder without remorse.’¹³

Leonard argues that video games contain preferred meanings that support ‘American hegemony, the militarization of everyday life, and the all-pervasive rhetoric of warfare.’ Here we see a one-to-one relationship between text and the current neoconservative experiment underway in America. In this one-to-one relationship between text and dominant ideology, the ‘trigger happiness’ of video game players is a reflection of ‘their happiness with American military efforts.’¹⁴ This conclusion positions the gaming community as holding a uniform set of opinions on American foreign policy. But do preferred meanings within videos games truly generate acceptance of war, consent for U.S. foreign policy, and support for ‘murder without remorse’ among the millions who participate in online gaming?

Leonard is attributing substantial power and overwhelmingly negative effects to this media form when he asserts that video games have clearly defined meanings that overwhelm participants’ critical capacities. His claim that the video game somehow ‘regulates’ its own meanings lacks any recognition of the contradictory nature of media texts such as video games. One is left wondering exactly whose preferred meanings are being identified here – that of the text (video games), or the textual interpreter.

Philosophical Excess Versus Ethnographic Insight

It is tempting to make claims about how a distant audience is overwhelmed by supposed preferred meanings embedded within nefarious video games. Yet what happens when the audience itself is told of its subordinate position to the military industrial pedagogy of

video games? Where the analysis of audiences was once done at a distance and produced within the isolated texts of academia, it is now possible to bring our texts back to the Internet audience for immediate and interactive interrogation. To demonstrate this process, as well as the overstated character of Leonard's analysis, I posted (published) his conclusions to the Tactical Gamer community of online gamers. My post, made under the name of my own online character, E-Male, and the community's response can be found at [url= <http://www.tacticalgamer.com/battlefield-2-general-discussion/87992-ideology-online-war-games.html>]tacticalgamer.com[/url].

When confronted with Leonard's conclusions, online gamers who actively participate in many warfare-style games clearly reject the distant scholar's interpretation of their own experience. Thus one gamer named Backlash-7 wrote, 'Only a jackass would believe this ... really. I'm in the military and believe me my HALO and BF2 trigger happiness in no way makes me happy with our military efforts' (HALO and BF2 are popular video games in the war genre). Likewise, Beatnik, another gamer replied, 'Just because the games "simulate" war doesn't mean that we confuse military games, which I see as being more glamorized versions of paintball that I used to play than actual military conflict, with blind acceptance of the waging of war.' The theorist collapses the virtual and the real into one seamless moment of hegemony wherein gamers are said to 'consent' to the militarization of society. Yet the gamers themselves are clearly capable of maintaining their critical capacities, and many do indeed reject the current war on terror and find real-life violence odious.

Returning to the video *The Art of War*, at what point can it be said with any certainty that the video game Battlefield 2 has caused me to consent to U.S. foreign policy, to associate pleasure with death and suffering, or to support murder without remorse? My ethnographic immersion in gaming culture suggests that Leonard's rather hysterical claims tend to position the theorist over the subject in an entirely problematic fashion. We have been here before. We have too often played the expert who tells the subject, the alien culture, what the 'real' meanings of their actions are. The culture of online video games is far too contradictory and complex to fit into Leonard's 'military-industrial' box.

It would be a mistake to assume that video games that immerse the individual in a story of war and conquest somehow compel the player to accept the hegemonic beliefs of a highly militarized social order. This type of interpretation is reminiscent of the very early days of media studies which saw members of the Frankfurt School reject mass entertainment as an irresistible source of false consciousness. It also brings to mind the moral hysteria that was directed towards comic books in the first half of the 1900s. In both cases the new cultural forms were seen as uniformly irredeemable and little attention was paid to embedded contradictory meanings and the audience's own interpretation of their experience.

Such analysis as Leonard's represents a form of philosophical excess often found within critical theory. It fails to test confident claims about the audience mindlessly consenting to imperialism against the gaming community's own diversity of opinions. While I do not intend to dismiss such connections or altogether deny the hegemonic character of capitalism's belief system,¹⁵ it is quite clear that theorists are often interpreting the gamer's experience from too great a distance. What is left out is an adequate interrogation of gamers' own experience, as well as an adequate experience of their experience. The 'hegemonic bias of experience' is no more a totalizing force in real life than it is within cyberspace.¹⁶ Leonard is quite wrong to speak of video war games as media forms that 'force' students to reach certain conclusions about the world.¹⁷ No less than the real world, cyberspace is a realm where meanings are contested. Virtual video ethnography provides a way to explore this contest over meanings that overcomes the philosophical excess often seen in media theory.

Conclusion

In my ethnography of virtual war gaming communities I have made myself a subject of study as much as the Tactical Gamer community. In doing so I am engaging in auto-ethnography, which transgresses the subject/object relationship within academic analysis.¹⁸ This is a process that is not without risks. When the academic becomes a

member of an online community, or a fan of a media form, then analysis risks being reduced to an exercise in self-validation and uncritical celebration. An unresolved issue within this discursive practice is the way authority is attributed to both the fan's account of his experience and the academic's account of his own experience as a fan. This matter of the authority of any one point of view remains unresolved within ethnography, and is most likely to remain so.

There is no reason to doubt the viability of virtual video ethnography. Anthropologists have been pushing the ethnographic method far beyond conventional person-to-person encounters for at least three decades now. Likewise, the practice of ethnography itself is no longer the privileged reserve of anthropologists. It has been warmly embraced by media studies scholars and is found in a wide variety of other disciplines. As James Clifford observed in 1986, institutional limits on interpretive freedom and established representational forms (such as *written* ethnography) are being challenged, 'Ethnography is a hybrid textual activity: it traverses genres and disciplines.'¹⁹ Long gone are the days when one needed institutional membership and professional certification to practice any given interpretive methodology.

Ethnography has yet to escape the fundamental problems of all intellectual inquiry – how can we escape from history, ideology, the subjective self? These are problems that are not so much to be solved as they are to be acknowledged. By bringing us into the highly reflexive, multi-perspectival environment of online communities, virtual video ethnographies will make cultural accounts of online behaviour more accountable to the communities they seek to interpret. The 'intense and authority-giving personal experience of fieldwork' is extending deep into the virtual realm.²⁰ In-game video recording provides a novel tool for authoritative virtual fieldwork of an emotionally intense and highly personal nature.

The virtual realm needs to be approached as a distinct realm of human action, one not to be collapsed into some other category of the 'real' or even the 'hyperreal'. By maintaining a clear distinction between the virtual and the real, ethnographic encounters

in cyberspace will open up new ways of addressing the old problems of verification, truth, and authority. Lights, cameras, virtual action!

Note: The images and videos mentioned in this article can also be found at www.strangelove.com/ethnography

¹ Bruce Mason, 'Ethnographic Studies in Real and Virtual Environments: Inhabited Information Spaces and Connected Communities,' ed. K. Buckner, *Proceedings of Esprit i3 Workshop on Ethnographic Studies*, (Edinburgh: Queen Margaret College, January 1999), 63.

² Wesley Shrum, Ricardo Duque, and Timothy Brown, 'Digital Video as Research Practice: Methodology for the Millennium,' *Journal of Research Practice* 1, no. 1, article M4, 2005, <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/6/12>.

³ Evo SiNz, 'History of TG: Past, Present, & Future,' *Tactical Gamer*, 2007 <http://www.tacticalgamer.com/tactical-gamer-news-items/87913-history-tactical-gamer-past-present-future.html>.

⁴ Ellen Sandor and Janine Fron, 'The Future of Video Games as an Art: On the Art of Playing with Shadows,' conference paper from *Playing the Roles*, (Cultural Policy Center, The University of Chicago, 2001), <http://culturalpolicy.uchicago.edu/conf2001/papers/sandor.html>.

⁵ On fan cultural production see Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992).

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- ⁶ Michael Strangelove, 'Two Camera Point of View: Virtual Video Ethnography Techniques,' Tactical Gamer, March 31, 2007, <http://www.tacticalgamer.com/battlefield-2-after-action-reports/88991-two-camera-point-view-aar-video-al-basrah-mar-29-a.html>. The video can be found in this forum posting.
- ⁷ For example, see David Walsh, 'Video Game Violence and Public Policy,' conference paper from Playing the Roles, (Cultural Policy Center, The University of Chicago, 2001), <http://culturalpolicy.uchicago.edu/conf2001/papers/walsh.html>.
- ⁸ Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Only Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 26.
- ⁹ Mark Cousins and Parveen Adams, 'The Truth on Assault,' *October* 71 (Winter 1995), 93.
- ¹⁰ Jeffrey Goldstein, 'Does Playing Violent Video Games Cause Aggressive Behavior,' conference paper from Playing the Roles, (Cultural Policy Center, The University of Chicago, 2001), <http://culturalpolicy.uchicago.edu/conf2001/papers/goldstein.html>.
- ¹¹ Jonathan L. Freedman, 'Evaluating the Research on Violent Video Games,' conference paper from Playing the Roles, (Cultural Policy Center, The University of Chicago, 2001), <http://culturalpolicy.uchicago.edu/conf2001/papers/freedman.html>.
- ¹² Freedman, 'Evaluating the Research on Violent Video Games.'
- ¹³ David Leonard, 'Unsettling the Military Entertainment Complex: Video Games and a Pedagogy of Peace,' *Studies in Media and Literacy Education* 4, no. 4 (November 2004), <http://www.utpjournals.com/simile/issue16/leonard1.html>.
- ¹⁴ Leonard, 'Unsettling the Military Entertainment Complex.'
- ¹⁵ On the hegemonic nature of capitalism's belief system, see Michael Strangelove, *The Empire of Mind: Digital Piracy and the Anti-Capitalist Movement* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).
- ¹⁶ On the contradictory nature of virtual games, see Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig de Peuter, *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).
- ¹⁷ Leonard, 'Unsettling the Military Entertainment Complex.'
- ¹⁸ For one of the most detailed discussions of auto-ethnography for the analysis of fan communities (which are very similar to video gaming communities), see Matt Hill, *Fan*

Cultures (London: Routledge, 2002). In 'pre-Internet' textual culture, writing was primarily a linear process, and the subject of study was, for the most part, a passive and voiceless thing objectified by the scholar's text. The researcher studied a community and produced an authoritative text about the community. Herein I attempt to bring the subject of the study, the online gaming community, into the process of producing the text about the subject. This was done by bringing the analysis to the community for comment and cross-examination. What was once a linear and closed process transforms into a circular and open ended process. The scholar studies the community (of which he is also part), and via the Internet, subjects that study to the scrutiny of the online community. In this way the evolving mode of scholarly production takes on the interactive character of the very subject it is studying -- Internet culture. This process challenges the authority of the scholar's interpretation of the community by bringing community and interpretative text together within the interconnected realm of the Internet. The Internet is changing our relationship to the subjects we study and challenging the authority of our interpretation of audience behaviour.

¹⁹ James Clifford, 'Introduction,' in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986), 26.

²⁰ Mary Lousie Pratt, 'Fieldwork in Common Places,' in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986), 32.