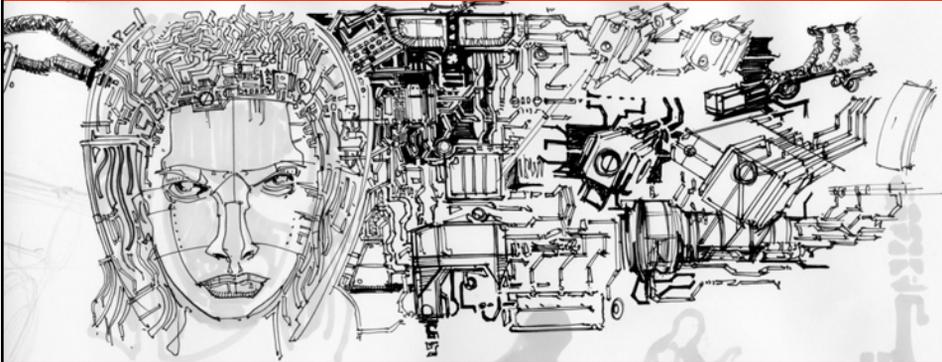


**'This Is Not a Game':
Immersive Aesthetics & Collective Play**

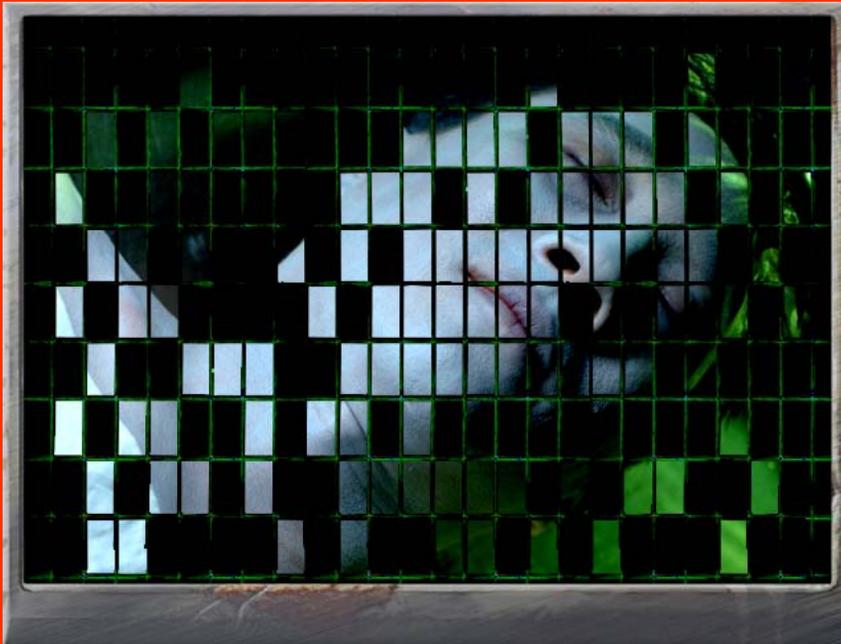


Presented by Jane McGonigal
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How do we interact with reality differently when our games feel and behave increasingly like real life?

How do we interact with reality differently when our games are played:

- in the same everyday spaces as real life?
- with the same everyday technologies as real life?
- in real time, that is, according to the same pace and duration as the standard clock and calendar of our everyday lives?



Artwork from *The Beast* (2001)

A mission statement for immersive gaming:

“The instant you click on a link your phone should start to ring, your car should only drive in reverse, and none of your friends should remember your name. And nothing admits that it is not real.”

— Elan Lee, lead designer for *The Beast*

3 features of the immersive experience:

invasive, episodic, subversive

Invasive:

This experience extends beyond the ‘fourth wall’ of your computer monitor into every communication device you own; phone, fax, email, snail mail, pagers, cell phones, newspapers, television, and movies. You will have to use each of these devices to seek clues – and, even scarier, the clues will seek you out via each of these devices.

The game can reach you anywhere.” – Elan Lee on *The Beast*

3 features of the immersive experience:

invasive, episodic, subversive

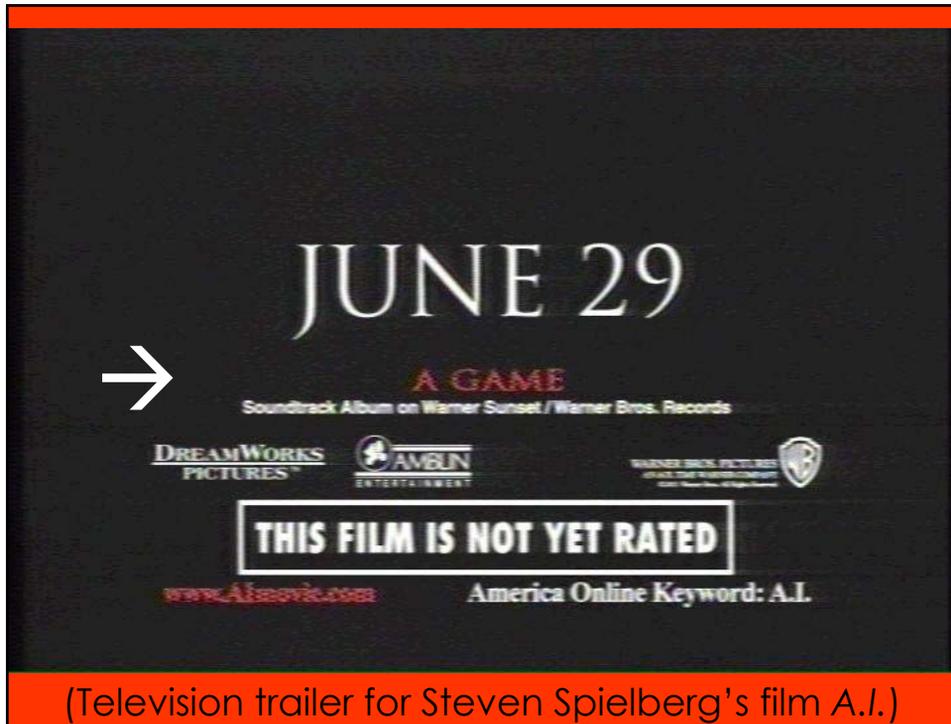
Episodic:

An audience must be taken on a journey, so every story needs an arrow through time. The key here is that the player must feel on a monthly, weekly, daily basis, even on a minute by minute basis, second by second, that things are happening to these characters, right now, they are really happening at this very moment and you *absolutely have to act now*. – Elan Lee on *The Beast*



Artwork from *The Beast* (2001)



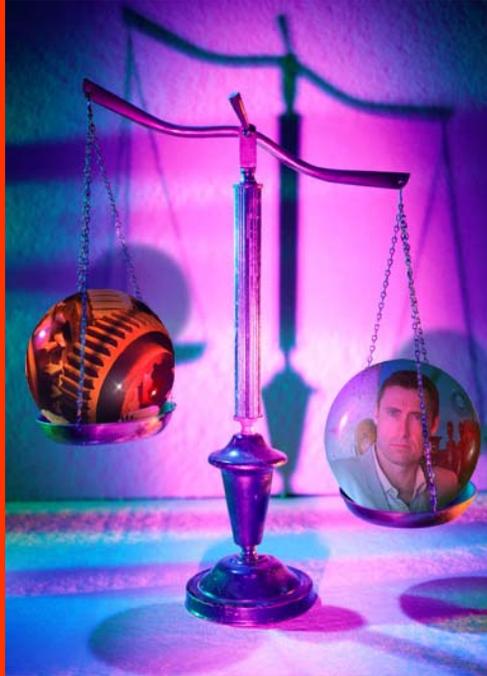


3 features of the immersive experience:

invasive, episodic, subversive

Subversive:

"This is what we tell the players: 'There is no game. There is no mystery. We do not know what you are talking about.' Everyone loves a secret, and we are going to make a huge secret, one that involves hundreds of thousands of fans, all of whom are struggling to solve the mystery we *will deny exists*. And the more we deny it, the more they will desire it." – Elan Lee on *The Beast*



Artwork from *The Beast* (2001)

**What happens when our games
tell us: "This is *not* a game?"**

Do we start to game real life?



Artwork from *The Beast* (2001)

Gaming Reality: the Cloudmakers play 9/11

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Phase I: Confidence and mobilization arise from conceptualizing the terrorist attacks as a puzzle

Gaming Reality: the Cloudmakers play 9/11

Phase I: Confidence and mobilization arise from conceptualizing the terrorist attacks as a puzzle

“9/11... the darkest puzzle?”

“Cloudmakers to the rescue!”

“We can solve the puzzle of who the terrorists are.”

“If we put our collective conscious together, we can find the perpetrators of this crime.”

(From Cloudmakers message board posts on 9/11/2001)

Gaming Reality: the Cloudmakers play 9/11

Phase I: Confidence and mobilization arise from conceptualizing the terrorist attacks as a puzzle

“We have the means, resources, and experience to put a picture together from a vast wealth of knowledge and personal intuition.”

“Let's become a resource. Utilize your computer & analytical talents to generate leads.”

“We like to flaunt our 7,000 members and our voracious appetite for difficult problems, but when the chips are down can we really make a difference?”

(From Cloudmakers message board posts on 9/11/2001)



Artwork from *The Beast* (2001)

Gaming Reality: the Cloudmakers play 9/11

Phase II: Self-aware negotiation and defense of the slippage between games and reality

Gaming Reality: the Cloudmakers play 9/11

Phase II: Self-aware negotiation and defense of the slippage between games and reality

"What's being proposed is beyond the game we've played, but you must admit that the spirit is the same."

"Since I found out about this today, I could do nothing but think of the CMs group.... I AM IN NO WAY ATTEMPTING TO MAKE LIGHT OF THE SITUATION. However ... this sort of thing is sorta our MO. Picking things apart and figuring them out."

(From Cloudmakers message board posts on 9/11/2001)

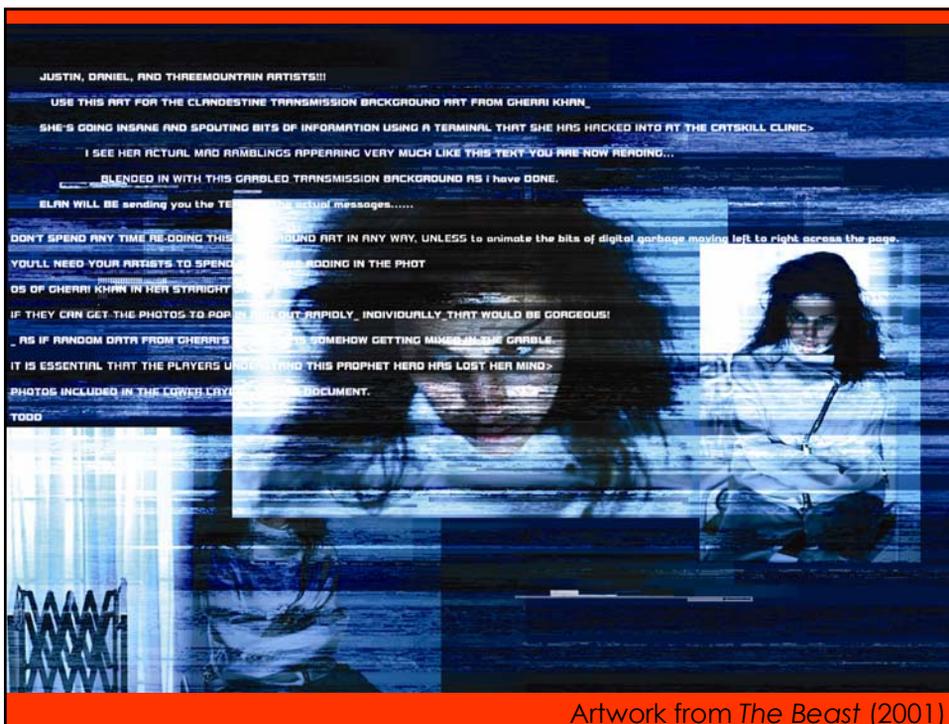
Gaming Reality: the Cloudmakers play 9/11

Phase II: Self-aware negotiation and defense of the slippage between games and reality

"When I first heard of the events I went to this state of mind automatically... I did it without even thinking. It's really just become of a state of mind."

"I'm a Cloudmaker. What I do best is look at the world like a Cloudmaker. Perhaps that's taking group identity to the next step.... But I've been permanently changed by the Game."

(From Cloudmakers message board posts on 9/11/2001)



Artwork from *The Beast* (2001)

Gaming Reality: the Cloudmakers play 9/11

Phase III: Reinstatement of reality boundaries and capitulation of agency

Gaming Reality: the Cloudmakers play 9/11

Phase III: Reinstatement of reality boundaries and capitulation of agency

"The Cloudmakers were a 'collective detective' for a *game*. Remember that. It was scripted. There were clues hidden that were gauged for us. It was *narrative*.... *This is not a game*. Do not go getting delusions of grandeur. Cloudmakers solved a story. This is real life."

"The references to this as a 'puzzle' and the thought that this group could 'solve' this make me sick. Even if the people posted with good intention. This is not a game."

(Cloudmakers message board posts from 9/12-9/14/2001)

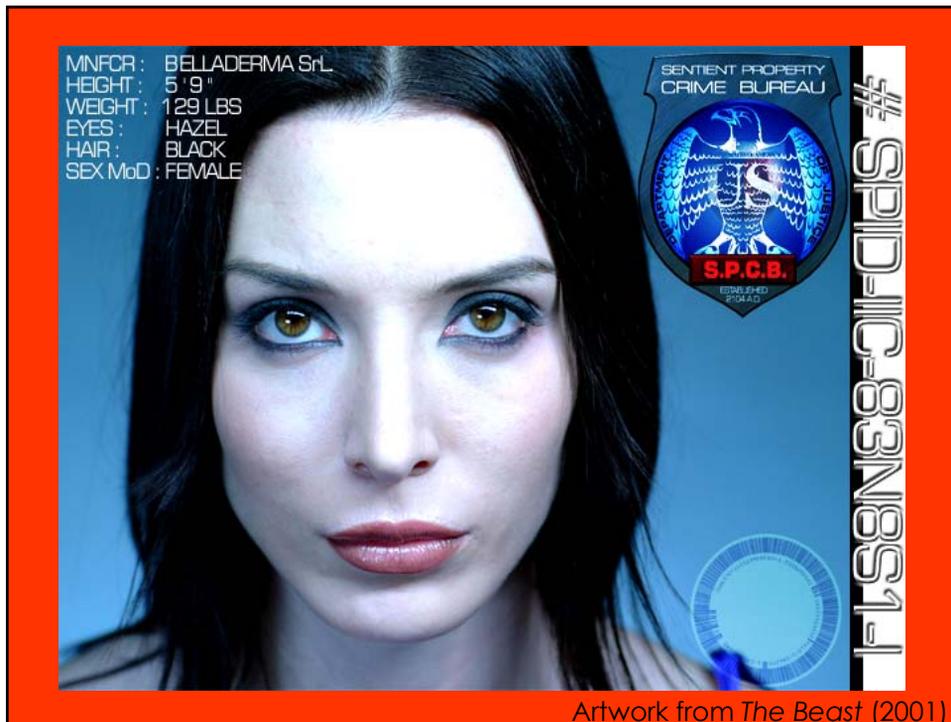
Gaming Reality: the Cloudmakers play 9/11

Phase III: Reinstatement of reality boundaries and capitulation of agency

"The game was just that --- a game. not real. therefore it didn't really matter in the real world. It was what we did for fun. this is not fun, this is LIFE... Everyone should have had the sense to keep out of what we don't really understand."

"Let's put a stop to this nonsense for good. We can't do anything... [we are just] a bunch of anonymous people on an unsecured website... So stop suggesting that we could possibly do anything about solving it."

(Cloudmakers message board posts from 9/12-9/14/2001)



Artwork from *The Beast* (2001)

Questions raised by the Cloudmakers attempt to solve 9/11:

How did the reality boundaries between game and real life become so slippery?

Why did this slippage compel gamers to action?

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How did the reality boundaries between game and real life become so slippery?

Powerful new strategies for audience immersion

"Consensual hallucination" experienced collectively and oppositionally

Why did this slippage compel gamers to action?

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Powerful new strategies for audience immersion

"Consensual hallucination" experienced collectively, rather than individually

Why did this slippage compel gamers to action?

Gamers are trained to (inter)act

Networks become tools for engagement

Powerful new strategies for audience immersion

Old school immersion

New school immersion

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Old school immersion

- Virtual reality
- Simulation
- Special interface
- Confined environment
- Specific and limited means of interaction

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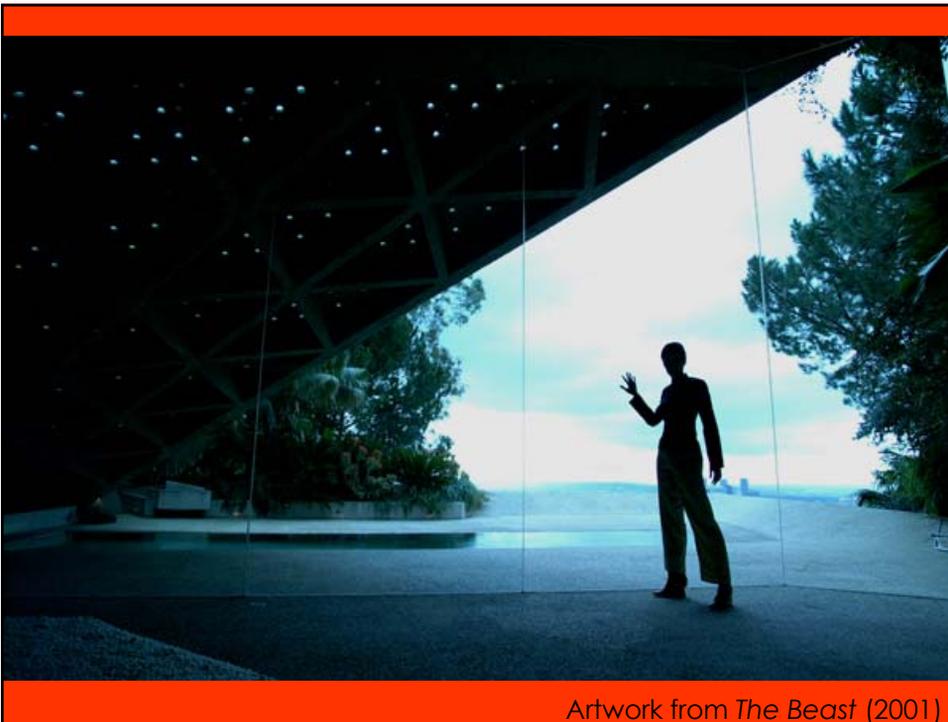
New school immersion

- Augmented reality and mixed reality
- Integration
- Everyday interface
- Everyday spaces
- No restrictions on action or interaction
- An emphasis on rhetorical strategies (i.e., "This is not a game")

The Effects of New School Immersion

“You find yourself at the end of the game, waking up as if from a long sleep. Your marriage or relationship may be in tatters. Your job may be on the brink of the void, or gone completely. You may have lost a scholarship, or lost or gained too many pounds. You slowly wake up to discover that you have missed the early spring unfolding into late summer.... yet now here we are, every one of us excited at blurring the lines between story and reality. The game promises to become not just entertainment, but our lives.”

(Excerpt from a Beast recovery guide published online by the Cloudmakers)



Artwork from *The Beast* (2001)

“Consensual hallucination” experienced collectively

The power of reverse psychology:

"There's nothing going on back here!" BANG "Don't look at this!" BANG "There's no one at all back here!" BANG BANG "Just keep looking at the real world, because there's nothing to see here!"

“Consensual hallucination” experienced collectively

The power of reverse psychology:

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Puppetmasters: "This is not a game" → There is no game → This game is not really happening → You are not really experiencing anything → You are hallucinating

Players: "You see it too, don't you?" → "This game IS really happening" → This experience is real → This game is real → This game is reality

Gamers are trained to (inter)act

Players are expected to demonstrate initiative, to respond and to progress through the game through direct action

Flow builds confidence

Networks become tools for engagement

“The 7500+ people in this group ... 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.”

(Post from Cloudmakers message board)

Networks become tools for engagement

“The solutions do not lie in the puzzles we are presented with, they lie in the connections we make, between the ideas and between one another. These are what will last. I look down at myself and see that I, too, have been incorporated into the whole, connections flowing to me and from me, ideas flowing freely as we work together, as individuals and as a group, to solve the challenges we are presented with. The solution, however, does not lie in the story. We are the solution.”

(Excerpt from editorial on the Cloudmakers home page)

Networks become tools for engagement

“We're about to break up the most intelligent group of folks ever assembled - we could have built the atomic bomb if the solution was put to us in code.... I'm going to catch myself still looking for patterns and riddles in my daily life months from now.”

(Post from the Cloudmakers message board)

To be continued...

**OUR DJINN IS COMPLETING
CONSTRUCTION ON THIS SITE.**



For a CD-Rom copy of a research archive of *The Beast*, email
janemcg@uclink4.berkeley.edu