Virtual Reality and Establishing a Presence in Second Life: New Forms of Grey Literature?

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Abstract
The virtual reality program Second Life poses new challenges to its more than 3 million users that include economic interactions, methods of communication, and documentation. This paper assesses the range of activities taking place in Second Life, proposes how Second Life may be viewed as a form of emergent grey literature, discusses the tools used to discover, document, and preserve it.

Just five years ago, we would not have such a presentation as I am to share with you today. Virtual Reality, much less, Second Life was just in the embryonic stages of development, making today, just beyond toddler years. The early stages we have seen pioneered have brought to the forefront some new roles that have now become mainstream in education and learning and that is what the focus is today. Virtual reality is defined as a technology which allows a user to interact with a computer-simulated environment, be it a real or imagined one, and can be similar to the real world or differ significantly from reality. Common methods of engaging in virtual reality is via computer games and the technical limitations of creating certain kinds of environments is shrinking daily as faster and more advanced computer processors, improved imaging and data communication technologies become more ubiquitous and affordable in each new release.

Early experiences in virtual reality have been captured and developed in several now classical books, including those by Howard Rheingold (*Virtual Reality*, 1991; *Virtual Community*, 1993) who demystified the subject and made it part of the average college student's lexicon. Many different applications of computer graphics depicted over the last decade led to advancements in audio and sound amplification and thus a higher quality simulation was possible. As entertainment and education entered the world of virtual reality in a profound way, the futurist Mychilo Stephenson Cline (2004) offers how cognitive and behavior scientists were exploring how virtual reality leads to a number of important changes in human life and activity by being more integrated into daily life with patterns and techniques to influence human behavior, interpersonal communication and cognition.

Science fiction, film, music videos, computer games, art, marketing and promotions each are representative examples how experiments in 3D opened up new creative opportunities. By 2003, when Philip Rosedale started Linden Research, now known as Linden Labs to launch Second Life (http://secondlife.com/) virtual worlds were well on the generation of youth's radar and it was the new environment in which people could interact, play, engage in business, study and learn, and otherwise do business, and it was this concept "that Second Life would be like reality, but kinder and gentler" (Maney, 2007). By populating it with residents, genuine people who have names and powers and known as avatars, a new civilization was born that could be of either sex, customized to produce a wide variety of humanoid and other forms in a variety of costumes to resemble both real and imaginary life (Second Life avatars and their real life, 2007).

Second Life has its own method of commerce trading in Linden dollars and the environment is divided into islands forming different real estate parcels that can be bought and sold, resembling the rise and tumble of real life real estate transactions in this volatile age of disputes over land use. Residents must develop skills to build virtual objects or anything that they want on or to furnish their parcel and a 3D modeling tool helps do that, or now in a more mature virtual world, one can buy services and products already produced but the resident avatars are responsible for creating their environments.

Commitment to SL in Business

Brick and mortar businesses have been quick to take advantage of Second Life as a virtual environment to conduct both their internal and external business. Companies such as IBM and Reuters are using this virtual world to conduct recruiting for a variety of positions (Corporations use Second Life as recruitment tool, 2007). Some in human resources even believe that virtual worlds like Second Life can't be beat as a non-discriminatory method of interacting with potential employees and clients (Krell, 2007). In addition, companies are using Second Life as a tool to conduct meetings among geographically dispersed workers. American Apparel was one of the first companies to set up shop in Second Life and begin selling its virtual merchandise. Other companies are now offering products and services for sale from clothes to law advice. For profit businesses aren't the only ones getting involved. Charitable organizations such as the American Cancer Society are also actively involved. The American Cancer Society hopes to raise $75,000 in 2007 (Murray, 2007). In fact magazines and journals devoted to those in the non-profit world are now offering advice on how to make the most of this new frontier underlining that it is not one that should be ignored (Rigby, 2007).