For almost as long as we've been here we've been imagining alternate places to inhabit, to escape the everyday for any number of reasons—its mundanity, its banality, its depravity, its cruelty, its dysfunctionality. We've crafted visions of afterlives, fantasies of alternate universes, secret worlds inside our own expressed in folklore, religion, art, and culture. Until recently we were limited in our tools—words shaping spaces limited to our minds; hands shaping spaces limited by the rules of materiality. But technology has changed that, allowing us to create increasingly complex and immersive alternate realities to inhabit together, not only allowing us to experience a world different than our own, but also an identity transcendent of our physical bodies, personal circumstances, and societal expectations. Performance and ritual are persistent, familiar, and ancient manifestations of this desire to model and embody other ways of being, but the trajectory of the past half-century has accelerated and intensified active group participation models, from the fantastical role-playing games (RPG) of the 1970s, to the costumed live-action role playing (LARP) of the 1980s; from cooperative multiplayer video games in the 1990s, to the fully simulacric Second Life of the 2000s. We live in an age of 3-d digital animation and enhanced virtual reality now, but none of these predecessors have been supplanted, only augmented by or differentiated from their kin.

These sites of action are all advanced forms of Heterotopias, the term Michel Foucault gave in 1966 to spaces that exist within and are formed by societies as counter-sites that represent, contest, and invert "real" sites—defined in opposition to utopias, the perfect, unreal spaces that could never exist. I put "real" in quotes since in the years since he invented the term, "real" is a slippery and contested notion, and the conception of these sites has moved beyond the mental or textual or geographic locations he could imagine to virtual and multi-versal spaces we are only beginning to understand. A Heterotopia is the "other place" to the "no place" of Utopia, a space of radical difference which can function both as a microcosm and a departure from the "real" spaces of our lives, through temporal or geographic displacement (along the spectrums and off the charts of past and future, some place and no place), reworking of social conventions and hierarchies, shifting of self and identity. They can function as hyper-distilled essences of reality, strictly ruled, or complexly layered cocktails of free will. Holman's three-channel *Heterotopias* imagines the latter through a collaborative process that allows participants to freely assemble myriad visual and cultural referents to invent their own imaginary and virtual selves. We can locate the archetypal cues from each of them, from fringed suede to silver lamé, fairytale castles to Tron-like hyperspace—but the characters gather in a pink-hued world of suspended reality, devoid of its own context, filled only with theirs. When they appear alone against backdrops of their own contexts, each bears a pink aura that Holman likens to spirit ectoplasm, or psychological shadow, that brings the traces of this shared third space along with them.

In its structure, *Heterotopias* borrows from Erving Goffman's notions of frameworks, the social and cultural frames that delimit our experiences, giving them meaning and shaping our perception of the world. An epic soundtrack underscores the passage through various frameworks, its visceral escalations and guttural chanting pushing the characters through, from the reality of a computer screen to the imaginary space of characters realized in the flesh via Holman's handmade props and costumes, to the fully digital 3-D rendered avatars. Slipping between physical, psychological, and virtual realms each character explores their own fantastical identity, their own radical differences, wordlessly through images and actions—posturing, play fighting, and dancing, enacting the primal narratives of conflict and fellowship at the heart of most heterotopic spaces.

The anthemic refrain "we go all the way" rousing them between conflict and unity, self and other self, reality and fantasy.

Whether analog or digital, a lot has been written about how this kind of self-performance functions in societies, from affinities of shared social and cultural vision to escapist fantasy. One could argue we need these moments of shared and individual invention apart from reality in order to understand how to operate within it, the personal agency it provides to self-determine either serving to model better ways of being in the real world that we can enact, or providing respite for when we can't adapt the world around us to suit our desires. With the accelerated capacities technology provides, cultural critics see utopia and dystopia mirrored in the spaces of virtual interaction. These spaces allow us to reimagine hierarchies, dissolve boundaries, conflate identities, reinvent ourselves and the social systems that frame us, but there is no firewall that keeps the things that plague us in the flesh from following us into the virtual, and vice versa.

Someday we might transcend reality, "real" spaces, "real" bodies, "real" minds. Even the five years since *Heterotopias* was made have brought huge advances in virtual realities, bio- and cybertenchnology, and artificial intelligence. But for the moment our fantasies and desires for ourselves still can't transcend material and social reality. Our avatars can be skinned to reveal the constructed wireframe that gives them form, and their bodies distorted with a keystroke. *Heterotopias* revels in the freedom and possibility of fantasy, but at the same time reveals the digital apparatus that underpins that virtual fantasy. Although the characters resolve in unity, *Heterotopias* doesn't let us stay in our embrace of each other in our radical difference, or our shared movement. It isn't absent of skepticism around the virtual and the fantastical, it brings us back to our bodies, our imperfect bodies and selves confronting the framing of our experience through technology.

- Elizabeth Thomas

Former MATRIX Curator at the UC Berkeley Art Museum, **Elizabeth Thomas** is a curator and writer, currently working independently. She lectures and publishes frequently, and has served as nominator or jurist for many national awards and grants. Her independent projects have appeared (or will appear) at University of Michigan Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Mass MoCA, Mills College, Temple Gallery, and the Andy Warhol Museum.