

Under the scientific supervision of Dr. Peter Podrez, students at the Institute of Theatre and Media Studies at FAU Erlangen-Nuremberg have searched for answers to these questions. In collaboration with the Nuremberg Museum of Communication, they analysed, transformed and created avatars while discovering their challenges and opportunities. The results show the manifold messages of avatars from a cultural and media studies perspective in video game research.

Theme development and production of the work

Introduction/Virtual Egos

Dr. Peter Podrez und Alexander Becker

Inter- and transmedial avatars

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Animals as computer game avatars

Miriam Mullen, Lena Priebe, Cornelia J. Schnaars

Avatars and depression

Anna Hohenöcker, Lars Kocher, Fabian Schuster

Avatars and cosplay as fan practice

Sarah Loughran, Mandy Maurer, Lukas Weiß

Cosplay appropriation

Milena Matticka, Sascha Meixner, Svenja Pirk

Avatars in history games

Solveig Böhner, Leonie Eising, Nico Hilscher, Sina Kagerer

Avatars and gender

Hannah Haberberger und Celina Crämer

Monstrous avatars

Lara Schiffer

Editors and identity

Cassandra Haas



WhoAmIWantToBe
Avatars in digital games
Exhibition duration 15 October 2022–early summer 2023

Opening Hours Tue–Fr 09 a.m.–5 p.m.
Sat + Sun, bank holidays 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Please inform yourself before your visit on our website about the Corona-rules.
www.mfk-nuernberg.de

Admission Adults: 9 Euro
Reduced: 7 Euro
Families: 18 Euro
Children and adolescent (6–17 years): 5 Euro

Public transport connections U2, U3 stop:
Opernhaus

Museum of Communication Nuremberg

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A museum of the Museumsstiftung
Post und Telekommunikation
Supported by Deutsche Post
and Deutsche Telekom



WHO AM I WANT TO BE

Avatars in digital games

Museum of
Communication
Nuremberg



WhoAmIWantToBe Lara Croft, Super Mario or werewolves in fantasy
Avatars in Digital Games role-playing games – avatars, i.e. controllable characters, are important elements of video games. They contribute to storytelling and let us act in the world of the game, but they also embody different identities: Who can we be? Which gender or class roles can we take on? Which body images do games (re-)produce? How are stereotypes involved and how can they be overcome?



Insight into the exhibition

What are avatars? What does Indian mythology have to do with computer games and why do we speak of avatars? Why is it important to talk about them? The projects gathered here present different views of the avatar phenomenon – including media-historical, aesthetic and cultural perspectives. They show which tasks avatars fulfil in a game, how we connect with them as gamers and what social meanings they carry. This is illustrated by various examples from computer game history.

ANALOGUE AVATAR DIGITAL At first glance, Super Mario doesn't seem to have much to do with a chess king. However, both digital and analogue games – and their characters – have in fact been influencing each other since the beginning of video game history: as platforms that inspire, compete with and complement each other. But what happens to avatars when they move from the screen to a playboard? And vice versa: How is a material game character 'avatarised'? The project shows various analogue-digital forms of avatars and points to their medial, aesthetic and cultural differences, but also to their commonalities. For if, according to a well-known saying by Friedrich Schiller, man is only fully human where he plays, does this not apply to both analogue and digital media?

Editors and identity Some games give players the opportunity to design their own characters or even create their own avatars. Each character creation begins with an idea of who or what is to be represented. In this project, you may get some inspiration for your own personal avatar. Many games promise a wide range of opportunities for customisation, so that there should be virtually no limits to the individuality of avatars. But how do these character editors really work? And what are their limits? This project tries to answer these questions.

Avatars and cosplay as fan practice What is avatar cosplay all about? This project takes a closer look at the terminology and characteristics of this fan practice. What's more, there's ample opportunity to discover cosplays from different video games and learn about some of the avatars' special features in short video game clips. You also get to see which details cosplayers pay attention to when they slip into the avatar's role.

Cosplay appropriation What does it mean to adopt a character? It implies using a video game avatar as a model and recreating them according to one's own preferences. This is a process consisting of several phases. Cosplayers include their own cultural background as well as personal and physical features in their cosplays. During this process, they assign specific meanings to the character.

Inter- and trans-medial Avatars This exhibit deals with J.R.R. Tolkien's character Aragorn from the Lord of the Rings trilogy. The character is portrayed as an avatar in the video game of the same name, as a Lego minifigure and as a token in a Lego board game. Therefore, the exhibit is not only about different media adaptations, but also about analogue and digital transformations of the character. Aragorn was examined along six categories: Appearance, Agility, Designability, Gameplay (Ludus/Paidia), layer Involvement, (Ir-)Replaceability



Avatars and depression According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), around 300 million people globally suffer from depression. Depression is often not recognised as an illness by both the affected and the healthy. Films, television series or social media frequently spread oversimplified notions about depression, establishing prejudice and clichés. In this way, films, television or social media may unintentionally contribute to the stigmatisation of those affected. The central questions here are: Can clichés also be observed in video games? To what extent can avatars change the perception of depression? Or do video games, having their own conventions, deliver relatively nuanced portrayals of the condition?

Animals as computer game avatars Animals have always been part of our everyday lives: We lovingly take care of our pets and marvel at wild animals in zoos and forests, while farm animals end up on our plates and become part of our clothes. Such categories express different human-animal relations that differ depending on time, place and culture. The relations between humans and animals in video games are as diverse as those found in our society. There are animals that merely serve as anonymous resources, others that accompany and support us on our journeys, and still others that pose a threat to us. This project illustrates various human-animal relationships in video games.

Monstrous avatars Monsters transgress boundaries. By combining the impossible with the forbidden, they embody everything that goes against biological, moral and cultural norms. And this is precisely the appeal of the monstrous. It expresses not only the superhuman, but also liberation from everyday order. Do we play monsters to free ourselves from values? Do we have to hold ourselves responsible for our actions when we play a monster? This project provides examples of different types of monstrous avatars and deals with the physical and the mental aspects of the monster.

Avatars in history games From childhood on we are surrounded by media shaping our view of history. As a result, what children and adults know about history and culture is influenced by films, toy sets, Lego minifigures, storybooks or children's programmes. Video games, too, can be seen as important features of historical and commemorative culture where avatars serve as vehicles for time travel. Within the exhibit's games, a certain pattern becomes visible: Avatars impart historical knowledge to the gamers by representing relevant characters from different time horizons. In most cases, though, they do not represent actual historical figures themselves.

Avatars and gender From film and television to advertisement posters on a walk through the city centre, stereotypes are part of everyday life. Men are strong, women are beautiful and blondes are a bit dim while male superheroes save the day. These clichés are often found in video games. Even though there are more nuanced avatars, superficial portrayals are in the majority. Recurring thought patterns constantly reinforce established role models. This is often noticeable visually without even knowing a character's background. But it doesn't have to be this way. Stereotypes can be broken. In this project you will find ideas on how this can be done.

