Digital Media, Society, and Culture

Angus A. A. Mol

Flappy Bird as a Playground
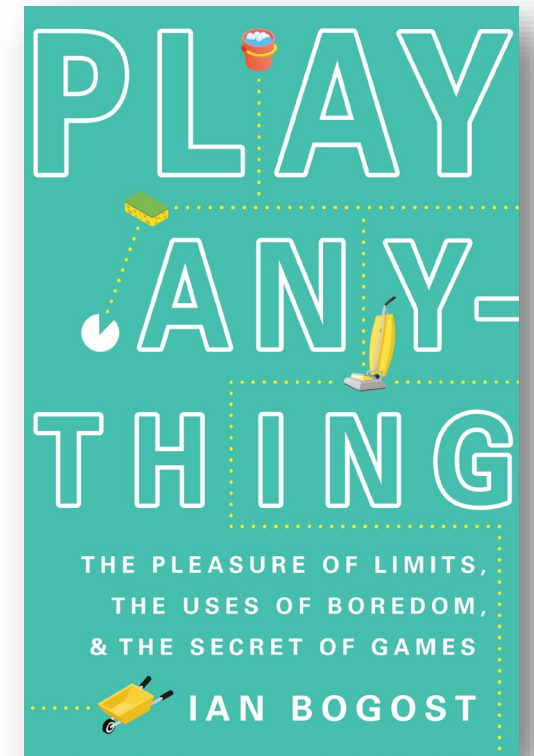
- Lotte on [a Meme a Day](a-meme-a-day)
- Jakob on [Sequelitis](sequelitis)
- Cathinka on [Online Extremism](online-extremism)
- Julia on [Becoming a Device](becoming-a-device)
- Alison on [RSVP](rsvp)

Trigger warning:

After the break there will be a section that contains a discussion and description of sexual assault

Virtual (adj)

- "in essence, potentiality, or effect, although not in form or actuality" (OED)
    - Roots in Latin's *virtus* (*vir* [man]+ *tus* [suffix to form a noun]): virtue,
- Virtual is "that which isn't, having the form or effect of that which is." (Bartle 2004)
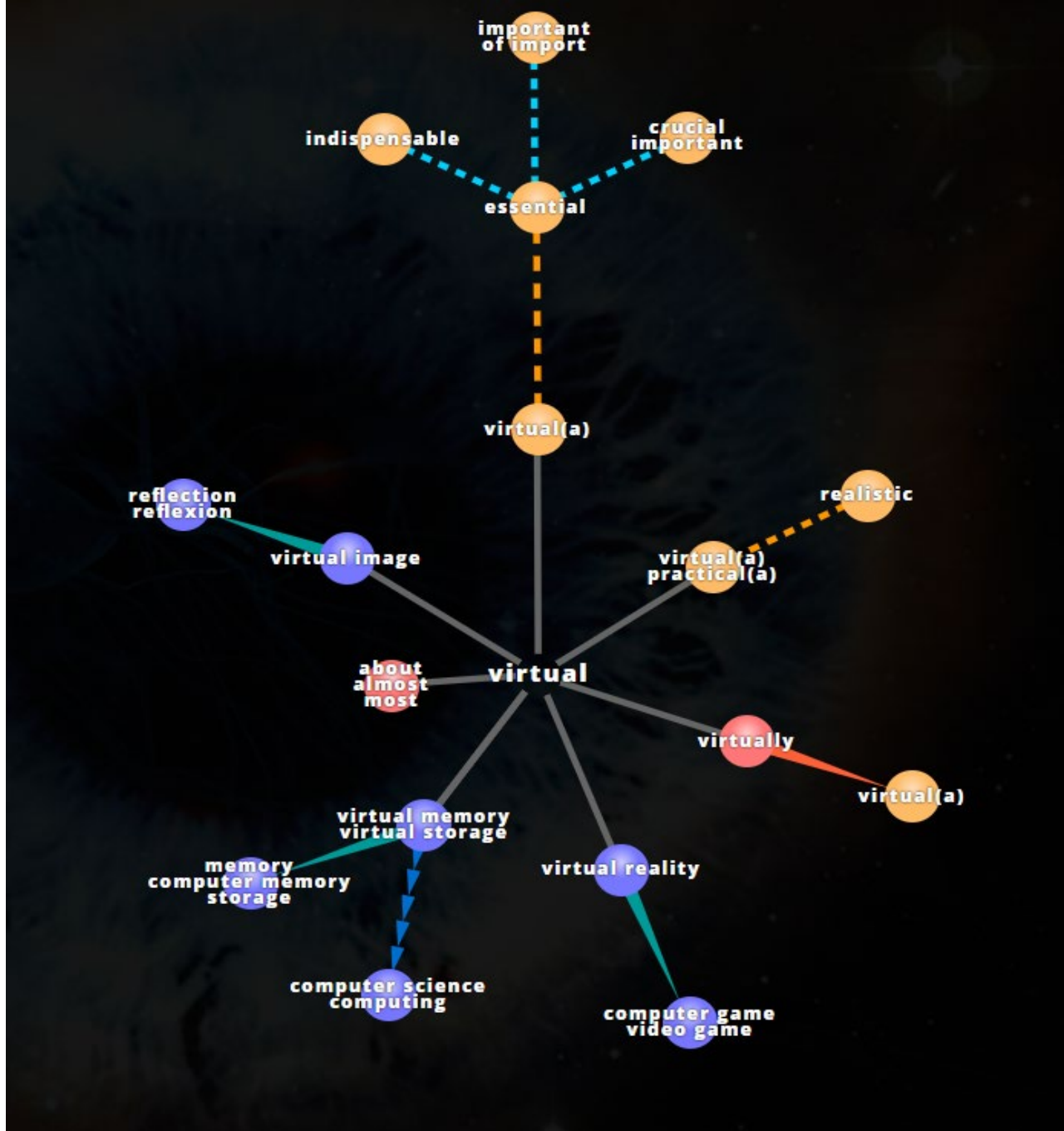
Pre-digital Virtuality

Lascaux Cave (France; 17.000 BCE)

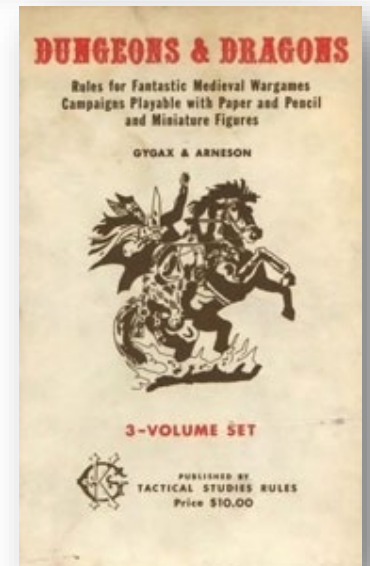Indigenous Caribbean petroglyphs
(Dominican Republic)

Fresco from the Villa of Livia

(Rome, 1st Century CE)
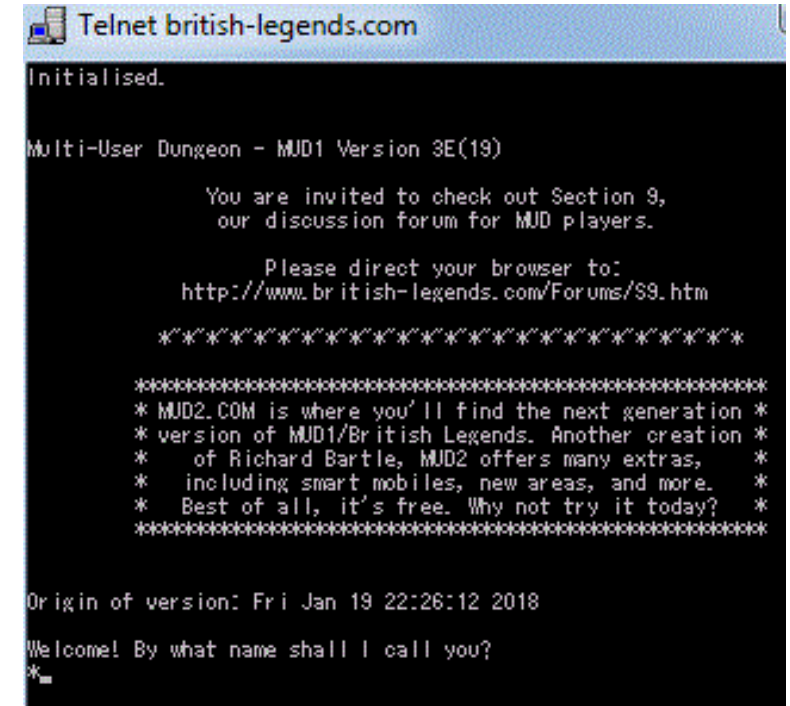

Plato's Allegory of the Cave
(Theory of Forms)

Arthur Conan Doyle's *Lost World*

Gary Gygax' *Dungeons
and Dragons*

Virtual Worlds

- "Where the imaginary meets the real" (Bartle 2004)
- Virtual Worlds:
  - Have *physics*: underlying automated rules that enable players to effect changes to it.
  - Have players that represent individuals or *characters* in the world
  - Interaction takes place in *real time*
  - are *shared*
  - are (at least to some degree) *persistent*.

MUD (Multi-User Dungeon)

Colossal Cave (circa 1979) Ralph Witt, Dave Platt, Architects

- Multi-User
  - Multiplayer, i.e. via a network
  - University networks
  - Early Dial-up networks
    - Access to MUDs based on provider (MUD belonged to CompuServe)
    - Once responsible for up to 10% of internet traffic (1993)

- Dungeon
  - Zork, originally called Dungeon (MIT 1977-1079) ← Colossal Cave Adventure (Will Crowther, 1976), also known as ADVENT ← Dungeons and Dragons + Caving
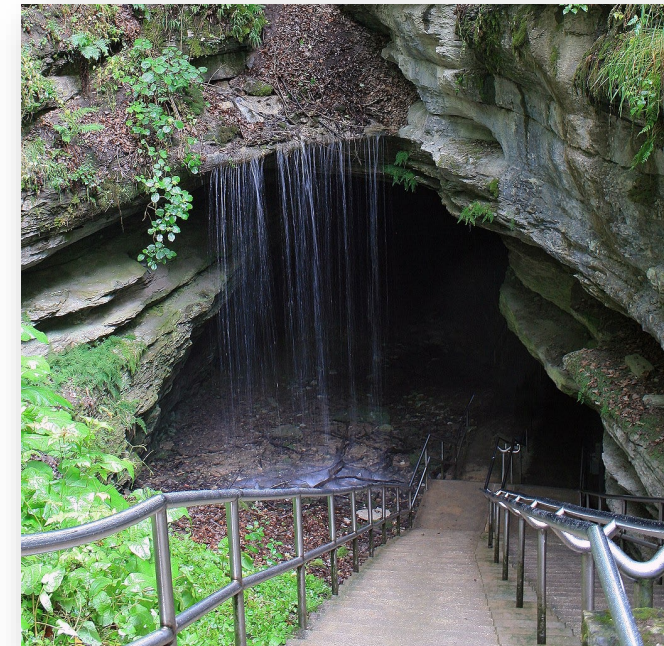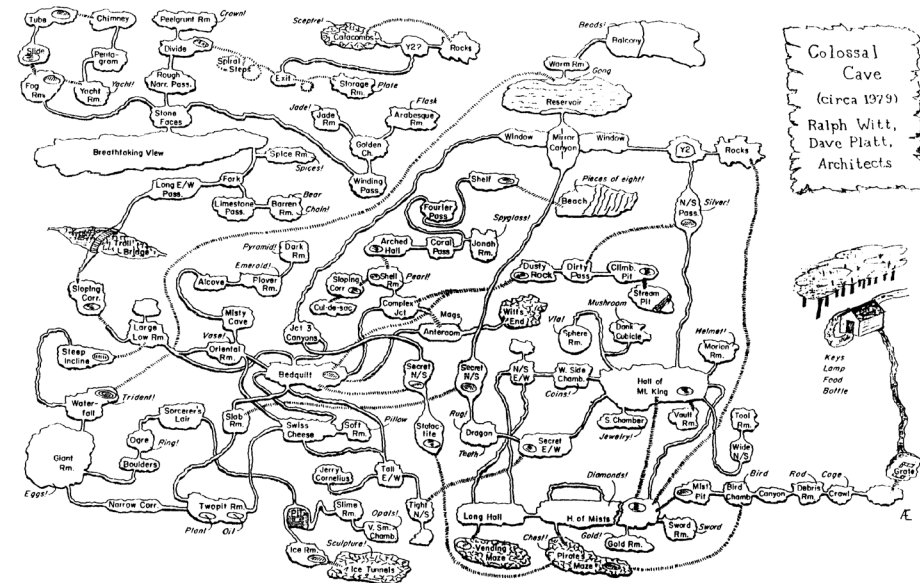
Mammoth Cave (Kentucky)

[LambdaMOO](#)

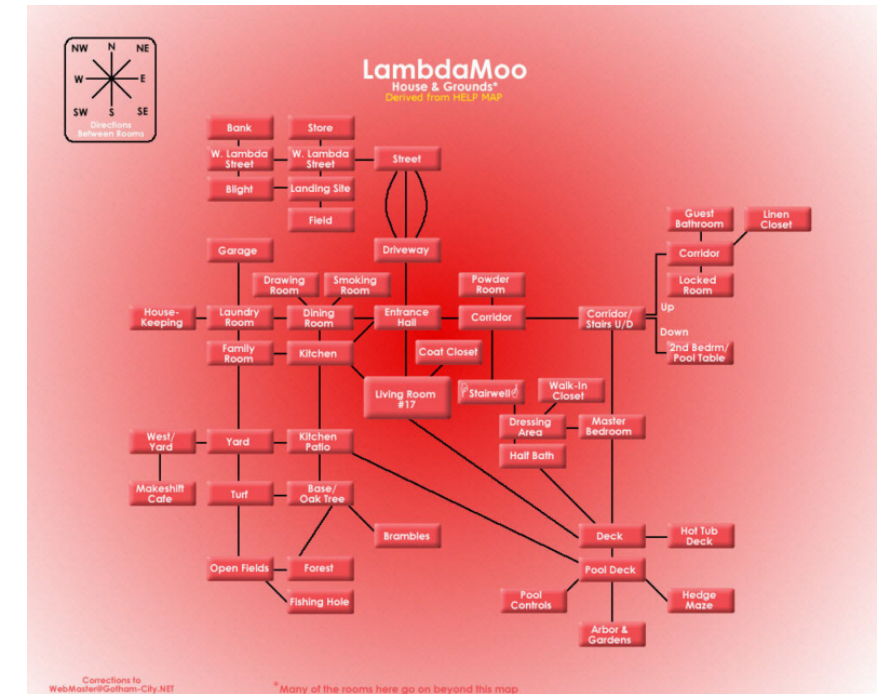Pavel Curtis

Xerox PARC (Palo Alto, CA)

- MUD, Object Oriented
  - Players can create objects through scripting

- LambdaMOO
  - Hosted in Xerox Parc
  - Made by Pavel Curtis, further developed by thousands of people after him.

- Longest running virtual world

- Social Experiment
  - No hierarchy
  - "Wizards"
  - Large community

- *A Rape in Cyberspace* (1993)
  - Using a virtual voodoo doll
  - "As if against her will, Moondreamer jabs a steak knife up her ass, causing immense joy. You hear Mr._Bungle laughing evilly in the distance."
  - Led to institution of code of ethics and democratic self-governance system.

Map of LambdaMOO

Graphical Virtual Worlds

Mazewar on an IMLAC-PDS 1D (1973)

- *Mazewar*

- *Ultima Online* (1997)
  - Set in the world of the Ultima games by Richard Garriott
  - Famous for having a carefully thought out eco-system that was completely destroyed by players.

- Second Life (Linden Labs; 2003)
  - Social and entrepreneurial hub
  - Virtual Economy (GDP) in 2006: $64 million
    - If actual economy would have ranked 55 out of 179 countries.

# MMO (Massively Multiplayer Online) Games

- World of Warcraft (Blizzard 2004)
  - Broke every record in the MMO book
    - 12 million subscribers at peak
    - Still bucking the trend at around 5.5 million subscribers (2016)
- More "playground-like" than early virtual worlds (more delineated)
  - Emergent economies, cultures and societies.
- "Death by Virtual Worlds"
  - Escapism
  - Addictive

Molten Core in *WoW*   Lord of the Rings Online
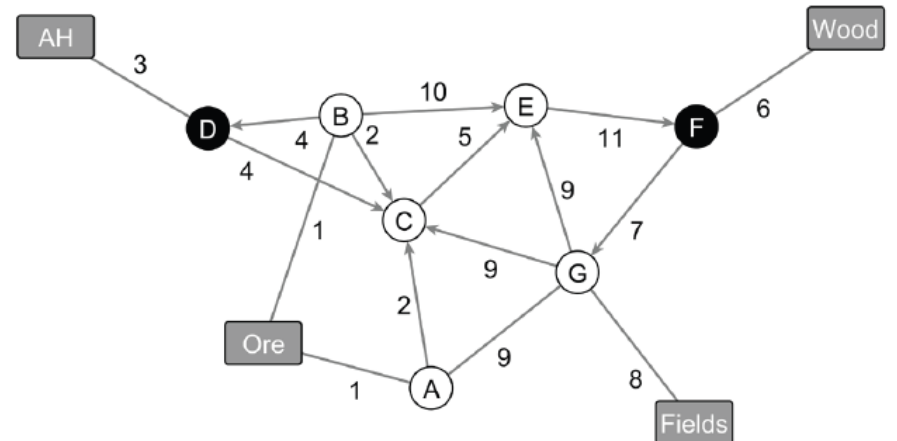
Virtual Reality

- VR has been around for a long time

- 2016: "Year of VR"
  - Consumer-version VR

- 2018 breakthrough?

- Welcome to come and try!

3D movies in the Sensorama (1962)

A virtual reality suit (1989; VPL Research)

Virtual Worlds

- Use visual and narrative technologies that have been present for ages.
  - Add interactivity (real time physics) to the mix.
- Mimic a culture, society, and ecology that is also found in the actual world (good and bad).
  - The Virtual as Skeuomorph
  - The Proteus Paradox
- Are surprisingly fragile places!
- Point to a fundamental strain in (Western) conceptions as well as practicalities of reality/actuality
- Future of Virtual Worlds?