

Alternate Reality Gaming

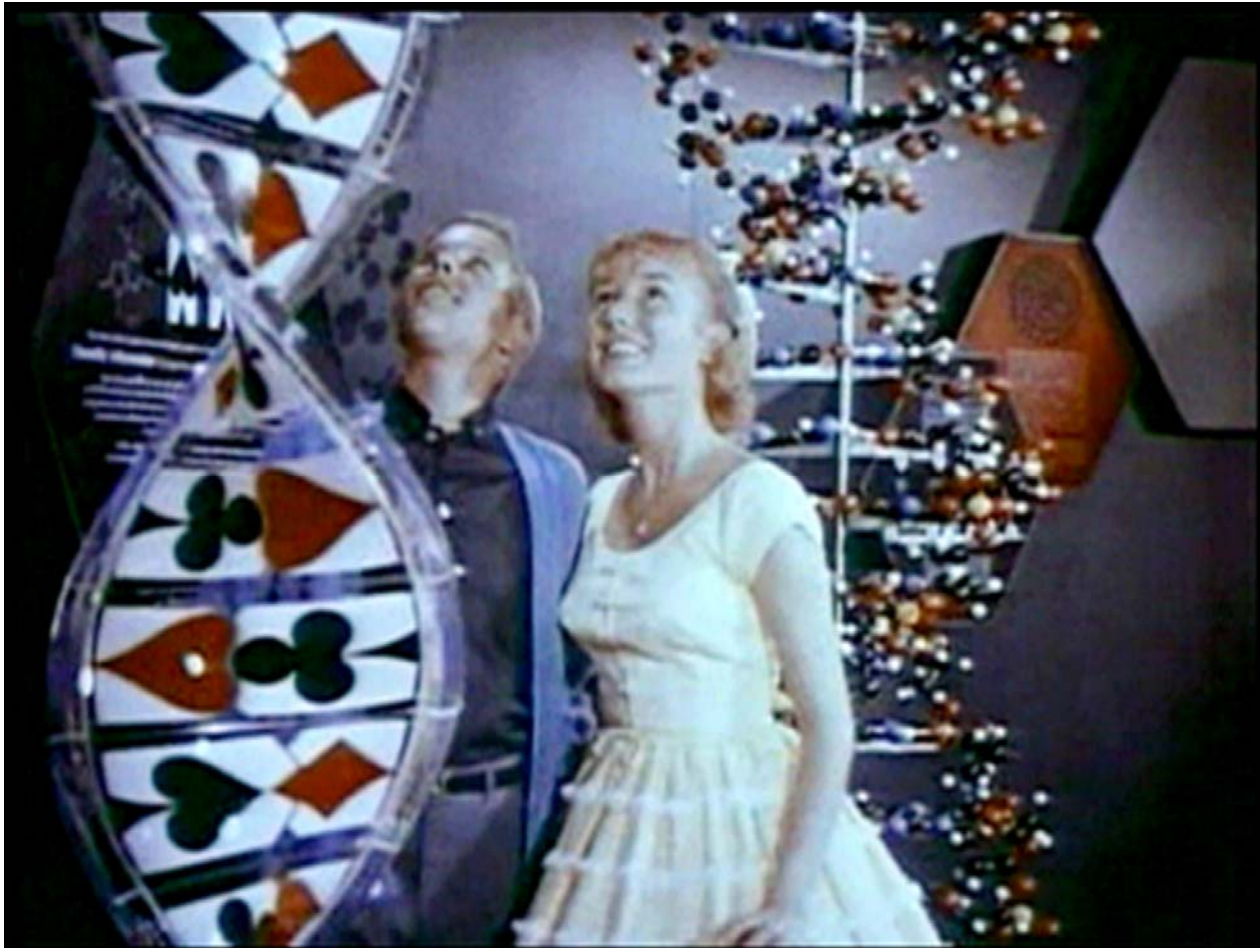
experimental social structures for MMOs



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Alternate Reality Gaming

experimental social structures for MMOs



- Too weird for GDC
- No practical takeaways
- “serious games,” sort of
- Massively Multiplayer Thumb Wrestling

ARGs: collaborative, reality-based MMOs

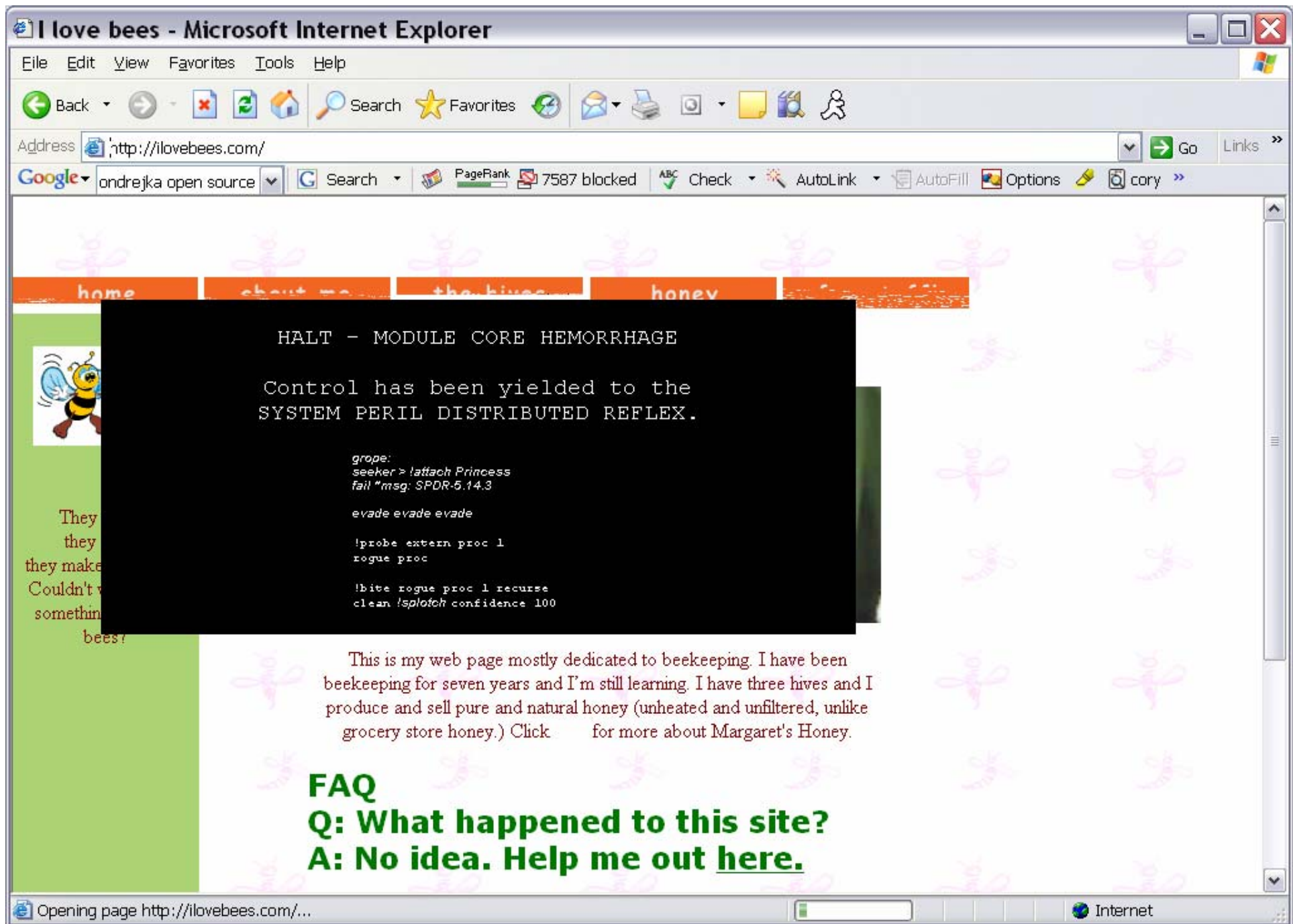
An alternate reality game is:

- an **interactive narrative**, or **immersive drama**...
- played out both **online** and in **real-world** spaces...
- taking place over **several weeks** or **months**...
- in which **hundreds, thousands, or 10's of thousands** of players come together online...
- To real play, not role play...
- forming unusually **collaborative social networks**...
- and working together to **solve a mystery** or **problem**...
- that would be absolutely *impossible* to solve alone.

ARGs: collaborative, reality-based MMOs

Elements of the **plotline** may be provided, and real-world **missions** and **puzzles** delivered, to the players in almost **any electronic or broadcast form**.

- e-mail and websites
- SMS and phone calls to a player's home, cell, work phone or local payphone
- local radio broadcast or local WiFi intranet
- chat/Instant messaging, and IRC channels
- land mail and newspaper articles or classifieds
- real world artifacts related to the game in play
- real world events utilizing actors who interact with the players who attend
- Toasters that print messages on your bread (ok, not yet)



HOME TOP PLAYERS FORUM / HELP THE MUCK MY PROFILE PLAY POKER Login

100% FREE ALWAYS! ONLINE TEXAS HOLD'EM

MAKE A KILLING

PLAY NOW

LAST CALL POKER

If you're reading this, I'm already

Lucy's story starts [here](#). The story of the Gun goes back to Al Capone's Chicago, 1929 - bullets and booze and a stock market that couldn't go wrong... I'll take you back there, and hope to see you at a [live event](#).



EASY TO PLAY: NO DOWNLOADS!
CLICK HERE TO START PLAYING NOW

Tip: Fastest way to get more chips:



The Mark of the Joker

Find it and get a 25,000 chip bonus each week

2 days 9 hours 11 minutes left until chip reset.

madamobrien wins the LEADER BOARD TOURNAMENT



When the stacks reset, the Lucky ones on top will get invites to the Big Game.

That's Wednesday, November 2nd, 7 pm Pacific.

LOGIN

PASSWORD

Enter

Not Registered? Sign up here

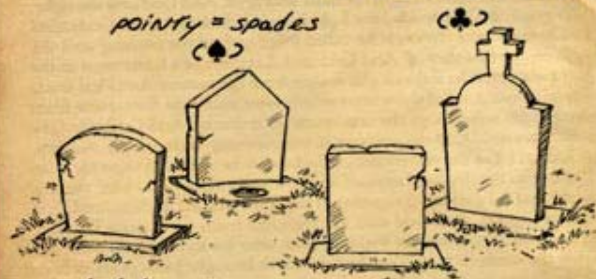
FULL OFFICIAL 100% US ARMY CERTIFIED GRADE A RULES FOR TOMBSTONE HOLD'EM POKER

LUCKY'S QUICK AND DIRTY RULES FOR TOMBSTONE HOLD'EM

The key thing about the game is,
there's only four shapes
you get on top of a tombstone.

statue on top = clubs

pointy = spades



rounded = hearts

flat = diamonds

Take the last year in the date of death, that's
your card value. d. 1945, that's a 5; d. 2001,
the one is the Ace.



Lay out the flop -- 5 regular cards if you
got 'em, a line of 5 tombstones if you don't.
Now each pair has two minutes to find their
two best hole cards. Trick is, you got to be
able to touch both tombstones and each other
at the same time -- so maybe I've got one hand
on a ten of hearts, and the other on my buddy's
tor while he's stretched out to touch another
heart for the flush.



After 3 minutes, whoever's got the working
watch yells out "LAST CALL" and everybody
runs hell for leather back to the flop and
says what they found. Only the best hand has
to prove it, and in case of ties, first back to

Go Game The Go Game



Presented by Wink Back, Inc. in San Francisco

Ministry of Reshelving / Pool

[View as slideshow](#)

[\(New window\)](#)

The Top Posters

 [joebrent](#) (21)

 [Avant Game](#) (19)

 [hmrpita](#) (16)

 [tyfn](#) (14)

Photos you've added

The Top Five Tags

 [reshelving](#)

 [1984](#)

 [ministryofreshelving](#)

 [avantgaming](#)

 [orwell](#)

[See all group tags](#)



From [Joyuna](#) [X]



From [Joyuna](#) [X]



From [Joyuna](#) [X]



From [Joyuna](#) [X]



From [Joyuna](#) [X]



From [Perfectiononacurve](#) [X]



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From [ariock](#) [X]



From [ariock](#) [X]



ARGs: collaborative, reality-based MMOs

“It deliberately blurs the line between the in-game and out-of-game experiences. ARGs may primarily be centered around online resources, often events that happen inside the game reality will ‘reach out’ into the players' lives **in order to bring them together.**

...

These games often have a specific goal of not only involving the player with the story and/or fictional characters but also of **connecting them to each other.** Many game puzzles and real-world missions can be solved only by the collective and collaborative efforts of multiple players.”

--players' ARG page on Wikipedia

ARGs: the community experience

“The community **is** the game.” –ARG player Alzheimers

“Such a great sense of **cooperation**, **fair play**, and **camaraderie** I haven’t seen in other online games. I’m absolutely hooked.” –ARG (Last Call Poker) player JTony

“From a **social engineering** perspective, it is amazing“ –ARG (The Beast) critic Eric Ng.

ARGs: the community experience

“It is really important to me that you (and other people) understand the differences that ARG has made in my way of thinking. It has powerfully affected my attitudes about **what is possible**. The game for me has been about gathering a first hand knowledge of how a large community can function - including the role of technology. I know that large scale communities can work and be extraordinarily effective. I am not afraid of the complexities.” –ARG (ilovebees) player Rose

ARGs: the community experience

“This kind of game is **completely contrary to our normal societal ethic** of individual self-promotion. But we all, very (and surprisingly) naturally, formed a community and worked collectively. This is contrary to the me-first attitude promoted by so many elements of our society. It demonstrates a remarkable lack of egotism.” –ARG player Phaedra

ARGs: the community experience

“The 7500+ players in this group ... we are all one. We have made manifest the idea of an unbelievably intricate intelligence. **We are one mind**, one voice ... made of 7500+ neurons... We sit back and look at our monitors, and our keyboards...our window to this vast collective consciousness... we are not alone. We are not one person secluded from the rest of the world...kept apart by the technology we have embraced. We have become a part of it through the technology. We have become a part of **something greater than ourselves.**” –ARG (The Beast) player T.

ARGs: the community experience

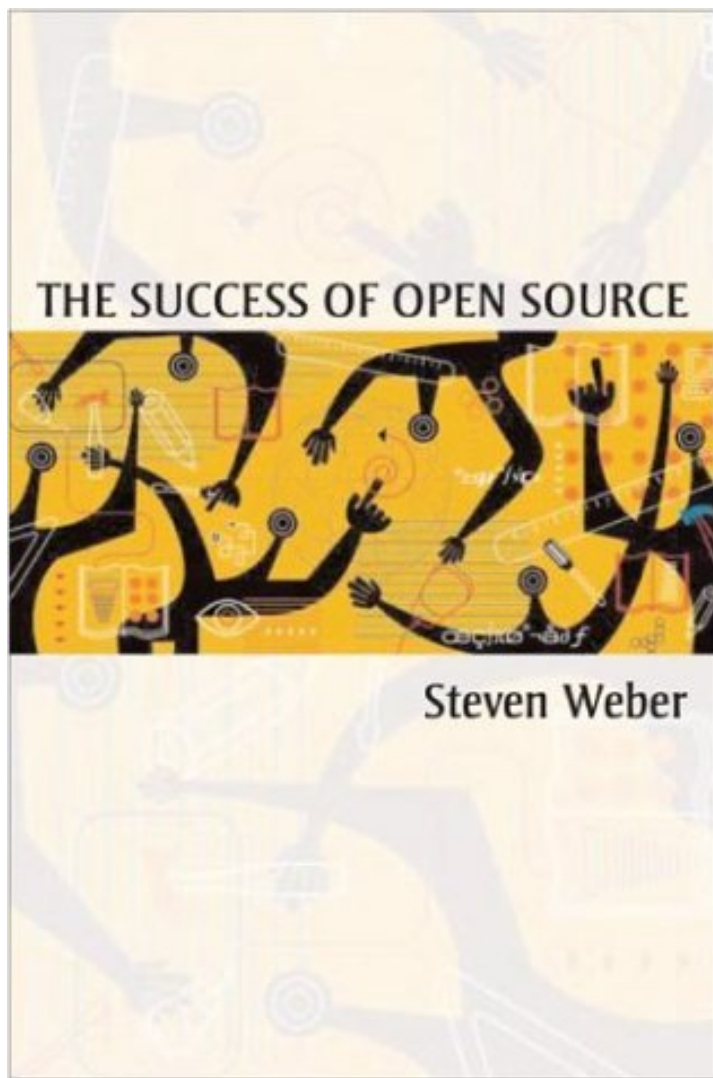
“A community that can agree to disagree and debate about that disagreement (sometimes heatedly) while continuing to work together towards a **common goal** (even when how to get to said goal is one of the main points of disagreement). 'Tis a rare thing indeed. EDIT: wish we could get politicians to actually work together like this, huh?” –ARG player Weephun

“That's huge. That doesn't happen a lot in life. **That's why ARG is different.** That's why **the community is the thing.** That's why it works, and why it grows. It fosters diversity, it fosters risk-taking thoughts, it fosters imagination and creativity, and it challenges you. When's the last time you got that from ANYTHING ELSE? Can't remember. Not sure if I ever have.” –ARG player Dorkmaster

ARGs: the community experience

“ARGS today offer an experience of mutual debate and collaborative interpretation for a society just beginning to experiment with collective intelligence. To be sure, there have been earlier forms of **collective intelligence** -- people collaborating to create imaginary societies and **creating relationships** which extended into real world spaces....But, ARGs push it to the next level.” –media theorist/ARG critic (ilovebees) Henry Jenkins

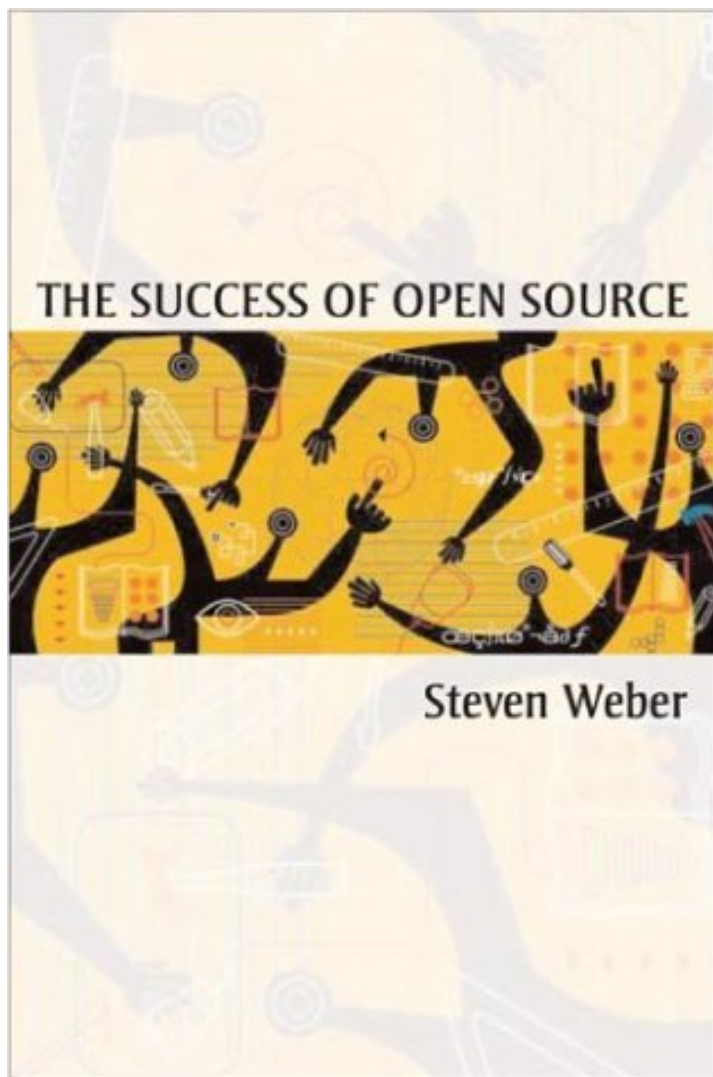
ARGs: the community experience



“Self-organization is used too often as a placeholder for an unspecified mechanism. The term becomes a euphemism for ‘I don’t really understand the mechanism that holds the system together.’ ” - Steven Weber’s *The Success of Open Source**

**thanks Cory Ondrejka for recommending this book!*

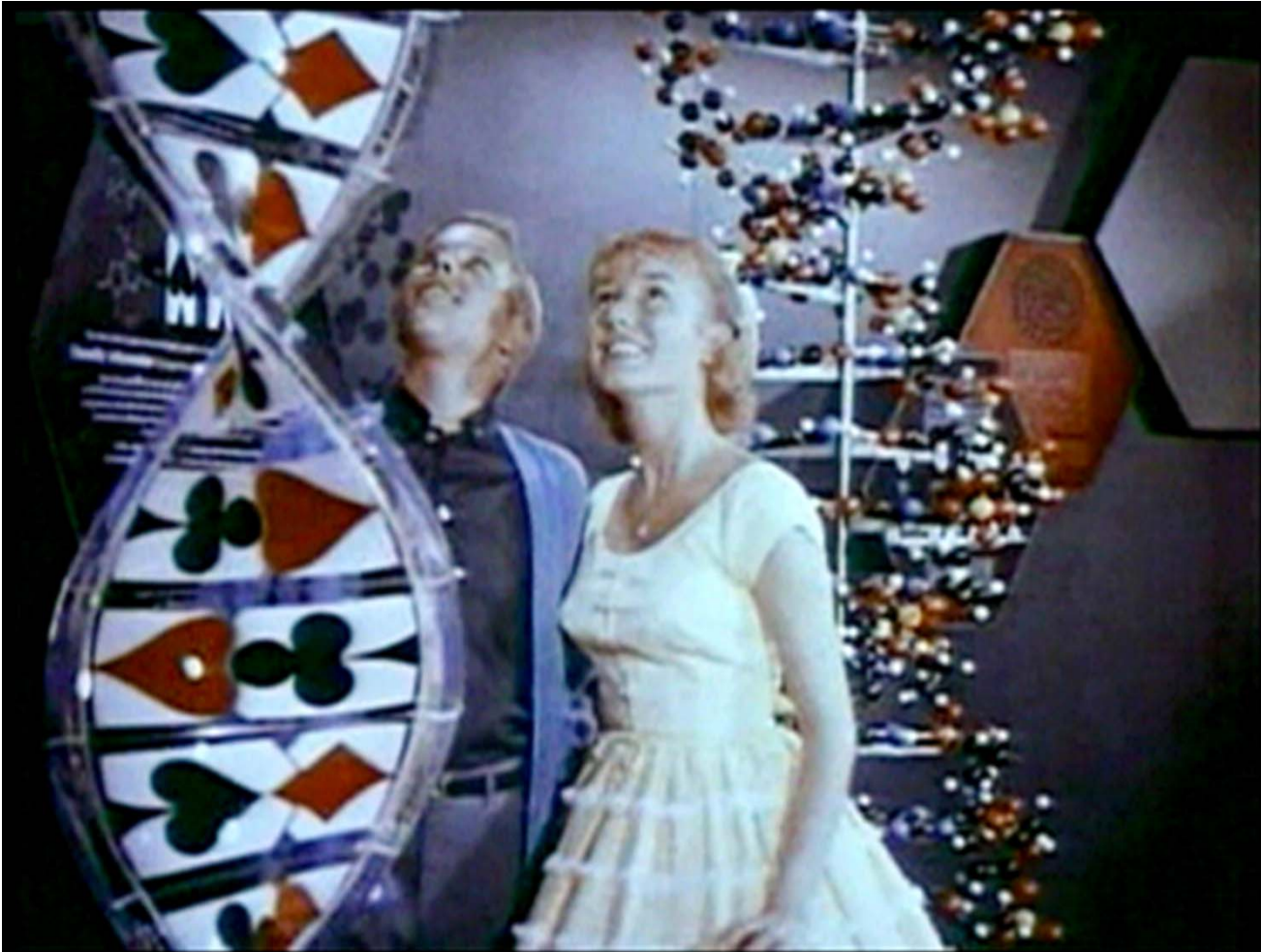
ARGs: the community experience



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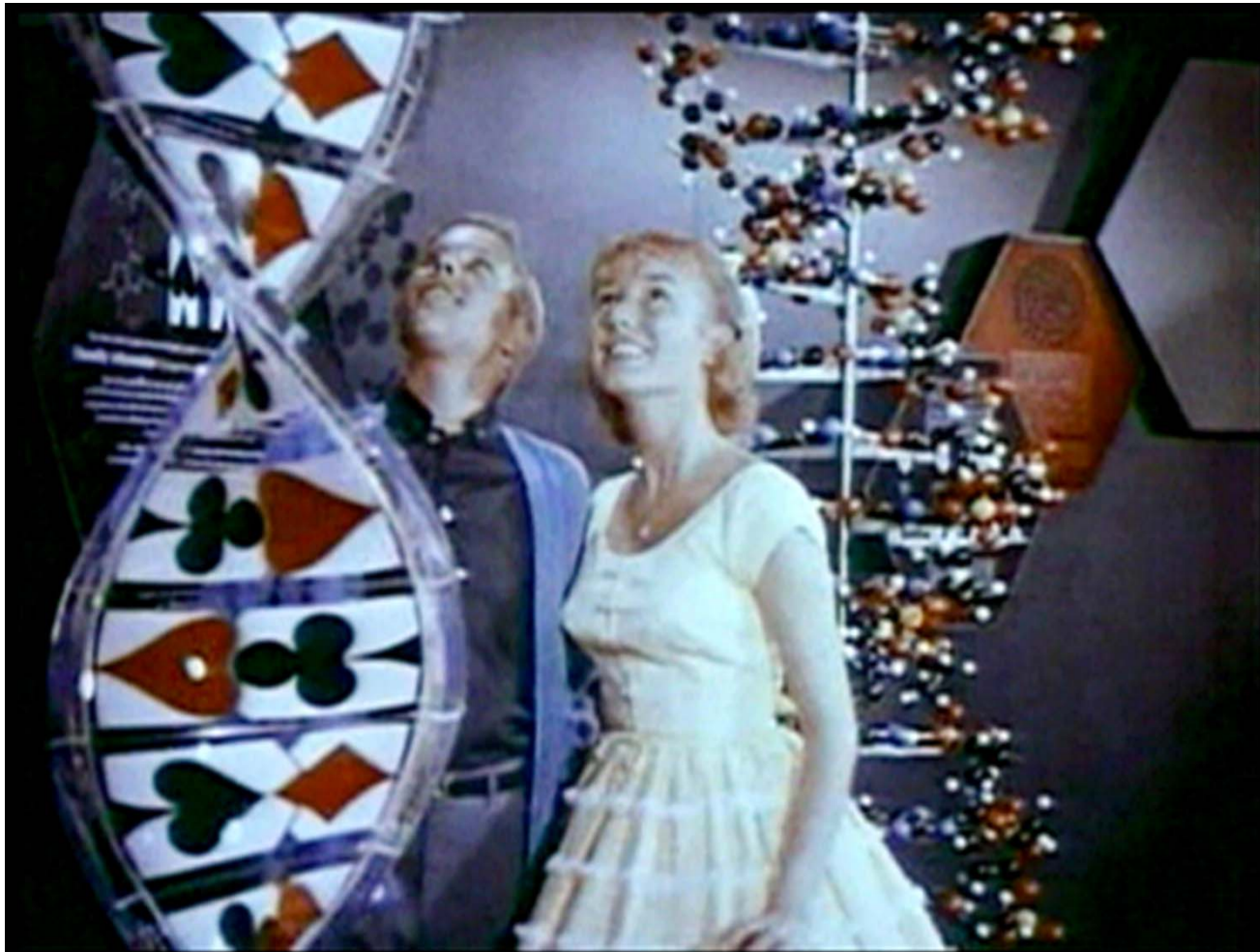
What is the gameplay mechanism that holds the collaborative system of ARGs together?

what is community design?



Jane McGonigal ~ Alternate Reality Gaming ~ www.avantgame.com

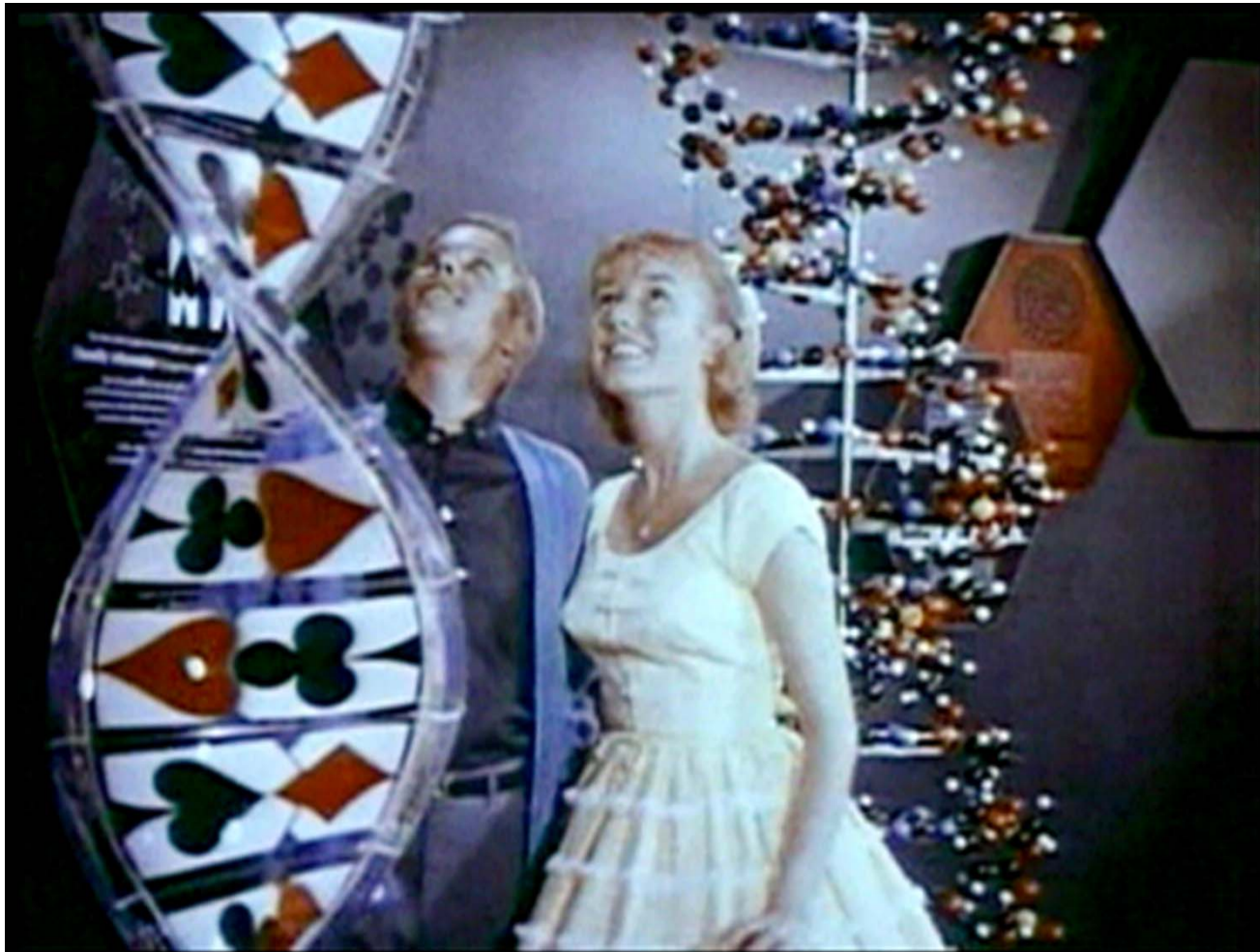
what is community design?



Player
recombination
as design
framework

“It is the process
through which
combinations not
present in earlier
generations are
made possible.” —
some sciencey site

what is community design?



“We are more ready to try the untried when what we do is inconsequential. Hence the fact that many inventions had their birth as toys.” -- social philosopher *Eric Hoffer*

ARGs: so what?

Cory Ondrejka of *Second Life* has said: “Digital worlds are places that use the real world as a metaphor.”

I say: Alternate realities are **real worlds** that use **games as a metaphor**.

So: Community design is the practice of creating new metaphors for collective experience in real life.

what's in a name? ARG etymology

...we interrupt this previously
scheduled Austin Game Conference
talk to bring you a portion of the
first annual ARGfest lecture...

HELLO, my name is Alternate Reality Gaming

Names have dreams.



What does the name 'ARG' say about our dreams for the future of the genre?

HELLO, my name is Alternate Reality Gaming

Names tell stories.



What history are we writing by choosing
the name 'ARG'?

HELLO, my name is Alternate Reality Gaming

Names make claims.



What are saying about ourselves as audiences, players, and designers by calling these experiences 'ARG's'?

HELLO, my name is Alternate Reality Gaming

1. The chosen words:

Alternate
Reality
Gaming

2. The phrasing:

Alternate Reality
Reality Gaming

HELLO, my name is Alternate Reality Gaming

ALTERNATE

NOT *al·ter·na·tive* (*ôl-tûrn-tv, l-*)

n.

- The choice between **two mutually exclusive possibilities**.
- A situation presenting such a **choice**.

adj.

- Allowing or **necessitating a choice between two things**.

HELLO, my name is Alternate Reality Gaming

ALTERNATE

al·ter·nate (ôltr-nt, l-)

-v. *intr.* To **pass back and forth** from one state, action, or place to another:
alternated between happiness and depression.

-v. *tr.* To **cause** to alternate: *alternated light and dark squares to form a pattern.*

-adj. Serving or used in place of another; **substitute**: *an alternate plan.*

HELLO, my name is Alternate Reality Gaming

REALITY

re·al·i·ty n.

- The quality or state of being **actual** or **true**.
- One, such as a person, an entity, or an event, that is actual: “the weight of **history** and **political** realities”
- The **totality of all things** possessing actuality, existence, or essence.
- That which exists **objectively** and **in fact**.

HELLO, my name is Alternate Reality Gaming

REALITY

re·al·i·ty n.

- All of your experiences that determine how things appear to you.
- The state of the world as it really is rather than as you might want it to be.
- Everything that is accessible or understandable by science, philosophy, theology or any other system of analysis.

HELLO, my name is Alternate Reality Gaming

GAMING

NOT *games*.

Games vs. *Gaming*:

Objects vs. *practice*

Emphasis on the thing, vs. emphasis on the participants.

HELLO, my name is **Alternate Reality Gaming**

GAMING

gam·ing n.

- The hobby of playing games.
- A contract between two or more persons by which they agree to play by certain rules

HELLO, my name is **Alternate Reality Gaming**

ALTERNATE REALITY

A **subgenre** and hybrid of Urban Fantasy and Alternate History; this often fun and extraordinarily small genre not only alters this world's history, but also its **dynamics**.

OED Science Fiction citations:

<http://www.jessesword.com/sf/view/158>

HELLO, my name is **Alternate Reality Gaming**

ALTERNATE REALITY

1978 G. S. ELRICK *Sci. Fiction Handbk.* 30

“*Alternate reality*, another—equally valid but not always **attainable**—way of experiencing existence.”

HELLO, my name is **Alternate Reality Gaming**

ALTERNATE REALITY

1992 L. TUTTLE *Lost Futures* 95

“We're not bound by the same limitations, and we can become **aware** of alternate realities.”

HELLO, my name is **Alternate Reality Gaming**

ALTERNATE REALITY

1989 G. A. EFFINGER in *Isaac Asimov's Sci.
Fiction Mag.* Feb. 120

“When they returned to T0, Placide and Fein discovered that the present was just as they'd left it, that their excursion in time had not changed the past, but rather **created** a new alternate reality.”

ARG experimental social structures

...we now return you to the Austin
Game Conference, already in
progress...

*(wow you missed some really
amazing slides.)*

why MMOs? **more, more, more**



“The more the better.”
– Andrew Fluegelman,
founding member of the
1970s New Games
movement, on the optimal
number of players.

Read: there is a
**phenomenological
pleasure** in being part of
a larger (much larger)
whole.

why MMOs? **more, more, more**



“More is different.”
– P.W. Anderson,
physicist, on the
phenomenon of
emergence — the
unpredictably complex
behavior of atoms in
larger particle systems.

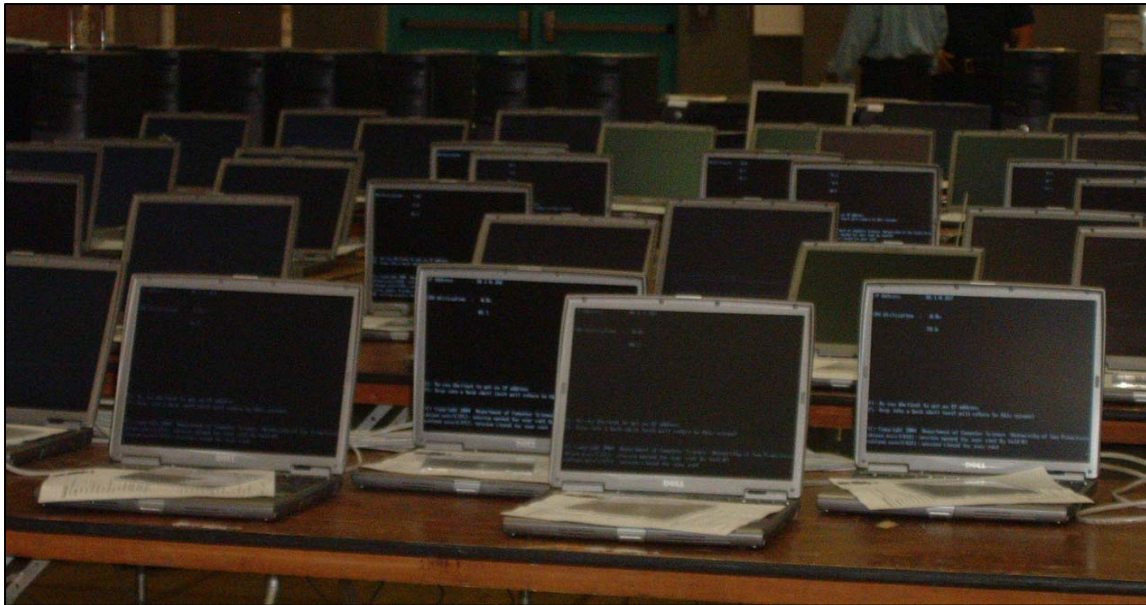
Read: **Unexpected
things happen** when
you scale up.

why MMOs? **more, more, more**

“More is needed.”

— Pat Miller,
computer scientist, on
the massive number of
PCs required to create
an ad-hoc
supercomputer.

Read: Massive scaling
allows you to create
exponentially **more**
effective and
powerful systems.



recombination #1: benevolent conspiracies

recombination #1: benevolent conspiracies

A brief history of **pronoia**:

- Coined in the mid-1970s by Grateful Dead lyricist and co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, John Perry Barlow: **“The opposite of paranoia—the suspicion that the universe is a conspiracy on your behalf.”**
- Scottish psychologist Fraser Clark revived the word in the 1990s: **“Pronoia is the sneaking hunch that others are conspiring behind your back to help you.”**
- Fraser Clark, cont’d: **“Symptoms include sudden attacks of optimism and outbreaks of good will.”**

recombination #1: benevolent conspiracies

A brief history of **pronoia**:

- J.D. Salinger, *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*
(Character Seymour Glass writes in his diary): “**Oh, God, if I’m anything by a clinical name, I’m a kind of paranoiac in reverse. I suspect people of plotting to make me happy.**”
- Philosopher Terrence McKenna: “**I believe reality is a marvelous joke staged for my edification and amusement, and everybody is working very hard to make me happy.**”

recombination #1: benevolent conspiracies

A brief history of **pronoia**:

- Philosopher Robert Anton Wilson: **“You should view the world as a conspiracy run by a very closely-knit group of nearly omnipotent people, and you should think of those people as yourself and your friends.”**
- Sociologist Fred Goldner in an article in *Social Problems* in 1982: **“The delusion that others think well of one, the unreasoning belief that you are doing brilliantly in your work.”** He was warning against the dangers of the rose-tinted view, in which an over-positive view of oneself and the world around one can lead to fatal mistakes.

recombination #1: benevolent conspiracies

A brief history of **pronoia**:

- Rob Brezsny's 2004 definition: "Pronoia is the antidote for paranoia. It's the understanding that the world is fundamentally friendly. **It's a mode of training the senses and intellect so you're able to perceive the fact that life always gives you what you need, exactly when you need it.**"

recombination #1: benevolent conspiracies

Examples of **pronoia** at work in ARGs:

- *The Go Game* banner mission
- *Ilovebees* payphone outreach
- *Last Call Poker* redistribution and socialist Texas Hold Em

recombination #2: scientific literati

recombination #2: scientific literati

A brief history of Scientific Correspondence Networks:

“Letters were the most common form of writing in the seventeenth century. Because they were 'swift, certain, and cheap,' letters were easily adapted to the needs of the New Science and quickly earned an enduring niche in the exchange of information. Throughout the Scientific Revolution, the size and number of 'correspondence networks' continued to expand, and in the course of the century, 'intelligencers' adapted the Renaissance ideal of a *Republic of Letters* to the realities of the New Science - a learned world divided by time and distance.” – Dr. Robert A. Hatch

recombination #2: scientific literati

Example of scientific literati at work in ARGs:

- GPS coordinates in *Ilovebees*


the Apocalypse
It served its

AXONS GO HOT:
01:17:3755:528

home	about me	the hives	honey	fun stuff!
Goodies	38.891883 -077.026117 06:07 PDT	41.511567 -081.607317 06:11 PDT		
Amazing facts!	42.970906 -077.228967 06:15 PDT	41.652214 -070.289091 06:19 PDT		
Hive-Ku	35.247483 -080.805150 06:23 PDT	40.451597 -079.932884 06:27 PDT		
The Fable of the Bee	31.217259 -085.360847 06:31 PDT	33.794257 -084.387394 06:35 PDT		
The Myth of Comatas	38.885250 -077.028167 06:39 PDT	39.404469 -077.428227 06:43 PDT		
Bee-licious Chocolate	30.792165 -085.376517 06:47 PDT	41.667164 -070.291601 06:51 PDT		
Chip Cookies	38.799738 -081.348157 06:55 PDT	41.153867 -081.356250 06:59 PDT		
Bee Sting Cake	41.889273 -087.626523 07:03 PDT	36.859230 -075.979429 07:07 PDT		
Saffron Honey Ice Cream	38.561793 -090.369923 07:11 PDT	30.270063 -087.688176 07:15 PDT		
Honey Butter	41.360234 -072.870524 07:19 PDT	35.228683 -080.840817 07:23 PDT		
Honey Roasted Carrots	39.911569 -086.215736	30.670746 -088.101535		
Honey Cough Medicine				
Green Goddess Facial				
Contact me!				

the crash. Looking back on the logs of
it is clear I went completely metempsychotic.

configured to travel light, I have stripped down to the
the



Amazing facts

In the summer, a single

- 1 queen
- 250 drones
- 20,000 female foragers
- 40,000 female house-b
- 5,000 to 7,000 eggs
- 7,000 to 11,000 larvae
- 16,000 to 24,000 larva

The average worker be

Bees are fully grown w

For centuries, bees hav
honeybee Apis Dorsata

I am it app. before th

recombination #3: folksonomy mobs

recombination #3: folksonomy mobs

A brief history of folksonomy:

- A portmanteau of the words folk (or *folks*) and taxonomy, the term *folksonomy* has been attributed to Thomas Vander Wal. "Taxonomy" is from the Greek *taxis* and *nomos*. *Taxis* means "classification", and *nomos* (or *nomia*) means "management". "Folk" is from the Old English *folc*, meaning people. So "folksonomy" literally means "people's classification management". (del.icio.us, late 2003)

recombination #3: folksonomy mobs

A brief history of folksonomy:

- Wikipedia says: “Folksonomy is a neologism for a practice of collaborative categorization using freely chosen keywords. More colloquially, this refers to a group of people cooperating spontaneously to organize information into categories. In contrast to formal classification methods, this phenomenon typically only arises in non-hierarchical communities, such as public websites.”

recombination #3: folksonomy mobs

A brief history of smart mobs:

- Howard Rheingold: “Smart mobs emerge when communication and computing technologies amplify human talents for cooperation. The technologies that are beginning to make smart mobs possible are mobile communication devices and pervasive computing - inexpensive microprocessors embedded in everyday objects and environments. Already, governments have fallen, youth subcultures have blossomed from Asia to Scandinavia, new industries have been born and older industries have launched furious counterattacks.”

recombination #3: folksonomy mobs

Examples of **folksonomy mobs** at work in ARGs:

- *Ministry of Reshelving's* social bookmarking
- *Tombstone Hold 'Em's* graveyard games

This book has been relocated by

The Ministry of Reshelving

Dedicated to the proper classification
of fiction and non-fiction texts.

⚡ ♂ \ " ☺ ♀ = ❄️ X \ . " ≡ ☹️ ♥ X ☹️ ☺ Flickr tag: reshelving

A man in a dark blue sweatshirt and trousers stands in front of a Waterston bookstore. He is holding a small white card up to his eyes. A green and white recycling bin with the 'ORCHARD SQUARE' logo is visible in the foreground.





recombination #4: grooming networks

recombination #4: grooming networks

A brief history of grooming networks:

- Robin Dunbar: “To be groomed by a monkey is to experience primordial emotions.[...] The experience is both physical sensation and social intercourse. A light touch, a gentle caress, can convey all the meanings in the world: one moment it can be a word of consolation, an apology, a request to be groomed, an invitation to play [...] Knowing which meaning to infer is the very basis of social being, depending as it does on the close reading of another’s mind. In that brief moment of mutual understanding in a fast-moving, frenzied world, all social life is distilled in a single gesture.”

recombination #4: grooming networks

A brief history of grooming networks:

- This “wordless pageant” of physical connection, as Dunbar describes it, suggests a natural, alternate infrastructure for social networks: a community connected through nodes of physical intimacy and gesture. And with ubiquitous computing giving network members massively scaled mobility, the opportunity to place multiple users in a physical proximity that supports this alternate infrastructure is increasingly available.

recombination #4: grooming networks

Examples of **grooming networks** in ARGs:

- Secret gestures of *the Go Game*
- *Zombie mobs*
- Touch in *Tombstone Hold Em*
- “I take care of my crew” in *Ilovebees*

Experimental social structures for thumbs

Massively multiplayer thumb-wrestling (Monochrom 2004)



Experimental social structures for thumbs

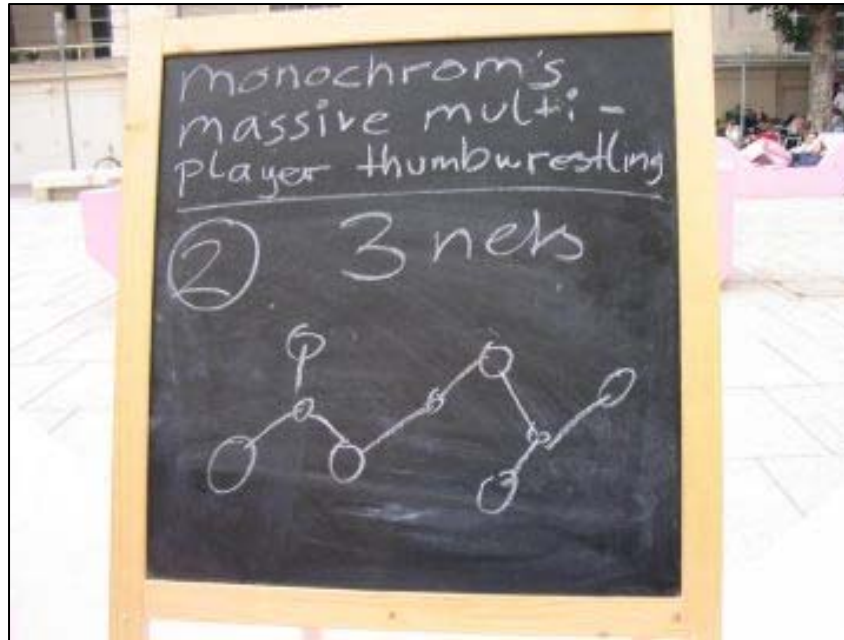
Massively multiplayer thumb-wrestling (Monochrom 2004)



“This experimental project engages low-fi sweaty-fingers-entertainment and places it in the high TCP/IP context of recent Massive Multiplayer Online Gaming.”

Experimental social structures for thumbs

Massively multiplayer thumb-wrestling (Monochrom 2004)



“Unlimited amounts of players can connect to join a Multiplayer Thumb-Wrestling Network. As the number of players is unlimited, global thumb-wrestling may emerge through self-sustaining peer-to-peer networks and ad-hoc socializing.”

Experimental social structures for thumbs

Massively multiplayer thumb-wrestling (Monochrom 2004)

Kazaa Peer to Peer

As many three-player-knots as possible are built. Then these knots are connected via the players' free left hands.



Experimental social structures for thumbs

Massively multiplayer thumb-wrestling (janemcg mod 2005)

RULES:

1. At the start of each round, players form a massive network of three-thumb nodes.
2. A disconnected hand is a dead hand. If you can't find a node to join by the start of the round, you lose that thumb for the rest of the game.
3. After each round, all losing thumbs convert to dead hands.
4. After each round, players re-structure themselves so all remaining hands are in new nodes. Failure to reconnect? See rule #1.
5. **The last remaining thumb wins!** * but also, everyone wins if you can actually execute this game play successfully



Jane McGonigal ~ jane@avantgame.com



Current project www.lastcallpoker.com/allin

Games research www.avantgame.com

Game design www.42entertainment.com

...benevolent conspiracies ...scientific literati ...folksonomy mobs ...grooming networks...