Behaviours and Ethics
Lunch Debate Report
January 2011

Produced by body>data>space as part of
Robots and Avatars

Behaviours and Ethics Report

Introduction

The education of a young person starting secondary school in 2011 will have to stand them in good stead for the next 60 years. With this in mind, Robots and Avatars has been looking at how young people will work and play with new representational forms of themselves and others in 10 to 15 years time. Through a series of debates and events we have been speculating what that future may be like and asking how the education system can evolve to respond to the changes we will face in our digital futures? These questions stem from body>data>space's previous work which has explored our evolving virtual and physical identity over the past 20 years.

About the Lunch Debates

Between June and November 2010, Robots and Avatars hosted a series of Lunch Debates which brought together diverse and specialised groups of professionals and experts to deepen the research and further the conversations around the themes of Robots and Avatars. The Lunch Debates ask, 'What sort of world are we educating our young people for?' and are designed to help extend the understanding of what young people's needs are for the future world of work, given that many of the jobs they will do have not been invented yet. The debates also envision the skill-sets, aptitudes, resources and methodologies that will be required by today's young people who will be at work from 2020 onwards.

The groups were formed from a researched pool of experts from a wide variety of backgrounds, including academics, creative practitioners, industry professionals, public service specialists, artists and designers. There were four debates in the series: Artificial Intelligence, Behaviours and Ethics, Health and Well Being and the Future World of Work. More information including, downloads and videos are available at www.robotsandavatars.net.

The Behaviours and Ethics Lunch Debate was attended by Steve Boxer (Games Expert/Journalist), Ron Edwards (Ambient Performance), Michael Magruder (Artist and Researcher, King's College Visulisation Lab), Toby Coffey (Lead Digital Creative, National Theatre, London), Professor Anna Craft (University of Exeter and The Open University), Oliver Gingrich (Musion), Luke Hudson Powell (Designer), Ash Nehru (UVA) and Professor Mike Stubbs (Director, FACT, Liverpool). The debate was moderated by Ghislaine Boddington (Creative Director, body>data>space) and Benedict Arora (NESTA, Programme Director, Education).

The debate began with Ghislaine Boddington outlining some key areas for the group to consider in the context of an increasingly fluid future which will see young people needing to be more self reliant, entrepreneurial and dynamic – particularly in their working lives. The keywords were split into two categories:

Behaviours - Roles and behaviours in virtual / physical blended space:

Collaborative and interactive methods, communication, orientation, mobility, codes of behaviour, gestural and emotional interfaces, tele-presence, tele-intuition, intimacy, sociality, diversity and interculturalism, business/work space, innovation space, free agency/activism, group belonging, fragmentation, flame wars, realism, immersion.

"what sort of world are we educating our young people for?"

Ethics - Ethics and Morals in virtual / physical blended space:

Multi-identity, trust and credibility, identity fraud, identity maintenance, litigation, influence exertion, data security, politics and activism, social innovation, borders, value judgments, altruism, power dynamics, addiction, vulnerability.

These keyword were placed in the middle to enable and guide the discussion. The group then went on to hear four provocations on Telepresence, Gaming, Avatars and Virtual Training Worlds which provided practical examples and future visions and to inform the discussion and debate.

Provocation 1- Ghislaine Boddington - Telepresence

The first provocation was given by Ghislaine Boddington who explored behaviours and ethics within telepresence environments. Boddington contextualised telepresence as an evolution, as opposed to substitution, of your real life identity saying that telepresence can "create intimacy and build trust as it encourages an evolving expression of yourself and others". She emphasised that rather than replace live presence, we can extend and enhance it through telematic interactions.

Telepresence also gives us new ways to explore intimacy and trust. Boddigton suggested that it challenges our "uptight presence", as we get used to being infront of a camera and "being live - out there all the time" we will develop skills in tele-intution[i]. For Boddington it is also important to recognise the role the gaze plays in creating intimacy and trust, as is demonstrated by the "vis a vis" (face to face) nature of tools such as Skype or Apple's Facetime. With regards to young people, she explained that "it is not going to be a problem for future generations," given that they are increasingly and habitually communicating using telepresence.

Highlighting the evolution of community sharing, knowledge transfer and group creation processes as a result of wider access to telepresence, through the use of tools such as Skype, Boddington emphasised that we should recognise the opportunities to use telepresence in a 'local to local' situation (school to school, youth centre to youth centre, business to business). This use of telepresence can help us to "bridge distance, reduce our carbon footprint, extend cultural understanding and trust, re-examine identity and presence enhance our senses"[ii].

"Collective collaboration is absolutely key in this debate. However we still have a long way to go with regards to the acceptance of group and collective work practice."

Ghislaine Boddington, Creative Director body>data>space

Provocation 2 – Steve Boxer - Gaming

Steve Boxer began by refuting the traditional moral approach towards gaming, which, despite the lack of research into the effects of games on young people, often suggests that they will replicate the things they experience in games in real life. He emphasized that games provide 'safe spaces' to operate in and explained that it can be beneficial for young people to experiment and play in these spaces where the normal social norms, such as with gender, sexuality, body image don't apply in the same ways. As a result allowing young people the opportunity to explore these issues with a freedom that they might find difficult to experience in real social situations.

Clearly not all video games are suitable for young people and Boxer comprehensively outlined the mechanisms put in place, such as age ratings and parental lockout, which allow parents to have control over their children's privacy online. Raising a laugh in the room, Boxer also mentioned that it is most often young people themselves who know how to use so called parental controls. As such he touched on one of the ongoing themes of the debate - how it might be possible to bring young people into the decision making process regarding trust and privacy online as opposed to trying to lock them out?

One of the key questions in this discussion is how online connectivity through platforms such as Xbox Live and Playstation Network, which have allowed radical new forms of game play and interactivity, can be made both safe and productive for young people?

Multiplayer Gaming

Boxer then went on to talk about online multiplayer gaming and how this form of play is changing the ethical and behavioural landscape for young people. He drew attention to the pleasure of playing games against humans rather than against 'AI' and how suggested MMO's (Massively Multiplayer Online Games) have fundamentally changed the gaming landscape, as they allow radical new forms of connectivity, socialiability, scalability and learning in real-time. They also allow young people to forge new identities for themselves which Boxer sees as liberating although he was keen to point out the challenges that multi identity brings with it. For example, there was outrage amongst the World of Warcarft community in July 20101 when Blizzard, who make the game, were forced to do a u-turn after trying to implement Real ID's, which displayed users real names in message boards as opposed to their in-game namesiii.

Obsessive Play

Boxer highlighted some of the issues around obsessive play sighting the shocking example of a baby that had died in Korea because the parents had become obsessed with raising their virtual baby insteadiv. In the context of this example he asked whether " that is a reflection of the game or of the players personality?" Despite the group favouring the latter and understanding this tragic case as an exception rather than the rule, obsessive play remains an important and complex issue when thinking about young people and gaming.

> "When examining behaviors and ethics from a gaming perspective...there is in particular one problem...a lot of people play games to actually abandon their ordinary ethical codes"
>
> **Steve Boxer, Games Expert**

Games and ethical dilemmas

Boxer outlined games which not only deal with ethical dilemmas, but in fact hinge on them. In the game Heavy Rainv the player is regularly involved in dilemmas which ask you to question your own ethics in relation to the game. For example, at one stage in the game you have been kidnapped and are asked "whether you should kill or incapacitate your kidnapper?". Not only do these sorts of dilemmas raise moral questions but they also take you deep into the emotional life of the character further implicating ethics. Boxer also cited the game Global Conflict Palestinevi, which explores the Israeli Palestinian conflict, by posing ethical questions to players, whilst at the same time educating them about real world issues.

Some question to come out of Boxers presentation were:

Could games be used to teach moral codes, teamwork etc? And will they, or will profits take precedence? Will games increasingly need to discriminate themselves with ethical subtleties in the future? Will casual/mobile games change the ethical landscape for the better? Tech divide might be getting bigger right now - but what about the future when the young people today are the parents?

"Video games allow you to behave like you would never behave in real life."

Provocation 3 – Michael Takeo Magruder – Virtual Worlds

Artist and researcher Michel Takeo Magruder began by surveying the developments in virtual world technology over the last ten years explaining that it has moved from being an "exotic specialisation" to environments such as Second Life, which have several million users interacting within a virtual environment with no game objective. Magruder highlighted the repurposing of a game-like environment such as Second Life into a social space as a key development for virtual worlds.

Magrugder then went onto reference gaming in relation to young people and the use of avatars in these environments. He explained that the use of avatars is embedded into the core of all the mainstream consoles (PS3, Wii, Xbox) and that for young people this forms part of their everyday. He highlighted issues around "trust and accountability" as some key areas for concern explaining that whilst "free accessibility is supremely important" security also needs to be taken into account and that "we have to find the right balance". He gave the example of Club Penguinvii an online game in which 12 million young people "run around in penguin form, socialising and playing". Magruder feels that for his 9 year old daughter this is a valuable space for her to socialise in without leaving home but he also shared some of the issues he has had to deal with. For example, his daughters friend had requested to use her password and username to log onto the game himself. This had lead Magruder to have a conversation with his daughter about the nature of her identity online, explaining that it was not only her identity that was at stake but also his, since he pays for the service using his credit card.

Magruder was also keen to suggest that we look to find "future solutions for future generations" and not get too stuck in the current paradigms, saying that "the issues we face today are not necessarily the things that future generations will face" and going on to emphasise that "the systems we are making now might not be applicable or even desirable for them". He ended by explaining that "we have to prepare them as best as we can but also remember that our problems are not [necessarily] going to be their problems". Asking what we can do now to help young people Magrugder suggested that it is perhaps more important to have "the right dialogues [with young people], rather than being prescriptive because the interface with technology is always changing".

"It is important to have the right dialogues with young people, rather than being prescriptive because the interface with technology is always changing"

Provocation 4 – Ron Edwards - Enterprise Virtual Worlds

Next to speak was Ron Edwards, CEO of Ambient Performance, who create and facilitate the use of virtual worlds in enterprise and training scenarios. Edwards began by outlining some of the questions he and his team have to ask in relation to the creation of virtual worlds: What is it about these environments that make them effective for decision making under stress? How are you going to appear in a virtual world? Is it okay to let people experiment with their identity in a virtual training world?

Edwards explained that through his work and after "countless hours in virtual training worlds" he has experienced many instances of behaviours that have an affect emotionally. He suggested that even though virtual worlds are just digital pixels that there are very real consequences that come out of the interactions in these environments. For example when another avatar comes too close to your avatar you might feel uncomfortable in the same way that you do in the real world. Another example related to disaster management and a virtual training world where a power station gets flooded and the emergency response team have to decide whether to shut off power to hospitals or not.

Edwards then went on to talk about inappropriate behaviour in virtual worlds by giving the example of how during one training session, a participant decided to get into a virtual vehicle and run over his fellow employees. Whilst Edwards felt that this action was completely unsuitable he explained that this was because the freedom was there to do it and echoed other provocateurs by saying that, "you don't want to be too controlling" and instead have to find the right balance between freedom and restriction to make the virtual world operate effectively. He added that in many corporate environments there is often a request for high degrees of control.

Edwards also talked about the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in virtual worlds. For example, AI was used in a virtual world that Ambient Performance developed for the Highways Agency in order to help them practice which lanes to close in order to regulate traffic. He ended by explaining that within virtual worlds, "you get a far more immersivity and hence emotional reactions" than you do in real world simulated training scenarios and that an essential part of his work is asking "what are the ethical considerations for people making decisions in these worlds?"

"within virtual worlds, you get a far more immersivity and hence emotional reactions"

The Group Debate

Access to Technology

The group discussion began with an exploration of access to technology, with Michael Magruder debunking the myth that, "everyone can do it," explaining that "you have to have the money to engage with technology". Ash Nehru was keen to point out that it depends what you classify as technology by giving the example of India where "everyone has mobile phones" despite many being very poor and that "people who have not been educated at all are all carrying around machines". Indeed it is worth considering that, even if people don't necessarily have access to their own computer and a broadband connection, digital technology is still very likely to affect them – particularly in relation to mobile phones which increasingly provide cheap ways to access the internet. The group went on to discuss how this use of mobile devices, often by people who can't read, is potentially changing the way literacy is operating in India. However despite what appears to be a beneficial trend, Nehru also expressed concern in terms the control that these "machines" have over people in India, since they have a limited ability to mould them and their software and become truly empowered by them.

Collective Wisdom

The group then went on to consider 'collective wisdom' in relation to changing behaviours and ethics. Collective wisdom or collective intelligence, is where shared knowledge arrived at by individuals and groups is used to solve wider problems and conflicts.viii

Professor Anna Craft hinted towards the current emergence of collective wisdom by asking "where are our identities are located now?" She went on to explain that, "it's not just what we are able to do with others but how this shifts our ethical awareness to a collective one" which is important. Going further, it is not just about trusting that collective wisdom will emerge but crucially about trusting and creating the environment and the conditions for it to emerge. The group went onto discuss virtual environments such as World of Warcraft where notions of collective wisdom are at the core of the experience. In these spaces young people have the opportunity to be agents of change rather than objects of it. The group considered that through this empowered collective behaviour a significant shift towards collective wisdom is already present as a new (digital) ethics.

Wikipedia stands out as a shining example of the power of collective wisdom and intelligence, however due to its factual nature, it does somewhat limit creativity and playfulness. As such it's useful to look towards gaming – one example where we can see the strength of collective wisdom combined with creativity is in the game Little Big Planet (LBP)ix, where players not only have to collaborate in order to complete levels but they also have the opportunity to create levels together which they can then share online for others to play. The combination between the complexity offered by the gaming platform of LBP and the social aspect of the playing of the game itself enabled by the internet, has created a powerful, educational and literally 'game changing' experience which depends on collective wisdom.

In a similar way to how LBP is creating co-authored levels for the game, Professor Anna Craft pointed out that one key aspect we can already be thinking about in the context of collective wisdom in schools is how young

people can "co author the learning experience" and how we can open avenues in order to embrace their willingness to do this.

Privacy and the Acceptance of Artificial Life

The influence of collective modes of thinking, which have been significantly enabled by networked technology, challenge ideas of classical consciousness. To that end Mike Stubbs wittily called for there to be a theologian in the room in order to be able to have the debate between the 'old' and the 'new'. He went on to suggest that as young people "are departing from classical notions of consciousness and privacy", as demonstrated through an almost ubiquitous use of social networks, they are finding themselves in a more porous and fluid spaces which need us to ask a whole set of new questions. Stubbs went on to suggest that we are "acknowledging obsolescence" and as a result departing from romantic and nostalgic notions of the past. As such he suggested that a key question to ask is whether we are happy to accept a far more mechanistic society? Toby Coffey went on to add to this view by calling for a psychologist to be present – in order to understand some of the emotional issues around the new models of privacy that we can see emerging.

Death and Virtual Space

Currently there is a great deal of concern surrounding our 'data trails' and how the information that certain companies gain about us as we use the internet is affecting our privacy. This can impact on our jobs and our personal relationships but, as Michael Magruder pointed, out an important question we need to ask is not how we live with this but "how we die in virtual space?". Luke Powell challenged the notion that we will actually be able to 'die' at all saying that "you leave a bit of yourself with every discussion you have had, every paper you have written…" suggesting that it is indeed impossible to erase your data trail completely. In more practical terms Magruder explained how at some fundamental level his artworks in Second Life are in fact owned by the makers of the platform, Linden Lab**x**, and that very often we tick the terms and conditions box without having read what this actually means.

Skills for the Future

Michael Magruder suggested that parents can "educate their children though dialogue," which aims to openly and honestly raise awareness about the sorts of issues that they will face when interacting in digital environment. Mike Stubbs asked how we can tackle nostalgia in society? How we can involve teachers and schools in conversations around the new questions that the digital future poses? Benedict Arora affirmed the importance of getting more schools to work directly with young people to co-produce learning, since this involvement from young people has the potential to change the traditional and nostalgic dynamic that we find in many schools in the UK today. Indeed this is a challenge when schools tend to move at a slower paces of change in contrast to the high paced changes in the digital world.

Professor Anna Craft laid out some of the challenges explaining that, "student engagement will continue to be an issue for governments of any complexion". She suggested that it would be useful for us to ask "what kind of skills sets need to be nurtured and what kind of dispositions need to be encouraged?" She explained that she see "lots of opportunities within the school environment for really good creative dialogue between students and teachers" which she reckons, could bring technology and new modes of thinking right into the heart

"How we die in virtual space?"

"What does a departure from privacy mean for young people?"

of the educational system. However, she was keen to point out that implementation of these sorts of strategies is a major hurdle. Craft thinks it "is going to have to come through a Trojan Horse!" and, as such, she explained that she "sees a real role for the work of project such as Robots and Avatars and organisations such a NESTA" to create the conditions needed for change, because tackling the current system and making it dynamic demands "highly creative responses".

"student engagement will continue to be an issue for governments of any complexion"

Professor Anna Craft

About Robots and Avatars

Robots and Avatars – our colleagues and playmates of the future.

This innovative project explores how young people will work and play with new representational forms of themselves and others in virtual and physical life in the next 10-15 years.

It examines multi-identity evolutions of today's younger generations within the context of a world in which virtual and physical spaces are increasingly blended.

A participatory web and events led programme with connected educational activities is taking place across 2010 and onwards, in the UK and internationally. We are open to collaborations and inputs.

About body>data>space

body>data>space is an interdisciplinary design collective based in East London. We engage in creating fascinating connections between performance, architecture, new media, virtual world and education. We work in Europe and internationally with a focus on tele-presence, connectivity and virtual/physical blended space.

[ii] Ghislaine Boddington, Telepresence, Provocation – Health and Wellbeing Lunch Debate, 2010

[iii] See Cruch Gear - http://www.crunchgear.com/2010/07/08/when-privacy-meets-hypocrisy-blizzard-real-id-edition/

[iv] See Guardian Online - http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/mar/05/korean-girl-starved-online-game

[v] Heavy Rain is a video game created by Quantic Dream exclusively for the PlayStation 3 gaming system - http://www.heavyrainps3.com/

[vi] Developer(s), Serious Games Interactive. Distributor(s) Gamers Gate, Manifesto Games & Macgamestore. Designer(s) Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Nick Price & Nicholas Franics - www.globalconflicts.eu/

[vii] Club Penguin Entertainment (formerly New Horizon Interactive) Publisher, Disney Online Studios - http://www.clubpenguin.com/

[viii] See article on Collective Wisdom on Wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_wisdom

[ix] Little Big Planet - www.littlebigplanet.com/

[x] Second Life (SL) is an online virtual world developed by Linden Lab which was launched on June 23, 2003