

Plaything

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ABSTRACT

In this presentation I will demonstrate how artists and designers are bringing diversity and subversion to game culture.

General Terms

Design, Experimentation, Theory.

Keywords

Game Art, Game Culture, Game Modification

In digital games we play with notions of the subject through body options, weapon options, various forms of representation and the interaction with imaginary spaces. Gameplay, especially on the internet, is enabling us to indulge in multiple personalities and explore shifts in our own subjectivity, while the huge increase in internet role playing games is transforming notions of community. In South Korea, playing digital games has become a national obsession. MMORPGs (massive multiplayer online role-playing games) like Starcraft take up dedicated broadband channels and the medieval fantasy game Lineage, boasts millions of players. In Sydney, large crowds attend networked game tournaments at Darling Harbour, and as the gaming industry proliferates around the world, there is a significant amount of media speculation on the profound effects this may be having on global culture.

Can computer games produce meaning and culture? What role does pleasure and play have in this process? A flick of the joystick

creates moments of intensity which may empower or manipulate the user.

Many artists are incorporating various types of gameplay into their practice resulting in new hybrid artforms. It has also become common for gamers, hackers, and artists to modify commercial computer games by changing the software to make mods, patches and plug-ins.

In October 2003 I curated an exhibition in Sydney titled *Plaything* which showcased the work of International and Australian artists who explore the language and structure of digital games. For example in American artist Natalie Bookchin's, online game *Metapet*, players are given 'employee pets' and the task of making the transgenic humans as productive as possible at the least cost with incentives that range from vacations to chemical enhancement and plastic surgery. *Metapet* is a new kind of Tamagotchi, where industrial, gender and workplace issues can't be ignored. Beijing Artist Feng Mengbo came to prominence during the 'Political Pop' movement in China in the late 80's and early 90's. For several years now, he has been placing himself inside the networked first person shooter game *Quake* as a strategy to create new works. In *Q3* Mengbo enters the game as a war correspondent reporting on the multiplayer online quake tournaments and interviews a fighter named 'Filth' about life and death on the battlefield.

In this presentation I will demonstrate some of these works to illustrate how artists and designers are bringing diversity and subversion to a global cultural industry.