

## Keywords for a Digital Profession

### Race

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Race in cyberspace has a history, albeit a short one. In the nineties, neoliberalism simultaneously provided the context for the Internet's rapid uptake in the United States and discouraged public conversations about racial politics. At the same time, many scholars lauded the widespread use of text-driven interfaces as a solution to the problem of racial intolerance, indeed, of racial perception. Text-driven interfaces were credited with a utopian, anonymous quality, a comforting thought indeed in an era marked by multiple racial tensions and outright riots. However, ample scholarship has shown that textual self-descriptions in online social spaces tended to contain many signifiers of race, gender, and class. Understanding the Internet as a space of personal nondisclosure has given way to far more visually and commercially driven media forms that not only reveal but showcase racial, gender, and ethnic identity. As both Ted Castronova, a scholar of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMO's) like *World of Warcraft* and *Everquest* and Coco Fusco, a feminist performance artist and scholar have noted in very different contexts, racial and gender difference provide *visual pleasure*. Omitting them from synthetic worlds, be they blogs, bulletin boards, or other more intensely visual forms such as digital video, MMO's, and websites would be a foolish move, and indeed, as cyberspace's short history has shown, an impossible one.

According to the Entertainment Software Association, "US computer and video game software sales grew six percent in 2006 to \$7.4 billion" and in addition, this group is more diverse than had been thought: "thirty-eight percent of all game players are women. In fact, women over the age of 18 represent a significantly greater portion of the game-playing population (31%) than boys age 17 or younger (20%)" and "the average game player is 33 years old and has been playing games for 12 years."

[http://www.theesa.com/facts/top\\_10\\_facts.php](http://www.theesa.com/facts/top_10_facts.php)

Literary and media scholars must attend to the procedural logics and avatarial identifications of digital games in order to speak to their students' experiences as well as to gauge their profound influences upon other aspects of literary and narrative culture and the ongoing evolution of racial, gender, and sexual identity.

Like transnational literatures, digital games are subject to multiple cultural influences and discourses. Social games like *World of Warcraft* construct virtual worlds radiating from a colonial core—the U.S. based games industry—and intended for habitation by a global audience. The struggle for national, linguistic, and racial hegemony plays itself out in this space in regards to social behavior norms, media production, and above all when it comes to virtual and avatarial capital accumulation and distribution, and this presentation will focus on the position of subaltern players within the game. The case of "Chinese gold farmers" in *WoW* pose surprising answers to a question from the nineties: "can the

subaltern speak?" answers that directly address the changes that digital technologies of writing and embodiment have brought to notions of race.