

**CK Tower**  
**WRA 415**  
**Project 3**  
**11/15/2006**

### **The Digital Tower**

The Digital Rhetoric course (WRA 415) has been an enlightening, enriching and thoroughly engaging place from which to launch into my M.A. program. I've been afforded the opportunity to try on new ideas and concepts, to examine and debate bleeding edge issues of technology, while at the same time, ground myself in the foundational materials and history of technology and digital rhetoric. As someone who's inhabited, worked and played in digital spaces for over twelve years, it's been affirming for me to engage in discussions that assume the relevance of digital spaces, communities and technologies, as necessary to scholarly work and a valid medium for explorations of human sociology of all types.

So now that I have been exposed to this emerging body of theory and knowledge about communication and writing in online spaces, the next logical step is to think about how I want to apply it. What am I going to do with all of this stuff? My ever growing collection of links to resources, the stacks of essays and articles, the beginnings of my own thoughts and theories, the formation of my virtual history—everything I am collecting through my coursework? Where am I headed with it all and what am I going to do with these bits and pieces of digital this and that? When all the browsing and exploring, sifting and sorting is done, I hope to have achieved some specific goals, both personal and professional, on this virtual trip.

Professionally, I want this program to reinforce and advance my skills in the following areas:

- information architecture
- usability
- accessibility
- technical writing for the web

These are skills and areas of expertise that are present in my everyday work experience. A successful outcome for this program would mean I am stronger and more proficient in these core areas of my job. In addition to improving technical expertise, I want to enhance my ability to comprehend, analyze and dissect academic and professional works and apply them in practical ways to my work. I believe there is also the potential for expanding my work to include more dissemination of information, in the form of presentations to internal and external work audiences.

I also have personal goals I'd like to achieve through this program. I'd like to further explore online gaming cultures and identities, examining the dynamics of social interactions in these spaces. Within the context of online gaming, I'd like to examine the role of gender. Beyond online gaming, I am interested in exploring access issues as pertains to race, class, socioeconomics, age, gender, and sexual orientation. As someone

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who was deeply involved in the birth and revolution of online literary publishing in the early and mid nineties, I would like to retrace my steps through that time, take a look at what effect those spaces and communities had on me and assess the state of online literary publishing, today. Has there been an evolution, to what?

A larger personal goal I have in the course of working through this program is to solidify and execute my final thesis concept. For my thesis, I'd like to construct a book-length piece, recounting the story of my virtual evolution; the affects of constructing virtual identities and online social networks, on a potentially lethal disability, bipolar disorder. In addition to recounting my story, I'd like to explore the affects of virtual identities and spaces on people with similar experiences to mine. The final aspect of the project is to research scholarly and other published work on virtual cultures, digital identities and online communities, as a form of therapy or means of transformation for persons with disabilities of this nature. I hope to show through a deep analysis of these collected experiences, with support from related scholarly work, that virtual environs and online social networks, provide unique and effective therapeutic environment. Our virtual lives can teach us real-world social survival skills--our virtual lives can free us to live stronger in the corporal world.

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'The term "consensual hallucination" is [William Gibson's](#) (from [Neuromancer](#)), who is generally credited with coining the term [Cyberspace](#).  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuromancer>.

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### **Sample thesis content**

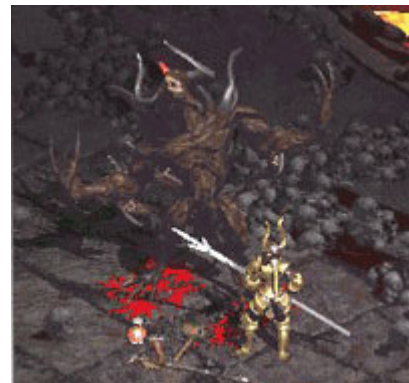
#### **It's just a game**

*Games are the cartoon version of real world sophisticated problems.*

[-Raph Koster](#)

Games aren't "just" anything, they encompass the entire spectrum of human experience (and beyond) and are available on every platform and in every genre you can imagine. Games can solve major crises, train war heroes, and civilize nations.

U.S. spending on video games for personal computers hit \$1.4 billion in 2005, according to an estimate released by



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market research firm [NPD Group](#).<sup>1</sup> Online subscriptions to PC games and gaming Web sites accounted for about \$344 million of those annual sales, said NPD. Faster

Internet connections are making it easier for consumers to play games online and to download game content that had once only been available in stores, said NPD, which last year began tracking online subscriptions. It is impossible to calculate how much people benefit from games:

- Games give lessons on taking turns, the basic requirement of all relationships.
- Games train us to find underlying patterns in a systemic way
- They can be training grounds for legendary generals and make the difference between winning and losing wars.
- Playing games can expanded a person's grasp of human nature in general and improve their group dynamics
- Finally, and most important, games can open and reopen portals into the world of imagination and childhood, reminding us of full tilt fun, igniting our creativity

People have been playing games at least since recorded history. The oldest known form of chess, [Chaturanga](#), dates back to India in the seventh century A.D. Game boards found in Ancient Sumeria (~2500BC), in the royal tombs at Ur, Mesopotamia, are believed to be the oldest set of board gaming equipment ever found.<sup>2</sup>

### **Good Stress**

From the beginning, games have been essential to revealing secrets- our secrets. What separates early games from the modern plethora of games we love to play is the direction of that revelation. Ancient games tried to reveal the secrets of the world outside; modern games, and particularly online games, are extraordinary in the way they can disclose the mysteries we hold within us.

If there's a hard-wired template for language in our brains, there seems to be one for game playing, too. Where does this come from? And why do we show parts of ourselves playing World of Warcraft we'd never be comfortable revealing in a non-game setting?

Games can set us free.

Today's most popular online games are social worlds unto themselves. What every great game, online or offline, does is take the negative stress of socializing out of the social

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situation, leaving the good stress, the excitement of competition and social dialogues, in. Games do this by providing stress-minimized settings for human interactions--we usually play with friendly people, at times of our choosing, when there's less likely going to be an outside pressure that might inhibit us--and by imposing structure or protocol into the interaction, the structure and format helps to eliminate the often-paralyzing burden of social dialogue some people experience in non-virtual settings.

What we need are *more* virtual networking spaces with structures that encourage human dialogues and playful interaction. What we need is more time for playing games.

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<sup>1</sup> ["PC Game Spending Hit \\$1.4 Billion in U.S."](#) The Spill Group.

<sup>2</sup> ["Chaturanga."](#) The Chess Variant Pages."

<sup>3</sup> ["Board game."](#) Wikipedia.

**Portfolio/Research page:** <http://digitaltower.blogspot.com>