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Austin's Digital Cultures Blog

MSc in E-learning at the University of Edinburgh

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Nov 21 2011

Posthuman Pedagogy – Think Like a Robot

By [Austin Tate](#) and has [2 comments.](#)([Edit](#))

See http://atate.org/mscel/think/

When discussing the nature of an individual's beliefs about intelligence, knowledge or the learning process, I have noticed in a number of discussion forum threads on EDEDC and ULOE11 where it can be a useful device to put oneself into the position of an artificial intelligence agent, knowledge-based computer system or a robot. Or go further and think like a creature, or even a disembodied network.

Please add any comments you have here.

Categories: [EDC11](#)
tags: [EDC11](#), [Octopus](#), [Pedagogy](#), [Robot](#), [Skynet](#)
Nov 18 2011

Meta Body – Try an Out of Your Body Experience

By Austin Tate and has no comments yet.(Edit)

A very beautifully designed Second Life region is worth exploring. I suggest you arrive in the Meta_Body area first. Use this teleport link:

http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Porto/132/109/703

Look at the (freely available) avatars to explore your identity and see which feel strange to you, and some which might appeal. There are a few male and more female avatars available to try. Select the strangest before you embark on a tour of the lovely areas which are on the land surface, on small islands, on sky islands, and underwater. Sit for a while on some of the areas. Click on things to see what they do.

Eventually find your way to a white ice themed area with a lady playing a white piano. Try touching the black "Omega Star Dream 5″ sphere for an animated tour through some of the lower elements of the region. If you cannot find this use this SLurl to get there directly:

http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Porto/105/91/62

Categories: EDC11
tags: EDC11, Second Life
Nov 17 2011

Lifestream Week 9

By Austin Tate and has no comments yet.(Edit)

I was pleased that David Richardson (Twitter @_djcr) was able to join in Digital Cultures as my class friend for discussions on "The Posthuman" for the current two week block. After an exchange between us about a couple of the readings (Donna Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto and Pickering's Asian Eels and Global Warming) he has been tweeting along merrily since then. Quite a bit of David's input has come as comments into the Digital Culture's Blog entries… one of which I prepared to give him relevant quick access links and an anchor for his inputs.

My own input to the Posthuman discussions came via my Digital Culture's blog entry on Posthuman – Connected and a lot of very interesting commentary by classmates and Jeremy (as Tutor) along with notes by me on that. David has also been commenting and adding his thoughts as comments to this blog entry.

I have noticed that I seem to be a long weekend ahead of discussion on the forums on all my MSc in e-learning modules, not just Digital Cultures. I tend to use Friday to prepare the ground for the start of the next week, get the readings organised, file previous material, and I think of **start** of the weekend as the change over point. That seems to put my Lifestream entries a few days, and sometimes as much as a week, ahead of similar topic events from others. So I felt rather lonely on the WallWisher Walls where I was more than 4 days ahead of any other entry appearing. Then we had an episode where we had two wall accidentally for a while. All sorted now, and entries appearing. Unfortunately, these entries are not reflected in the LifeStream as noted before. I continued to comment on the new virtual community ethnographies as they appeared through the week.

Work on the Moodle/SLoodle experiments was at a lower level this week, though I did a blog post expressing my feelings about the labyrinthine complexity of roles and permissions in Moodle against how I felt it ought to appear. This image from the posting expresses how things seem to me:

Walled Garden with Gate

Castle Defences with Moats, Drawbridges & Secret Tunnels
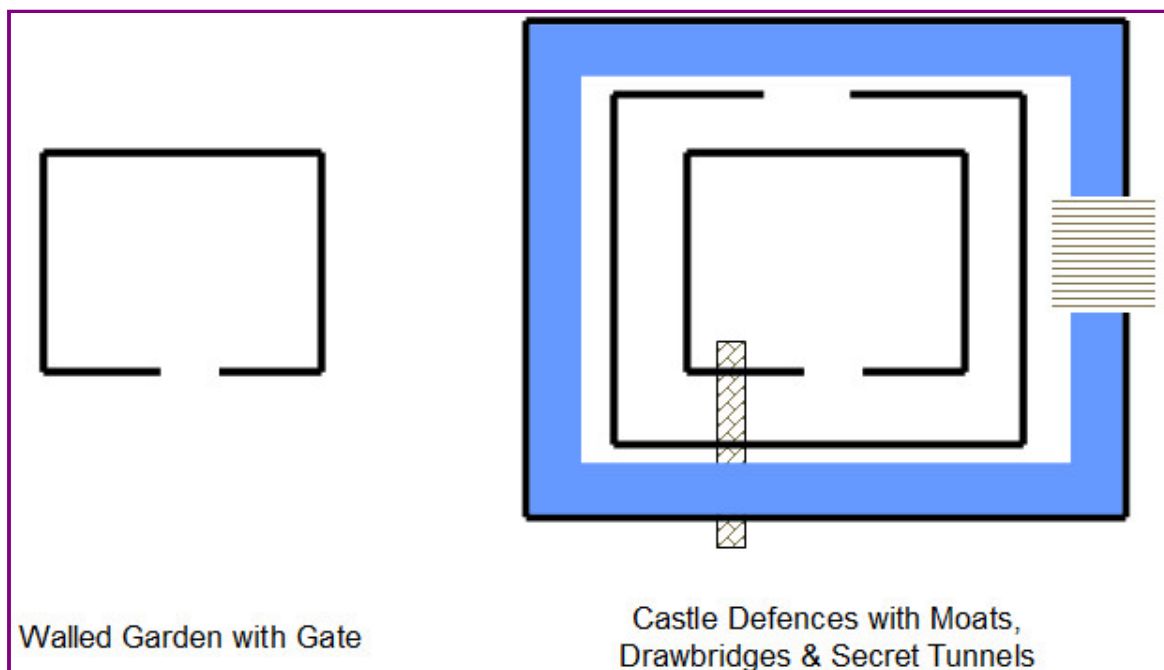
Underground Activity

My on-line activity on one aspect of the Digital Cultures course has "gone underground" a little in that I am preparing elements of my final assignment in a web area of my Personal Learning Space and elements of this are not reflected in my lifestream yet.

Research and International Links

Some Lifestream events relate to my research with the OpenVCE.net community and its emergency response groups. There has been a build up of events that relate to a shift of one of the web portals from HarmonieWeb, which provided Adobe Connect services in particular for the OpenVCE.net community, to the All Partners Access Network (APAN). This could be interesting as APAN uses the Telligent Community Platform integrated with Adobe Connect and XMPP/Jabber text chat for synchronous meetings. Details of the transition, which I am managing, are being built at http://openvce.net/apan. More tweets and status messages will appear on this over the next few weeks as I keep the OpenVCE.net community informed of progress.

Another international community I am involved in is KSCO – the Knowledge Systems for Coalition Operations community. We are in the run up to the closing date for submission of papers for KSCO-2012 which I am an organiser for. It will be run in February 2012 this year in Florida. We have just had approval for a proposal we made for a KSCO special issue of the high quality journal IEEE Intelligent Systems, so some Lifestream events relate to communicating this to the KSCO community.

Categories: EDC11
tags: EDC11, Lifestream
Nov 16 2011

AI, Cyborgs and Robots

By Austin Tate and has 5 comments.(Edit)

When discussing the nature of an individual's beliefs about intelligence, knowledge or the learning process, I have noticed in a number of discussion forum threads on EDEDC and ULOE11 that it can be a useful device to refer to an artificial intelligence agent, knowledge-based computer systems or robot.
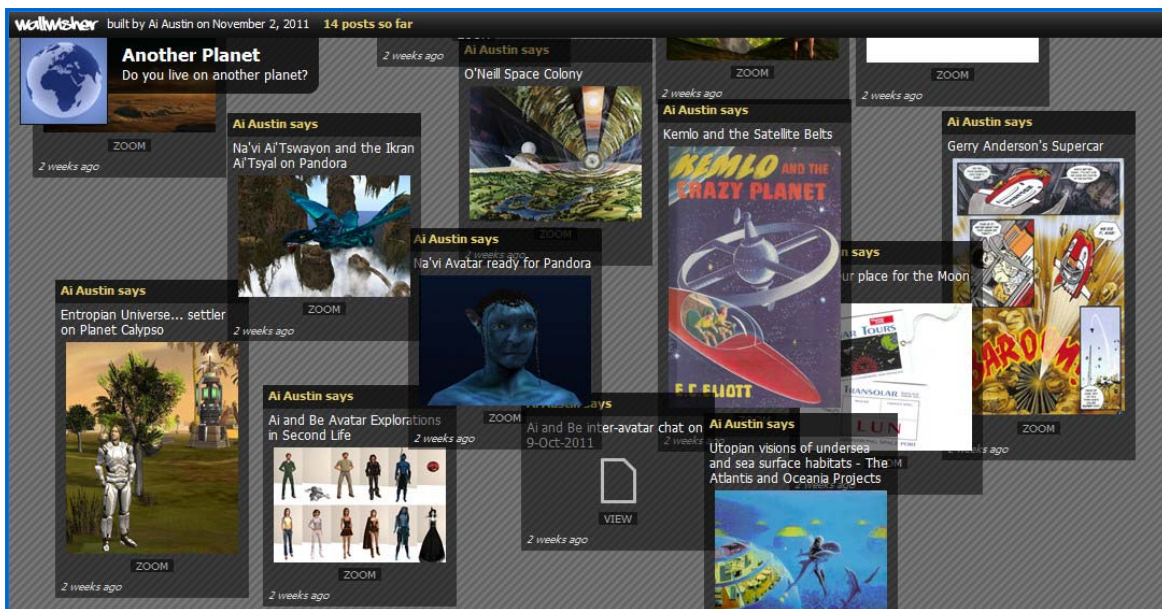
Hayles (1999, pp 23-24) mentioned Philip Dick's novel, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep" (which was the basis for the Blade Runner movie) through which a number of personal identity and ethical issues are explored. I have previously mentioned some of these issues as having been raised at http://www.philfilms.utm.edu/1/blade.htm

This transference of the argument to an artificial agent can help avoid the over emphasis of human traits or superior species assumptive arguments. The more we observe of animals and consider artificial agents, the more we will come to realise we are just another type of soft machine. Recent studies apparently show we can even share blood transfusions with chimpanzees, as they are so closely related to us. Dolphins may have a different type of intelligence, but should we put such intelligent creatures in zoos? A recent article by Montgomery (2011) on "How Smart is an Octopus" is fascinating. See http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/6474/

Hayles, N. Katherine, (1999) "Towards embodied virtuality" from Hayles, N. Katherine, "How we became posthuman: virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics" pp.1-25,293-297, Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press

Montgomery, Syd (2011) "Deep Intellect: Inside the mind of the octopus", Orion Magazine, November/December 2011.

Categories: EDC11

tags: EDC11
Nov 10 2011

Lifestream Week 8

By Austin Tate and has no comments yet.(Edit)

The work on digital ethnographies dribbled over into this week with continuing comments on the ethnographic studies of others in the class, and feedback to those kindly commenting on my own ethnographic study on the GA-MMA community. I made a few changes to the study artifact to take into account some suggestions made. The refined artifact is at the same URL of http://atate.org/mscel/ethno/.

The week has been characterised by some preparatory work for assignments on the three MSc in e -Learning courses I am on. There is a lot to pull together, many interesting areas to explore, and readings to go back over. But I like to start such projects early, do an initial burst of activity to get some material in place, and then take a long time to reflect and refine.

I had a flurry of activity to create a new digital artifact along the style of "AI – Avatar Identity" under the theme "Are You on Another Planet?" at http://atate.org/another-planet/ picking up on the "Other Worlds" and utopian dreams elements in earlier blocks of EDEDC. This involved setting up and the populating a new WallWisher wall and dozens of entries on that – none of which showed in my Lifestream unfortunately due to a glitch in the way that Wallwisher RSS feeds seem to come to Lifestream. It also involved some experimentation with a "grammar" of "connectors" which are meant to give a visual typography based method to show links between themes, token, topics and readings on the course.

I did this originally to be a potential EDEDC final assignment topic. But as I explored, I widened out to try to take a more holistic and "posthuman" aggregating view of the work I had done on EDEDC on personal identity (Life Wall), projected identity (Another World) and community identity (GA-MMA and social networks). I have now proposed and had accepted a theme for my EDEDC final assignment in this area with working title "I, PI, with my little Eye". My Lifesteam shows a trickle of contributing elements as I build assets and on-line materials for that.

My Lifestream also shows a number of entries reflecting my continuing discussions on the use of Personal Learning Environments, and experience I am gaining with setting up and using a VLE based on Moodle. A frustrating experience as there are so many labyrinthine paths through which roles and permissions seem to be set up.

The initial readings into "posthuman" literature on EDEDC are just starting to come through as events in my Lifestream. I also hope we might see comments from my EDEDC "bring a friend to class" David Richardson. I added a couple of entries on the PostHuman2011 WallWisher wall, but as noted before these do not show in my Lifestream even though I have the RSS feed set up for that wall too. I posted a blog entry giving some background on why I chose to put an image and information about my PSA avatar on the Posthuman 20011 wall. I will use some elements of this in trying to pull EDEDC themes together for the final assignment.

I see also some entries which reflect the interests I have in space exploration. My twitter feeds are often dominated by NASA and ESA related activities. But in a few week's time, we are off to Mars again. To be more precise, the names of myself, my virtual worlds avatar (who gets the original invitation due to involvement in NASA's CoLab in Second Life), my wife, and our elderly parents (who watch these missions with interest) are this time on a chip on the deck of the Opportunity Mars Science Lab.

Categories: EDC11
tags: EDC11, Lifestream
Nov 09 2011

Spacewar – virtual worlds circa 1972

By Austin Tate and has no comments yet.(Edit)

You may be amused to read an account of virtual worlds and computer gaming circa 1962 to 1972. You needed imagination to play then! As you needed imagination for the MUDs and MOOs of the early 1980s.

This is an on-line version of an article in **Rolling Stone** magazine of 7th December 1972 entitled **SPACEWAR – Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death Among the Computer Bums**. It starts:

> Ready or not, computers are coming to the people.

See http://www.wheels.org/spacewar/stone/rolling_stone.html

I was using that very same DEC PDP-10 computer at Stanford University via a terminal at Hope Park Square in Edinburgh through our own PDP-10 on the ARPANet just after this period.

Stick with the article to further down and you will get a fascinating insight into some of the folks involved in early creative uses of computers when ARPAnet had less than 20 nodes on it… and people were even then concered about "central computers" and "big brother".

Categories: EDC11
tags: EDC11, Spacewar
Nov 08 2011

Posthuman – Connected

By Austin Tate and has 9 comments.(Edit)
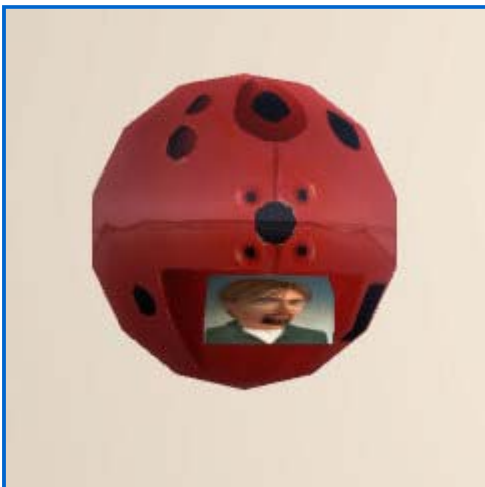
"Posthuman" as a term is used quite widely and in flowery prose for a range of aggregations of human and other external entities… machinery as in the cyborg, with bionic devices, sensitivity to the environment, connections with others, remote sensing capability beyond normal human sensing, etc.

A person "connected the Internet" by whatever means seems to me to transcend simple improvements to technology which allow us communicate to other separate individuals. The Internet becomes an extension of their capabilities. They can have agents which act within that space in a conceptual sense, and, via connectors, outside that space and back into the real environment. This does not require biological/machine connectivity. The amalgam of a person, their mean of connection to the Internet, and the embodiment of a surrogate on-line agent are sufficient to take us to this "posthuman" state.

We can endow our "avatars" or on-line agents with semi-autonomous capabilities and knowledge via sets of FAQs and answers as we would choose to answer, with sets of processes and procedures, with tutorial capabilities (e.g. MyCybertwin).

But this is a symbiosis of human and AI agent for that person. Not a separately created entity. That raises other issues.

Ridley Scott's Blade Runner film explores issues of personal identity when autonomous cyborgs are created. Blade Runner is based on the sci-fi story "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep". One aspects covers the nature of our memories and how "real" they might seem even if implanted, adopted or transferred. A discussion of some of these issues is at http://www.philfilms.utm.edu/1/blade.htm.

I personally like the interesting depiction of two types of autonomous AI in Steven Spielberg's "Artificial Intelligence" movie. This is based on the short story "Supertoys Last All Summer Long". "David" is the child-like robot who implants on his adopted parents and seeks love from them – for thousands of years. "Teddy" is the wise guardian embedded in a toy and there to support David (AI supporting AI).

I think we will see "Teddy" style robots in our life times especially for the young and the old. Imagine a time when the robotic companion or aid along with the Internet is a part of your wider self, and can supplement the biological self as memory fades and capabilities are lost, and keep you in touch with others.

Categories: EDC11
Nov 07 2011

EDEDC Class Friend – David Richardson

By Austin Tate and has 1 comment.(Edit)

This is a links page for the convenience of my class friend, David Richardson (Twitter @_djcr)

- http://edc11.education.ed.ac.uk/week-by-week/block-3-cyborg-learners/
- …/block-3-cyborg-learners/weeks-8-9/
- …/block-3-cyborg-learners/weeks-8-9/bring-a-friend-to-class-2/
- …/block-3-cyborg-learners/weeks-8-9/weeks-8-9-readings/
- …/block-3-cyborg-learners/weeks-8-9/discussion-questions-week-8/
- tweet using #ededc
- wallwisher wall http://www.wallwisher.com/wall/posthuman2011

Categories: EDC11
Nov 03 2011

Lifestream Week 7

By Austin Tate and has no comments yet.(Edit)

The EDC11 ethnographic study was completed over the weekend, and provided to allow comments by others on 31st October. It was very interesting to see the other studies as they slowly became available… and I commented on those where I had some inputs to give.

It was also Halloween of course, so I could not resist a post or two that brought in my user name "bat", one of my avatar outfits for Halloween provided to me last year in fact and a chance to wear

it again, and a funny reference that came up as we had "Zombie" processes plaguing our Moodle service.

Good progress has been made in the last week on setting up a Moodle 2.1.2 (latest version) VLE for tests and connecting it via the SLoodle toolkit to a classroom in Second Life. Feedback is being given to the SLoodle development community as they move the current test systems from alpha code status to a first beta version that will work with Moodle 2.x versions. My Lifestream indicated a flurry of activity on this testing and interaction with the communities involved.

I was surprised that my Lifestream seemed to have a low number of events on a couple of days when I seemed to be very active on-line, and in areas I believed I had feeds in place. It turns out that all WallWisher feeds I have in place only received a single event, for the very first posting on each of my walls, and none since. Its not clear why. The event itself though is meaningless anyway as it does not contain the useful text posted on a WallWisher entry label, and the pointer does not go to the content of the entry, but just generically to the wall itself. As a snapshot today for my own walls (15+1+14) and some contributions to IDEL11 (2), EDC11 (3), and a new EDC11 "Post Human" (2) wall I have a total of 37 WallWisher "events" to date only a few of which show in my LifeStream unfortunately. [Mentioned at the suggestion of Jen Ross purely for assessment reasons 😃]

Only showing as a few hints in my on-line activity at present (deliberately) is a concept I am developing for work on "Another Planet". This involves some new concepts I am developing with an exploration of a non-linear "Neo-Grammar" that uses a visual and typographical style with hyperlinks to present "Connectors". A Wall Wisher wall that already contains 15 or so entries (not showing in my Lifestream) is being created in support of this experiment. More coming in next few weeks on this.

<Connector> ::= Token ⊃—⊂ Token

Finally, I set up a "Personal Learning Environment" web area and entry web page that brings together a lot of the scattered entry points, summary links pages and shortcuts I have to reach web sites, blogs, discussion forums, WallWisher walls, VLEs, etc for the MSc in e-Learning courses, as well as pointers to my own assignment contributions. Initially I created this as part of exploring VLEs vs. PLEs for the IDEL11 course, but it has quickly turned into my single point of entry at work, at home and on mobile devices for access to my educational resources and work areas. Since I cannot resist looking ahead, I also have the EDC11 "Post-Human" WallWisher board embedded on the page at present. This is a good example of how a PLE can reflect current focus for an individual learner. A more controlled VLE approach would definitely not have focused something for the following week on its front page. I have refined the style sheets a little to give a simple flexible width style that gives a maximum view of the core content and works well on a range of browsers and devices with large and small (e.g. mobile device) screens. This work space is at http://atate.org/space/.

Categories: EDC11
tags: EDC11, Lifestream
Nov 03 2011

# Another Planet

By Austin Tate and has no comments yet.(Edit)

I have been cooking up another project…. the appeal of utopian "Other Worlds" and projecting identities into them (see Gee, 2003). The creative experience of imagineering such a world,

making it plausible and "real", and inhabiting it in a social context is something I want to explore more. I am initially building some images related to this on Wall Wisher…
http://www.wallwisher.com/wall/another-planet
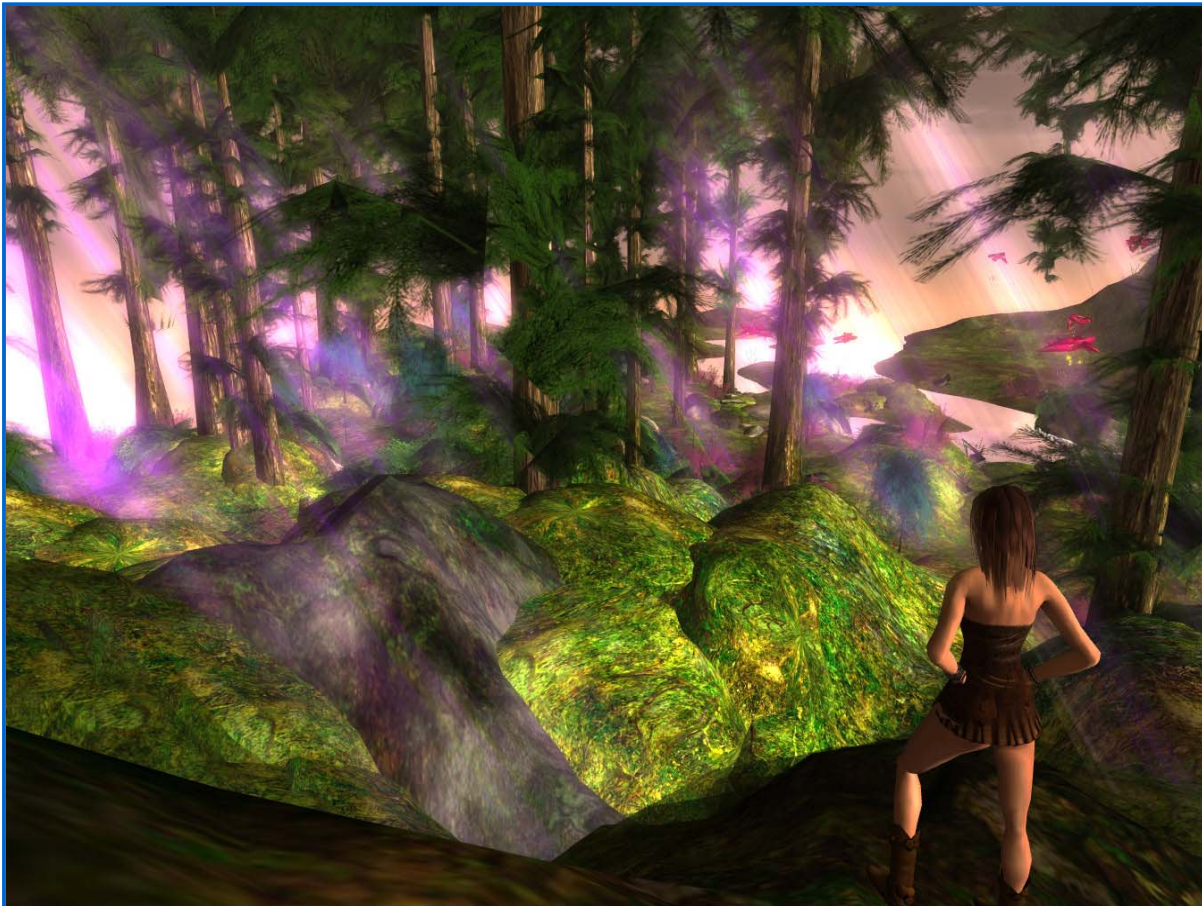
Gee, J. (2003) Learning and identity: What does it mean to be a half-elf? What video games have to teach us about language and literacy. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Categories: EDC11
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