

.....  
[Abstract] **Patches of Peace: Tiny Signs of Agency in Online Games**  
.....

Online games provide a networked media environment in which players have the opportunity to reshape, recontextualize, and remediate a game's message at the levels of narrative, gameplay and/or cultural space. Players take up the challenge of creating both permanent and ephemeral artefacts in games and game systems— artefacts that are not explicitly part of, and often subvert, initial game design(s). These artefacts include meta-gaming collectives, recombinant events, player-to-player design tools, and game modifications.

This paper examines this issue of secondary authorship in the context of anti-war and anti-violence protest artefacts in online games/game communities. Aside from its relevancy to current events, this genre offers two distinctive player artefacts for analysis: *Tiny Signs of Hope*, a tool for creating peace posters in the Sims; and *Velvet-Strike*, a collection of anti-violence tags for the Counter-Strike graffiti patch. *Fantasy-Theme Analysis*<sup>1</sup>, an epistemic rhetorical methodology, is used to examine how symbolic convergence creates a shared social reality conducive to secondary authorship in both *Velvet-Strike* and *Tiny Signs*. The analysis reveals the intersection of rhetorical visions between these artefacts and demonstrates shared themes concerning opposition/extension, meta-gaming, tactics in public space and the secondary agency of the artefact. These themes are shown to both reflect and reinforce the agency of the secondary author.

While a minority of players participate in game modification, their contribution to the overall game community ensures a constant, vibrant flow of new game content into the play arena. Current interest in both player-created content (from a positive perspective) and player subversion (from a negative perspective) calls for a deeper exploration of player agency, both in the game experience and the wider game community. This paper attempts to reveal some of the underlying cultural currents that feed the player-creator phenomenon, in the context of current peace-themed game artefacts.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bormann, E. (1972). Fantasy and rhetorical vision: The rhetorical criticism of social reality. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58, 396-407.

.....  
[Author Bio] **Cindy Poremba**  
.....

Cindy Poremba is a researcher and MASC candidate in Simon Fraser University's Interactive Arts program, Vancouver, BC, Canada. Her thesis research explores issues of agency and rhetoric surrounding player artifacts in online games. She is also engaged in several projects that use hobby robotics to explore alternative aesthetics and feminist issues. Cindy holds a Bachelors degree in Rhetoric and Professional Writing, and spent several years in educational multimedia design and development. In 2001, she received an International Game Developers Association GDC Scholarship. She currently serves as DigitalGirl Program Coordinator for DigitalEve Vancouver, and is one of the Conference Coordinators for Vancouver's 2003 New Forms Festival, a critically acclaimed celebration of emerging digital arts.

Cindy Poremba  
Simon Fraser University, Surrey  
2400 Central City, 10153 King George Hwy,  
Surrey, British Columbia, Canada , V3T 2W1

Email: [research@multiplayer.ca](mailto:research@multiplayer.ca)  
Web: <http://shinyspinning.com>