and we might also understand the reasons why some of them can be encountered even today, for instance, as interpreted by the modern mass media.

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HOMO LUDENS: DESCRIBING VIRTUAL LIVES

***Shaping Virtual Lives. Online Identities, Representations and Conducts*. Violetta Krawczyk-Wasilewska, Theo Meder, Andy Ross (eds.). Lodz: Lodz University Press, 2012. 148 pp.**

Real life and virtual reality – these are two categories that, when explored, can reveal quite a bit about contemporary people and the present of the whole human culture. The seven articles in the collection *Shaping Virtual Lives. Online Identities, Representations and Conducts*, authored by researchers with the background of mainly folkloristics or ethnology, are dedicated to the exploration of the Internet. The book is compiled on the basis of papers on Internet studies from a panel session of the SIEF congress in Lisbon in 2011.
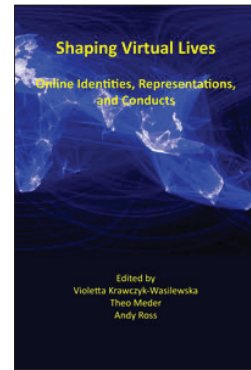
The collection deals with a range of topics related to social media and the Internet: rules, rituals, moralities, self-representations and gaming; stereotypes and rivalry on Russian Internet forums; grief and mourning and commemoration of suicide victims on the Internet; the way that the Internet can be used as a medium by the new religious movements.

Below I dwell upon a few studies in the collection that somehow addressed me more or made me find parallels at home. The dominant key word in this collection could easily be *homo ludens*, as four studies out of the seven focus on play and playfulness and person's self-image in this play. The reality created in cyberspace can be fantastic and mystical, with its human relationships and morality as described by Óli Gneisti Sóleyjarson in his article "Rules and boundaries: The morality of Eve Online". However, several virtual games popular among adults, such as IMVU (*Instant Messaging Virtual Universe*) and *Second Life*, try to imitate human life in its diversity. In these games the participants can create a complete image of themselves, choose for their avatars everything starting from gender and name to clothing, place of residence, job and partner; they can have fun, flirt, have a wedding, engage in cyber sex and give birth to children. For example, online dating, as it is described in Violetta Krawczyk-Wasilewska and Andrew Ross's article "Matchmaking through avatars: Social aspects of online dating", which safely realises people's romantic dreams, is an increasingly popular trend in the cyber world, but actually also business, because the creators of these online environments collect real money from the participants for a romantic date in a virtual Paris or New York café.

Theo Meder in his article "'You have to make up your own story here': Identities in cyberspace from Twitter to Second Life" does not define these environments as games

but rather as chatting in real time, carried on by animated avatars in 3D environment. Theo Meder argues that this image – the avatar – which the player creates to represent him/herself, is an idealised image of him/herself and has to be attractive also for other players. Through this image, the person realises his/her dreams and secret fantasies. So, many players of Afro-American or Asian origin have chosen an avatar with European appearance, or players have created an avatar of an opposite sex, i.e., men have created female avatars and vice versa. However, as Meder argues (p. 32), connection between the player and his/her avatar is quite close and is expressed in avatar's actions and words: "Our lives online are not something separate from our lives offline: both are an inherent part of our existence. In both realms we act, react, play roles and make choices about our representations."

As I come from Tartu, the second largest town in Estonia, I find Maria Yelenevskaya's article "Moscow and St. Petersburg compete: Negotiating city identity on ru.net" very interesting. In general lines, the problem seems to be the rivalry between physical and mental power, as is the case also for Tallinn and Tartu in Estonia. Yelenevskaja in her article discusses the change of internet identities of the two leading Russian cities and the stereotypes related to them, trying to find out what the most conspicuous categories are in their comparison and how Internet users present themselves in terms of these two cities. The author has used for analysis texts from different genres as well as visual material selected by the Yandex search engine: essays, interviews, media coverage, television and radio interviews, poems, jokes, etc. In the case of these two cities, the researcher points out nine opposing categories. While Moscow is central, powerful, rich, dynamic, commercial, Russian, female, cruel and vivacious, then St. Petersburg is peripheral, weak, poor, stagnant, culture-oriented, European, male, friendly and romantic. Maria Yelenevskaya's research reveals that even if several stereotypes related to these two cities have faded away due to post-socialist socio-economic changes, opinions based on the 19th-20th-century folklore and literature have become more fixed in people's minds.

Anders Gustavsson gives an overview of Norwegian and Swedish Internet pages that commemorate suicide victims. Currently, Norwegian and Swedish societies still relate suicide to taboos, dislike and condemnation, but also shame, misunderstanding, attempt to understand and certainly mourning. According to Anders Gustavsson, the memorial websites created on the Internet especially for expressing the last-mentioned feelings and emotions are more popular in Sweden. Norwegian society as a whole is considerably more conservative and sceptical as to attitudes towards suicides and memorial websites. Also, in Norway old traditions and beliefs related to suicides have survived, whereas in Sweden several innovative ideas connected to the death topic, for example, from the field of religion, have been adapted. The author points out that society's attitude towards suicide is influenced by several factors; for instance, a more open press, which, following all the laws of ethics, tries to elicit the causes of the final decision that people make in their utterly private sphere.

To conclude this brief overview, I would like to mention that this is an interesting and necessary book, which should stand side by side with Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga's book *Homo ludens: Proeve ener bepaling van het spelelement der cultuur* (Playing Man: A Study of the Play Element in Culture) on the bookshelf of a cultural researcher investigating the Internet, but definitely on that of each folklorist.

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