

Second Skin (2008)

ping summer institute / summer 2019 / ohio university / chang

For this week, we will be screening the documentary *Second Skin* (2008). The documentary follows the lives of a number of video game players. According to the film's Wikipedia page,

Second Skin is a 2008 American documentary film that follows the lives of seven people as they delve into the world of MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games). The film was directed by Juan Carlos Piñeiro Escoriaza and produced by Victor Piñeiro Escoriaza and Peter Brauer...

Second Skin examines people whose lives have been transformed by virtual worlds in online games such as *World of Warcraft*, *EverQuest*, *EverQuest II* and *Second Life*. The documentary follows a group of online gamers whose lives are intensely woven together inside and outside the virtual worlds, a couple whose lives have changed since meeting online, and an avid player whose life spins out of control due to his addiction to playing MMOs. It also presents disabled players who have been given voice and mobility in the virtual world and explores the controversial world of Chinese gold farming and presents facts about online gaming.

Watch the trailer here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPOxuOCGi9I>

To get our conversation started, I want to offer a few framing questions (and things to pay close attention to). Briefly answer the following (with examples from the documentary or even from the current popular culture):

- What is an MMORPG? How do these games help us think about the immersive fallacy / interactive fallacy (the idea that gamers have "power" and "control" and "choice" and "freedom" to do whatever they want)?
- Particularly for the film, continue to think about gender and gamers, gender and gaming. What is a gamer? Who gets to be a gamer? How is gaming gendered? In particular, think about the construction of masculinity. Compare the men and women, their roles, their norms, their stereotypes.
- Think about sexuality, desire, and queerness and gamers. Define heteronormativity. How does the film foreground or privilege heteronormativity?
- The trope of "addiction." I am generally anti-gaming addiction narratives (I think it is rarely nuanced enough in mainstream accounts). Consider how Dan's story links up to the ideologies of the self-made, pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps, productive individual (man).
- Is race even discussed? Why or why not?