

**Project Gargantua –  
A world of carnival in 3D**

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**Translated from German into English by Micha Frommeyer**

We are building a **3D-world Gargantua #**

which is inspired by the great carnival novel of the Renaissance, “Gargantua” by Francois Rabelais, and by Michail Bakthin’s interpretation of it. It is a world of laughter, of playful learning, created by and at the same time for children.

Its concept is ***Active learning in Activeworlds®***.

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Beyond all life’s official seriousness, laughter builds a second world and a second life. Carnival in Bakthin’s sense does not make a distinction between presentation and audience. With their immersive real-time and online interaction, the virtual world and artificial life find themselves in the tradition of this principle of non-separation of stage and audience.

It is this unity that means the biggest difference from television.

The role of the masks in real-life carnival here is played by the avatars. The protagonists of the 3D-Chat can hide behind their cyber-identity.

Carnival and laughter have their own rules, that of the freedom of carnival, and they have got a universal character, which is a state of the whole world, its rebirth and renewal in which everyone can take part. During carnival, it is life itself that acts, the play, however, then turns into life for a limited period of time.

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**The world “Gargantua” is still under construction.**

**It can be found in the 3D-Chat-Universe “Activeworlds Educational®” (AWEdu):  
www. ... (besides other projects)**

**At the moment, the world is still called “Diverse” (due to a former project by an Italian and a Finnish school, which we participated in before the idea of “Gargantua” came up).**

**Our website ([www.avatarchat.de.vu](http://www.avatarchat.de.vu)) is continually updated to fit our new project “Gargantua”. You can find information about 3D-chats, especially the one of Activeworlds®, there. The concept of Activeworlds® makes it possible to build and communicate together in real-time in one common world and together with partners from all over the (real) world.**

**So far, we have been working together with schools from Europe (Gymnasium Arnoldinum in Steinfurt/Münster, Liceo Artistico di Latina/Rome and Scuola Don Milani in Latina/Rome with Linda Giannini).**

**In University courses in Münster, we worked with students in the world, and our Italian partner Carlo Nati collaborated with future teachers at Università del Lazio, Rome. At Münster University, M.A. papers and media presentations are being developed about our project.**

**Cooperation with schools and universities for all over the world is part of the project's design. Those who participate in our AWEDu project are encouraged to bring in their own ideas.**

**Since as early as the 1970s, the ideas of Michail Bakhtin have inspired our former project VideoPossen(engl. VideoFarces), which was highly successful in more than 100 workshops (cf. our Website: "Our story"). His ideas about a culture of laughter (cf. Bakhtin's book: "The poetics of Dostoevsky", and my website) have also formed the basis of our work with 3D-chats since the end of the 1990s. When designing the concept for the world, we considered that it should fit the child's genius and the creative freedom of children's art. Therefore, the principle of tinkering plays an important role in the concept (s.b.).**

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**We bought the caretaker rights for this 3D-project world. Rüdiger Stiebitz is the originator of the concept of Gargantua and also one of the caretakers. As the world's administrator, Oscar Stiebitz brings in his enormous technological potential. We are getting good advice from the web-designer and professional programmer Volker Hatzenberger (aka "Ananas" in Activeworlds®). He also makes the large number of avatars created by him available.**

**Some of the buildings in our world were created in our last multicultural project with a school in Steinfurt (Gymnasium Arnoldinum) and a school in Italy (Liceo Artistico di Latina), others in a workshop at Münster University. Further buildings by Rüdiger Stiebitz will give a better impression of the project idea.**

**As caretakers, we can make use of new tool to shape the 3D landscape. A first attempt has been made with the giant's head, Monte Gargantua. (its nose and forehead are formed out of high mountains, its teeth are made from white rocks).**

**Monte Gargantua is situated at the entry point of our world and can be watched from a Belvedere platform above. At the entry point, there are teleports, which can beam the avatars via mouse-click to buildings that have already been finished.**

**In most parts the world is designed as a “happy hell” according to Bakhtin’s ideas and as a rabelaisique “descending to the underworld”. In another world in Activeworlds®, there are some buildings on the topic of Halloween, which were created during our workshops in Cologne/Bensberg and on the ARTESPACE fair in Munich. There, we encouraged children to create carnival-like avatars and build scary Halloween castles.**

According to the concept of the Rabelais world Gargantua, there are giants and dwarfs in our 3D-world.

In the world Gargantua, there are a lot of fantastic avatars created by the designer “Ananas”, which have been made in a childlike fantasy-fashion to fit the topics of laughter and carnival. This large repertoire of avatars will inspire the theatre we are going to stage.

Since we developed the concept of “VideoPossen”, we have become specialists for electronic figure-theatre. Now, we are transferring these skills to our projects in Activeworlds.

**In Michail Bakhtin’s book on Rabelais, there are 5 chapters on imageries concerning the culture of laughter, which also inspire our building activities in the 3d-world:**

- 1. The language of the marketplace** (today’s carnival barkers appear in advertisement and on websites as visual eye-catchers like clip arts)
- 2. Festive motifs** (like carnival and Halloween)
- 3. Images of the Banquet**
- 4. Grotesque visions of bodies** ( cf. the mouth-man taken from the VideoPossen concept, ... and Monte Gargantua)
- 5. Images of the material and physical lower stratus** (Gargantua’s toilet plays with the scale: The small enormous giant uses a lot of things to wipe his b... : tall trees, curtains, and animals; a ducks bites him in his b... until he screams!)

### **Building Activities in the Project World “Gargantua”**

**In our project world, the principle of tinkering rules** (cf. Sherry Turkle, “The Triumph of Tinkering” in: “Life on the Screen”; Turkle there refers to Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was also my teacher in Paris).

According to the giants in Rabelais, there are gigantic avatars in our world "Gargantua". It is the relation of scale between giant and normal size that makes tinkering highly interesting here; when building a banquet, a kitchen or a loo for the giant, you can, for example, use objects such as trees for the small, large Gargantua to use as "torchecul" (to wipe his b..). In doing so, the whole repertoire of objects is lessened but at the same time also renewed.

A banquet with a giant table was built for a pantagruelic feast. (s. screen) Large pots and bins are turned into small bowls and cups on the table. Then all of a sudden, these objects disappear (through a mouse-click on a trigger/command button). Now, a quest begins, which introduces to some extent an element of **games** to the 3D-learning environment. "Look for the stolen objects of the banquet!" and "Whodunit?" (maybe an animal avatar?) (The quest could also imply a change of medium from the 3D-world to the website that belongs to it. "Go to the website, there you will find the solution or password that you need to proceed at this stage.")

In order to make the quest self-explanatory for a foreigner coming into the world, a Chat-(Ro)Bot might intercept the visitor at the banquet and give him further advice.

Once you have found the objects of the banquet, your avatar gets promoted one round, that means your avatar Gargantua grows bigger in order to master the next, more difficult task. (This will demand different versions of Gargantua in different sizes, 4m, 6m, 8m, 12m, which can then be chosen from the avatar list. This idea was inspired by the classic game "Black & White" by George Molineux). So, a further element is introduced to the learning environment, which is far from perfectionist.

Finally, after having solved a number of tasks, the player will get a Gargantua in a truly Rabelaisique, over dimensional size.

The comical culture of the Rabelais novel casts a new light on the `player-killing` known from numerous games.

In general, our concept is more <chat and chill> than <player-kill>.

**The concept of the 3D-world shows great respect for games – the game as a principle of the culture of simulation, which has taken over the culture of calculating. Through games, the new generations socialised by the media acquire a higher competence in computing than the older ones.**

**Docere and delectare no longer form opposites but a dialectic "unity of opposites", incorporating the edutainment of the 3D-learning surrounding.**

The anthropomorphic Mount Gargantua, which has already been built, is indeed oversized. According to the "grotesque visions of bodies" (cf. leitmotifs of the culture of laughter), his nose is as big as a mountain and his mouth a great yawning abyss. His teeth are as large as rocks.

A building that has been there for some time already is the "Delphi-Palace" for the Oracle parody. The mirroring floor made of fine lapis lazuli fits the description in Rabelais. (s. screen)

According to Bakhtin's rabelaisian idea of a "happy hell", there will be Dungeons and Dragons in a Halloween manner on the way to the oracle. However, laughter about the ghosts, gothic- and Halloween-motifs is permitted and encouraged. ("Help, I don't want to go no further, I'm scared," as it says in Rabelais. Bakhtin: "The meaning of the culture of laughter is to free people from fear.")

The dungeons will be built by Micha Frommeyer, who also accompanied the European school project.

In a university course in Münster, a fair was created. (s. screen)

Fairs belong to the culture of festivity (s.a.). In its creativity, the course was also a festive day.

In the 3D world, the book Gargantua becomes an immersive event as a 3D-book, in which you can walk around as an avatar.

One important method for this is what I call the sentence as an object. This means that lines from "Gargantua" by Rabelais are written into the property lines of the most trivial objects in the kitchen or the toilet or the banquet; on mouse-over, the cursor will reveal these sentences. (s. screen) (With *copy and paste* these prepared sentences can be brought into the chatlog during the meetings.) This belongs to the material-physical motifs of the profane, material areas of meaning (s.a.). Thus, certain chapters of the book can be prepared in class for online-meetings with the international partners.

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At the same time, an immersive 3d-environment for ESL (English as a Second Foreign Language) language acquisition is created. In the intercultural school project, so far, considerable differences in the level of English as their lingua franca among the non-native-speaker students have been revealed. This aspect of the project is being investigated in an exam paper by Judith Steinkamp. While some pupils used an elaborate way of speaking including longer sentences, others stuck intentionally to nonsense-English.

In Rabelais' "Gargantua", there is a chapter play of a one-sided or uneven dialogue, in which one party poses long-winded questions while the other party answers monosyllabically. "Just like in real life." We consider this an occasion for laughter; thus, such a dialogue is being prepared in the kitchen.

This is a situation of genuine, life-like language, which can be seen frequently in original chat logs all over the world. In a chat, language acquisition takes place through immersion into real-life situations.

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Another important feature of interpersonal communication of avatars is the use of body language. In Rabelais, there is a parodist dispute between two famous scholars about who has got the greater eloquence in the area of body language. To stage this in an avatar theatre, we need two avatars with a great variety of gestures in their tool-bar. In this kind of online-meeting, it is not one's verbal skill that makes the difference between a non-native Italian or German speaker and a native speaker of English. For this scene, special avatars with a particularly wide range of gestures at their disposal could be designed.

Such a comparatively demanding task in designing could be carried out by a number of specialists in the respective field, according to the principle of open-source. Researchers and students from other 3d-worlds and projects will get building-rights in the Gargantua-world. We have a got a wide network of friends, colleagues and online-cooperation in Activeworlds® who could contribute their share in an open-source manner. These open-source contributors could make the 3d-world a success. They represent the "ultimate-state-of-the-art" concerning 3D-worlds, learning environments and computer games, some of which have undergone a stunning development when being developed open-source (website Canada, quotation → Bakthin).

It is not very difficult for specialists in the programming of chat-bots, to place such a bot in the world who turns into a double of any avatar that approaches him. "Say>mirror!bot<" is the trigger for the chat-bot to transform into the shape of any user's avatar. Another variety of this double-game of chatbots is the one in which the double fools the user by following him around everywhere. This motif is also in a chapter of "Gargantua". This is how tricks are being played by chat-bots who appear as parodist doubles.

This motif comes up in a lot of novels by Dostoevsky, too, which is taken up by Bakthin in his analysis of "The Poetics of Dostoevsky".

I devoted a whole website to the analysis of the culture of dialogue as a model for the interpretation of the culture of dialogue in 3D-chats.

The medium of 3D-chats reveals the potential of the culture of laughter (comical culture) that the Internet has. It is only through the unity of verbal speech and symbolic language of the images that 3D-chats can be wholly understood. This is a universal language, the "forgotten language" of the unconscious (in the sense of Erich Fromm and of Jaques Lacan)

We are looking for French project-partners: What does Rabelais' Gargantua mean for their culture?

And what does it mean for Brazilian partners?

"Building the other's culture" (idea of Bea Ligorio, Project "Euroland")

Bonnie DeVarco (aka Hypathia, world-famous celebrity in 3d-learning environments and 3d-learn online-conferences): her idea "Historical Role Play" combined with "Building the other's culture".

Cooperation with Bonnie DeVarco and her students UCSC (University of California, Santa Cruz) : field study in the 3d-world Gargantua in spring 2004

**Some further chapters of "Gargantua" and adjacent ideas for buildings are:**

- **Gargamelle and the birth of Gargantua's son, Pantagruel. The womb as a globe in a kind of Swiftesque metaphor (?).**
- **The giant as a metaphor for the masses of Internet users (one billion so far with the Indians and Chinese on the verge of entering)**
- **There is a satire on "miraculous healings" in therapy and medicine. Cyber-therapies for fear of dizzy heights: mount on a cloud and have no fear (screen)**
- **The teacher in Rome and Latina, Carlo Nati, who is teaching Geometrical Design could create geodetical buildings in the world (as synonyms of platonic ideas in geometry)**
- **Difficult students can be helped (The culture of laughter means: It is never too late to change a difficult pupil into a constructive one. cf. the Miriam English's report.**
- **Experiences of personal change in our videobased projects: VideoFarces)**
- **Feefina's Children Building (screen: sundae in a giant ice-cup)**
- **A carrier pigeon as messenger: An animal-avatar with symbolic meaning for the speed of the transfer of news in technological-historical dimension.**
- **Buildings of the Renaissance (Project: "Germantown"), which we should get from Richard Giles and Mark Arnold in AWedu**
- **Animated dance on a chess-board**
- **Basic research: most apt for the use in class: Bea Ligorio, Bonnie DeVarco**

- **Bonnie DeVarco aka Hypatia: Online Conferences**
- **The collective genius of mankind: the world's best universities in basic research**
- **Other projects by Rüdiger Stiebitz: in AW – AW: Campus, 3D-library, children's town**
- **List of recipients, sorted by groups...**