Terra Nova 2.0
The New Worlds of MMORPGs

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MMORPG
Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game
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Role Playing Game
Growth in *World of Warcraft* subscribers from Dec. 2005 to June 2009
Ailin Graef (aka Anshe Chung)
- *Second Life*’s first virtual millionaire
- Buys and develops virtual real estate
- Owns 36 sq. km of land in *Second Life*
EXODUS TO THE VIRTUAL WORLD

EDWARD CASTRONOVA Author of Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games
Objective:
Critical cost/benefit analysis of this “new world” and “frontier” metaphor.
1) New World Redux
   MMOPRG as *New World* and *Frontier*

2) The Darker Side of the West
   - Forgetting of History
   - Ethnocentrism
   - Consequences for Others

3) Conclusion and Effects
New World Redux
New World Redux

Amerigo Vespucci
*Mundus Novus* (1502)
New World Redux

Martin Waldseemüller, *Carta Marina* (1513)
Whatever Europe understood the New World to be—and it was many things, not all clearly assimilated yet—it was a new world, another half of the globe not known before, plainly different from Europe and even the Orient, rich and large and mysterious, a place of new peoples, new vistas, new treasures, new species (Sale, 2006, p. 234).
Frontier

New World Redux
Frederick Jackson Turner

The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin.
Up to our own day, American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development. (Turner, 1894, p. 199)
Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them. (Turner, 1894, p. 227)
Frontier

New World Redux
New World Redux
New World Redux

The synthetic world of Second Life sells server resources to those who want them, and nobody bats an eye when they call it 'land,' for that is what it is. Land. Space. Lebensraum. The New World. Terra Nova

Castronova, 2005, p. 306

It's the equivalent of getting on the boat to come to America or piling into the Conestoga wagon to head out west.

Kelly, 2004, p. 63

SL is a new frontier; by definition, we are all pioneers.

Ducking Kwak, 2006
1) Metaphors explain the new by way of the old.

A metaphor, like *new world* or *frontier*, helps us make sense of new technology by explaining things in terms that are already understood, well formulated and widely accepted.
2) Metaphors are never value-neutral. 

*New world* and *frontier* communicate powerful ideas: heroic exploration, discovery, progress, opportunity, individualism, freedom, wealth, and even utopia.
The Darker Side of the West
The New World became a nightmare as colonial power spread and its native peoples became the victim of colonialism, deprived of their ancient faith and their ancient lands and forced to accept a new civilization and a new religion. The Renaissance dream of a Christian Utopia in the New World was also destroyed by the harsh realities of colonialism: plunder, enslavement, genocide (Fuentes, 1999, p. 195).
New technologies are often heralded by a rhetoric that locates them as futuristic, without history, or at best arising from a scientific-technical lineage quite separate from cultural history (Penny, 1994, p. 231).
The imagination of Americans after 1800 was dominated by the belief that the American West represented a redemptive nature which would provide spiritual salvation for the men who settled upon it. European man, corrupted by civilization, was reborn, made innocent, when he abandoned old world history for new world nature (David Noble, 1964, p. 419).
Ethnocentrism

The Darker Side of the West
Ethnocentrism

The Darker Side of the West
I would speculate that part of the drive behind the rhetoric of virtual reality as a New World or new frontier is the desire to recreate the Renaissance encounter with America without guilt: this time, if there are others present, they really won't be human (in the case of Nintendo characters), or if they are, they will be other players like ourselves, whose bodies are not jeopardized by the virtual weapons we wield (Fuller and Jenkins, 1995, p. 59).

Consequences for Others
Cyberspace does have real victims. The rewriting of colonial history has a direct impact on the lives of those whose history is being denied and whose historic identity is distorted (Sardar, 1996, p. 19).

Although this virtual exclusion is admittedly bloodless and seemingly sanitized of the stigma of colonial conquest, it is no less problematic or hegemonic (Gunkel, 2001, p. 24).
Conclusions
1) **New world and frontier have a darker side:**

- Forgetting of history
- Imposition of colonial power and the exercise of ethnocentrism
- Exclusion of others.
2) Words Matter
The words that are employed to describe a technological innovation are never mere reports of the state-of-the-art but constitute sites for the production of and struggle over significance.

Conclusions
2) Words Matter
Not a matter of finding some perfect and less controversial terminology.

Language, any language, is already shaped by the sediment of its own culture and history.
3) The Point of Criticism
Anyone who practices the act of cultural criticism must endure being asked, What is the solution to the problems you describe? (Postman, 1993, p. 181)
A critique is not simply an examination of a particular system's flaw and imperfections designed to make that system better. Instead, it is an analysis that focuses on the grounds of that system's possibility. The critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal, in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a given but a construct, usually blind to itself (Johnson, 1981, p. xv).
Conclusions

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