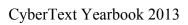# *A VIRTUAL RAPE IN CYBERSPACE REVISITED (ONCE AGAIN)*

by Victor J. Vitanza

For Lebbeus Woods, who has shown the wa*y*ves of anarchitecture

In MOOs (LambdaMOO): Julian Dibbell's "A Rape in Cyberspace" is now canonized.[1] This *rape*, this event, occurs in a virtual community at LambdaMOO, which is located physically-electronically in a computer server at MIT—"in just a box"—that is one of many MOOs,[2] where people meet and build virtual homes, marriages, families. (Or at least they used to, by the thousands. But their legacy is still with us.[3]) MOOs are similar to what were chat rooms, but enormously different in that members of a MOO community can build virtual objects with programming language. LambdaMOO is a text-oriented MOO. It is both social and educational. Its members use words (or ascii figures) primarily to signify the objects that they build, objects such as architectural (or archi*text*ural) rooms (e.g., living rooms, meeting rooms, study rooms, seminar rooms, tryst rooms). The members build whole cities and sprawls. (All of what I have said thus far, I mean, to be *back in the daze*. So to speak. For you, perhaps, yesterday, there were, and still remain, a few other MOOs that allow for graphical representations.) Today, however, there is *Second Life*. Which, yes, has had its day![4] Perhaps we can project here a *Third Life* (thereby setting aside *chronos* for *aeon*). Whatever the MOO, textual or graphical, or life span, the real people who take on representations in these MOOs seldom, if ever, meet in real life. They can be actual worlds apart.

What Dibbell writes about is a virtual rape (sexual violence). It has been difficult for most people to entertain the possibility that rape, indeed, can occur in a virtual place or space. Without any physical contact whatsoever. What I attempt, like Allucquère Roseanne Stone and others,[5] is to deal with the actual/virtual split. But my approach is to deal with rape in cyberspace as an architectural problem of space itself, and how a different architecture—*an*architecture—of thoughts, entities, and buildings can help us rethink rape and the various spaces it takes place in.

I should let you know that what I have written here is a major revision of work I first started and published in *High Wired*.[6] Since then, however, I thoroughly revised this piece to be a closing excursus in my most recent book, *Sexual Violence in Western Thought and Writing: Chaste Rape*. Architecturally, I thought of my discussion in terms of the basement as Kate Millett envisioned it in her work *The Basement* (1979, 1991). But I withdrew this piece before publishing the book so that I could include it here with my friends. In order to rebegin this discussion, I will now take up with the question of the *living room* at LambdaMOO, where the cyber-rape took place. When Pavel Curtis programmed LambdaMOO, he modeled the virtual living room on his own living room. Members-who-are-characters entered LambdaMOO through the *closet* of Curtis's living room.

I also examine selected follow-up arguments put forth by Dibbell and others in respect to rape at LambdaMOO as well as yet other rapes in virtual space. What is most interesting about the *event* (caesura, interruption, expropriation) at LambdMOO is the impact that it has had on a virtual community and how the community's response to the event continues to cause us to rethink community altogether. It is no exaggeration to say that the event of the rape becomes a founding event, more broadly conceived, for a rethinking of community. Consequently, I examine the problems that develop in judicial law when there is a diminishing differentiation between actual and virtual assaults. The case that I am most interested in is that of the State vs. Maxwell.[7] But I am most interested in the event as an interruption of the principles of constitution and reconstitution (stasis theory). I am interested in ex-stasis, *ek-stasis* as well as *ecstasies*.

I introduce *virtuality* as a means of rethinking rape in terms of possible-turn-incompossible worlds. We know that G. W. Leibniz thought through the paraconcept of possible co-extensive worlds by way of the story of the rape of Lucretia (see Matthes). This paraconcept will be my primary example while dealing with this problem, moving from the architectural space of actuality to virtuality, and vice versa. After all has been said and undone, *virtual/ity* is the *condition* of the actual (see Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 42-43, 55).[8]

I am concerned, however, not solely with Leibniz, but with a *bloc of becoming* that is known as a Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze bloc with its *thinkings* about folds and the Baroque. The immediate purpose of my discussion, therefore, will be to rethink the architecture of MUDs/MOOs+. To refold them into Baroque Houses. In dis/order to refold our thinking about virtual architecture, we will have had to refold our notion of *archi* and of *sufficient reason* (continuity) and the *possible* (determination). We will have had to multiply our principles without sets and subsets. In our rethinkings and refoldings, there will be no *species* in a *genus* under surveillance by a set of *differentiae*. Rather, there will be radical singularities (hence, virtually everything would be compossible). Our thinking and folding, therefore, would no longer be informed by way of the Platonic-Aristotelian-Cartesian bloc of being with its thinking the principle of *sufficient reason* and the *possible*. Rather, we will be refolded, as well as unfolded, by *wayves* of the Leibnizean-Borges-Deleuzean principle of *indiscernibles* and the *compossible* (*incompossibles*). Likewise, our theory of motives will no longer be based on necessity but on *inclination* and *inflection*. The difference between *necessity* but also *inclination* and *inflection* will allow us to understand a Baroque concept of justice. Why is this important? Sufficient reason knows that without such an understanding, a house of BaroqueMOO that we would allegorize (our polis, our cyber-societies/cyberieties in the face of anxieties) and that we would build and dwell in allegorically-cum-virtually would be *inclined* to recapitulate the house of all MOOs. And, therefore, justice would continue in its reactionary form. The virtual affects the actual; the actual, the virtual. Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze say: "The world is a virtuality that is actualized monads or souls, but also a possibility that must be realized in matter or in bodies" (*Fold* 104). What this means in simpler language is that the virtual, or virtuality, is the very source of actualities (Deleuze), as impotentiality is the very source of potentiality (Agamben). A case in point: In a Cartesian world, Sextus Tarquin always already rapes Lucretia. In Leibnizean possible worlds, in our BaroqueMOO with a multiplicity of apartments, however, there is a multiplicity of Sextus Tarquins (see *Theodicy* 368-73) and a multiplicity of destinies.

My motive and inclination for introducing into this discussion Leibniz's treatment of Sextus and the rape of Lucretia is to reopen (i.e., to unfold, as well as at times to fold folds into other folds), and thereby to keep open, the Question of "A Rape in Cyberspace."[9] The conditions for the compossibility of justice and destinies, therefore, change—with the opening up and increasing of the compossibility of radical revisions (refoldings and unfoldings) of founding rape narratives.

My concerns are with discovering *wayves* via a Leibnizean-Borges-Deleuzean bloc with its notions of the fold and the Baroque to rethink the question of MOO-*an*archi*tech*ural space, but also to think of folds and this space that these folds establish as a means of our political resistance that would not be reactionary.[10] Virtual space, rather virtualities re-informing virtual space, is one rebeginning among countless, coextensive other ways. Hence, "we" will, as Deleuze himself has, think of folds as Foucault has. We

will examine Deleuze's account of Foucault's *third axis*, moving from the axes of Knowledge and Power to that of *Thought*—which means, like Foucault et al., that *we will* have had to think the paradox of "The inside as an operation of the outside" (Deleuze, *Foucault* 97). And yet, "we" will do this incipiently, immanently (imminently). We may find a way of rethinking the question of refolding a society/cyberiety, *not* without rape—for Leibniz's thinking is no baroque *eu*topian thinking of cyberiety. What "we" will do initially is to diminish the problem of the negative by multiplying the one possible world into radical multiplicities of the world. But this is not near enough, never ever enough! For rape is not only in the particular incompossible world we live in, but is also the very foundation for all of what stands for thinking. Reactionary thinking.[11] Knowing this, I will move on to a scandalous enterprise, restarted by Lyotard in his *Libidinal Economy*. The Great Ephemeral Skin! A place *without* a place, denegated as in: Not a sheet of paper, or a pleat of cloth, with no twist and, therefore, an edge; not a sheet-pleat with a full twist and still an edge that cuts (rapes); but a sheet-pleat with a half twist and no edge. Then, a cut without a cut, to the body-politic.
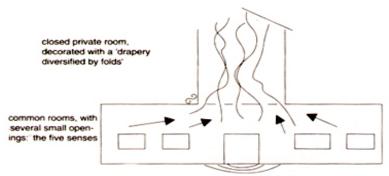
A MOO is a topos made up of virtual texts. It is *metaphor-based*. Programmers work with metaphors. Give a MOO programmer a metaphor and she will attempt to simulate it. *I offer*, therefore, *just such a metaphor*. I toss one into the discussion: The Great Ephemeral Skin as Möbius (half twist) Strip. So as to forget MOOs in dis/order to unfold (increase), un/think, a Baroque Möbius Strip MOO. WOO+. Or *WOOmb*. I toss this initial metaphor into the discussion, while preparing for a radical multiplication of *rebeginnings*. A metaphor of bovine flesh that will have been all non-differentiating-libidinal surface. So as to create the conditions for a new compossible world, what Deleuze would call "a reorientation of . . . entire thought and a new geography" (*Logic* 132).

To be sure, you, Dear Reader, will only feel cheated, feel frustrated. You, too, Programmer. And Why? Because not *eu*topian (i.e., not totally—a great, good place—without rape), and, therefore, disappointing. Enraging? Leading some readers to continue reactionary thinking? No, this is not salvation-history. (The agenda is a series of perpetual *rebeginnings*. The possibilities of a narrative with beginning-middle-end leads us only back to the white, epistemic violence, of which Lyotard speaks, *while* rebeginnings and *more* rebeginnings lead to the red cruelty of singularities.[12] The rebeginnings will require all of us who attend to the tossed metaphor to "*dance* on the feet of Chance" [Nietzsche, *Thus Spake* 278], and if need be to dance "with tears in [our] eyes" [220].) The MOO will have become (in future-anteriors) a pagan theater across a new geography. Virtually, a new cartography and choreography. What I would call a *WOOmb*. Where all along the surface, without height and depth, the principle of individuation will not be. That will be "our" primary rebeginning for further rebeginnings.

To think means to experiment and to problematize.
Deleuze (*Foucault* 116)

Baroque House (A User's Manual): With the above set of white and red promises and this subtitle, Baroque House, and this reinstitution of a user's manual, we might expect now to have a Baroque house described. Or the question answered, How is a MOO *like* a Baroque house? How to make such a house? A Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze bloc supplies us with a sketch (*Fold* 5).

closed private room, decorated with a 'drapery diversified by folds'

common rooms, with several small open-ings: the five senses

The Baroque House (an allegory)

And yet, to get an understanding of what a Baroque House (a monad) might possibly be, Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze do not just give a simple sketch (*ichnography*) without problematizing it. They give a textual description of a sketch that has to be seen as dynamically folding, unfolding (unveiling), then, refolding (veiling), and yet again unfolding (and increasingly so) in subsequent pages that overflow the academic frame. (Theirs is a deformative approach to writing-thinking.) What they give, also, are a set of counterprinciples to the commonsensical principles of what constitutes the thinking of *what a house is* or rather *can become*. So we will have to start with these counterprinciples to get to some idea of what should be called Baroque *an*archi*tech*ure, what a Baroque house or, better, BaroqueMOO, might be. (A house, a monad, can be a Klein Jar, which is without an inside or outside. A MOO can be such a topological figure also.)[13]

It is tempting for me to describe particular MOO-experiences as, say, simulated unfoldings (*Da*) and refoldings (*Fort*), for example, as manifested metaphorically in terms of cascading waves of words being illuminated on a screen; or in terms of a "liquid identity" (Sandy Stone) of metamorphosing from male to female to hermaphrodite to becoming-animal. (I am, yes, thinking of Virginia's *Waves* as well as *Orlando*.) And while these metaphors (as catachreses) are helpful, they do not explain how different the paraconcept (or paracept) of the Baroque is for unthinking (unfolding) a BaroqueMOO. And so, as y/our guide, in this manual, I am going to unfold and refold, yet through brief ex-positions, this simulated conversation of familiarities to some principles that Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze discuss, namely, that of *sufficient reason*/continuity and the *possible*/determination (*Fold* 41-58), on the one hand, and the *principle of indiscernibles* and the *compossible*/incompossible (59-75), on the other. With Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze, we will take a look at the *multiplication of principles* (67) and the paraconcept of *radical singularities* (60-61). So my approach—Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze's approach—will be to call on abstract thinking to refold what goes for state/Imperial thinking about thought so as to be able to unfold it, in a wider scope, as nomadic thought. With constant interruptions. It is, as Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze say, a matter of unfolding to remember what has been forgotten.

The principle of sufficient reason (Plato-Descartes) is bound to—in bondage with—the three master principles of reason (logic, the Great Zero), namely, identity, non-contradiction, and excluded middle. Either A is A or is not B or nothing else. A—in one steady-dominant fold—cannot be both A and B and C, Etceteras. Sufficient reason could not allow for a refolding (problematizing) because, then, as Socrates-Plato were well aware, we would fall into infinite regress or, as Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze know, would

slide laterally into ramifications of foldings-unfoldings-refoldings. The thinking that goes by sufficient reason, quite ironically, leads to nihilism. For Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze, sufficiency (limit) was . . . *is* never, never, never enough. Hence, the principle of indiscernibles or Excess (on their way to red cruelties). And the sophistical-casuistic thought presents itself: The Compossible (world), yet the incompossibilities (monads). Let us take a closer look.

For Leibniz, Adam sinned, and yet he did not sin! In other words-folds, there are the singularities of Adam-A and Adam-B, who are equal: A = B. Is this a contradiction? Yes, if there is only one possible world, in which there cannot be such radical singularities. Or if there is only one possible way of thinking about this problem, that Leibniz-Borges-Deleuze would (cannot not) problematize. Remember: Thinking is the issue here. For Leibniz, there are, in this folding-unfolding-refolding example, at least, two ways of thinking about this problem and, hence, two possible worlds. Deleuze explains, "Between the worlds there exists a relation other than one of contradiction. . . . It is a vice-diction, not a contradiction" (*Fold* 59). The contradiction can only exist in one possible world/monad. Here then, we have the Leibnizean paraconcept of compossible and incompossible. If the possible world is limited by sufficient reason, the compossible world is limitless (in excess) by indiscernibles, while each of the incompossibles or monads is limited. (The possible is informed by a restricted economy; the compossible, by a general economy, within which, again, there is a radically infinite finitude of monads, or radical singularities, with quasi-restricted economies. The best of all possible worlds is the white violence of Truth or imposed truth; the compossible world is the red cruelty.)

In Deleuzean terms, "the world [is] an infinity of converging series, capable of being extended into each other, around unique points" (60). Allow me to illustrate, refolding back to an earlier attempt, with an example of a Möbius Strip that when constructed from a narrow and long strip of blank paper has two parallel lines drawn on both sides of it and then, given *a half twist*, is/are taped together. If we start cutting with a pair of scissors on one line we will eventually see that we get to the other line (parallel lines do meet in this configuration/space) and will see that, when finished cutting, we have one strip (circle of paper), which is no longer a Möbius Strip and another, which is a new Möbius Strip. The two are joined, looped, or folded into each other. If we, then, cut the new Möbius Strip, as we cut the previous one, we will get another Non-Möbius strip (paper circle) and yet another new Möbius Strip, and on ad infinitum. The Möbius Strip is an infinity of converging series, capable of being extended into each other, around unique points. The event is a cut without a cut: Möbius Strip = the compossible world; the paper circles/folds = monads, the incompossibilities, each made up of singularities (cf. Grosz, *Volatile* 36-37).

Now back to Deleuze, with my interpolation: "The result [in other words, of cutting the Möbius Strip] is that another world appears *when the obtained series diverge in the neighborhood of singularities*" (*Fold* 60; Deleuze's emphasis). He distinguishes: "Compossibles can be called (1) the totality of converging and extensive series that constitute the world, (2) the totality of monads that convey the same world (Adam the sinner, Caesar the emperor, Christ the savior . . .). Incompossibles can be called (1) the series that diverge, and that from then on belong to two possible worlds, and (2) monads of which each expresses a world different from the other (Caesar the emperor and Adam the nonsinner). The eventual divergence of series is what allows for the definition of incompossibility or the relation of vice-diction" (60). When God creates the world (keep

in mind that Deleuze is describing Leibniz's view, not his view which is by far more heretical than Leibniz's, and then there is Borges's and Lyotard's yet to come), He sets forth "a series of . . . *pure emission of singularities*: to be the first man, to live in a garden of paradise, to have a wife created from one's own rib. And then a fourth: sinning" (60; Deleuze's emphasis). Each of these singularities is held in a double (not contradictory, but vicedictory) relationship. They form a bloc of becoming. One line of the narrative is somewhat fixed like the paper circle cut from the Möbius Strip; the other line is not fixed like the new Möbius Strip. Their doubleness converges. (Incompossible converges, in other folds, with the compossible.) Because they converge, a fifth singularity can appear: "resistance to temptation" (61). Deleuze continues: "It is not simply that it contradicts the fourth, 'sinning,' such that a choice has to be made between the two. It is that the lines of prolongation that go from this fifth to the three others are not convergent . . . *do not pass through common values*" (61; Deleuze's emphasis). In other words, "It is neither the same garden, nor the same primeval world, nor even the same gynegenesis. A bifurcation [a vice-diction] takes place that we at least take for granted, since reason escapes us. We are satisfied to know that one exists. It always suffices [principle of sufficient reason] to be able to say: that is what makes Adam the nonsinner to be supposed incompossible [principle of indiscernibles] with this world, since it implies a singularity that diverges from those of this world" (61).

And now from Adam(s) to his-their progeny. (Yes, let us not forget this is all about not forgetting what has been forgotten and goes by the name of Thinking that there are Adams that are non-sinners in other worlds/monads. If compossibility, then, the characters or creatures that we meet, say, in a Borges tale should be open to our acceptance. What un/kind of MOO would Borges construct, what un/kind of cybereity and what un/kind of justice? The conditions for my rethinking this question are to be un/founded in Foucault's telling of Borges's tale of "order" according to "a certain Chinese Encyclopaedia" [Foucault, *Order* xv].)

The Baroque House that is The Book (To Come): In the above sketch of The Baroque House (an allegory), there are two floors. The top floor, Deleuze tells us, "has no windows. It is a dark room or chamber decorated only with a stretched canvas 'diversified by folds,' as if it were *a living dermis*. Placed on the opaque canvas, these folds, cords, or springs represent an innate form of knowledge, but when solicited by matter they move into action" (4; emphasis added). The bottom floor, which is connected to the upper, is "pierced with windows" and has "souls . . . sensitive, animal" (4). This description is more complex, and we will return to it shortly. For now, however, I want to focus on another, later description of the House that is The Book. (Lest the reader forget, we are folding, unfolding, refolding our way/*wayves* to thinking affirmatively the thought of BaroqueMOO. And though this "I" alludes to Foucault's reference to Borges's tale, it will take a while for us to get there and beyond to the Ephemeral Skin, though as can be seen Leibniz-Deleuze speak of "a living dermis" when describing The Baroque House. We are far from, yet ever near the Ephemeral Skin.)

Deleuze, in passing, summarizes the "great Baroque staging [and narrative] at the end of [Leibniz's] *Théodicée*" (61), in which there "is an architectural dream: an immense pyramid that has a summit but no base, and that is built from an infinity of apartments, of which each one makes up a world. It has a summit because there is a world that is the best of all worlds, and it lacks a base because the others are lost in the fog, and finally there remains no final one that can be called the worst. In every apartment a Sextus bears a

number on his forehead. He mimes a sequence of his life or even his whole life, 'as if in a theatrical staging,' right next to a thick book" (61; Leibniz 371-72). Deleuze continues:

> The number appears to refer to the page that tells the story of the life of this Sextus in greater detail, on a smaller scale, while the other pages probably tell of the other events of the world to which he belongs. Here is the Baroque combination of what we read and what we see. And, in the other apartments, we discover other Sextuses and other books. Leaving Jupiter's [or God's] abode [temple], one Sextus will go to Corinth and become a famous man, while another Sextus will go to Thrace and become king, instead of returning to Rome and raping Lucretia, as he does in the first apartment. All these singularities diverge from each other, and each converges with the first (the exit from the temple), only with values that differ from the others. All these Sextuses are possible, but they are part of incompossible worlds. (61-62)

Sextus in one incompossible world is a rapist; in another, he is not. And then, there are an infinite number of other versions. Remember: The possible narratives here, not informed by the principle of sufficient reason, are potentially infinite. And a concept of justice? Is there one, or more, that goes with all this talk here? The simple answer is Yes. However, this, too, is a question, a thinking, that must be problematized.

A Deleuze-Leibniz-Borges Excursus: Therefore, let us problematize the condition for a question of justice by recalling Borges, just as Deleuze himself does in relation to what he says about Leibniz. Both Leibniz and Borges deal in bifurcations. For me, they themselves—the singularities, the incompossibility, of their visions—form *a bifurcation*. (We will have eventually taken a fork in the rhizomatic road.) Deleuze, at a tactical-pivotal point among others in his discussion, introduces Borges into his exposition of Leibniz's new logic. He says, "Borges, one of Leibniz's disciples, invoked the Chinese philosopher-*architect* Ts'ui Pen, the inventor of the 'garden with bifurcating paths,' a baroque labyrinth whose infinite series converge or diverge, forming a webbing of time embracing all possibilities" (62). More specifically now, Deleuze quotes Borges: " 'Fang, for example, keeps a secret; a stranger knocks at his door; Fang decides to kill him. Naturally, several outcomes are possible: Fang can kill the intruder; the intruder can kill Fang; both of them can escape from their peril; both can die, etc. In Ts'ui Pen's work, all outcomes are produced, each being the point of departure for other bifurcations" (62; cf. Borges, *Labyrinths* 51). The implicit question in Deleuze's discussion of Borges is Why select Ts'ui Pen, instead of Leibniz as a primary example of justice/justification? Deleuze's answer: "Borges . . . wanted . . . to have God pass into existence all incompossible worlds at once instead of choosing one of them, the best" (62).

Yes, this traditional thinking of the *best of all possible* is the answer to the question of justice that must be further problematized. Deleuze, of course, explains that "what especially impedes God from making all possibles—even incompossibles—exist is that this would then be a mendacious God, a trickster God, a deceiving God. . . . Leibniz, who strongly distrusts the Cartesian argument of the nonmalevolent God, gives him a new basis at the level of incompossibility: God plays tricks, but he also furnishes the rules of the game" (63). At this point, Leibniz, as Deleuze renders him, must unfold and refold his arguments for the defense or the justification of the way/*wayves* of God to all men. (The foldings and pleats of the justification are intricate, and they do not advance this present

discussion.) The important thing to remember, however, is that God chooses not only the best of all possible worlds but also "chooses the best allotment of singularities in possible individuals" (66). Deleuze continues: "Hence we have rules of the world's composition in a compossible architectonic totality" (66).

What this excursus is about to tell us, un/just as Deleuze's on Borges leads us to, is that Leibniz is perhaps situated somewhere *between* a beneficent God (Cartesian) *and* a trickster God or no God at all (Nietzsche and Mallarmé). Nihilism, as Deleuze recounts, presents itself, incipiently in Leibniz. And so, Deleuze asks: "But what happened in this long history of 'nihilism,' before the world lost its principles [of sufficient reason]?" (67). Or sufficient justice? His tentative answer:

> At a point close to us human *Reason had to collapse*, like the Kantian refuge, the last refuge of principles. It falls victim to 'neurosis.' But still, before, a psychotic episode was necessary. A crisis and collapse of all theological Reason had to take place. That is where the Baroque assumes its position: Is there some way of saving the theological ideal at a moment when it is being contested on all sides. . . ? The Baroque solution is the following: *we shall multiply principles*—we can always slip a new one out from under our cuffs—and in this way we will change their use. . . . Principles . . . will be put to *a reflective use*. A case being given, we shall invent its principles. It is a transformation from Law to universal Jurisprudence. (67; emphasis added)

Hence, the introduction of "the Leibnizian game" that "is first of all a proliferation of principles: play is executed through excess and not a lack of principles; the game is that of . . . inventing principles" (67-68). (Of course, we find this today in a variety of rhetorical and sophistical venues from Chaim Perelman's *The New Rhetoric* to Jean François Lyotard's *Just Gaming* and *The Differend*.) The *best* that Leibniz can do at the time is to invent multiple Adams and Sextuses. In a typical atypical characterization, Deleuze writes: "We clearly witness a schizophrenic reconstruction: God's attorney convenes characters who reconstitute the world *with their inner, so-called autoplastic modifications*. Such are the monads, or Leibniz's Selves, automata" (68). But here is the clincher, as Deleuze sees it: "[H]uman liberty is not itself safeguarded inasmuch as it has to be practiced in this existing world. In human eyes it does not suffice that [Sextus] may not [rape] in another world, if he is certainly [raping] in this world" (Fold, 69).

They say he raped them that night. They say he did it with a cunning little doll, fashioned in their image and imbued with the power to make them do whatever he desired. . . . And though I wasn't there that night, I think I can assure you that what they say is true, because it all happened right in the living room—right there amid the well-stocked bookcases and the sofas and the fireplace—of a house I've come to think of as my second home. Dr. Bombay (Julian Dibbell, "A Rape" 11)

The Question of Justice: We inhabit a world, in which rape is an everyday occurrence, and mostly suffered by women. We have good reasons to believe that many rapes go unreported, and we do know that they are an everyday occurrence in the world's prison systems. We for the most part think of rape as a physical, not a figurative, act. And yet, that view is changing; *the difference between the actual and the virtual is*

disappearing. (Is the Libidinal Band, the Möbius Band, speeding up, taking us from the world of semiotic signs to the whirl of tensor signs, i.e., the world in which differences collapse into radical singularities?) This difference between physical and figurative, however, is still a hotly debated topic. But the fact that it is debated gives support to the notion that the difference may be disappearing and that the discussion (deliberation) itself ironically speeds up the Möbius band, which in turn collapses differences even further.

In the now canonized article "A Rape in Cyberspace," which Dibbell—or perhaps I should say, Dr. Bombay, Dibbell's persona-avatar—examines the issue of difference in terms of judiciary discourse, jurisprudence. Allegedly a rape occurs in cyberspace, and the argument centers in great part on whether or not the virtual act constituted a rape. As presented by Bombay, as the first chapter of *My Tiny Life*, the "facts" of the case are that on "a Monday night in March [in] the living room [at LambdaMOO, in a mainframe or server] at or about 10 p.m. Pacific Standard Time . . . exu [in original version, legba], a South American [originally, Haitian] trickster spirit of indeterminate gender," coded and being typed in by a person in Seattle, and then "Moondreamer [originally, Starsinger], a nondescript female character" (12-13), in Haverford, Pennsylvania, were both raped by Mr. Bungle, a puppet, who was manipulated with code by "a young man logging in to the MOO from a New York University computer" (15). There were a number of "witnesses" in the living room, which was modeled virtually after Pavel Curtis's own living room in real life. There was a furor over the virtual act. Some—including exu (legba), who made a formal motion, and Moondreamer (Starsinger), Kropokin (originally Bakunin), and even HortonWho (originally, SamIAm, the "Australian Deleuzean") seconded the motion— wanted "to toad" Mr. Bungle, that is, virtually to execute his being erased from the memory of the MOO (18). Soon, about 50 members of the virtual community agreed to the judgment. But as Dr. Bombay tells us: "There was one small but stubborn obstacle [namely] the New Direction" (18), which was a formal document on matters of policy that had been developed by Pavel Curtis, the archwizard, Haakon, and "principle architect" of LambdaMOO (19). The policy stated that "the wizards . . . were pure technicians. . . . [T]hey would make no decisions affecting the social life of the MOO, but only implement whatever decisions the community as a whole directed them to" (19). In other words, the members of the MOO were given the right of "*inventing* [their] own self-governance from scratch" (19; emphasis added). And yet, there was no legislation (*nomos*—customs, rules, laws) for handling The Affair Bungle that—let us not forget—took place in cyberspace. There was a resolve to act, but no legal way to implement the act.

What follows from that moment on in Dr. Bombay's report is a fall into jurisprudence and what emerges are different groups formed by a mutual acceptance of a variety of warrants. The language game that the community generally agreed to, however, was basic, informal argumentation. There were the "Parliamentarian legalist types [who] argued that unfortunately Bungle could not legitimately be toaded at all, since there were no explicit MOO rules against rape, or against just about anything else" (19). Next were those composing a "royalist streak" who wanted to do away with "this New Directions silliness" and to recall "the wizardocracy . . . to the position of swift and decisive leadership their player class was born to" (19). Then there were "the technolibertarians" and the "resident anarchists" (19-20). There was a call for a meeting on the third day so as to settle the case, but after a long meeting nothing was settled (21-24). Mr. Bungle shows up (22). Instead of his appearance acting as a catalyst to fire up the group, it only

emphasizes their apparent hopeless situation. (How does the community or someone toad Mr. Bungle from the memory of the MOO without his ever returning as the repressed?)

Instead of ending in a state of entropy, something does happen. Present at the meetings were the wizards, one by the name of Tom Traceback [originally, Joe Feedback], "who'd sat brooding on the sidelines all evening" (24), trying to decide whether he was going to do something about the case. He finally decides, on his own, to toad Bungle (25). We are told: "They say that LambdaMOO has never been the same since Mr. Bungle's toading. They say as well that nothing's really changed. And though it skirts the fuzziest of dream-logics to say that both these statements are true, the MOO is just the sort of fuzzy, dreamlike place in which such contradictions thrive" (25). The Moo here is described as Baroque, as having a vice-diction. And the MOO is not the same—and virtually was not the same since the origination of the problem by the act of cyberrape—for someone has virtually acted out the full narrative of crime and punishment.

Haakon (Curtis, archwizard), having been away from LambdaMOO, returns to see the "wreckage strewn across the tiny universe" and consequently adds a statement to New Directions saying that "he would build into the database a system of petitions and ballots whereby anyone could put to popular vote any social scheme requiring wizardly powers for its implementation, with the results of the vote to be binding on the wizards" (25). LambdaMOO was now a pure democracy. And so all's well that ends well. Not so! For a few days after the toading, "a strange new character named Dr. Jest" arrives. There is every reason to believe that this new character is "Mr. Bungle [who] had risen from the grave" (26). Toading was not fatal because all that is necessary for the dead to rise again is to get a new account from another provider and then return to LambaMOO under a different name. The return of the repressed is automatic in one form or another. And to this day Mr. Bungle/Dr. Jest sleeps in his room at LambdaMOO. Waiting to awake.

Lest we think that some good did come from the event in terms of the revision of New Directions, which established a pure democracy, we need constantly to remind ourselves of the larger event and who constructed this society. Though it was put into motion by the programming of the arch-wizard, Haakon, the society and its anxieties were all established by those who composed the cybersociety. The subtitle of Dibbell's article "A Rape in Cyberspace" reads "How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Sprint, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society." And again, How? What Dr. Bombay-Dibbell make clear—though subtly—is that the How of the event is the "UrBungle" (26). The bungling of the whole matter, which perhaps could only be bungled, is *the founding* event for LambdaMOO. First the cyberrape (crime), the attempt at justice (deliberation), the toading (the punishment determined and executed by one person), and then the regeneration of the Bungle-like character. And let us not forget the reactionary form that the punishment took and how it was unwittingly engineered, because of the media (software, hardware, wetware), to repeat itself perpetually. Like Adam, like Sextus, like Bungle, like Jest, Etceteras. (Let us not forget that LambdaMOO was the original of its kind of experimental MOO, or world.) It can certainly be argued that the decree added to New Directions should or would solve any future problems in terms of this narrative repeating itself, but the founding event can never be circumvented. Nor can anyone ever stop a wizard or the archwizard, as constituted wizards, from repeating the original act of punishment. To be sure, allegedly some good came from the event in terms of the new MOO commands subsequently made available to members of the society. Having access to an *@gag* or *@boot* command, however, only deflects the problem,

which is always already there waiting in the shadows to happen again and again. And of course, these commands can be used indiscriminately. Moreover, arriving at consensus itself (*homologia*) is predetermined by the UrBungle, un/just as a question determines what its answer could be. Instead of one acting out the punishment, it is the many in the name of one acting. Lyotard so describes such deliberative (empowering?) Thinking (and I interpolate):

> *Thought* begins with the possible. This is why the *logos* begins with the *politeia* and the market. It is as the voice of writing [typing on the screen], the production of [semiotic] signs with a view to exchange, monopolized almost all the libido of the citizen-merchant bodies. But I am not saying that the body that speaks, writes and thinks [types], does not enjoy . . . rather that its charge instead of taking place in singular intensities, *comes to be folded back* [reterritorialized, returned] not only onto the need of the market and the city, but *onto the zero* [the lack, the Negative, the principle of Exclusion in the name of Justice] where both are centered, on the zero of money [virtual capital] and discourse. Nihilism . . . brings the empty *méson* [virtual community as political sphere] round which the members of the *koinonia* gravitate. (*Libidinal* 162-63; emphasis added)

I would continue describing and summating, for the Ur-narrative of LambdaMOO does repeat itself in terms of "it was." So many commonplace questions are left standing, and yet: Look at the questions! How they tantalize! If "we" refuse them, "we" are (will be) accused of being neoconservatives. And yet, "we" must refuse them. If we do not refuse them, they only fold us back onto the Zero. Let us recall Zarathustra's words:

> Alas, every prisoner [of a past misdeed] becomes a fool; and the imprisoned will redeems himself [and herself] foolishly. That time does not run backwards, that is his [her] wrath; 'that which was' is the name of the stone he [she] cannot move. And so, he [she] moves stones out of wrath and displeasure, and he [she] wreaks revenge on whatever does not feel wrath and displeasure as he [she] does. Thus the will, the liberator, took to hurting; and on all who can suffer he [she] wreaks revenge for his [her] inability to go backwards. This, indeed this alone, is what revenge is: the will's ill will against time and its 'it was.' (Nietzsche, *Thus Spake*, 251-52; Nietzsche's emphasis).[14]

And yet: We are in a continuum, as we should expect, on this issue of what took place at LambdaMOO. At least, Dibbell finds himself in a continuum of thought—inviting us to be with him a for a ride in that continuum—thinking the yet unthought. When Dibbell returns to the scene of the crime, when he speaks at the conference "Virtue and Virtuality: Gender, Law, and Cyberspace," at MIT, April 20-21, 1996, he returns to think again about the virtual community at LambaMOO and its actions taken, but his thinking is the result of his prior appearance at Yale Law School with Catherine MacKinnon, discussing rape in cyberspace and afterwards having dinner with MacKinnon, who had just published *Only Words* (cf. Parveen and Cousins). During dinner Dibbell says virtually nothing. He simply listens. He sits and listens to MacKinnon's occasional appropriation of his views. Dibbell says subsequently that he is anxiety ridden, for fear that he will be totally appropriated by MacKinnon and her take on words and deeds (sexual violence) and

for fear that he, who works at the *Village Voice*, would be "out[ed] as a MacKinnonite" ("My Dinner"). The tone of this reportage is humorous, though Dibbell is serious.

In this remembrance of things past at the conference at MIT, Dibbell revisits his take on community and its actions taken at LambdaMOO. He writes:

Now, what had Mr. Bungle done, exactly? Well, in a sense, not much. He had typed some words and caused them to be communicated to the understanding of others. And let me make it clear that no one present that night was so confused as to doubt that words were the only weapon Mr. Bungle had wielded. But they also had several additional things to say about what he'd done. They called it 'uncivil,' they called it 'despicable,' and lastly but most precisely they called it 'virtual rape.' And I say precisely because I think the phrase captures as well as any can the ambivalence with which Bungle's victims seemed to regard his actions—the way their response seemed to oscillate irresolvably *between* outrage and mere annoyance, *between* a tone that equated his actions with real-life rape and a tone that recognized them as nothing of the sort. *And I want to emphasize that oscillation, because I think that if you don't get it, you don't really get virtual rape at all.*

I think it also helps explain the LambdaMOO community's response to Mr. Bungle, which was neither to seek redress in the real world (though there were a couple of ways they could have done that) nor merely to censure him within the MOO. Instead the community decided *to cut him off at the boundary between real life and virtual reality*—and so they did, eliminating his account and all the objects associated with it.

And thus the story ends. . . . ("My Dinner")

And yet, it does continue for Dibbell as for us:

But what about the First Amendment? How did that get in there? Well, I suppose in writing up the Bungle Affair I probably should have just let the story tell itself, but ultimately I didn't have enough faith in its accessibility for that. I thought it a little too alien to the average non-MUDder's experience and felt I should try to inject a little universal relevance into it, to tease from it a broader significance I wasn't entirely sure it had. And so I closed the piece with some reflections on the ways my encounter with LambdaMOO's version of virtual reality and with the phenomenon of virtual rape had begun to unsettle my long reflexively held understanding of the relationship between word and deed. 'The more seriously I took the notion of virtual rape,' I wrote, 'the less seriously I was able to take the notion of freedom of speech, with its tidy division of the world into the symbolic and the real.'

I was careful to insist that these reflections constituted not so much an argument as a report on a kind of emergent Information Age mindset—a postmodern return to the premodern logic of the incantation, ushered in by the operating principle of the computer, whose typed-in commands are after all a lot like magic words in the way that they simultaneously convey information and cause things to happen with the immediacy of a trigger pulled. But secretly I

wasn't quite sure what my relationship to this emergent mindset was or ought to be, and it was in the midst of this uncertainty that the specter of Catherine MacKinnon began to haunt me.

After his dinner with MacKinnon, he begins to think the contrary, namely, that "Catharine MacKinnon [*sic*] was no Dibbellian." He continues:

> For what had become clear to me as I'd listened to MacKinnon's appreciation of 'A Rape in Cyberspace' was that she really wasn't interested in that *oscillation* I find so central to the notion of virtual rape, and indeed of virtual reality in general. She wasn't interested in the way the victims' rage was tempered by irritation; she wasn't interested in the community's refusal to seek redress in real life. She was only interested—for fairly obvious reasons—in the extent to which the people of LambdaMOO had felt Mr. Bungle's actions to be equivalent to real-life rape. In short, as far as I was concerned, she didn't get it.
>
> But that didn't mean I now found myself thrown back into the camp of those who had attacked me for taking virtual rape seriously. On the contrary, I now saw in their attitude a kind of mirror image of MacKinnon's understanding. For they, too, *wanted to see only one half* of VR's irreducibly ambiguous truth. For them, the MOO was only a game, and could not be more.
>
> I think the MOO is a game, and I think it is also much more. I think of it, finally, as a kind of conceptual DMZ—a permanently, radically liminal ground on which the real and the imagined meet on equal terms. (emphasis added)

And yet again, the wider community does not appear to remain in a mode of oscillation. And perhaps, it should not, given differences of circumstances. Still, there are differences of opinion about an area in the law that is itself caught in between the actual and the virtual. In her article "Virtual Rape," Wendy Kaminer writes of a real man by the name of "Maxwell [who] was . . . charged with aggravated sexual assault. The victim was a 10-year-old girl known in court documents as S.M. During one phone call, in which Maxwell posed as her mother's gynecologist, he persuaded S.M. to insert her finger into her vagina" (70). Kaminer reports:

> Maxwell never even met his victim, making the charge of aggravated sexual assault unprecedented. But it's not entirely surprising, considering pervasive concern about electronic or virtual sex involving unsuspecting children. This case is a testament to the presumed power of the Internet and law enforcement's efforts to tame it. The application of sexual assault laws to cases involving children who are duped over the phone into fondling or penetrating themselves would greatly facilitate the prosecutions of people who engage in sexually explicit conversations in chat rooms, especially with minors. So it hardly matters that Maxwell used a telephone instead of a computer. Thirty years ago, he might have been dismissed as a dirty old man; now he's more likely to remind people of a pedophile prowling the Net. (70)

But what is missed here is layering. The student at NYU whose MOO name or avatar was "Bungle" used a computer, but one connected to a telephone. Does the

computer, the extra layer or filter, add something special? In most discussions of place, cyber-place or virtual-space, there is a definite, indefinite topos (locus) where communications take place between or among people who are participating from their various geographical locations. For the telephone, hooked to a computer or not, it is cyberspace, which is in the *matrix* (etymologically, the womb). *Where*, then, *did rape in cyberspace take place*? If the answer is in the *Question*, that is, *of*, now *in*, *Cyberspace*, then the rape took place in the matrix (the womb). It is either in the switches or in the satellite that relays the conversation. And yet, there is an element of virtuality to this description. In discussions of virtual space, unlike those on cyberspace, the location is in the brains of those who are participating. Dibbell, as well as others, is not really clear in his use of these two terms.[15] The rape occurred, he says in his title, in cyberspace (the womb), but most of the discussion is in terms of virtuality. Is this just a matter of etymology, a play on words in relation to space? And nothing more? The etymological womb or the horrible affects in the brain? Or should these distinctions even matter *when it comes down to* the "rape" of children or adults at the other end of the line? Which is a great deal more? In various communities we make laws and argue them in court (including the court of public opinion). Kaminer, in her discussion of Maxwell, *oscillates* with her argument, considering both sides of the issue. She writes:

> Still, New Jersey's sexual-offense statute was enacted in 1979, long before legislators were terribly concerned about the Internet. The law defines sexual assault as 'sexual penetration, either by the actor or upon the actor's instructions.' Penetration involving a child is aggravated sexual assault, with a maximum sentence of 20 years. Maxwell's victim acted on his instructions and under coercion (at 10 years old, she was incapable of consenting to phone sex). Joseph Del Russo, the chief assistant prosecutor for the case, considers the absence of physical or even visual contact between the offender and his victim irrelevant; Maxwell is 'equally culpable as the guy who gives a girl $5 to lure her into his car and gets her to penetrate herself digitally,' he explained. (70)

The judge decided not to dismiss the case. Maxwell pleaded guilty and is serving a 12-year sentence. Each person's *inclination* determines the outcome. The ever-coming community that is a community without a community. But as we have seen in Dibbell and in communities and their laws, inclinations change. Inclinations make for a virtual society, constantly caught in the topos: Out of the impossible perpetually comes the possible. Virtuality along with virtuosity is virtue.

. . . To Be Continued.

Notes

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[1] The text is titled "A Rape in Cyberspace; or, How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Sprit, Two Wizards, and A Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society." This initial version is published in *The Village Voice* (December 23, 1993). The updated version, with major revisions, is in Dibbell's *My Tiny Life* 11-30. It can be found online at <http://www.juliandibbell.com/articles/a-rape-in-cyberspace/>. My references will be from *My*

Tiny Life. Cf. Michals, "Cyber-Rape"; Richard Mackinnon, "Virtual Rape." Today, MOOs are less popular than other virtual venues, such as *Second Life*, but the rape that occurred at LamdaMOO, nonetheless, is the founding principle of virtual community space and remains a popular virtual venue: <http://www.lambdamoo.info/>.

[2] A MOO is an acronym for multi-user dungeon, object-oriented, or multi-object oriented.

[3] My colleague Cynthia Haynes tells me: "MOO technology is still functional and operating on both the telnet protocol (the text-based versions) and the web-based platform (our enCore interface)."

[4] See Regina Lynn, "Virtual Rape Is Traumatic, but Is It a Crime?" Lynn writes: "Last month, two Belgian publications reported that the Brussels police have begun an investigation into a citizen's allegations of rape -- in *Second Life*."

[5] See Stone, *War*. Cf. Turkle, *Life*.

[6] Previously, "Of MOOs, Folds, and Non-Reactionary Virtual Communities," in *High Wired* (U of Michigan P, 1998).

[7] As reported by Wendy Kaminer, "Maxwell was charged with aggravated sexual assault. The victim was a 10-year-old girl known in court documents as S.M. During one phone call, in which Maxwell posed as her mother's gynecologist, he persuaded S.M. to insert her finger into her vagina. Maxwell never met his victim, making the charge of aggravated sexual assault unprecedented. But it's not entirely surprising, considering pervasive concern about electronic or virtual sex involving unsuspecting children" (70).

[8] I am consciously and purposefully conflating *virtual/ity* as both a technological and philosophical term. The issue for me is not simply technology (mechanical reproduction), but Deleuze's notion of the virtual. Technology follows from virtual/ity. Additionally, *condition* (of the actual) becomes re-conditioned—no longer being the condition of *possibility*, but the condition of *compossibility*.

[9] Recall ever again, never forget, that while there are the Vestal, the Sabine women, and Lucretia, there is in modern times "the house that Jack built" (see Frayling).

[10] The issue is an ethico-political concern. Archi-tecture must be changed to Anarchi-TechTure, which is a neologism for denegating the Archi and the Techne of a philosophical, closed, Euclidean space. This chapter, then, concerns the ethics and politics of the MOO-Scape. My take is to build on yet to depart from the work of Badiou and Boundas.

[11] Cf. Hollier on Bataille and architecture.

[12] I borrow these terms of "white" and "red" from Lyotard (see *Libidinal* 241, 261). For a parallel see Serres's distinction, in *Rome*, between *white* multiplicities (total possibility) and *black* box (total actuality).

[13] For such a house, or monad, and possible interior design and furniture, see Cache, *Earth Moves*.

[14] Charles Stivale has given an excellent account of the continuum of revenge and counter-revenge at LambdaMOO and how it all spills over into elsewhere. The history of this event of Lambda, as in the sign of Alpha/Omega, is *all human, too pathetically human*, without a taste for life/*Eros*. Rather, without a taste for *A Life*. Stivale renders it as "it was." But he, too, has his detractors. One must always be subject to subtraction (cf. Richard Mackinnon).

[15] On the difference between cyberspace and virtual reality, see *CyberReader*, Ed. Vitanza, Ch. 1.

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