

[This is not a game, so please suspend your judgement for the duration of this paper]

Convergence of Virtual and Physical Worlds

The increasing convergence and mobility of digital network technologies have given rise to new, massively-scaled modes of social interaction where the physical and virtual worlds meet. The emergent genre of immersive entertainment, being one product of these extreme networks, is a potential tool for harnessing collective action.

The argument for gaming/play as a method to mobilize networks of people:

1. If peoples' proclivity for real-world action is engendered through their interaction with online social networks; and,
2. the collective play of immersive gaming is positioned to mobilize networked collectives - as opposed to merely providing a network of potential resources and collaborators; then,
3. two significant outcomes are possible:
 - i. Collective intelligence and problem-solving of huge, even systemic issues; and,
 - ii. A sense of belonging to something much larger than oneself.

That sense of belonging cycles back to reinforce #1 and inspire #2, leading to more of #3.

A definition of the immersive gaming/entertainment/play

"A cross-media genre of interactive story-telling using multiple delivery and communications media, including in-person, television, radio, newspapers, Internet, email, text-messaging, telephone, voicemail, and postal service. Gaming is typically comprised of a group of Game Facilitators¹ and a group of players, the collective detective² that attempts to solve the puzzles and thereby win the furtherance of the story."³

Quotes from the Field

In December '06, Bridges To The Future - a youth program of Muscular Dystrophy, Spina Bifida, Cerebral Palsy and BC Paraplegic - tested the gaming approach. Here is a quote from their final report:

"Games are a dominant force for youth today. We also discovered that gaming provides youth with disabilities a level of support and training that puts them on the same playing field as their able bodied counterparts... gaming is an effective way to motivate youth to participate and take ownership of their lives. Gaming created a safe atmosphere where everyone was on the same page regardless of their disability. "

In 2003, Jane McGonigal wrote a seminal paper entitled '*This Is Not a Game*': *Immersive Aesthetics and Collective Play*⁴ in which she concludes:

"The grassroots immersive gaming scene today is thriving... there are ample opportunities and audiences for multiple, independently-produced immersive games to explore a variety of goals and belief systems, and thereby to inspire grassroots, rather than hegemonic, action."

¹ Game facilitators: An individual working "behind the curtain" to guide the storyline.

² Collective Detective: A team of players that works together to attempt to solve puzzles and find the hidden bits, thereby winning the furtherance of the story.

³ This is a reworked definition from unfiction.com. Unfiction.com is a key source of information on the current Gaming scene, yet does not propose nor attempt to it marry any social justice mandate.

⁴ See <http://www.seanstewart.org/beast/mcgonigal/notagame/paper.pdf> for a full version of 'This Is Not A Game'.