

NATIONAL OR RATIONAL?

BREACHING BORDERS THROUGH VIRTUAL WORLDS

15TH FEBRUARY, 2007

PROF. RICHARD A. BARTLE
ESSEX UNIVERSITY, ENGLAND

INTRODUCTION

- AN **ENGLISHMAN** AND A **SCOTSMAN** GO TO **PARIS** TOGETHER ON A BUSINESS TRIP...
- TODAY, I'M GOING TO BE TALKING ABOUT **VIRTUAL WORLDS** AND **CULTURE**
- WHAT I'LL BE SAYING APPLIES TO **BOTH** MAIN KINDS OF VIRTUAL WORLD:
 - **GAME-LIKE** ONES, SUCH AS *WORLD OF WARCRAFT*
 - **SOCIAL** ONES, SUCH AS *SECOND LIFE*
- I'LL **FOCUS** ON **GAMES**, HOWEVER, AS THIS CONFERENCE IS *GAME FOCUS GERMANY*
 - I'LL GET TO THE **GERMANY** PART LATER...

CULTURE

- WHAT IS **CULTURE**?
- WELL, THERE ARE **MANY** DEFINITIONS...
- OFTEN, "CULTURE" REALLY MEANS "THE **ARTS**"
 - OPERA, SCULPTURE, THEATRE, FILM, BALLET, LITERATURE, ...
 - **MAYBE** EVEN COMPUTER GAMES
- I'LL BE TAKING AN **ANTHROPOLOGICAL** DEFINITION:
 - "CULTURE IS THAT WHICH **ONE** GENERATION PASSES TO THE **NEXT** IN ANY WAY EXCEPT **BIOLOGICALLY**"
- IT'S **NOT** CULTURAL THAT THE DUTCH ARE **TALL**
- IT **IS** CULTURAL THAT THEY PUT **MAYONNAISE** ON THEIR **CHIPS**

ASIDE

- I CAN'T **TELL** YOU HOW **SCARY** THIS IS TO AN ENGLISHMAN...

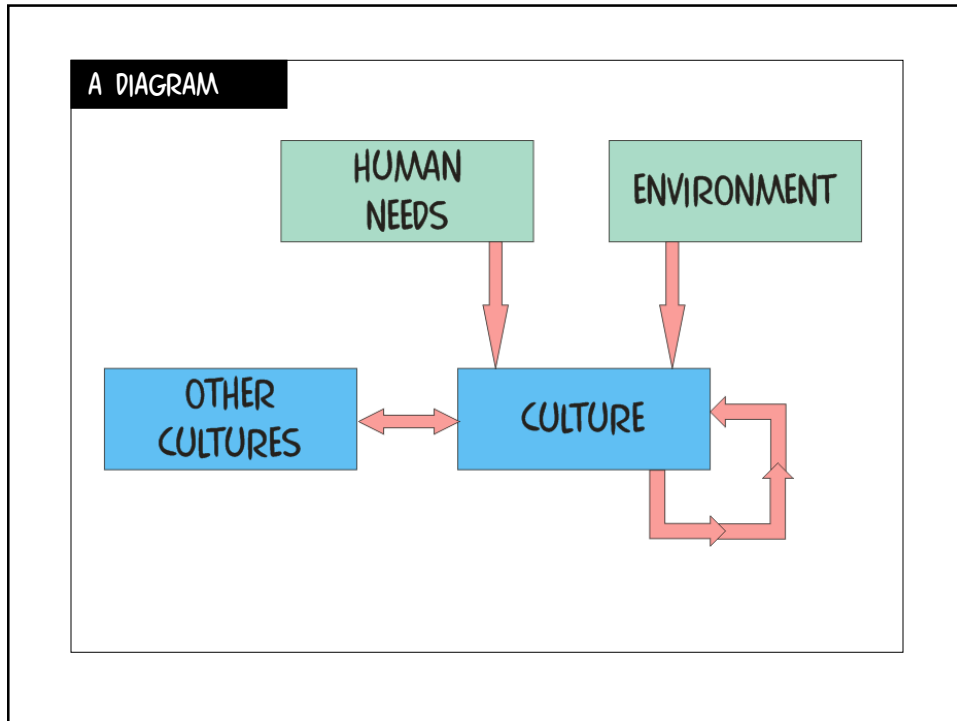


CONDITIONS

- SO: CULTURE IS WHAT PARENTS TELL THEIR CHILDREN
- IT **EVOLVES** OVER TIME
 - WE **DON'T** FEED **PEOPLE** TO **LIONS** FOR FUN ANY MORE
- IT ARISES TO ADDRESS HUMAN **NEEDS**
 - HEALTH, WEALTH, HAPPINESS, ...
- IT IS INFLUENCED BY **OTHER** CULTURES
 - HMM, SMORGASBORD, THAT'S A NICE IDEA, WE'LL HAVE THAT, THANKS SWEDEN!
- IT'S INFLUENCED BY **GEOGRAPHY**
 - PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST DON'T EAT **PORK** BECAUSE THOSE THAT DID GOT **FOOD POISONING** AND **DIED**

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

- THERE ARE MANY **DIFFERENT** SOLUTIONS TO THE **SAME** PROBLEMS OF HUMAN NEED & ENVIRONMENT
- **SOME** GROUPS OF PEOPLE WILL ADOPT **ONE** SOLUTION, AND **OTHERS** WILL ADOPT **ANOTHER**
- THERE'S A **CULTURAL EXCHANGE** BETWEEN NEIGHBOURING POPULATIONS
 - NEIGHBOURING POPULATIONS CAN COMMUNICATE MORE EASILY
 - NEIGHBOURING POPULATIONS HAVE SIMILAR ENVIRONMENTS
- IN SOME CASES, DIFFERENT IS **BETTER**
 - INDIVIDUALS WHO ADAPT TO REFLECT NEW WAYS OF THINKING WILL **CHANGE** THE CULTURE OF WHICH THEY ARE A PART



BUT...

- BECAUSE CULTURES **FEED BACK** ON THEMSELVES, THEY CAN CONSTRUCT ENTIRE **STRUCTURES** ON RATHER **SMALL** FOUNDATIONS
- INDIVIDUALS ARE **ENCOURAGED** TO ACT IN LINE WITH CULTURAL **NORMS** EVEN WHEN THE **RATIONALE** FOR THOSE NORMS **NO LONGER APPLIES**
- PEOPLE OF MIDDLE-EASTERN CULTURES OFTEN **STILL** WON'T EAT PORK EVEN THOUGH WE CAN **CURE** SALMONELLA NOW
 - **AND** EVEN IF THEIR FAMILIES HAVEN'T LIVED IN THE MIDDLE EAST FOR **GENERATIONS**

EMIGRATION

- IF ENOUGH PEOPLE **RECOGNISE** THE SUPERIORITY OF A NEW IDEA THEN THE CULTURE WILL **EVOLVE**
- THIS IS **VERY** DIFFICULT WHEN THERE'S A CULTURAL **STRUCTURE** INVOLVED, THOUGH
 - EXAMPLES: LEGAL SYSTEMS, RELIGIONS, ECONOMIES, ...
- THE **MORE** A CULTURE STANDS TO **LOSE** BY CHANGING, THE **HARDER** IT IS FOR IT TO **CHANGE**
- SO WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU'RE **DISSATISFIED** WITH YOUR CULTURE?
- YOU GO **SOMEWHERE ELSE**
 - TAKING THE **BEST** OF YOUR CULTURE WITH YOU

LINEAGE

- *LINEAGE*, NCSoft, 1997



RECONCILING

- WHEN YOU BECOME IMMERSSED IN A **NEW** CULTURE, YOU PICK UP THAT CULTURE'S **VALUES**
- YOU **ADAPT** YOUR OWN VALUES TO **RECONCILE** THE BEST PARTS OF BOTH CULTURES
- YOU DON'T IMPACT **MUCH** ON THE NEW CULTURE, THOUGH, BECAUSE YOURS IS ONLY A **SMALL** VOICE
 - UNLESS THERE ARE **MANY** OF YOU
- THE CULTURE YOU PASS ON TO THE NEXT GENERATION WILL BE THE GENERALLY **PREVAILING** ONE
- **YOU** BENEFIT FROM THE EXCHANGE, BUT THE CULTURE YOU **BENEFITED** FROM DOESN'T

VIRTUAL WORLDS

- VIRTUAL WORLDS **ALSO** HAVE CULTURES
- THEIR CULTURES DERIVE FROM THE **USUAL** SOURCES
 - HUMAN NEEDS, THE ENVIRONMENT, OTHER CULTURES
- THE PRIMARY "OTHER CULTURES" ARE THE CULTURES OF ITS **SEED** PLAYERS
 - THE ONES WHO STARTED PLAYING FROM THE BEGINNING
- THE "ENVIRONMENT" IS DEFINED BY THE **DESIGNER**
- YOU CAN - AND PEOPLE **DO!** - BUILD A VIRTUAL WORLD TO **ARGUE** A POLITICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL OR **CULTURAL** POINT
 - WE CALL THIS "**ART**"

EXAMPLE

- *LINEAGE* HAD **4 MILLION** PLAYERS IN KOREA WHEN IT LAUNCHED IN THE **USA**
- IT WAS A **FLOP** THERE
- THE GAME'S DESIGN EMBODIED KOREAN IDEALS OF THE **GROUP**
- AMERICAN PLAYERS WERE WAY TOO **INDIVIDUALISTIC** AND **REJECTED** IT
 - WITH NO **SEED** PLAYERS, IT WAS NOT AN EASY SYSTEM FOR THEM TO UNDERSTAND
 - THEY DIDN'T LIKE THE **SUBSERVIENCE** ANYWAY

INHERITANCE

- SO VIRTUAL WORLDS TAKE THEIR CULTURE FROM:
 - THE **DESIGN** OF THE VIRTUAL WORLD
 - THE **SEED** PLAYERS
- THE SEED PLAYERS ARE THE PUBLIC **BETA-TESTERS**
- WHERE DID **THEY** GET **THEIR** CULTURE FROM?
 - THE **REAL** WORLD
 - THE **VIRTUAL** WORLD THEY "GREW UP" PLAYING
- CULTURE CAN BE **PASSED** FROM PARENT VIRTUAL WORLD TO CHILD VIRTUAL WORLD
- THIS MEANS CULTURAL NORMS CAN **PERSIST** EVEN IF THEY RUN **COUNTER** TO **SOCIETY'S** NORMS

EXAMPLE

- WHY IS IT ACCEPTABLE FOR **MEN** TO PLAY **FEMALE** CHARACTERS IN *WORLD OF WARCRAFT*?
 - THE REAL WORLD IS **FAR** LESS TOLERANT
- IT'S OK IN *WOW* BECAUSE IT WAS OK IN *EVERQUEST*
- IT WAS OK IN *EVERQUEST* BECAUSE IT WAS OK IN *DIKUMUDS*
- IT WAS OK IN *DIKUMUDS* BECAUSE IT WAS OK IN *ABERMUDS*
- IT WAS OK IN *ABERMUDS* BECAUSE IT WAS OK IN *MUDI*
- IT WAS OK IN *MUDI* BECAUSE I **MADE** IT OK

EVOLUTION

- THE **FIRST** VIRTUAL WORLD WAS BUILT TO **EMBODY** HACKER CULTURE NOTIONS OF **FREEDOM**
 - THE FIRST **PLAYERS** BOUGHT INTO THIS
- THE GAME ATTRACTED PEOPLE WITH **SIMILAR** IDEAS
- THEY WROTE **THEIR** GAMES BASED ON THE **SAME** PHILOSOPHY
- EACH **NEW** ITERATION'S CULTURE **BEGAN** WITH NORMS ESTABLISHED BY THE **PREVIOUS** GENERATION AND THE **CODE**
- **SOME** IMPORTATION OF THE PLAYERS' CULTURE, BUT GENERALLY AN **EXPORT**

CLASHES

- IF PLAYERS ARRIVE IN **LARGE** NUMBERS SUCH THAT THEY **OVERWHELM** THE SEED POPULATION, THEY CAN IMPOSE A **NEW** CULTURE
 - EXAMPLE: **RENYAO** IN SOME CHINESE VIRTUAL WORLDS
 - EXAMPLE: AOL AND USENET
- IF THERE ARE **FEW** SEED PLAYERS AND **TWO** DOMINANT STARTING POPULATIONS, THERE **WILL** BE CLASHES
 - EXAMPLE: THE GREEK/ITALIAN *WOW* SERVER

EVOLUTIONARY PRESSURE

- THERE'S A SURVIVAL-OF-THE-FITTEST **CONFLICT** BETWEEN **COMPETING** CULTURAL NORMS
 - DEFINED BY THE SOFTWARE
 - DEFINED BY THE SEED PLAYERS
 - DEFINED BY THE INCOMING PLAYERS
- BAD IDEAS **DIE**; GOOD IDEAS **GROW**
 - REMEMBER *LINEAGE* IN THE USA
- BUT SOME **GOOD** IDEAS **FAIL** BECAUSE THEY LACK A **CRITICAL MASS** OF PROPONENTS
 - I'LL COME **BACK** TO THIS SHORTLY...

LANGUAGE

- THE **STRONGEST** ASPECT OF A CULTURE IS ITS **LANGUAGE**
 - THE MAIN **VEHICLE** OF CULTURAL PROPAGATION
- THIS APPLIES TO **VIRTUAL WORLDS**, TOO
- THERE'S **NO SUCH THING** AS A **NATIONAL VIRTUAL WORLD**
- THERE **IS** SUCH A THING AS THE **SERVER LANGUAGE**
- PEOPLE WILL **USUALLY** PREFER TO PLAY WHERE THE **SERVER** LANGUAGE IS THEIR OWN **FIRST** LANGUAGE
- THIS CAN BE **COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE**, THOUGH

ISOLATIONISM

- PEOPLE PLAY VIRTUAL WORLDS TO **BREAK FREE** OF REAL-WORLD CULTURAL **CONSTRAINTS**
 - SO THEY CAN **BE** AND **BECOME** THEMSELVES
- BUT IF THE VIRTUAL WORLD **SHARES** THOSE **SAME** CONSTRAINTS..?
- THIS WOULD HAPPEN IF:
 - THE SEED PLAYERS WERE **NEWBIES** FROM YOUR **OWN** REAL-WORLD CULTURE
 - THE VIRTUAL WORLD'S DESIGN **EMBODIED** YOUR REAL-WORLD CULTURE
 - THE PLAYER BASE WAS COMPRISED **OVERWHELMINGLY** OF PEOPLE FROM YOUR CULTURE

EXAMPLE

- A VIRTUAL WORLD WITH A SERVER LANGUAGE OF **GERMAN** WILL ATTRACT GERMANS, AUSTRIANS, SOME **SWISS** AND **TOO FEW** OTHER PEOPLE TO REGISTER
- THE VIRTUAL WORLD WOULD **ONLY** REFLECT THE CULTURES OF THE **GERMAN**-SPEAKING NATIONS
- WHERE'S THE BATTLE FOR **NEW** CULTURAL NORMS?
- WHERE'S THE **ESCAPE** FROM CONSTRAINTS?
- HOW CAN IT IMPORT THE **BEST** OF OTHER VIRTUAL WORLD CULTURES?
- HOW CAN IT **EXPORT** THE BEST OF ITS OWN?

IMPORT

- THERE ARE **TWO** WAYS IT CAN IMPORT THE BEST OF THOSE NORMS WHICH HAVE EVOLVED **ELSEWHERE**
 - THEY CAN BE **CODED IN** AS PART OF THE **DESIGN**
 - GERMAN-SPEAKING PLAYERS OF NON-GERMAN LANGUAGE GAMES COULD **BRING** THEM IN
- THE FIRST WAY **DOES** HAPPEN
 - DESIGNERS **SHAMELESSLY** STEAL PARADIGMS FROM ONE ANOTHER
- THE SECOND **ALSO** HAPPENS
 - BUT ARE THERE **ENOUGH** PLAYERS WITH THIS KIND OF EXPERIENCE TO MAKE A **DIFFERENCE**?
 - ACTUALLY, MAYBE THERE **ARE!**

EXPORT

- HOW CAN A GERMAN-LANGUAGE VIRTUAL WORLD **EXPORT** THE BEST OF ITS CULTURE?
- WELL, IT **CAN'T**
- IF PEOPLE OF **OTHER** CULTURES CAN'T SPEAK **GERMAN** THEY WON'T **PLAY** IT
 - NO MATTER **HOW** GREAT IT IS
- UNFORTUNATELY FOR **YOU**, PEOPLE OF OTHER CULTURES **CAN'T** SPEAK GERMAN
 - I ONLY KNOW **20 WORDS** OF GERMAN, AND 10 OF **THOSE** ARE NUMBERS...
- THIS LEADS TO AN **IMBALANCE**

EVE ONLINE

- *EVE ONLINE*, CCP GAMES 2003



- **~150,000** SUBSCRIBERS
 - POPULATION OF **ICELAND** IS **~300,000**

IMBALANCE

- AS A NATION, GERMANY **IMPORTS** VIRTUAL WORLD CULTURE BUT DOESN'T **EXPORT** IT
- WHY IS THIS A **BAD** THING?
- THERE ARE **TWO** REASONS
 - ONE SELFISH AND ONE UNSELFISH
- **SELFISH**: BECAUSE GERMAN CULTURE IS BEING **DILUTED** BY INFLUENCES FROM OTHER CULTURES
- **UNSELFISH**: BECAUSE THERE ARE **GOOD** THINGS ABOUT GERMAN CULTURE WHICH WOULD SURELY BENEFIT **EVERYONE** EXPOSED TO THEM

LINGUA FRANCA

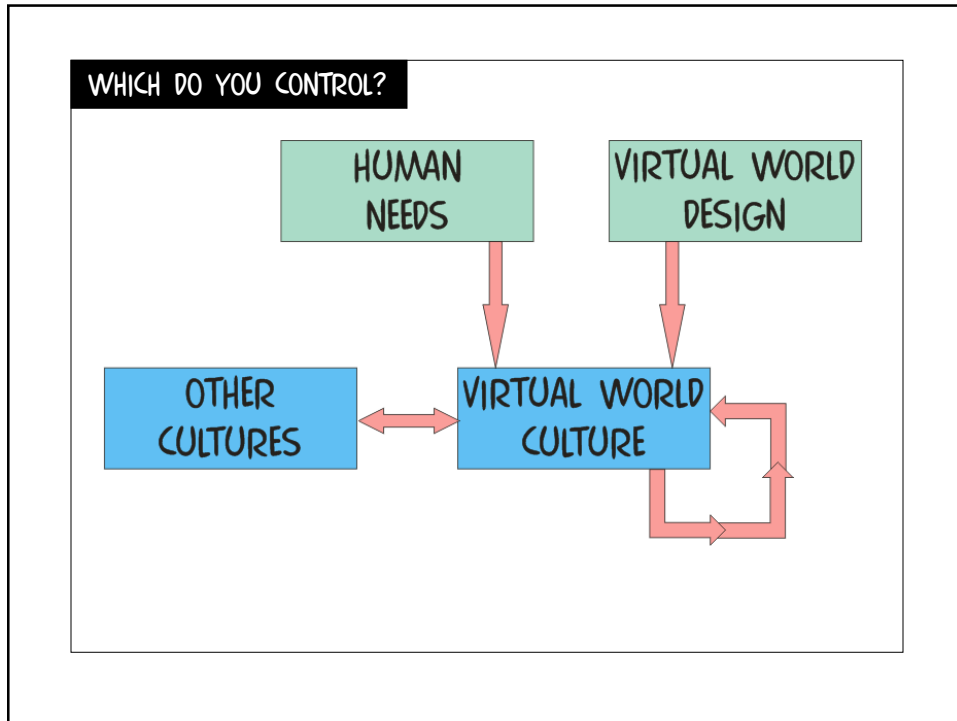
- SOMEONE WHO **ONLY** SPOKE **GERMAN** FLUENTLY WOULD HAVE ONLY A **SMALL** RANGE OF VIRTUAL WORLDS TO CHOOSE FROM
 - **HARDER** FOR INDIVIDUALS TO FIND ONE WITH A CULTURE THAT **SUITS** THEM
- GERMANY IS **BIGGER** THAN ENGLAND, SO WHY DON'T **I** HAVE THAT PROBLEM?
- WELL, REMEMBER THE **JOKE** AT THE BEGINNING?
- ENGLAND IS A SMALLER **COUNTRY**, BUT ENGLISH IS A **BIGGER** LANGUAGE
- A **BIG-LANGUAGE** VIRTUAL WORLD IS A VIRTUAL WORLD FOR **EVERYONE**

TELEVISION

- IN DECEMBER, THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT FUNDED A NEW **TV** CHANNEL TO CHALLENGE **CNN** AND THE **BBC** FOR GLOBAL NEWS REPORTING
- **CIT** GIVES MOST OF ITS REPORTS IN **ENGLISH**
 - 80% OF THEIR TARGET AUDIENCE IS **ANGLOPHONE**
- NEWS FROM A **FRENCH** PERSPECTIVE IS PRESENTED IN A "**UNIVERSAL** LANGUAGE" (THEIR WORDS)
- FRANCE IS ONE OF THE MORE **MONOCULTURAL** NATIONS IN EUROPE, SO WHY DO THEY WANT THEIR GLOBAL TV STATION TO SPEAK IN **ENGLISH**?
- BECAUSE PEOPLE WHO SPEAK FRENCH **ALREADY** HAVE A FRENCH PERSPECTIVE ON GLOBAL NEWS

PERSPECTIVE

- THAT'S ALL VERY WELL FOR **TELEVISION**, BUT WHAT ABOUT **VIRTUAL WORLDS**?
- A NEWS REPORT CAN SPEAK FROM A NATIONAL OR CULTURAL **POINT OF VIEW**, BUT CAN A VIRTUAL WORLD?
- **YES**, IT CAN
- A VIRTUAL WORLD CAN **ENSHRINE** CULTURAL VALUES IN ITS **DESIGN**
 - *LINEAGE* IN THE USA AGAIN
- UPDATING THE **EARLIER** DIAGRAM:



- EMBODIMENT**
- YOU CAN DESIGN A VIRTUAL WORLD TO EMBODY **IN** ITS DESIGN **CULTURAL IDEALS**
 - IF THOSE IDEALS ARE **WORTH HAVING**, PEOPLE WILL **PLAY** THE GAME
 - IT SHOWS THAT WHAT YOU **BELIEVE** HAS WORTH **DOES** HAVE WORTH
 - WHAT'S MORE, THAT WORTH IS **UNIVERSAL**
 - BUT IT HAS TO BE **ACCESSIBLE**
 - LANGUAGES THAT ARE **NOT** WIDELY SPOKEN ARE **INACCESSIBLE**
 - LANGUAGE IS **PART** OF CULTURE, BUT IT IS NOT **ITSELF** CULTURE

CONCLUSION

- VIRTUAL WORLDS CAN **EMBODY** A CULTURE
- BUT LANGUAGE CAN **LIMIT** ACCESS TO SUCH WORLDS
- IF YOU WANT TO **EXPORT** YOUR CULTURE, YOU HAVE TO **REMOVE** THE LIMITATIONS ON ACCESS
- IF YOU **DON'T** EXPORT YOUR CULTURE, THE REST OF THE WORLD **MISSES** OUT
 - AND YOUR **OWN** CULTURE CAN FEEL LESS FAMILIAR
- **THEREFORE**, IF YOU WANT VIRTUAL WORLDS TO BE MORE **GERMAN**, WRITE THEM IN **ENGLISH**