THE NATURE OF VIRTUALITY

JACKIE MARSH, UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD
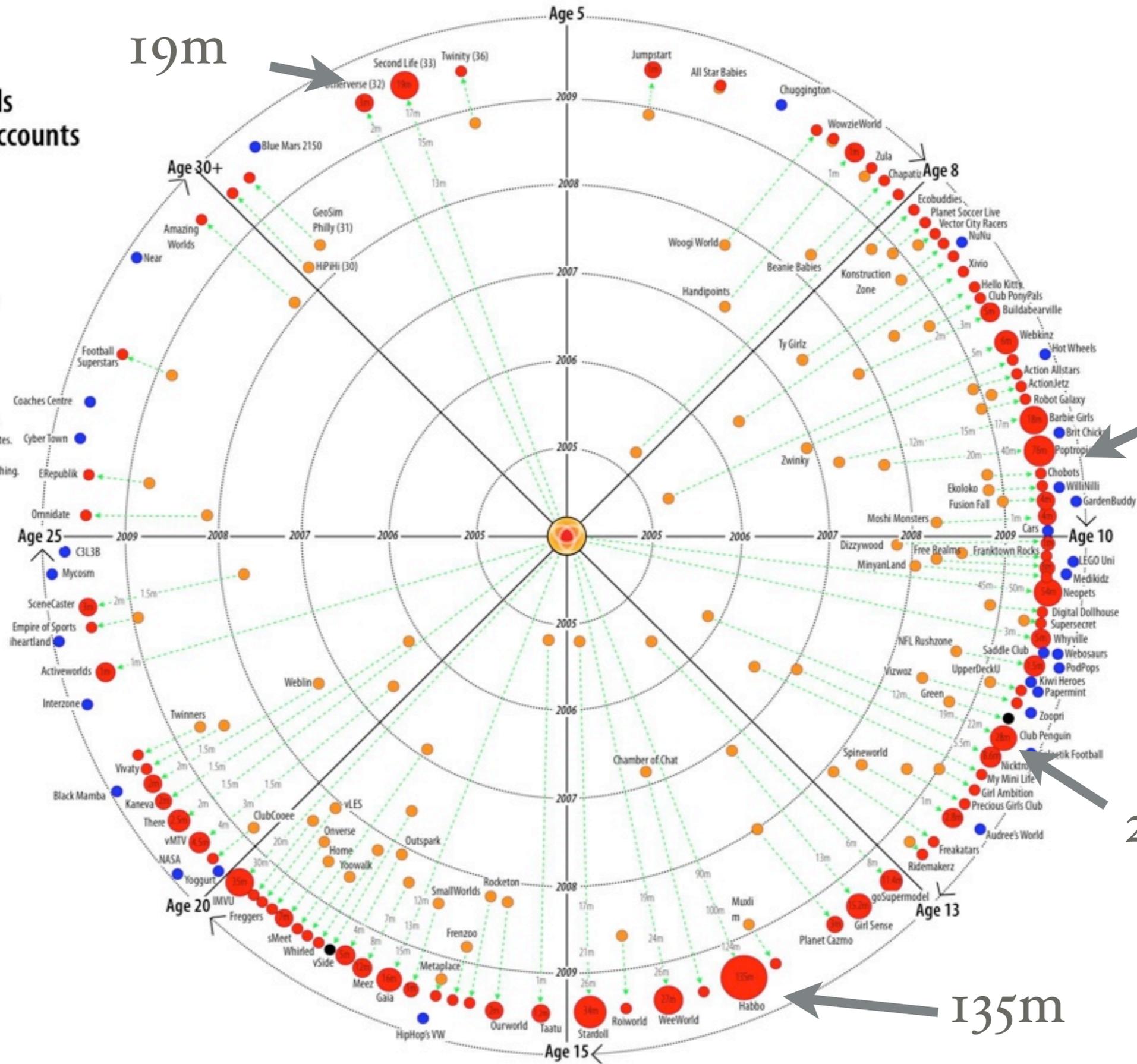
Presentation

✳ Reflections on the nature of virtuality

✳ Case study: the nature of virtuality in young children's use of '*Club Penguin*': frames, identity and play

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Virtual Worlds Registered Accounts Q2 2009

Legend:
- 🔴 Live or open beta
- 🟠 Launched in
- 🔵 In development/private beta
- ⚫ Closed/ closing

No data shown for worlds under 1m registered accounts. Includes estimates. Copyright KZero 2006-2009. Permission required prior to republishing.
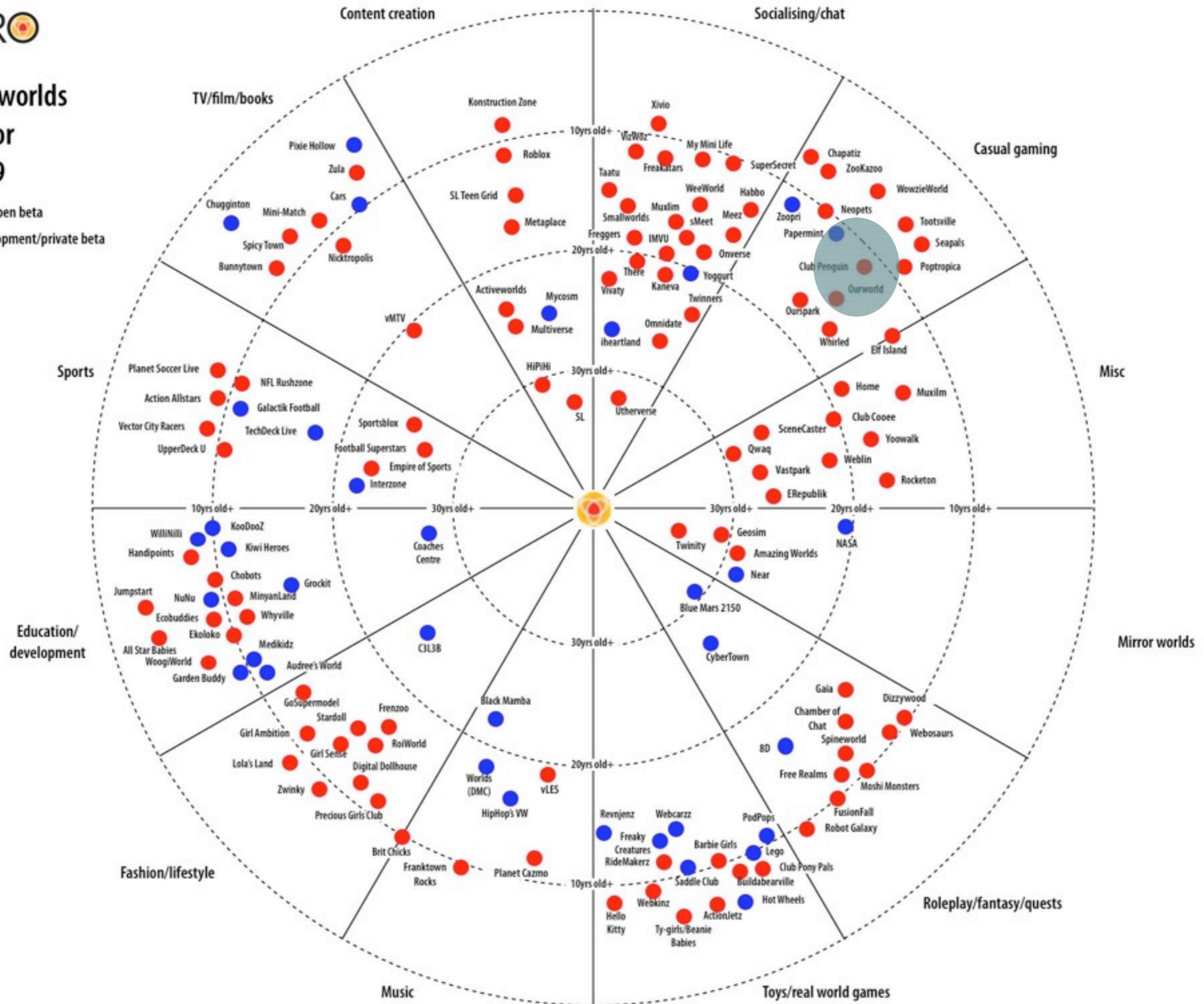
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Virtual worlds by sector Q2 2009

● Live or open beta
● In development/private beta

Content creation
Socialising/chat
Casual gaming
Misc
Mirror worlds
Roleplay/fantasy/quests
Toys/real world games
Music
Fashion/lifestyle
Education/development
Sports
TV/film/books

10yrs old+
20yrs old+
30yrs old+

Konstruction Zone, Xivio, VizWizz, My Mini Life, Chapatiz, ZooKazoo, WowzieWorld, Roblox, Taatu, Freakatars, SuperSecret, Neopets, Tootsville, SL Teen Grid, Muxlim, WeeWorld, Habbo, Zoopri, Seapals, Metaplace, Smallworlds, sMeet, Meez, Papermint, Poptropica, Freggers, IMVU, Onverse, Club Penguin, Ourworld, There, Vivaty, Kaneva, Yogurt, Ourspark, Activeworlds, Mycosm, Twinners, Whirled, Elf Island, vMTV, Multiverse, iheartland, Omnidate

Pixie Hollow, Zula, Cars, Chuggington, Mini-Match, Spicy Town, Nicktropolis, Bunnytown

HiPiHi, SL, Utherverse, Home, Muxilm, SceneCaster, Club Cooee, Yoowalk, Qwaq, Weblin, Rocketon, Vastpark, ERepublik

Planet Soccer Live, NFL Rushzone, Action Allstars, Galactik Football, Vector City Racers, TechDeck Live, UpperDeck U, Sportsblox, Football Superstars, Empire of Sports, Interzone

Twinity, Geosim, Amazing Worlds, NASA, Near, Blue Mars 2150

WilliNilli, KooDooZ, Handipoints, Kiwi Heroes, Chobots, Grockit, Jumpstart, NuNu, MinyanLand, Whyville, Ecobuddies, Ekoloko, Medikidz, All Star Babies, Woogi World, Garden Buddy, Audree's World, Coaches Centre, C3L3B, CyberTown

GoSupermodel, Stardoll, Frenzoo, Black Mamba, Gaia, Dizzywood, Girl Ambition, RoiWorld, Chamber of Chat, Spineworld, Webosaurs, Lola's Land, Girl Sense, Digital Dollhouse, 8D, Zwinky, Precious Girls' Club, Worlds (DMC), vLES, HipHop's VW, Free Realms, Moshi Monsters, Brit Chicks, Franktown Rocks, Planet Cazmo, FusionFall, Robot Galaxy

Revnjenz, Webcarzz, PodPops, Freaky Creatures, RideMakerz, Barbie Girls, Lego, Saddle Club, Club Pony Pals, Buildabearville, Hot Wheels, Webkinz, ActionJetz, Hello Kitty, Ty-girls/Beanie Babies

Real and virtual

 In the eyes of the debunkers, the "virtual" (the false, the inauthentic, the new, the disembodied) threatens to invade or pollute "the real" (the genuine, the authentic, the traditional, the embodied).
	(Valentine and Holloway, 2002, p304)

...the performance of identity and the actual presence of things or settings [online] utterly depend upon the real physical presence of actual bodies at the same moment in time.

(Slater, 2002:232)

Cognition leaks out into body and world.

(Clark, 2007)

A basic starting point for any serious discussion of the virtual must be recognition of the *non-autonomy* of the virtual - a recognition of the fact that the virtual does not constitute an autonomous, independent, or 'closed' system, but is instead always dependent, in a variety of ways, on the everyday world within which it is embedded. (Malpas 2009:135).

The non-autonomy of the virtual is perhaps most obvious when one looks to the causal dependence of the virtual on the everyday - and not only its dependence on the physical structures that make it possible, but also on the various socio-economic and socio-cultural processes (including the process of design) out of which it arises. Yet the non-autonomy of the virtual is not simply a matter of causal or physical dependence. It is just as much a matter of its *contentual* dependence. The content that is embodied in the virtual - the narratives it presents, the significance of the individual events and elements that occur within it, the meanings that can be attached to the images and texts that it generates - is always dependent on the everyday world in which the virtual is embedded (Malpas, 2009:136)

Club Penguin

- Club Penguin - aimed at children aged from six to fourteen

- Acquired in 2006 by Disney for £350 million

- 2 levels of use - paid membership has more benefits

Study

- Primarily white, working class community

- 175 children in one school surveyed (52% use VWs)

- 15 children in Years 2 and 6 interviewed

- 3 children filmed using Club Penguin over the period of 1 month (8 hours, 48 mins, 55 secs of film)

- Interviews with the 3 children and their parents

Research questions

∗ What framing structures did children use when constructing social order in *Club Penguin*?

∗ What was the relationship between children's use of *Club Penguin* and their 'offline' worlds?

∗ What was the relationship between virtual/ 'offline' play?

'play as a generative site for developing the agency of the cultural producer or worker' (Ito, 2006:)

WARNING: Only enter your password on the official clubpenguin.com or miniclip.com website.

Lost your Password | Become a Member

lubpenguin.com

NEWS

- Hello
- Good-Bye
- Friend
- Questions
- Answers
- Game
- Activities
- Grub!
- Hurray!
- Yes
- No
- Ok

Amy603

MAP

THE (VIRTUAL) INTERACTION ORDER

Main activities

- Meeting siblings and friends online

- Playing

- Shopping

- Visiting other igloos

- Reading the newspaper/ books

- Writing and reading messages to/ from friends

Social interaction can be identified narrowly as that which uniquely transpires in social situations, that is, environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another's response presence. (Presumably the telephone and the mails provide reduced versions of primordial real thing).

(Goffman, 1983:2)

The frames of meaning that give significance to the virtual are thus the frames of significance that users bring with them into the virtual and that encompass more than just the virtual alone - virtual experiences gain their content and significance through being embedded in those frames, and so through being connected to other experiences both virtual and everyday.

(Malpas, 2009:136)

John: *I look at a name and if it sound weird or not right, I always press no, but that's only occasionally because I have only got one friend. If the name is not a normal name, or sounds weird to me, I don't normally press it.*

Jackie: *And what do you mean, a normal name?*

John: *If it's like, a funny name, or like, I don't know, their real name, or like coolgirl or something like that, I would normally press yes, but if it is something weird...*

Sally clicks on the avatar of another user and looks at the profile. She then visits their igloo.

Jackie: *When you say you like the look of somebody, what are you looking for exactly?*
Sally: *Looking for their clothes, hair and their posh houses, but it doesn't really matter because I've got a lot of plain friends. So he's just got little hats and stuff [pointing to an avatar of a user who does not have paid membership], so most people don't click on him because he's plain. Just because he's plain and {not} got a fancy background, they just won't click on him because they don't really....think, 'Oh he's not rich...I won't go and see him, so I'll just leave him out'. I just click on anybody.*

Economic capital	Cultural capital	Social capital
(i)The number of coins accrued in game play

(ii)Additional membership charge enables greater spending power | (i) Users accrue social and cultural knowledge of CP through engagement with specific communities of practice (e.g. groups of paid members) | ...the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. (Bourdieu)

(i) Relationship between online/ offline networks |
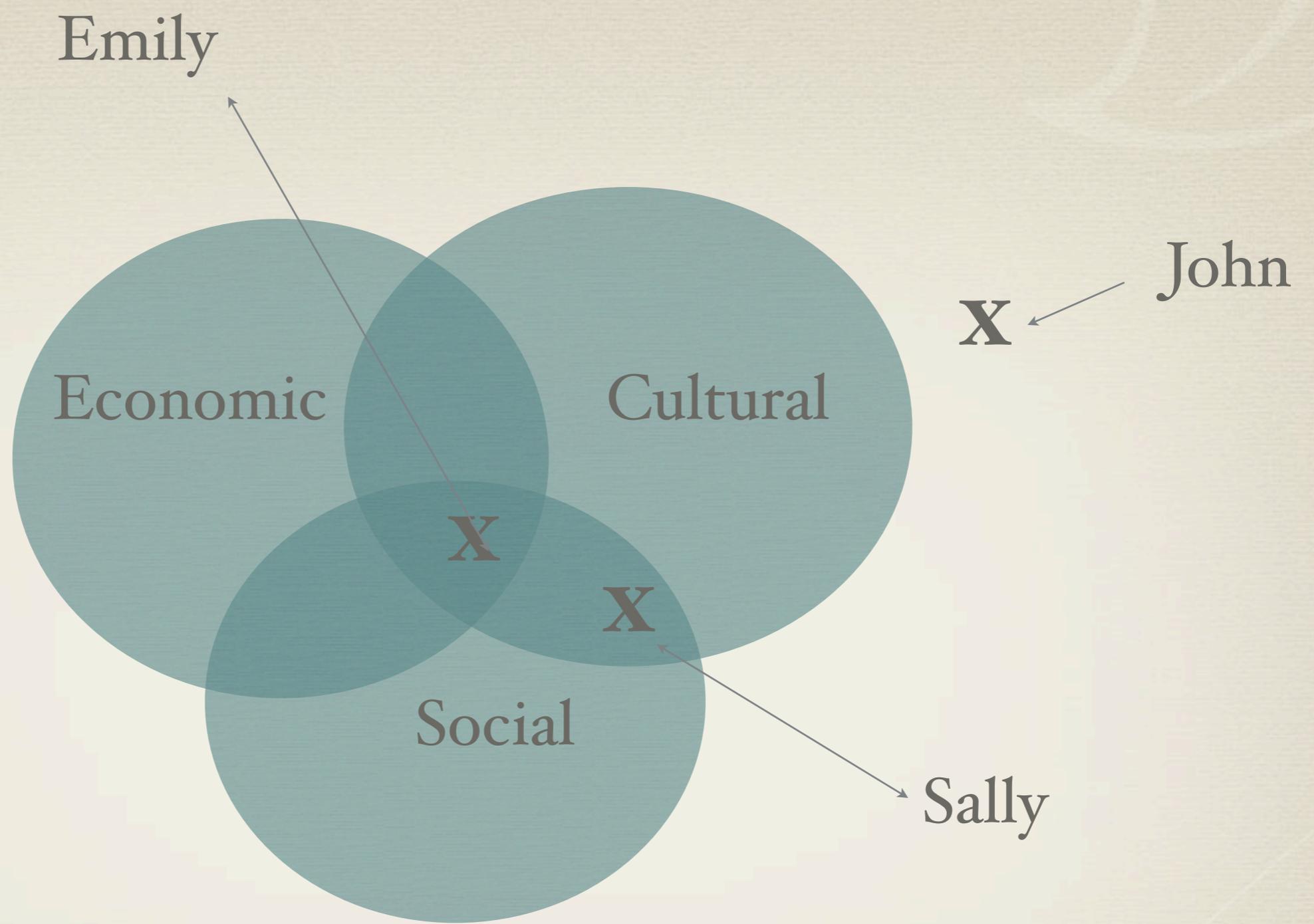
There's big gangs that can walk round with each other, like what you do, but people like walking in fours, like they're probably seeing each other from school or made friends....I've walked in threes and stuff with my friends and then we go and play like Connect 4 or things. (Sally)

...the problematic or unstable character of thingness produced a sense of the instability of social order.

(Slater, 1992, 243)

Sally: *"I usually use these up here [set phrases] because its easier than writing When you like someone to play with you, you ask them a question because they're your buddy you've got to like type it really quick before they run off...so its just easier to click things so they don't run off or something."*

Participants do manage to stabilize order and identity, but always provisionally and always with a sense of fighting against the odds.(Slater, 2002:233)

Sally: *Sometimes if you ask people who are just really rich and stuff, they'll just turn you down because they think you're not rich. you know when you're all on your own and your just a plain person with nothing, they just don't click on you.*

Jackie: *And how do you know that's the case?*

Sally: *Because it happens. It happened to my sister, my sister we were going, finding each other and we kept picking all these right nice people but it doesn't really matter because they just don't want to be friends.*

Jackie: *Do they tell you that or you just guess that?*

Sally: *No just guess, but its most likely because that's what it's like because you want to be somebody's friend. I just click on everybody and so does Susan [sister], but it doesn't really matter what they look like 'cos you don't even know who they are basically, so what does it matter?*

Adventure Rock
(Gauntlett and jackson, 2008)

* Nurturers

* Explorer-investigators

* Self-stampers

* Social climbers

* Fighters

* Power-users

* Life-system builders

* Collector-consumers

Nurturers

It's good because you get to feed the pet and play with it. (Ruth, aged 7)

Pet troubles

Lisa (7): I go on the games…all the money I get back I save it up to buy furniture and pets and things. And I've already got some pets but one of them ran away.

Jackie: Why did it run away?

Lisa: I weren't feeding it – I left it at home. They're supposed to be left at home. I can't take all 15 of them out for a walk. It were called 'Princess'.

People who grew up in the world of the mechanical are more comfortable with a definition of what is alive that excludes all but the biological and resist shifting definitions of aliveness.… Children who have grown up with computational objects don't experience that dichotomy. They turn the dichotomy into a menu and cycle through its choices. (Turkle, 1999, p. 552)

Lisa (7): I got it this mermaid's costume with this tiara. And I got it a wig and it's just like that *[makes shape of a beehive]* ...The thing I thought in the end, I should have never bought the wig or the tiara.

Jackie: Why?

Lisa: 'Cos I thought I could wear the wig underneath and then the tiara on the top, it would be a lot more nicer.

Jackie: And can't you?

Lisa: No, it just takes it off. I wish there were a reverse button where you could get your money back. Like a garage sale.

Fighters

Playful engagement in the world

- Fantasy play

- Socio-dramatic play

- Ritualised play

- Games with rules

- 'Rough and tumble' play

Games with rules

- Games developed by producers

- Hide and seek

- Musical chairs

It's [Club Penguin] got some ski game. It's really good so I can ride on sleds and it goes really, really fast. (Leo, aged 7)

It's all games. I like the games. (Ewan, aged 5)

Fantasy Play

✳ Club Penguin producers introduce fantasy themes in which children can take on roles e.g. Pirates, mermaids, sleuths

✳ Narrative-driven

Sociodramatic play: Parties

- Mine's 18. He keeps having a party and having crisps and fishcakes (Daniel, 7)

- Me and my friends and my cousins and strangers who come to my party, we all went to the disco room and then when we were all drunk we went back to my house and had a little lay down (Kyle, 7)

- I like dance around and check if they've been looking after their puffles and if they've got security cameras I throw snowballs at them and block them (Lisa, 7)

Smilansky (1968):
Socio-dramatic play

- Imitative role play
- Make-believe with objects
- Make-believe with actions and situations
- Interaction
- Verbal communication
- Persistence

Ritualised play

I like reading messages and falling in love with girl penguins. I have got about five girlfriends. You have to win a loveheart and then you can send them to them.

(Billy, aged 7)

Steinkuehler (2005:12) noted that 'In-game social groups devise rituals and performances…and generate in-game antics and adventures' which develop social communities of practice.

'Rough and tumble' play
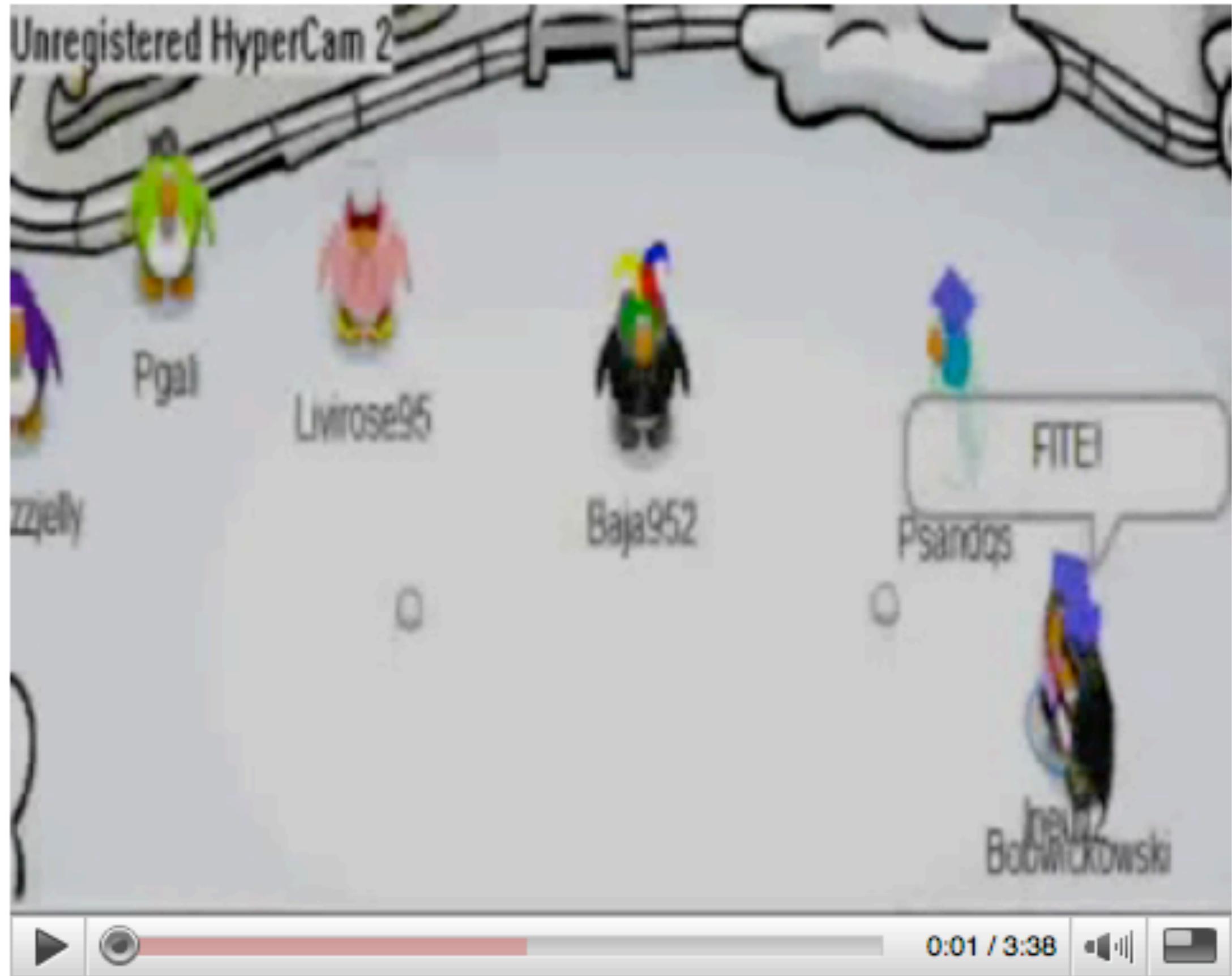
- Chasing/ tag

- Sinking the iceberg

- Physical fights (snowball fights)

Eye of the tiger: snowball fight on Club Penguin

Watch for a nascent culture of virtual reality that underscores the ways in which we construct gender and the self, the ways in which we *become* what we play, argue about, and build. And watch for a culture that leaves new space for the idea that he or she who plays, argues, and builds might be doing so with a machine. (Turkle, 1994 p167)