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The Sims as Resource:

A Virtual
Ethnography Evaluating the Concept of
Digital Information Culture in the Gaming World

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Abstract

This study looks into the life of a virtual gaming community, CTO Sims – a small slice of a wider community that engages in what Bruns (2006) has termed *produsage*, remediating videogame assets and content from a PC game, *The* Sims (2000) into custom or user-generated content – a practice also called 'modding'. Through a virtual ethnographic methodology, this study explores the digital library at the heart of CTO Sims, and the *participatory culture* (Jenkins, 1992; 2006) which has grown up around it. This paper presents a narrative of an online videogaming produsage community, and through a process of immersion uncovers and probes into the everyday practices of commodification and produsage as they take place in the virtual field. The study begins to develop a theory of information culture by observing and exploring the CTO Sims community, its members, and their roles in knowledge and information economies.

It is concluded that digital information cultures within online gaming communities form around the collaborative creation and exchange of digital cultural artefacts, in heterarchical networks that develop their own unique organisational and classification conventions. Moreover, these communities form support networks for members, acting as repositories for shared knowledge, skills and experiences. Freedom of communication acts as a tool for the generation of social and knowledge capital, and enables the growth of strong ties of affiliation between members. Further research is encouraged in *private,* offline produsage spaces, and into the individual motivations that drive regular users to become produsers.

Contents

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Lastly, thank you to the members of CTO Sims, who have been kind enough to take me in and share their experiences with me. You have been an inspiration, and I hope I have done you all justice.

1.0 Introduction

In 2000, a small games company called Maxis (now a subsidiary of Electronic Arts) released *The Sims*, a life-simulation game that quickly became the best-selling game of all time (Walker, 2002). The game was unusual in that it did not follow the gaming conventions of the time. Players did not have a pre-determined goal, nor did they follow a linear game path. The object was not to 'command and conquer', but to create a family unit, build a home, and have your Sims (as was the name of the virtual people who populated this virtual world) live out their lives in any way the player saw fit. Sims could socialise, chase careers, consume commodities (from furniture to clothing), and even go on vacation. Players could tailor their Sims lives in any number of ways – some not always strictly benign. For this reason, the game has been variously described as a god-game (Prensky, 2003), an open-ended sandbox game (Peterson, 2011), or what *The Sims* creator, Will Wright, has called a digital "dollhouse" (Yi, 2003), wherein the player becomes the arbitrator of the virtual Sims' lives.

From the outset, Wright intended that the game and its assets be modifiable by its users, even releasing instructions for the modification (or 'modding') of game content (Forbus and Wright, 2001). Maxis went so far as to release authoring tools to enable the game's modification:

> We're spending most of our efforts now on making cool downloadable tools for the Sims… We can make new objects that can be easily downloaded into the game (Will Wright, CNN.com chat transcript, 2000).

With this Maxis-developed suite of tools – free to anyone with access to the Web – consumers were able to create custom content (CC) to import into their own games. Six months before the release of *The Sims*, several websites had sprung up on the internet, offering CC exclusively made by fans. This CC comprised many different formats – Sim fashions, furniture, walls and floors; even open source programmes for tweaking game elements. Many of these items were freely available. Some were made for profit. Some users even earned a modest degree of fame from their creations (Herz, 2001; Curlew, 2004; Sihvonen, 2011).

However, by 2004 *The Sims* had been superseded by its sequel, *Sims 2*. Since then, websites catering to fans of *The Sims* have either switched to offering *Sims 2* (or *Sims 3*) content, or have shut down completely. Many fans of the original game found their old communities had disappeared, and much custom content was now unavailable. Many creations for *The Sims* were lost forever.

In 2008, CTO Sims opened[1]. The aim of the site was to create a digital library, collecting *The Sims* CC from defunct sites and offering them to the Sims community[2]. Run by a small core of fans and gamers, CTO Sims set about gathering files and uploading them to the site. This was a collaborative process, with many files being donated by site members. This crowd-sourced collection soon attracted a large community of member-user-contributors. A forum grew up around the digital library, where members were free to chat, share files, and exchange information about where to find missing CC.

Over the years, the site has also become a repository for CC creation tutorials, contributed by the members themselves. Many members have been encouraged to become creators, sharing their work with their peers and showcasing their talents to the community. This activity has helped to revitalise the fan culture of what is largely a dead game.

Since 2010, Electronic Arts has ceased supporting *The Sims*, removing related content from its official website[3]. This has created a void which remaining fansites are attempting to fill by offering the CC and guides no longer available to them from official sources.

This paper explores the CTO Sims community, using a virtual ethnographic methodology. It focuses on two key areas – first, the growth and effectiveness of its digital library, particularly exploring the dynamics of a user-aggregated library which has been formed largely on an ad hoc basis by a group of dedicated amateurs. Second is the community itself, and how it uses the remediation of game assets and the exchange of information to create what Jenkins has called a 'participatory culture' (1992; 2006a).

It is hoped that, through studying the virtual microcosm that is CTO Sims, the findings of the study will lead to a better understanding of what may be termed a 'digital information culture' – what characteristics define such a culture, who comprises it, and how it can better be applied to virtual communities on the World Wide Web as a whole.

The rest of this chapter will deal with the research objectives, a discussion of methodology, and the review of the relevant literature. A brief discussion of information culture will also be presented. The second chapter and its separate sections give an in-depth narrative of the virtual ethnography conducted on the CTO Sims website. The final chapter will give an account of the conclusions drawn from the study.

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[1] The original site was located at http://www.ctoccasions.com. The current site can now be found at http://www.ctosims.com. Most of the material presented in this study is based on or in the original site.

[2] The term 'Sims community' is here used in a loose sense, and refers to the wider community of players, users, modders and fans of *The Sims*.

[3] According to the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, all content from *The Sims* (originally located at http://thesims.ea.com/us/) was removed from the Electronic Arts site on or shortly after 11 August 2010.

1.1 Research Question and Objectives

The goal of this study is to work towards a clearer definition – and understanding – of the concept of digital information culture. This is no small task by any means, and I do not propose to form a fully fledged theory in this admittedly limited space. My intent is merely to lay the groundwork for future endeavour. The concept of information culture is a hazy one, with no uniform definition apparent across the many disciplines that have entertained it. Lash (2002), in his *Critique of Information*, has discussed the theory in terms of 'global flows'; whereas in the domain of corporate and business studies, Ginman (1987) has presented information culture as the use of primary resources such as tacit knowledge to facilitate the output of intellectual products via material activities. This study merely aims towards a *narrative* of the features of a purported information culture, by exploring a very small internet community. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that the community in questions falls into the domain of computer- and video-gaming, and cannot be representative of other domains.

In light of these limitations, the study will seek to define a digital information culture, *within the domain of computer and video-gaming.*

Consequently, the goals may be stated as follows:

1. From a computer- and video-gaming perspective, what can be said to be the *features* of a digital information culture?
2. Within the digital internet community of CTO Sims and its user-aggregated digital library, what can be determined about the relationship between the *user* and the *informational content* of the community?
3. Lastly, what can be determined about the relationships between users as a whole, and how do the politics of those relationships both *create* and *define* a digital information culture?

1.2. What is information culture?

As stated above, there is no one clear definition of information culture.[4] Both Ginman (1987) and Lash (2002) give useful insights into the nature of information culture, though they

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[4] It is accepted that 'culture' is a problematic concept, and there is insufficient space here to discuss theories of culture at any great length. Please refer to Briggle and Mitcham (2009) for a more in-depth discussion.

arrive from very different intellectual standpoints. Ginman's early business-orientated theory, defines information culture as a space wherein:

> …the transformation of intellectual resources is maintained alongside the transformation of material resources. The primary resources for this type of transformation are varying kinds of knowledge and information. The output achieved is a processed intellectual product which is necessary for the material activities to function and develop positively (p. 93).

Lash takes a more philosophical position, defining information culture in a rather more lengthy discourse. To summarise, he sees information culture as the production of cultural objects, produced via knowledge- and design-intensive processes (in contradistinction to labour-intensive), propagated through 'global flows' that traverse the world via modern information communication technologies (2002, p. 26).

Whilst there are clear differences between the two definitions – not least the first describing a time before the 'digital revolution' of the mid-1990's, when the internet first went mainstream – both are useful in terms of this study, as shall be discussed further in a later section. From Ginman's perspective, one may certainly observe the flow of knowledge and information within a community of individuals fuelling the creation of raw, material products. This is as true of the village craftswoman in India as it is of a corporate entity. Information cultures are not strictly limited to commercial enterprises either. Voluntary organisations may pool resources to create a finished product. An example of this is the World Archives Project[5], where volunteers work together to digitise and transcribe historical records for public consumption via Ancestry.com. What is interesting about the Project is that volunteers are enlisted from all over the globe, contributing via their computers and internet connections. Through these global flows, many disparate sources pool together their time, energy, resources, skills and knowledge. Online fora allow volunteers to converse and share experiences, tips and pleas for help. Many more prefer to work in silence. Whatever their role within the community, each is part of a larger network, feeding into a larger, coherent whole.

From Lash's perspective, it is not merely the community that entails culture, but the information itself – "[i]nformation is more than transmitted; it transforms" (Briggle and Mitcham, 2009). This harks back to Baudrillard's (1994) previous work on the goods economy being superseded by a cultural one – an economy of signs and symbols that move through spaces, both reflecting and reflected by the surrounding cultural milieu.

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[5] See http://community.ancestry.com/awap.

In his book, *Digital Information Culture*, Luke Treddinick (2008) has this to say about digital information cultures:

> Culture in digital information contexts does not just imply the shared characteristics and behaviour of bloggers, gamers and participants in *Second Life*[6], who each perhaps construct their identity with reference to digital technologies. It is also a matter of the general change digital technologies have brought to our lives, self-identity, and experiences online and offline (p. 16).

In accordance with this, this paper is very much concerned with the shared *offline* characteristics of CTO Sims members, as well as of those online; and how digital technologies have afforded their coming together in online fora.

A final note – in this paper I have chosen to differentiate between CTO-type, online communities and offline ones by using the label of 'digital information culture'. In so doing it is my intent to delimit the concept of a 'real world'-based and a 'virtual world'-based information culture. This is owing to the fact that CTO Sims is an internet community – its participants are linked by virtual, not physical spaces; the artefacts that circulate between them are entirely digital[7].

1.3 Literature Review

The study of online gaming and modding communities is not unprecedented. However, these studies usually take place within the domain of game, media, consumer and cultural studies. The aim of this study is to draw from the theories, findings and traditions of these domains and merge them with perspectives from the standpoint of library and information science.

Bearing this in mind, what can be gleaned from previous research pertaining to the use of

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[6] Like *The Sims*, *Second Life* is a virtual life simulator, wherein participants may design their own clothing, build their own houses and furniture, and sell these items online. Where the two games depart, however, is that *Second Life* is an *online* virtual world peopled by 'avatars', digital representations of the participant's virtual self. *The Sims* is an offline virtual world, where there is a degree of removal between the participant's self and their virtual Sim(s).

[7] There has been much debate on the nature of virtual communities; indeed some have questioned whether they exist at all (Miller, 2011). It is not the purpose of this study to define the concept of virtual communities, or to enter into a lengthy discourse on the subject. However, I am taking it as given that the concept of culture and community takes on a different form when discussed with reference to the digital and the virtual as opposed to the 'real' and everyday. The term 'community' is used in this paper as a loose descriptor of a group of people who interact in online virtual spaces. For more in-depth discussions on the virtues and vices of virtual communities and digital cultures, and their points of departure from traditional concepts of community and culture, please see Komito (1998), Treddinick (2008) and Miller (2011). For further reading on virtual gaming communities, please see Watson (1998).

information within online gaming communities?

Videogames and their related content, by nature, are digital artefacts (Sotamaa, 2003). When the game engine or code is sufficiently malleable, these artefacts are often subject to what is called computer game modification, or, in common parlance, 'modding'. Julian Kücklich (2005) defines modding as an activity undertaken by gamers who "prefer to create their own games using the tools provided by the games' manufacturer, or, in the absence of these, creating their own tools and utilities", and is thus "an important part of gaming culture". In other words, modding entails how games and their content are reappropriated and remediated by gamers to create unique, stand-alone digital artefacts.

The Sims is one in a class of games that allows gamers to mod various gaming elements[8]. With the right tools, gamers may create their own unique clothing for their Sim characters; build new furniture for their houses; design wallpapers and flooring; create new face shapes and hairstyles; even 'hack' an object to give it new in-game values. These mods are the digital artefacts - the virtual commodities - of the Sim modding community. Even a cursory search online will uncover a plethora of websites offering such modified gaming content - also termed 'custom content' or 'user-generated content' - which players may download and import into their game. For example, Conjuring Sims[9] offers objects, walls and floors to help recreate environments from Harry Potter; YviMai Designs[10] offers retro-themed fashions for players who are keen to dress their Sims in clothes from the forties and fifties. This allows players to effectively 'rewrite' the default, manufacturer-provided content with content that allows them to play out their own predilections and fantasies in virtual spaces.

1.3.1 *The Sims* and information culture

The wider community of Sim modders is rooted in a world of binary codes and digital data. Information is traded across global networks between gamers, players, users and modders in what Lash (2002) terms 'global flows'. Flexibly made products are passed between people along planet-wide, digital networks, linking the producer to the consumer and blurring the line between them. Lash sees information culture as displacing the manufacturing culture of the twentieth century,

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[8] Another genre of game with a unique and exceptionally well-established modding culture is the First-Person Shooter (FPS) game – see Nieborg (2005) for more on this.
[9] http://potter.esssims.com/
[10] http://home.arcor.de/fipsy_77/

moving data, knowledge and expertise from the hands of the few to the many:

> It suggests a politics, not of communicative action, civil society and the public sphere; but instead a politics of *symbolic* practices taking place on *the margins of public and private spaces* (p. 32; my emphasis).

It is my contention that communities such as CTO Sims reside within these public-private spaces – that is, places on the World Wide Web that are visible only to those who know where to look – and that they essentially trade in the products of their 'symbolic practices', thereby fulfilling the needs of the community by providing the consumer with digital-cultural artefacts that reflect their own symbolic preferences.

However, Lash also accepts the autonomy of these artefacts, i.e., that they may move (through global flows) irrespective of the intent of their original creators. A Sims mod may find its way into the hands of a player who is not quite satisfied with it; hence they may choose to modify the object further, reappropriating content previously designed by another, and projecting their own needs, cultural bias or experience, onto it.

Lash's view of information culture is limited to the artefacts that are the objects of global flows, and how they pass between people via communication technologies. But what about the people themselves – namely, the modders, the gamers, the users, and those who broker these digital artefacts?

1.3.2 *The Sims* and participatory culture

The people who mod *The Sims* and create CC are essentially hobbyists. They work closely with their machines on very narrowly defined projects (Turkle, 1995). They are what Leadbeater and Miller (2004) have called *pro-ams*, or professional amateurs. They straddle the boundary between the producer and the consumer, appropriating what they consume and transforming them into something different, something more. They are 'users', creators and programmers "involved with the machine in a hands-on way, but […] not interested in the technology except as it enables an application" (Turkle, 1995).

Yet they are not merely hobbyists locked in the proverbial garden shed. Nor are the objects of their creation the traditional products of handcrafts, chemistry or small-scale engineering. These are postmodern objects, which Turkle defines as "decentered", "fluid",

"nonlinear", and "opaque"[11]. These "exist in the information and connections of the Internet and the World Wide Web… in the creatures on a SimLife computer game, and in the simulations of the quantum world that are routinely used in introductory physics courses" (Turkle, 1995, p. 17). The WWW becomes an interconnected playground for the hobbyist to inhabit, a new kind of garden shed where the tools of the trade are now accessible to other users on a global scale.

In her extensive research into Sims modding communities, Sihvonen (2011) found them to be very much situated in the public-private sphere of the internet:

> …analysing…modding without connection to the internet is not feasible, since the players' activities tend to be so fundamentally based on the practices of sharing gameplay tips, hints and experiences as well as distributing the actual mods (pp. 105-106).

Both Sihvonen, and Gee and Hayes (2010) hint at the WWW being more than just the site of distribution of game mods. It is also the site of different processes, different exchanges. They mention the sharing of tips, hints and experiences; but that is not all they acknowledge. Throughout their studies they highlight the participatory nature of modding behaviour – how player-modders band together in order to produce mods that require several areas of expertise, or how mod consumers make the leap into becoming mod producers themselves. Both studies cite many disparate activities, such as wiki development, collaborative labour, and computer-mediated communication (CMC) via email, chat, or peer-to-peer networks. Knowledge is shared and passed on to others through an "informal mentorship whereby what has been learned and gathered by the most experienced is passed on to novices" (Sihvonen, 2011). It is clear that the global flows through which mods or custom content move are facilitated by the banding together of the modders and gamers, circulating knowledge, expertise and skills throughout the wider community. This is a concept that has been named 'participatory culture' by the media studies scholar, Henry Jenkins (1992).

Participatory culture has played a large part in the study of game modding communities. It is characterised by collaborative groups that work together to create and not just to consume. Game modding is but one facet of a larger movement that involves activities ranging from the creation of fanfiction, fanart and fanzines, to wikis, folksonomies and mashups. All of these may be termed or considered a component of participatory culture as a whole.

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[11] This view is countered by that of Kirby (2009), who considers these traits to be indicative of a new, digital modernist ('digimodern'), rather than postmodern, culture. Moreover, it is his suggestion that these 'objects' are "haphazard" and ephemeral, and, in many cases, disturbing, in that the participatory aspect of their creation is more indicative of "desocialization" and "pseudoautism". See Ch. 2 of his book, *Digimodernism.*

Jenkins (2006a, pp. 135-136) defines participatory culture through three important new trends:

1. Consumers are able to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate media content via new technologies;
2. Sub-cultures promote a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) approach to creating new media content, and;
3. Cultural artefacts flow across multiple media channels and demand audience participation due to present economic trends favouring horizontally integrated media[12].

Previous research into Sims communities has found that all three are certainly at play – Sivhonen highlights the complex indexing methods used by 'Simmers' to catalogue their game content, and also notes the reconstructive dimension of online collaboration between communities and their members. More recent incarnations of the Sims franchise have been released on various platforms, such as mobile phones, iPad and Facebook, as well as on consoles and PCs. Fans also use mods to create elaborate *gamics* (graphic novels made using screenshots of the game) and *machinima* (filmmaking which uses the game engine to create movies), remediating game content into entirely new forms[13].

In recent years, participatory culture has seen much development and discussion in the arena of media studies. A dearth of related concepts has grown up around it. These include *playbour* (Küklich, 2005), *produsage* (Bruns, 2005), *prosumption* (Toffler & Toffler, 2006), *commons-based peer production* (Benkler, 2006), *bricolage* (Deuze, 2006), *commodification* (Hand, 2008), and *passionate affinity groups* (Gee and Hayes, 2010). Variations on a theme, these terms all seek to describe the same essential model – that of the production of (digital) artefacts by a collaborative, consumer-led group.

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[12] It is important to note here that the economic element of Jenkins' theory – namely, that there is an exploitative aspect to participatory culture, in that corporations use and make profit from user mods (whether literally or figuratively) – is largely irrelevant to the aims of this paper. EA no longer supports *The Sims*, and the game and its related expansion packs are no longer in print. Indeed, finding the game usually involves a search through second-hand sales and eBay. Whilst economic exploitation may be pertinent in a discussion of the later *Sims 2* and *Sims 3*, both actively supported by EA, it may be safely set aside for the remainder of this paper.

[13] Gamics and machinima form an important part of remediation activities within *The Sims* community, but are not applicable to the purposes of this study. For more information, Gee and Hayes give an excellent account of fan-made gamics in *Women and Gaming* (2010).

1.3.3 *The Sims* and produsage

Recent scholarship has, by and large, accepted the blurring between the producer and consumer as a feature of postmodern consumerist society (Miller, 2011). Consumer studies have also embraced its existence in the form of a new business model, *social technographics* (Li, 2007). This outlines 6 levels of consumer, benchmarked according to their participation in consumer-based social technologies. These may include blogging, tagging, uploading videos and images, or maintaining a website. According to social technographics, a consumer may be anything from a creator to an 'inactive' (or what may also be termed a 'lurker' in the Sims community). Social technographics is a business model which seeks to engage with consumers by studying their participation in social technologies, creating a meeting point for producers and consumers, a kind of common ground where producers can learn more about their audience and tailor products to their needs and desires.

This concept of the converging nature of producing and consuming is not a new one. The idea of the 'prosumer' (an amalgamation of producer and consumer) was first touted by Toffler in 1971. Only in more recent years, with the rise of the internet and the WWW, has Toffler's prediction come into its own. But taking aside the profitable, corporate side to participatory culture – in which some may see prosumers as being exploited and their user-generated content appropriated by the conglomerates they unwittingly serve (for example, Kline, Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2003; Lessig, 2004; Brown and Quan-Haase, 2012) – other scholars have seen the benign benefits and social power of such endeavours, where custom content is created by and *for* the community, with or *without* the aid of a backing corporation.

This is what Axel Bruns (2006) has termed *produsage*, where digital artefacts are created communally and imbued with a kind of group ownership. As Miller explains:

> …information and cultural products are 'prodused' in a networked, communal environment involving both traditional consumers and producers, and … such information or products are not finished products owned and controlled by an author, but communally owned, unfinished 'processes' (2011, p. 97).

Wikipedia, of course, is such an entity – a user-generated, digital encyclopaedia, its content eternally added to, updated and regurgitated by the global population of contributors that both use and maintain it. Other well-known examples include YouTube, Flickr and Facebook.

Bruns (2006) himself cites *The Sims* as an example of produsage, explaining its users'

output as "the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement". He indicates five trends which can be observed in the domains in which produsage occurs:

1. User-led content production, where content is created by users;
2. Collaborative engagement, where more than one user may contribute to the production process;
3. Palimpsestic, iterative and evolutionary development, where a digital artefact may evolve into many forms, take on different functions, and be reappropriated for different purposes;
4. An alternative approach to intellectual property, where there is no traditional concept of a single 'author', and;
5. Heterarchical, permeable community structures, where individuals may participate in different roles within a group, taking on a variety of tasks and activities within any given project.

All these traits can be seen in the Sims community, as evidenced by Sihvonen's research, where custom content is constantly reappropriated, remediated and remoulded by countless users; and where the user develops a sometimes intimate bond with the content that they produse. Part of this paper's study is to investigate on a more intimate level how these factors come into play within a single, enclosed community – that of CTO Sims.

1.3.4 *The Sims* and collective intelligence

In his discussion of digital cultures, Miller (2011) cites 'collective intelligence' as a hallmark of new media experiences. Proposed by Pierre Levy in 1994, collective intelligence describes the coordination of skills, knowledge, intelligence and expertise through modern networking technologies, enabling groups to complete tasks that are outside the means or skill set of a lone individual. Levy (2010) briefly defines it as "the capacity of human collectives to engage in intellectual cooperation in order to create, innovate and invent" (p. 71), whilst Miller himself describes it as: "…the spontaneous or self-organised pooling of talents, resources and information through networked communication technologies towards problem-solving and collective creation that would not be achievable through individual effort" (p. 85).

Levy sees collective intelligence as a key aspect of the knowledge-based or information economy, and notes that it is multiplied through the existence of digital networks. Collective intelligence has been the driving force behind such projects as Wikimedia Commons and De.li.cious. In Levy's estimation, collective intelligence is positively tied to the growth of human development, and is a driving force behind it; yet it is also a *product* of human development. New communication technologies have allowed collective intelligence to thrive and flourish.

In Sihovnen's findings of an 'informal mentorship' within Sims communities, in the circulation of know-how and self-taught skills, such collective intelligence is perhaps the embodiment of the Sims modding community. Each modder has a skill-set to bring to any one single project, a vital element to bring to a single whole. It is my assertion that CTO Sims is a form of collective intelligence, an information economy through which produsers may collaborate in the making of unique digital artefacts. But it is also the digital artefacts that become the object of that information economy – their relative scarcity makes them an information commodity in their own right, and knowing where to find them brings the produser's cycle of collective intelligence full circle.

1.3.5 Evaluation of the literature

In reviewing the relevant literature, the aim is not merely to regurgitate previous research. Indeed, in the realm of game and media studies, it is becoming customary to talk of participatory culture and produsage (Jenkins, 2006a; Gee and Hayes, 2010; Sihvonen, 2011). What *is* the object of this study is to explore these cultural phenomena within the broader context of information culture as an entire entity, and as it applies to a single online gaming community – CTO Sims. In so doing, a merging of information and participatory culture (in all its wider, related forms) emerges as an appropriate framework for the study of such a community, and in the telling of its story. The aim is not for the researcher to develop theories per se; rather, it is to allow the CTO Sims community to write its own theory in relation to its own information use, and therefore to record the unique features of one information culture amongst many.

1.4 Methodology

In studying CTO Sims, an ethnographic approach was deemed most appropriate. According to Pickard (2007), the "focus of an ethnography is to describe and interpret a cultural and social group". CTO Sims may be considered such a group - it is self-contained, and members are required to register before being allowed access to the site. Group interaction also occurs outside of the site (e.g. via email or chat) - however, the bulk of the activity takes place on-site.

Whilst the site is centred around a digital library, members have access to a forum where they may interact with one another. Topics range from game-related tutorials to political discussions to mild banter. These social and cultural elements interlink to form the basis of what I suggest is an information culture.   Since it is the cultural fabric of CTO Sims that is the object of study, an ethnographic method was deemed the most appropriate methodology - in particular, a virtual ethnographic methodology.

An ethnography implies a prolonged term of observation - usually one year (Pickard, 2007). This is evidently not possible at postgraduate level, short of doctoral research. Fortunately, I have the benefit of having been a member of CTO Sims since 2009, and as an active member since late 2010. This has afforded me a head start in familiarising myself with the community's cultural milieu. I am already accepted by the community and a 'familiar face' to members. Thus I am already considered an insider; one of the prerequisites of an ethnography being to observe a culture from an insider point of view.

1.4.1 What is virtual ethnography?

Virtual ethnography as a methodology was first proposed by Christine Hine in 2000 as a method of studying online communities and cultures. It "takes the notion of a field site as a localised space and moves it into the virtual world of physically distributed actions" (Taurah, 2006). CTO Sims is such a community, and thus it was deemed most appropriate to use Hine's theoretical framework as a basis for this study. In her seminal work, *Virtual Ethnography*, Hine highlights ten principles of virtual ethnography, namely:

1. Virtual ethnographers maintain a sustained presence in the field, with intensive engagement in the everyday life of its inhabitants;
2. The internet must be accepted as both culture *and* cultural artefact;

3. The field is mobile, rather than located in a particular place;

4. Flow and connectivity replaces location and boundary as the field site;

5. The ethnographer should explore the making of boundaries and connections, especially between the 'virtual' and 'real';

6. Intermittent engagement rather than long-term immersion is appropriate;

7. Virtual ethnography is necessarily partial;

8. Intensive engagement with mediated interaction adds a reflexive dimension to the ethnography;

9. The ethnography is conducted *of*, *in* and *through* the virtual, and;

10. Virtual ethnography is adaptive, suiting itself to the conditions in which it finds itself.

The premise of virtual ethnography is to analyse and better understand the *social* underpinnings of an online community. By immersing oneself in that community, the ethnographer is given a unique opportunity to examine the boundaries between the virtual and the real, between the online and the offline world, and to experience online interactions on their own terms. It is this in-built reference to the virtual world of the Internet that renders virtual ethnography so relevant to the study of CTO Sims, and to the representation of the collective identity of its members.

But this study is not merely concerned with the virtual denizens that populate communities such as CTO Sims – it is also concerned with the digital cultural artefacts that those denizens fashion, and the processes through which they do so.

1.4.2 'A Workers' Inquiry 2.0' – a methodological framework

In order to better examine these cultural objects and these creative processes, I have made use of a new method of virtual ethnography called 'A Workers' Inquiry 2.0', recently developed by Brown and Quan-Haase (2012). Since its focus is on the study of produsage in social media contexts, it has been used as a methodological framework for the study of CTO Sims.

Brown and Quan-Haase's method is distinctly Marxist in tone, its purpose being to induce 'worker awareness' of their exploitation at the hands of the large corporations that appropriate the work of produsers for their own profit. This was perhaps pertinent to *The Sims* at one time; but as Electronic Arts no longer sells or supports the game, there is no longer any monetary gain to be made from the work of its produsers. Be that as it may, Brown and Quan-Haase's methodology

is still of particular use in its focus on produsage, commodification and co-creation. Their study of an online produsage community – Flickr – provides a framework on which to build the study of further virtual communities that engage in produsage.

Brown and Quan-Haase outline four stages of participant recruitment:

1. Engage the community in a discussion on the topic of interest;
2. Approach a select group for participation in more in-depth data collection;
3. Obtain informed consent for interviews, and;
4. Determine the time and media through which interviews will be conducted.

As with any ethnography, 'A Workers' Inquiry 2.0' encourages the immersion of the researcher into the field – in this case, the produsage community – and that the researcher explore and record the field both as an insider and an outsider. Triangulation from various sources is recommended in order to obtain as holistic a picture as possible of the community – produsers should be questioned about their thoughts, feelings and motivations with regards to their roles as produsers.

A key aspect of the methodology – and of utmost important to this study – is to locate and determine the digital artefacts at the heart of the community, as these "directly speak to the complex relations that exist between produsers, the rest of the community, and the norms and mores that characterize the site" (p. 503).

Thus do Brown and Quan-Haase single out the three main subjects of their methodology – the produser, the community, and the artefact. Together these create a kind of symbiotic ecology that perpetuates its own propagation.   The community facilitates the produser's output; the produser gives back that output via the community. Each feeds the other in a kind of virtuous circle (see Figure 1).

It is worth noting that this ecology has also been applied to *The Sims* itself. In his thesis, Curlew (2004) produces his own ecological cycle of produsage (albeit one that speaks in terms of EA's manipulation of the community in order to gain profits – see Figure 2). Whilst, as far as *The Sims* is concerned, Curlew's model is outdated, it does serve as a point of integration between *The Sims* communities and Brown and Quan-Haase's ecology. Cutting out the official website from Curlew's model still allows for a more intimate guide into the relationship between the individual produser, the *Sims* community, and the artefacts they produse.
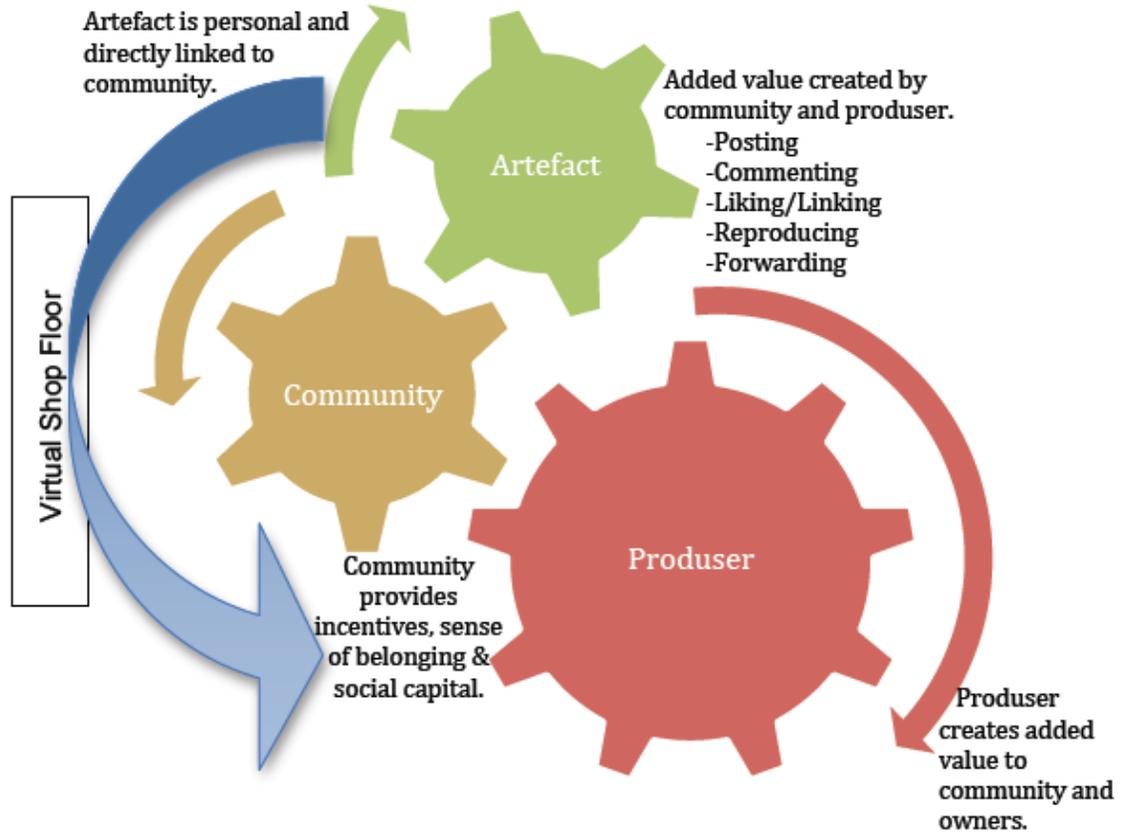
Figure 1: Brown and Quan-Haase's ecology of produsage. (Licensed via Creative Commons).
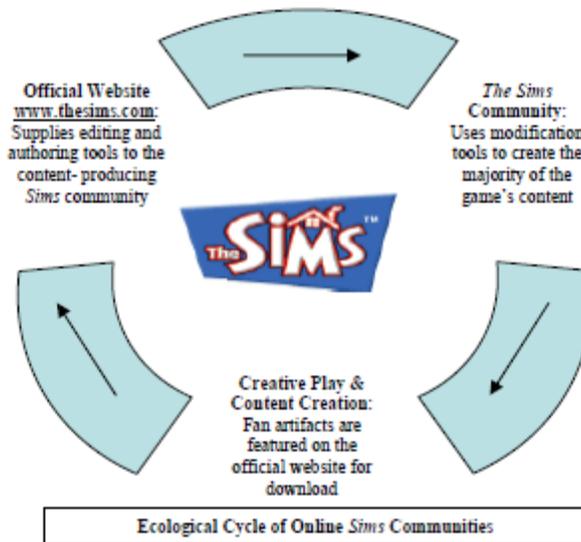
Figure 2: Curlew's ecological cycle of online *Sims* communities. (Curlew, 2004. Reproduced with permission).

1.4.3 Methodological limitations

Both Mann and Stewart (2000) and Orgad (2005) highlight the problems of 'going native' in the context of virtual ethnographies, and the difficulties in striking a balance between building trusting relationships with participants and maintaining a critical approach to the information they contribute.   Indeed, in Hine's ten guidelines for conducting a virtual ethnography, total immersion is discouraged in favour of sporadic interaction.   Balance is an overarching issue in any ethnography as, by its very nature, it is emic, and participation and immersion are the main tools of data collection. The researcher must share in the lives of participants; yet equally, they must aim to represent their realities as fairly and accurately as possible (Pickard, 2007).

The main limitation of this study was accepted early on - namely, can I be sufficiently considered an outsider, and successfully present an outsider's point of view in my research? Having been a long-term member of CTO, and an administrator since early 2011, the reader may thus question the researcher's ability to describe and analyse data. The reader can be assured that great pains were taken to be as objective as possible in conducting this study, and in allowing the participants to guide the flow of the investigation, as opposed to any preconceptions on the researcher's part.

A more pressing limitation is the attitude members may have towards myself. As an active member and poster on the forum, many may be aware of my character, views and opinions. As an administrator, they may seek to ingratiate themselves, and colour their responses accordingly. This can be difficult to minimise, and can only be dealt with by maintaining a critical approach, and encouraging participants to speak freely, assuring them of their right to anonymity.

1.4.4 Description of methodology

Recruitment of participants followed Brown and Quan-Haase's four-step process. Beginning in late May, posts were made in the CTO forum advising members of the study to be undertaken. Members were invited to question the researcher, as well as to participate in the study. Considerable interest was generated.

A week later, members were invited to take part in a preliminary survey. The survey was

created using online software called SurveyMonkey[14]. Members were asked 10 basic questions -
e.g., age, gender, nationality and so on - in order to ascertain the community demographics[15].
Other questions asked about member experiences in, and views on, CTO Sims. As the study was
emic, and essentially led by the members' responses, the questions were intended to form the
basis of further, in-depth interviews. Members were allowed to respond anonymously.

The survey was left up for 2 weeks and gleaned 77 responses. Data from these may be
found in Appendix C.

As soon as the survey was taken down, a post was made in the forum inviting members to
participate in in-depth interviews. Interviews were largely unstructured and conversational.
Those interested either emailed me, or contacted me through CTO's private messaging system.
Each of the interested parties was sent a generic email, informing them of their rights as a
participant, and attaching a consent form (see Appendix D.1). Since most respondents were based
overseas, forms were filled out electronically; although one UK-based respondent opted to fill hers
in by post. Each respondent answered three generic questions:

1. How long have you been a member of CTO?
2. What do you think of CTO's file system and its efforts to preserve Sims 1 content?
3. As a member, how would you describe your role at CTO?

According to their replies, subsequent interview questions were tailored to each
participant, following an emic, participant-led approach. Interviewees were allowed to choose the
method of their interview. Most chose to be interviewed via email, although two chose the
Google Talk platform. Interviews were conducted throughout the study period. Participants were
invited to contribute their own opinions, and to ask further questions of the researcher at the
close of the interviews.

As is regular in an ethnographic study, participant observation was a constant method of
data collection, and provided the bulk of the study's findings. It also led to the formulation of
relevant questions for the concurrently-running interviews.

Notes and observations were recorded in a notebook, reflecting on participant interviews
and behaviours in the forum, and also on events, activities and interactions on the site and

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[14] Available at http://www.surveymonkey.com/.
[15] Whilst this paper does not concern itself with the demographic features of CTO Sims due to space
constraints, it is worth taking note of these features in order to make a comparison with studies of other
gaming produsage communities. In particular, Gee and Hayes (2010) and Sihvonen (2011) highlight older
females as playing a major role in Sim communities, a trend borne out by the survey of CTO Sims members.

between its members. Data was processed through a piece of qualitative data analysis software, NVivo[16]. This allowed for the more efficient collating, cross-referencing and retrieval of relevant information.

All participants have been quoted by their usernames or an alias; quotes are given as is with spelling and grammatical errors intact[17]. Related transcripts of survey results, interviews and forum postings have been reproduced in the Appendices. Due to the length of some of these materials, editing has been introduced where appropriate.

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[16] Available at http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx. In this case, the free 30 day trial was used.
[17] It is worth noting that some participants speak English as a second language, which may account for any errors.

2.0 CTO Sims – A Virtual Ethnography

The summer of 2012 is a busy one for CTO Sims. The site is preparing to migrate to a new server, after 4 years of existence and accruing a total of 2,410 members. The site's digital library – a collection of some 23,000 items – must be downloaded from the old site, and manually re-uploaded to the new one. Volunteers are working to salvage the most important scraps of information from the members' forum, a treasure trove comprising 9,846 different subjects and 150,579 individual messages. Included are tutorials, guides, the records of collaborative projects between members; showcases of members' creative works, site lists, wish lists, FAQ lists, troubleshooting lists. Only a fraction of these can be saved before the site closes on 25 September 2012. The custom content – the hub of CTO's existence – will be saved in its entirety; much of the forum-based documents will be lost forever.

As fate would have it, this scenario turns out to be the background of an ethnographic study into CTO Sims' (christened 'CTO' by its members for short) information culture.

The 'real world' librarian would most likely struggle with the implications of the loss of so much data. For the members of CTO however, most do not appear to see their world as one made from ones and zeros, of Lash's 'symbolic artefacts' and 'global flows'. Neither do they see their world as one fundamentally made of information.

"A lot of it doesn't matter," says Arty-choke, one of the volunteers, of the forum threads he is moving. "…I'd say most will not be missed… Some will miss the history (myself included) – the posts that reflect the evolution of the site – … Most will NOT miss them as they have not read them."

Arty-choke says the loss will be a 'sacrifice' to some. For the new members, they cannot miss what they do not know. So he is helping to salvage what is important to the community as a whole.

Even in the 'real world' – or RL (real life) as CTO members term it – this scenario is a familiar one.   When a family moves house, when a business moves premises, when a conglomerate moves headquarters, they sort, they separate the wheat from the chaff, they decide what to keep and what to throw away. They preserve what is important.

But what *is* important to CTO members?

In the following sections, this paper will aim to determine just that.

2.1 The digital library

2.1.1 User-aggregation

> The basic, universal goals of digital libraries are to provide a locally organized, conveniently accessible, and (if possible), an easily *actionable* collection of digitized *knowledge* in some field or fields for an audience of *learners*.
> (Krowne, 2003)

When CTO was first established, it was a way of collecting together, in one easily accessible place, custom content from *The Sims* that (both now and at the time) was rapidly disappearing from the internet. In the beginning, there was no pre-planned process for collecting and organising the files into a coherent library. People who had files could upload what they had in any fashion they deemed appropriate. "Uploading was definitely more haphazard," Hypnotiq, an early member of the site muses. "Back then it was more of a free for all. 'Got a large jumble of old files from different sites? Upload away!'"

The web-mistress, jmrcrp, hadn't given organisation much thought either. She had the hosting covered, and a Joomla!-based[18], document management and download software called DOCman. With no funding and limited resources, now it seems something of a miracle that CTO has been able to grow to a site of over 2,000 members and 23,000 files at all. In actual fact, DOCman is not suitable for managing a vast amount of files[19]; but at the time, the original CTO members were not aware of just how many files they were going to aggregate. For jmrcrp, the main reason for choosing the software was entirely different:

> It [DOCman] is the one system I found that is easy or even possible for users to directly add to the collection (upload files). Most of the other ones are meant for only the SuperAdministrator to add files to the collection. This was very important to me, and I think it helps make CTO what it is - a community effort where everyone contributes to what we have.

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[18] Joomla! is an open source content management system (CMS) that allows for the building of websites with a high degree of user control. See http://www.joomla.org/ for more information.

[19] In the past CTO has had problems with the files list becoming inaccessible in the administrator's control panel. Whilst this did not affect the ability to download the files from the library, it did make it difficult to delete duplicate files from the server. In troubleshooting the problem, jmrcrp was told by Joomla! support staff that "large numbers of files might slow down searches and the ability to pull up the files list" (Appendix D.2 , p 86, email 2b).

Due to the nebulous status of many files[20], it made sense for CTO's library to be a user-aggregated one – one that community members could add to from their own stores or collections. Thus a long-lost object, thought to have disappeared forever from the digital record, may turn up in the hands of a single person, who may share that item with other users via CTO's dedicated archive. In this way, CTO was to become a platform, a kind of contact point from which members could request files and provide them, sometimes lifting a veil from over the past, uncovering and reconnecting digital artefacts once more with the present. Whoever passes by may access them.

This is what Hand (2008) has called *horizontal information* – a postmodern reaction (in Turkle's sense of fluidity and non-linearity) to traditionally top-down, hierarchically-disseminated knowledge. With the rise of new information communication technologies, information 'flows' have replaced the old structures, with the Web a "perpetually reflexive culture of information flows and unruly objects" (Hand, 2008). Why are these objects unruly? Because they traverse the networked Web in liquid form, where function, status and author are all ultimately meaningless. The unruly object belongs to all who would claim (and modify) it. As Lash opines:

> The global information culture for its part witnesses a new autonomy for *objects*, which in their global flows tend to escape from the intentions, from the sovereignty of the subject (2002, p. viii).

This harks back to Bruns' original concept of produsage, where content is essentially communal in nature. From its inception, CTO Sims was created to work in a way in which the community both contributed and were rewarded by the CC it collected. As its members grew, so too did its digital library. As Simtonic, a member of CTO enthuses: "due to the steadily increasing number of members new content can be added nearly every day" and, "at the moment [CTO] has the widest range of Sims 1 files of all categories".

Such is the reciprocal, self-propagating nature of the user-aggregated library.

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[20] Many files were erased from the digital record when the sites they were offered on closed. Some were archived via the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine (http://www.waybackmachine.org), which has since become a rich resource for Sims CC hunters. However, most copies of CC are in the hands of users who downloaded them from the original sites before they went down. Thus, a particular item may, conceivably, only be in the hands of a single user.

2.1.2 Digital cultural artefacts

> With computers we can simulate nature in a program or leave nature aside and build second natures limited only by our powers of imagination and abstraction. The objects on the screen have no simple physical referent. In this sense, life on the screen is without origins and foundation. It is a place where signs taken for reality may substitute for the real. Its aesthetic has to do with manipulation and recombination.
>
> (Turkle, 1995, p. 47)

CTO began as an effort to create an easily accessible digital library. To this day, that library is the hub around which the rest of the site revolves. Even jmrcrp herself admits: "I feel that most new members are joining to have access to the files."

It's something many members have acknowledged throughout my stay at the site. In an interview, Arty-choke says of the file section: "It's the reason we all joined CTO". I remember myself first joining the site in order to download animations that enabled Sims to make love – the most downloaded CC on the site at 941 hits at the time of writing. Tawdry, perhaps; yet such content has a huge lure to thousands, if not tens of thousands, of users. As one participant noted, "when all is said and done, it's my obsessive compulsive need to download more sims stuff that brings me back [to CTO]". And vetavestal, a member of CTO for 4 years, is even of the opinion that *The Sims* "is a cultural product which should be preserved".

It is clear that the custom content that comprises the CTO library is of vital importance to many members; indeed, that it is the lifeblood of the site. Custom content is the *raison d'etre* of *The Sims* community.

Custom content might be considered what Lash has called the "symbolic or cultural goods" that make up global information flows – items that are flexibly made and constructed. All CC, in whatever form they may take, is based upon an original, Maxis-made product. The original must be cloned in order to create a base for an entirely new object. The end product is a construct, a modified object that consists of both an original and a copy. These are the 'unruly objects' Hand speaks of, and they are the commodities of the larger informational world that CTO Sims inhabits.

Surfing the online Sims world, one gets a sense of just how powerful the lure of custom content can be. CTO Sims is not the only site to offer archives of long-lost CC. There are other fora such as The Sims Cave[21] and Neighborhood 99[22]. There is a plethora of Yahoo Groups,

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[21] http://simscave.mustbedestroyed.org/
[22] http://starlightsims.yuku.com/

gathered together under the moniker of 'Saving the Sims'[23], that cater to the many users hunting the final piece to round off a collection, or to create the perfect house for their Sims. A large bulk of CTO Sims' forum is dedicated to WCIF's (short for 'Where Can I Find?'), listing hundreds of posts pleading with members to help find a missing dining table, a half-remembered hat prop, or an Asian flavoured set to finish off the Japanese-style house they are building in-game.

A recent member of the site, ingriddav, explains her compulsion to download new CC in a post:

> Many of you will believe....."oh my....this ingriddav is crazy, she always has a wcif". But my answer is "I really love to play Sims 1" The reason I always have a wcif is that I try to make a huge collection of files, old and new, you never know what you need :D

Other WCIF's are based around users trying to rebuild collections lost in a hard-drive crash:

> I will have to start from scratch.....all my games & the customized parts & all my downloads. *sigh* I really had other things planned for this summer than redoing my computer. So I'm whining here & crying too!! Waaaaaaaaaaa!!!!! I love this game so much that I am having withdrawal pains from not being able to play!! It's only been a week!! — hobbitwife

Hundreds such posts demonstrate the intimate relationship users have with their custom content downloads. This is not inherently extraordinary in itself – consider the close bond collectors generate with their collections, or that fans form with the objects of their fandom. Sihvonen notes that these custom content downloads take on another dimension of association with its owner because of the "individual signification" that the owner imbues the content with, thus rendering them "the 'transtexual manifestation' of *The Sims* players' individual gameplay preferences". In this light, CC may not just be seen as inanimate game assets, but also as the digital prisms through which a user may amplify their own cultural biases and experiences (Wirman, 2008). This is typified in the words of one CTO member, whose comment on the custom content created by another member was:

> Thank you, Olena, for the cool Ipods. My simmies are like me, they like one of every color! — Kat165

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[23] The initial group is located at http://ca.groups.yahoo.com/group/savingthesims/, although there are many other groups gathered under the 'Saving the Sims' series.

For Kat165, the lives and predilections of her Sim characters are synonymous wither her own.

When one sees that CTO's digital library caters to the predilections of nearly every member – its collection covers everything from medieval to movie themes, from fetishes to fashion labels, from Goth to ethnic and just about everything in between – it is not hard to see why it attracts so much attention. It is less about scarcity than it is about *personalisation*; because these objects are digital, they can be tailored to the needs, wants and desires of the user; because they are the products of social processes, they become less commercial products (as they were in their original iteration, as created by Maxis), and more *cultural* artefacts (Bruns, 2006; Miller, 2011).

Throughout the course of this study, it became clear that CTO Sims was housing a collection of such *digital cultural artefacts*; that they were not merely the personal works of individual creators, but also mirrors upon which users were able to reflect their own personal idiosyncrasies. Both "valuable" yet "vulnerable", these unique objects are subject to a never-ending process of change; they are rarely fixed (Wirman, 2008).

This section has discussed CC as a cultural end-product; but its importance also lies in its role as part of an ongoing social process, the particulars of which will be examined in a later section.

2.1.3 File organisation and user conventions

Since CTO was migrating to a site using totally new software, a manual move of its digital library was required. At 23,000 files, this was no small task. I offered to help in the transfer, which would involve the wholesale downloading and re-uploading of the custom content files and any related, illustrative images. But this was not the only task in hand. Since many of the files had been uploaded haphazardly in CTO's infancy, there were many incorrectly or insufficiently catalogued entries, or items that had been uploaded in bulk, compressed files, in which few knew what the contents were. Another problem was the inappropriate manner in which many files had been uploaded. Whilst guides were available for uploading files, many members were either unaware of it, ignored it, or simply did not understand it. According to Krowne, this ordered chaos is one of the major drawbacks of a user-aggregated digital library (Krowne, 2003).

In my survey of CTO's members, many of the 77 respondents remarked unfavourably on these aspects of the library:

We need a better system for storing and organizing the files. We also need a more consistent maintenance routine. Personally, I think there should be a way of indicating, when a file is uploaded, if it is an original zip from the site, or if the file has been altered — deekitty31.

I do wish all of the downloads had photos. I simply hate not knowing what is in a file — darckn1ght.

… the file system has much to be desired. I'd like to be able to choose whether to download individual files. Don't know if it's possible, but it would be nice to be able to enter multiple words in the search box. It sometimes gets tedious searching through all the "white" files when you're looking for "white windows" — sardonicx4.

After presenting a report on the survey findings to the site members, CTO's webmistress, jmrcrp, was happy to iron out some of the problems. For example, a more prominent link was added to the file search page, as many members had been under the misapprehension that the general site search also searched through the library itself.   For a few months before the move to the new site, a couple of members had also been working through the bulk zip files, separating them into individual items and re-uploading them to the archive. This was a painstaking task; the move to the new site gave an opportunity for the collection to be more accurately and effectively organized wholesale.

Over the years, a number of classification conventions have been developed by Sims modding communities – Sihvonen points out "these online loci have their own conventions and terms of use that continue to shape and exert control over these products and services as well as the processes of interpretation and interaction they invite their users to engage in" (Sihvonen, p. 80). These conventions have been so ingrained that many users take it for granted that they exist. CTO Sims is no exception. The categories in its library are based on a complex indexing system which reflects these user-generated conventions.   CTO's early attempts to subvert these conventions (by arranging files without any formal indexing system) soon fell into anarchy. Ultimately, the files were arranged according to community conventions, being organised by site or original creator, in order to be coherently presented to the user. These general conventions are as follows:

1. Firstly, items are categorised according to their *author* (this may be a person, group, or website).

2. Secondly, they are categorised according to *type* – objects, skins, meshes, walls, floors and lots.

3. Thirdly, they are categorised according to *function* – e.g. female swimwear, kitchen furnishings, etc.

4. Lastly, individual items are expressed by a descriptive title, of which the author is usually the first element (see figure 3).
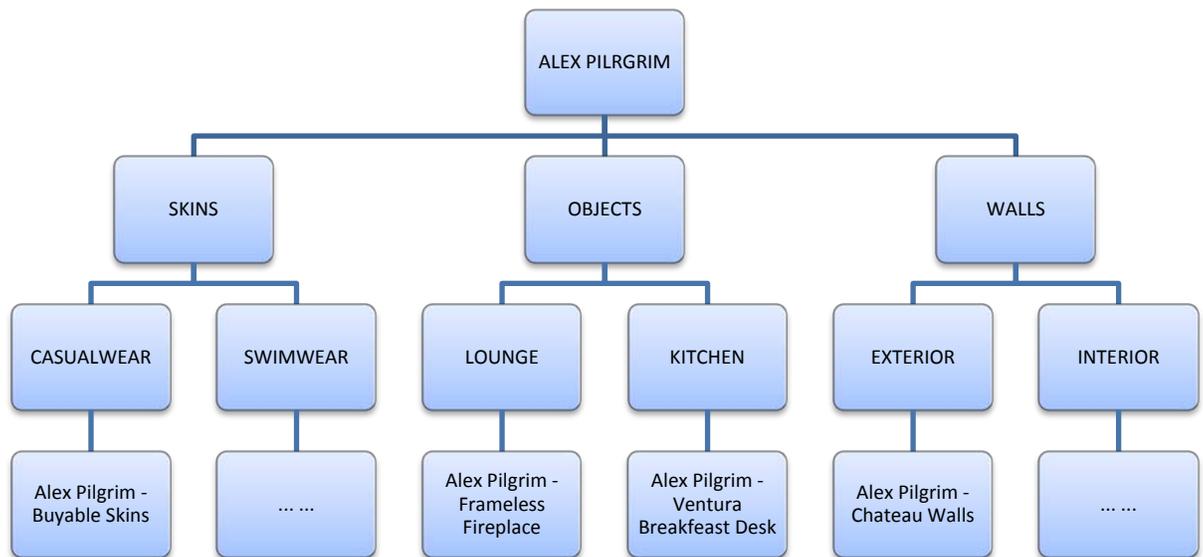
Figure 3 – An example of item organisation for *The Sims*, showing the four levels of categorisation.

This form has by and large proved successful, allowing for easier navigation of the collection.

In order to institute a form of authenticity and integrity, it was also deemed important to arrange the files as closely as possible to the sites that they originally came from:

> I also think that it is important to maintain the integrity of the original files, respecting the creators work and trying to preserve, as much as possible, the feeling or idea they had in mind when they created their sites. Even if they no longer care about their files and abandoned them, I still feel it is important and work hard to do this when I upload — deekitty31.

While this had become the aim of CTO Sims, it was impossible to adhere to because of the unregulated manner in which the digital library had first been built. The move opened up an opportunity to wipe the slate clean and start again from scratch.

CTO is thus fortunate in that it has had the opportunity to rectify its past mistakes. User-aggregated collections gathered on an ad hoc basis require just as much planning and forethought *before* implementation as more traditionally aggregated collections. jmrcrp agreed:

> Someone starting to create a library should know a lot about the type of items that will be in the library, and have very strict and clear-cut rules as to what users can contribute, and in what form. This would have saved countless hours of work if we had done this in the beginning. In addition, the person should create the library with the idea of presenting as much information as possible about the items it holds.

2.1.4 The culture of sharing

Each member of CTO has a different view on how the site's digital library should be organised. This has led to difficulties in maintaining the integrity of its entries. Nevertheless, the members' intimate relationship with the CC enables the library's growth to continue. For example, members may use the forum to post WCIF's or wishlists. If these are fulfilled, the object in question may be added to the library. Likewise, a thread for uploaders is maintained, where members can offer to upload the content of an entire closed site from their own collection. This describes what Krowne (2003) has called the 'optimal motivation' for creating and maintaining a digital library – the desire for more up-to-date material, for more interactivity with the audience, and for more peer review. This is coupled with Krowne's 'philosophical motivation' – a sense of greater camaraderie, democracy and altruism amongst members.

In terms of optimal motivation, CTO is very much driven by this ethos. Original members have explained that the site was originally created in order to provide a haven from the stifling atmosphere of the wider Sims community, where many creators charged for their CC, and chose not to share their work with others[24]. CTO was conceived as a place where people could share any file in peace, and upload any type of file to library, irrespective of the fact that they were fileshare-friendly or not. Sihvonen notes that "sharing content may prove to be a rather risky and problematic endeavour" (p. 119), due to the sensitive issue of copyright (see the following section). This made CTO the target of Simmers who did not share their opinion on file-sharing:

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[24] Some creators chose not to share their work with others, or allow others to modify it. This was opposed to others who chose to share their own files, or the files of non-fileshare-friendly creators, willy-nilly. The fileshare debate is a complex one and there is not sufficient space to discuss it here; however, CTO Sims was seen by many in the community as a 'pirate site' that stole from creators and it was thus subject to much hostility in its infancy.

I was the 117th member to join when CTO was still very much "underground". Back then JM and the other mods had to be very wary of "spies" from other forums who were adamantly against what she was doing—to the point of publicly shaming those who were known file sharers (The Coconut Hut[25] had a forum rank of "bottom feeder" given to any who were known to share files) — Hypnotiq.

In its early days, CTO Sims was the pariah of the Sims community, with many people joining anonymously (or under an alias) in order to avoid conflict. Even during my study of CTO, members were still 'coming out' and revealing their true identities. Yet despite these early difficulties, the lure of free files has allowed CTO to grow its digital library and member base exponentially. Over the years, CTO has become one of the most popular stopping points for *The Sims* CC:

Because of it's unrestricted sharing conditions, the pleasant atmosphere and the convenient access to the files, CTO seems to have got a leading position among the collector's fairs. At the moment it has the widest range of Sims 1 files of all categories, the file section is well assorted, the illustrations are a helpful reminder — simtonic.

This perception of success despite adversity that many members hold may well be a result of Krowne's 'philosophical motivation' – the belief in their collective fellowship and solidarity, and in the altruistic impulse that drives their quest to preserve files for posterity. It is to these elements of digital information culture that we now turn.

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[25] The Coconut Hut was a Sims forum that had a strict non-fileshare policy without a creator's permission.

2.2 The community

2.2.1 Collaboration in modification

The internet has afforded people the ability to come together in one space as has never before been seen in history. The passive role we take in absorbing culture through books, movies and TV is slowly giving way to a mode of productive engagement with these cultural products. The internet becomes a cultural tool with which we are able to play a part in forming culture ourselves (e.g., Turkle, 1995, Jenkins, 2006; Hand, 2008, Miller 2011).

Throughout my observation of CTO Sims, I discovered that members were actively engaging with cultural artefacts and reconfiguring them according to their needs, wants and desires, in an activity that Bruns (2006) has termed *produsage*. Moreover, members were performing this activity *together*.

As mentioned above, *The Sims* creator, Will Wright, had in mind the idea of produsage amongst Sims fans from the outset, encouraging this bricolage culture by turning a blind eye to what, in many cases, might be considered infringement of copyright (see Figure 4). Indeed, fan culture is widely prevalent in the Sims community, with entire sites devoted to a particular fandom (take, again, Conjuring Sims as an example, with its exclusively Harry Potter-related content). Wright acknowledges that in allowing this copycat culture to exist, and in giving users free range to appropriate and remediate, *The Sims* has become the success that it has – and that that success has been built for the most part not by EA/Maxis, but by the users themselves:

> We see such benefit from interacting with our fans. They are not just people who buy our stuff. In a very real sense, they are people who helped to create our stuff… We are competing with other properties for these creative individuals. All of these different games are competing for communities, which in the long run are what will drive our sales… Whichever game attracts the best community will enjoy the most success. What you can do to make the game more successful is not to make the game better but to make the community better (Will Wright, cited in Jenkins, 2006b).

EA/Maxis actively courted produsers in practical ways. It relaxed its EULA (End-User License Agreement) arrangements, and released various authoring tools enabling modification of the game's content (Curlew, 2004). These tools allowed gamers to take a base object already in the game and change it to something new. For example, the Maxis-based program, Face Lift Gold, allows gamer-creators to edit a face into any shape they wish (Figure 5).

Figure 4 – Skins of Miku Hatsune from the Japanese franchise, *Vocaloid*. Such derivative works might well be considered copyright infringement (Skye, CTO Sims).

Figure 5 – A screenshot of Face Lift Gold, depicting extreme modified Sim heads.

Figure 6 – *Left:* Original Maxis bookcase. *Centre:* Black recolour of the Maxis bookcase (jessmasjus, CTO Sims). *Right:* Complete, structural modification of a Maxis bookcase using the original as a base (simtonic, CTO Sims).

Programmes such as these proved to be very popular, and as time went on, gamers began developing their own tools in order to modify game elements further (Sihvonen, 2011). An example is The Sims Transmogrifier[26], which enables the modification of in-game objects. T-Mog (as it is affectionately named by Sim creators) allows anything from a *recolour* of a Maxis object (changing the colour of an item), to a complete structural change (Figure 6).

This custom content would previously have been made available via *The Sims* official website, as well as on creators' personal websites. However, this content has been removed from the official website since 2010, and many creators' websites have disappeared or been abandoned. As has been discussed, CTO Sims took on the mission of preserving CC in its digital library. But as its membership grew, so too did its mission develop. Because of CTO's open sharing policy, the site began to appeal to creators who wanted to modify the work of other creators freely. The site was quick to embrace these newcomers:

> We didn't have many creators in the beginning, but as we grow and more join, I believe they are seeing that one big way to keep the Sims alive is to encourage new creators, to be supportive and help as much as they can. Seeing this, I believe more and more new creators will come forward. People who were afraid to try before because they didn't think they could ever be good enough — deekitty31.

Away from a perceived hostile, outside environment, CTO Sims was becoming its own produsage space for a game that had come to be marginalised by the original company that had created it.

Spending time on the forums reveals just how much of the chatter there revolves around the collaborative production of CC. In addition, many of these collaborations seem to be reached serendipitously. For example, one of the largest and most involved collaboration projects on the site began with a simple post on the WCIF board, wherein one member wanted to find a retro-style bowling alley set (see Appendix E.1 for excerpts of the thread). It turned out that such a set did not exist; but there was sufficient interest in obtaining one for other members to suggest making one from scratch. Within a short space of time, there was a flurry of postings from various members, each contributing to the project in their own way, from posting inspirational pictures, to suggesting bases to use for individual objects, to offering to create objects themselves.

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[26] The official website can be found at http://www.thesimstransmogrifier.com/, although the programme has now been abandoned by its developer.

Interestingly, the thread did not merely focus on the technical aspects of the project. There were also posts reminiscing on retro bowling alleys, often meandering off topic to other memories from members' childhoods. This freedom to discuss a topic without censure – or *freedom of engagement* as Miller (2011) puts it – helps to build a space where members are comfortable contributing to the site on their own terms. One may give a lot of time, skills and resources to a project; others may use a project as a stage for gossiping with others on related topics; others may 'lurk' and read a thread without contributing. Each has "their place and are accorded varying degrees of prestige within the community itself on the basis of their involvement. No one is obliged to contribute more than they want to contribute" (Miller, p. 192).

2.2.2 Prestige or social capital

> I once refered [sic] in one of my forum posts that spending time with them (the creators) was not unlike hanging-out with 'The Rolling Stones' at a barbeque.
> (ripmagnum, CTO Sims member)

If one takes a cursory look at the CTO Sims forum, one will probably find that most of the talking is done by a core of members, and that many of those members are creators – that is, those who engage in creating custom content for *The Sims*. That is perhaps natural, since the progression of a project such as the Retro Bowling Alley collaboration demands much discussion, debate and troubleshooting. And it is probable that much of the 'techno-babble' on these threads might intimidate someone who isn't familiar with the jargon. Creators are given respect and are often praised for their work, skills and perceived superior knowledge (Gee and Hayes, 2010; Sihvonen, 2011). Prestige is not achieved by one's presence as an authority figure per se. As Komito states:

> [I]n electronic groups, social status is rarely based on external attributes, such as occupation or gender in the "real" world; it is dependent on abilities or achievements demonstrated in the group itself (1998, p. 103).

Sihvonen accepts the production and distribution of CC as a source of "peer recognition" and "notoriety"; Gee and Hayes also discuss extensively the followings that creators can garner through the popularity of their mods. Social capital plays a large part in the dynamics of produsage communities in the context of *The Sims* and other similar modifiable games.

Communication technologies such as the internet provide incentives other than monetary reward. These include social capital, recognition and prestige. This in itself is a driving force to share (Leadbeater, 2008; Shirky, 2010). But Leadbeater also accepts that "this sets up a further potential conflict, however, relating to the terms on which people are allowed to participate in these activities and how" (p. 230).

During my time at CTO, I became increasingly aware of a mild feeling of discontent, a impression that some members felt that they were more marginal compared to others. Interestingly, this was not just a sentiment felt by those who were *not* creators. Hypnotiq, a creator and CTO administrator says:

> I think the more active members get the most attention and the creators that create the most objects get more praise than those who only create skins.

Hypnotiq also went on to add that she had noticed that those who made gifts of CC to other members were the ones who got the most gifts in return in a kind of 'gift economy', where those who give more receive more, and thus gain more social capital. For some of the old-time members, all this was proof of a change from the close-knit, intimate group that CTO had been in the beginning:

> CTO had grown, and with that growth, the intimacy that the original group had shared, was gone. The openness and communication with the members had nearly stopped. There was a clique-ish feel to the posts. As if only certain people were permitted to respond, and if others did respond, their input was not as welcome as other's might be. There seemed to be a social order, with the Admin and Creators reigning at the top and the "simple" members were just peasants. The "vibe" that I was getting left me feeling pretty heartbroken, but I felt that I needed to give it time and wait it out. So, I delved back into my collecting and sharing, hoping to get the old feeling back. The separation between the "classes" of members became more defined and more obvious — deekitty31.

Leadbeater is quick to remind us that participation in virtual spaces does not necessarily engender benevolent circumstances. He cites the exploitation of produsers by global corporations, or the spread of radical religious ideals by fundamentalists. In his opinion, a 'hacker ethos' is most desirable in bringing together "self-governing, democratic communities of digital craft workers" (p. 232).

Such communities serve as support networks, encouraging members to learn skills through advice, mentorship and tutorials. Through this guidance, members are able to grow as

creators in their own right. Some may choose to pass on their skills and thus gain the respect of their peers (Gee and Hayes, 2010; Sihvonen, 2011). This cycle enables members to give back what they gain from the community; but this is not a process divorced from the social relations contracted within that community.

One of the successes of CTO Sims is the high level of members that have gone on to become creators through the site. An example is member mmarie, who was inspired to start recolouring and opened her own site in June. But whilst mmarie is excited by the attention her work draws, it is not for fame that she creates; rather, it is something she enjoys doing, something she "just loves to do". For most creators at least, it seems that this is the case. They do what they do for the sheer passion they have for the game itself.

Nevertheless, it is certain that on CTO one may see many examples of exuberant praise being publicly given to certain creators. As the site grew, the inequalities between members seemed more sharply defined. According to Shirky (2010), this is just a part of the growing pains of a participatory culture:

> [I]n participatory systems, "average" is an almost useless concept. The behaviours of the most and least active members diverge sharply as the population grows… In small groups everyone can participate roughly equally, but in large systems a core group and a peripheral one emerge (p. 199).

Some members do see these delineations as potentially damaging to the community – there are others who see it as inevitable, with one member saying that hierarchies are a natural part of community growth and that "there is no other way". Others accept that creators work hard to promote themselves and that they deserve the praise they receive:

> … to be a popular creator it is important to be proactive and build a reputation. BUT I do think that quality creations and popular themes precede that. A good example of that would be Dincer's[27] or Anna's Timeless Treasures[28], they have been long gone but their creations are still some of the most popular around — mmarie.

Whilst access to the custom content tools may be egalitarian, it is what is done with those tools that makes the difference; it is not that participatory culture is inherently egalitarian in itself. As Miller points out "[n]o one is obliged to contribute more than they want to contribute".

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[27] Dincer Hepguler's The Sims Site, available at http://moonsims.asi.org/dh-sims-site/. The site is known for its high quality objects, although it has been abandoned for several years now.
[28] A closed site, once available at http://www.annas-treasures.net/, that specialised in period costumes and antique objects for *The Sims*.

Hierarchies are "often established according to fan knowledge, measures of fandom level or quality" (Watson, 1998, p. 108), more akin to a meritocracy. Where one is placed in this meritocracy is determined by ones own actions, and these are not determined by being a creator per se, but how much you have (or are able) to give back to the community itself:

> I think creators put a lot of time and effort into their creations, but I don't think they put more effort into CTO itself than the rest of us — bogies.
>
> As far as a hierarchy among the members and creators, no, I don't see that at all. I don't see how creators could have more "air time" in the forum than any other members, everyone has the opportunity to post as much as they like — mmarie.

Nevertheless, members seem to accept the need for a hierarchy in the form of a "chain of command"; although this is not by any means an immovable dictatorship, but what (to go back to Bruns' work), might be called a *heterarchy*, where there is no formal hierarchy, nor a state of anarchy – where organisational structures are fluid and permeable (Bruns, 2006). Rather than thinking of virtual community structures in the sense of hierarchies, thinking in terms of a *network* seems more appropriate. Interconnectedness affords a horizontal flow of power, rather than a top-down flow (Castells, 1996; cited in Miller, 2011). In this horizontal world, anyone may become part of a team project, and anyone may become a moderator – it is the prerogative of the individual as to the degree of their involvement.

Furthermore, on CTO Sims, being a creator is not the only method of earning social capital, or to give something back to the community, as we shall discuss in the following section.

2.2.3 Information and knowledge capital

In her discussion of information culture, Ginman (1987) is clear that material resources and intellectual resources are implemented side by side. Taylor (2007) is also keen to talk about gaming communities as networks of knowledge – social networks combined with knowledge databases. "One of the most widespread forms of participatory activity in game culture is the production of elaborate knowledge databases and information about the game," he notes. These "give players an opportunity to share and catalogue game elements far beyond what introductory game manuals provide" (p. 120). CTO itself is a resource for more than just CC. It is a repository for knowledge as well.

In March 2012, a new member named Jonesie registered at CTO Sims. Jonesie is something of a self-avowed technophobe, and confesses to not knowing much about the more technical aspects of *The Sims*; nor is she particularly creative. She admits that joining CTO made her feel somewhat inadequate: "Not being super-tech savvy, or highly creative, I'm pretty much an Observer and a Cheerleader. That made me feel like I wasn't offering very much in return for the benefits I receive from CTO." What set Jonesie apart from most other less tech-savvy members is that she quickly found an alternative way of contributing to the community: "it's why I came up with the idea of creating a definitions Wiki, why I take the time (when I can) to say hello to new Members, and why I provide positive input to other Member's helpful advice and creative contributions when it's appropriate to do so."

Jonesie transformed her perceived shortcomings into a bonus. Shortly after her appearance on the forum, she posted a thread asking for help with all the confusing terminology she was coming up against. The thread, entitled 'Definitions? Do we have an on-site dictionary or glossary?' (see Appendix E.2), immediately sparked a chain of responses from members all over the site. Jonesie herself offered to aggregate all the definitions and present them to the administrators for inclusion on the site. This quickly gained the notice of the administrators, who were happy to host the dictionary as an on-site Wiki that any member could add to and edit.

Jonesie's idea is another example of how a produsage community can pool its resources. No one person can represent the sum of a community's knowledge, but they can contribute towards that knowledge where they feel qualified to do so (Jenkins, 2006). At the time of writing, the 'CTO Wiki' (as the project has been christened) is being compiled by a group of volunteers for the new CTO site. Jonesie, the non-creative technophobe, has recently been promoted to Wiki moderator. Her ability to harness information and knowledge capital has granted her a different kind of success. "Half the joy of being a part of any group is coming up with new (serious or fun) ideas, and urging people to pitch in," she says. "It's a good way of getting to know each other, finding 'kindred spirits,' and keeping the whole forum endeavor moving forward."

Other resources revolve around the education of potential creators. One of the longest running threads on CTO Sims was initiated by simtonic, one of the more prolific creators on the site. The thread, 'anim8or laboratory' (see Appendix E.3), linked to a tutorial simtonic had written for creating objects for *The Sims*. Subsequent posts revolved around hints, tips, and troubleshooting problems, with simtonic giving guidance where she could. Other creators were also eager to compare their methods with simtonic's own. As a result, the thread also inspired novices to begin creating objects from scratch – for example, itharius, mmarie and Ms. Shabby.

Through her experience, simtonic was able to procure considerable information and knowledge capital. This was knowledge that she shared with the community in order to enrich the skills of other members. What began with her reading a similar, German tutorial years earlier bloomed into a desire to pass on her newfound talents to others: "I thought doing something similar for my CTO friends would be an initial help because some of them had expressed a genuine interest to learn creating for Sims," she says. "I wanted to break down barriers because it's not too difficult to make Sims objects out of pre-made 3d models. It was a success – several new creator sites resulted from this tutorial and I'm happy about this."

2.2.4 When produsage breaks down

> This capricious and fickle labour force shows up to 'work' when they want, they concentrate their energies on what they want, work with whom they want, and can walk away from these tasks at any time they see fit.
> (Brown and Quan-Haase, 2012, p. 493)

Despite the collaborative camaraderie that is evident in CTO Sims, produsage communities are only bound together by mutual passion and interest, not out of obligation (Miller, 2011). This is not a paid workforce; it does not work to set hours, there is no management, there is no monetary remuneration for the tasks performed. When a project outlives the interest of its participants, there is no reason for those participants to stay. Likewise, a project can only take off if there is sufficient interest in getting it started.   Produsage is subject to the whims of its participants.

CTO Sims is no exception. The ephemeral nature of many relationships can end working partnerships and stall projects leaving works unfinished. However, through mutual benefit (e.g. owning of a finished product that both parties are interested in), working relationships are usually sustained until the project is finished.

A case in point is the aforementioned Retro Bowling Alley thread. Whilst the project started out in a collaborative spirit, this later degenerated as relations between the creators soured and disagreements about how the project should be undertaken developed. The set was only completed after several other creators offered to lend their skills, despite the fact that they did not share a general interest in the retro genre.

Figure 7 – *Left:* One of the original images posted as an example in the Retro Bowling Alley thread. *Right:* Some of the objects created for the resulting project.

It must be noted, however, that such events appear to be rare. Many CTO members appeared to be upset by the furore that the project ended up causing, and one member ended up being banned – one of only two ever to be banned in CTO's history[29]. In fact, CTO as a community struggled to deal with the affair, with some members feeling that too little had been done too late to curb the dispute. It is a testament to the general goodwill of the community that the project was finished and deemed a success. That a produsage collaboration can still succeed despite the breakdown of relations between produsers is evidence of how strong a network of mutual interest, benefit and passion can really be. This adds weight to Benkler and Nissenbaum's assertion that peer production also produces, and is born out of, virtue:

> … commons-based peer production opens a path previously restricted by economic cost and industrial organization to small numbers of professional producers of information, knowledge and culture to large numbers of ordinary people, enabling them to contribute to the public good in a particular domain. *The path does not bypass virtuous action, but generates new opportunities for it* (2006, p. 418; my emphasis).

Benkler and Nissenbaum's contention is that commons-based peer production and produsage present the context for positive *moral* development in participants (cf. Krowne's philosophical motivations of produsers, where altruism and moral integrity guide the behaviours of a produsage community; also Komito (1998), who accepts that moral motivations are not necessarily absent in the growth of online communities). Whilst they accept that the 'gift culture' apparent in many produsage circles may be motivated by less than altruistic impulses such as to gain favour or to boost ones own reputation, their research has uncovered that the vast majority

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[29] Interview with Hypnotiq (31 July 2012, 12:05AM).

of produsers contribute their skills and knowledge because of the wish to be part of something bigger, something that is beneficial to others and to the community at large[30]. Whilst their studies are not conclusive, it is possible that these are the reasons why several CTO members contributed to the completion of a project they had little or no interest in, and which had proved to be a detrimental event in the group's history.

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[30] Benkler and Nissenbaum cite two cases as indicative of the altruistic motivations of produsage participants – the SETI@home website, and the Free/Libre and Open Source Software (FLOSS) study, wherein contributors to the projects were invited to explain why they contributed in the first place. The overwhelming majority expressed a desire to "share their knowledge and skill", and to be part of a wider community working towards a worthwhile cause. For more on the subject, see Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006, pp. 394-419.

2.3 The people

2.3.1 Produsers as offline personages

The largest cog in Jones and Quan-Haase's ecology of produsage is the produser his or herself (Figure 1). As we have seen, produsage comes into its own as a participatory activity, but that does not preclude the fact that the process begins in the privacy of ones own home. Produsers are individuals who create in private spaces, although their work is (re)mediated in public spaces, for example via the internet.

As Treddinick (2008) discusses, digital cultures are not merely concerned with the online aspects of culture. They are also concerned with how individuals express their identities offline. Regarding CTO Sims, it is difficult to discuss its activities without also discussing its members, for they are an integral part of the community and its related digital artefacts.

As discussed in the previous section, it is Benkler and Nissenbaum's claim that many produsers operate out of some sense of inherent virtue. Certainly, on the surface, much of the produsage activity on CTO seems to bear out this assertion. For example, some members will create birthday gifts for other members, or simply as a token of appreciation or friendship; members who build Sim houses and showcase them on the forum will regularly help others find the items they have used in the building, or send them items themselves if they cannot be located. This also applies to members who are *not* creators and who simply want to help out. In terms of CTO's move to a new server, there are several members who willingly came forward with their time and energies to migrate the files, collate information for the Wiki, and so on. But whether this is the result of virtue or not is not easy to explicate on face value.

In my original survey of 77 CTO members, I found several interesting responses regarding the reasons why some members had joined. Below are some examples:

I own my own business so I come when I need to relax. :) It's nice here.

[T]o give back something to a group of people that I have grown to care a great deal for.

The most important thing is belonging to a community where there are others from around the world who share my interest in a game which I, like thousands of others, have used as a diversion from illness.

To see what I might have in my old files that CTO doesn't, in order to share them with others who might enjoy using them too.

These examples – coupled with observations of the forum itself, where it was noticed that a significant proportion of members had unsettled personal lives – prompted further research.

Literature on participatory cultures tends to focus on the communal aspect of the phenomenon – the actual mod practices, and the economic, political and social implications of produsage communities (e.g. Nieborg, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Sihvonen, 2011; van Best, 2011). Research on produsers themselves is sparse in comparison. Yet without individuals, these communities are without their constituent parts. It is thus vital to understand the motivations of those individuals in order to better grasp why it is that such communities exist, and how to better harness their potential benefits.

During my time on CTO, I was surprised to notice how comfortable members were talking about their personal lives on the forum. Their frankness was perhaps indicative of an eagerness to discuss subjects that are considered more taboo and inaccessible in RL. It is not uncommon, for example, for members to explain their absences to the forum – reasons including illness, family upheaval and even natural disaster. There is even a dedicated thread – 'Prayers and Concerns' – which members use to commiserate. This perceived high incidence of disruption in the lives of its members led to a conclusion that perhaps there was a relationship between such disruption and membership in produsage communities. One response to my survey provided interesting evidence:

> The most important thing is belonging to a community where there are others from around the world who share my interest in a game which I, like thousands of others, have used as a diversion from illness. Many creators (and probably an even higher number of non-creating forum members) have found in the Custom Content creation possibilities of the original open-ended, non 1st person shooter game, an escape from a life constrained by health issues. I have thought for years that there is a doctoral thesis in the way so many people have found this path. There was widespread grieving when we discovered that a community member Nansheh/Yersinia had died. For those of us who have been around since early days, this was far from the first known death. Mostly, however, community members just disappear.

Health issues seem to be somewhat of a common thread among several CTO members – Nansheh/Yersinia suffered from terminal cancer, and there are others who suffer from the same disease. But health issues are not only limited to physical ones. "Many other members have Aspergers or other kinds of social disabilities," Hypnotiq told me. "They seem to handle themselves just fine". jmrcrp, CTO's webmistress, was candid about her own mental health issues: "Couple [them] with the periodic demands on my time from RL, and you may be able to

understand why I sometimes 'disappear' for a while. And truthfully, there have been periods of total burnout where I wish the whole thing would just go away and I wouldn't have to deal with it anymore".

Others see CTO has having had a more positive impact on their offline lives:

The most important thing is the friends I have made here, if not for some of the people here … I may have went crazy. I was extremely depressed and some of the folks here helped me through my time of need — darckn1ght

Since a hearing loss I had to quit up my job in the field of youth and family welfare and have to overcome feelings of void and social isolation. CTO helps me to cultivate social contacts because the focus is on the written word and I can participate in any discussion — simtonic

… i was jobless and I was here all day every day to keep my sanity… — jessmasjus

It is clear from these interviews and other observations that CTO is not merely a digital resource or a creative outlet. It also offers a sort of extended support network and family. This is not to say that participants initially join CTO in order to become part of that larger whole – many members explained that their reason for joining the site was to access the files – but somehow they become "hooked on the community itself and its larger passion" (Gee and Hayes, 2010, p. 105). As ripmagnum, a CTO member says: "I came for the downloads, but I stayed for the all the friends I made…"

Shirky (2008) and Benkler and Nissenbaum (2012) agree that there are many different motivations for joining social production communities. In their opinion, however, social motivations come to reinforce personal ones, and these focus around connectedness and generosity. What begins as a need to connect develops into a need to share. The community harnesses the motivations of those individuals towards common goals. They also maintain that if the community is virtuous in its principles, that virtuosity extends to the actions of its constituent members.

Gee and Hayes (2010) are one of the few researchers to delve into the lives of individual produsers in the gaming community. Their work includes a case study of a housebound grandmother, Tabby Lou, who has become a popular CC creator for *The Sims* and its sequels. Due to a health condition Tabby Lou spent most of her time shut-in at home and isolated. She took up creating for *The Sims* when her granddaughter wanted a purple toilet for her game. Gee and

Hayes chart Tabby Lou's joining of two produsage communities – Mod the Sims[31] and The Sims Resource[32] – and her growth as a creator. Through the support of the community, Tabby Lou was able to develop from a novice to one of the community's most popular creators. Her motivation was powered by her passion for the game, for creating itself, and for giving people pleasure through her work. "It has given me great satisfaction and fulfillment that people like my recolors," Gee and Hayes quote her as saying. "These feelings make my days less lonely and boring."

These sentiments are quite similar to some of those expressed by CTO members above – but it is important to note that it is not merely through creating CC that members may experience similar feelings. "I enjoy coming to this community precisely because everyone is so inviting and friendly," a member, Thedabara, volunteers in the forum. "I would participate a lot more if I was a creator, but alas, that talent has never reached me, so I participate in topics that I am familiar with, or in the off chance I have some helpful advice!" And in an interview, deekitty31 added: "I often helped pass on files that I had received from other SFV[33] [Sims File Vault] members, and became 'hooked' on the sharing aspect. It felt good to help other people complete their collections. I had already belonged to several forums where files were shared, with permission, and gifts were passed around, and I liked that, but this [CTO] was different. I felt that I was helping to provide a community service, in a way." The sharing of one's social and knowledge capital gives just as much satisfaction as sharing one's creations, and this should not be ignored as a vital element of produsage communities.

2.3.2 Roles

The fluid nature of produsage communities extends to the individuals – they may choose to what extent they participate in a project, or even whether they wish to participate at all. Unlike most workplaces in the 'real world', members of a produsage community are not restricted to performing only one task, or fulfilling a single function. This also harks back to Miller's *freedom of engagement* – how one opts to engage is determined by their shifting interests, their personal lives, perhaps even their 'tactical affiliations' (Jenkins, 2006), as is evidenced by the schism in the Sims community due to the file-sharing debate.

The literature has made much of the many roles produsers may take on, but for the most

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[31] http://www.modthesims2.com/
[32] http://www.thesimsresource.com/
[33] Sims File Vault was a CC file repository similar to CTO Sims which is now defunct.

part it does not extrapolate on what these roles *mean* to the users themselves. Indeed, Gee and Hayes see the fluid nature of roles as a hallmark of what they call 'passionate affinity groups'; in their view, "roles are reciprocal… people sometimes lead, sometimes follow, sometimes mentor, sometimes get mentored, sometimes teach, sometimes learn, sometimes ask questions, sometimes answer them, sometimes encourage, and sometimes get encouraged (p. 112)".

The study of CTO afforded an opportunity to engage members in their own perception of roles within the group. It would be fair to say that some members do not perceive themselves as fulfilling roles per se. To some, 'role' is far too stringent a concept to describe what they engage in:

> I have never really thought of myself as having a "role" at CTO. Since members can be anything from lurkers to mega posters I guess there can be as many different answers to this as there are members at CTO — mmarie

Mmarie's opinion was that 'role' was too akin to the concept of having a title – moderator, administrator, creator, and so on. These were meaningless to her as her personal contributions to the site would change over time and circumstance. "I think the kind of member I am changes from time to time," she added, "mostly due to time constraints. I used to be more involved in posting and contests when I had more time, but when I don't have much time to spend I tend to be a lurker because I don't want to post in threads and then not be able to keep up with them."

CTO is less a mechanical than a mercurial organism. Participants who choose to engage in it are caught in its current, taking myriad paths, contributing to these 'global flows' (to use Lash's terminology) as and when they see fit, and more importantly, *how* they see fit. mmarie hopes that her membership in the forum is defined by what she brings to it, rather than by any role she might be *seen* to have: "I *hope* that I bring friendship and humor. I like to try to help people when they have game issues or WCIFs, and when I am able to do that I get a feeling of satisfaction from knowing that I was able to contribute in some way."

Simtonic saw herself as fulfilling 10 'unofficial' roles – an advisor, a point of contact for requests, a helper, a coach/teacher, a donator, a friend, a beneficiary, a class clown, a critical voice and a mediator[34]. But she also adds, "I don't feel like an exceptional member", but merely part of "a stable group of people that are very motivated and show an extraordinary amount of commitment towards CTO and the CTO community". In this way, each member may be considered as situated within the community, *by* the community – everyone in the group "is audience for some people and potential peers for others" (Gee and Hayes, 2010, p. 113). Even a

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[34] Simtonic's detailed discussion of her roles can be found in Appendix D.2, p.95, email 4b.

lurker has their own part to play – as an audience, as the user of a resource – indeed, Shirky (2008) notes that an imbalance in those who contribute to a produsage community is *beneficial* to it rather than detrimental. Without the few that contribute, there is no resource to share with the majority, and thus, no potential for a lurker to become a contributor.

For those who do not perceive themselves as having a role, it can be difficult to situate themselves within the community. Nevertheless the nature of produsage communities is to be open-ended and freely accessible, and there are always unforeseen opportunities for those who are eager to contribute. For instance, one member, pumpkin, spoke up in a forum post, saying:

> "I just don't have a clue where I fit in at, and I have been here for 3 years. It bothers me that I can't create; I don't participate in any of the contests, and I am not good at WCIF's, I don't feel I offer anything to CTO. But I still come here, because it's like home. I first came here for the files, but it has been 3 years and I am still here. I will be here forever just lurking in the background."

Pumpkin is now one of the volunteers helping to migrate the digital library to the new server, making classification decisions and re-uploading the CC that is so vital to the life of the site.

2.3.3 Communication - from the individual to the community

If the individual is the constituent part, how then does the community form from these single elements into a coherent whole? What is the glue that binds individuals together?

Certainly passion for *The Sims* is a factor; so too is collaborating, sharing, and being part of a larger whole. But the members of CTO itself offered another, more basic constituent to the mix – *communication*.

> Communication is all we have. Words on a screen. Those words (with real people behind those words) are what create that sense of "family"… We all share the interest in the "game" - The Sims - it and the files are what brought all of us here, but without that communication it's just a repository for files — Arty-choke

Throughout the study I was interested to discover that communication (or lack of it) played a large part in the sense of community that developed in members' minds. Indeed, during 2011, CTO went through a crisis as the community grew and the level intimacy between members declined: "The openness and communication with the members had nearly stopped" (deekitty31).

To compound the difficulties, jmrcrp would often go on hiatus during this period, due to RL issues and the overwhelming time and commitment managing CTO entailed. It was only when jmrcrp returned in 2012 that the site began to take "a few steps back toward the openness and communication that we had in the beginning" (deekitty31).

Whilst conducting the interviews for this study, some participants felt encouraged to discuss issues generated by the study in the forum. Simtonic started a thread named 'Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?', in which she discussed some of the concerns raised in her interview. Her question to the group was whether lurkers could be considered a part of the community, and what could be done to reinforce community spirit. The post attracted a landslide of follow-up postings, some from people who had previously been relatively passive. Some members wondered whether they were considered passive simply because they did not create or enter contests. simtonic's reply was, "WCIF's are *communication* and this is of course a part of community life" (my emphasis). But she also added:

> Communication is always on a voluntary basis, that applies also for CTO. It is in no one's interest if members feel pressed to say something. The only thing that we can do is remaining open for everyone who is seeking entry to our community and extend her/him a warm welcome. Having friends is wonderful but becoming cliquish is the death of a community.

It may be surmised from this that there are two prerequisites to a successful produsage community: freedom of engagement, and freedom of communication. Shirky (2010) talks of a 'culture of communication', wherein knowledge is freely expressed between individuals, enabling the improved harnessing of information and skills towards a more cohesive – and better quality – output. Technology enables the existence of collaborative information and knowledge cultures, but having free access to the sum of that knowledge requires an ethos of transparency amongst the members of that culture. The norms of the community and its participants must reflect and implement this transparency, thus enabling the free flow of information, skills and the resulting digital cultural artefacts.

In this sense, jmrcrp's return and the creation of the new site appears to have improved CTO's communication culture. Members are more confident coming forward with ideas and are having their voices heard. Jonesie's Wiki is being implemented on the new site, as is a member's map. Jmrcrp posts regularly on site progress, and has been more open about the site's finances, publishing regular financial reports so that donators can see where their money is going. A new board has been opened to help liaise between forum moderators and administrators. A special

Mac board is being added at the behest of Mac-users. And the need for volunteers in the move to the new server has opened up far more communication channels, as well as opportunities for members who felt they could not contribute before. These are all positive changes in communication terms, and morale seems to be high, where before it was more subdued.

In fact, the move to the new server proved to be a unique opportunity, as, far from being a major disruption to the course of the study (as had initially been feared), it afforded an insight into how an information community begins to build itself again from scratch. Much has had to be jettisoned – including many members who are casual or inactive. A core remains, and what grows up around it is up to the remaining members themselves:

> Maybe it's like seeing a library on fire, with no way to quench the flames. You rush in, save what you think will be the most valuable - then hope for the best after the new library is constructed, and the re-stocking of lost knowledge can begin again —Jonesie.

The overwhelming sense was one of positivity about the move, as members themselves were combining efforts to rescue what they personally deemed important. Arty-choke is one of those salvaging the most informative posts from two boards on the forum, one of them being the Game Play Help board. "There will [be] many that contain good how-to info, links, etc that will be lost - no way we can find and salvage all of them in the time allotted," he explains. However, what he salvages will be crystallized into a more accessible, and thus more useful, form when it is entered into the Wiki on the new site. What is *not* reproducible is the *evolution* of CTO's original community, and it is the loss of *this* that appears to trouble long-term members the most:

> … I for one will be sad to lose all the history of our forum. So much has happened in the last 4 years in the sims community and we have been on the front lines — Hypnotiq.

> As a Newbie, I have been following the thread where people are asking Joan [jmrcrp] many questions about the transition. Lately, I note several members referred to it as the "sinking of the Titanic," information-wise. I smiled, but I understood. They don't seem to be saying this in a sarcastic manner, but rather because they are genuinely concerned that not all of the site info can be saved — Jonesie.

> … I see a loss of collective consciousness and keep-sake. That's why I feel emotionally affected with regard to the server changing and receive it as a personal loss. So I saved a lot of datas for my own use and memory, especially the name of friends who have left CTO. It makes me sad to see them crossed out from group memory — simtonic.

We see a pattern in the above passages. As Watson (1998) asserts: "Community depends not only upon communication and shared interests, but also upon 'communion'… [W]hile

knowledge capital as a collective good may be one sign of community, the relationship between an individual and other individuals in that space remains devoid of commitment or stake" (pp. 104-105). Communication on its own forms the skeletal structure of a community, but it does not add flesh.

It becomes apparent that it is not merely information and digital-cultural artefacts that are the vital organs of a produsage community. It is the *context* of that community that is also a defining (and symbolic) factor of its existence. The community thus becomes a symbolic artefact in and of itself. This does much to refute the idea of virtual communities as ephemeral cultures marked by a reliance on phatic communication[35] – e.g. the 'like' and 'poke' buttons on Facebook (see, for example, Miller, 2011). Whilst these are certainly a significant part of connectedness in participatory cultures (the new CTO is, coincidentally, instituting a new 'thank you' button in its forum), there is a further depth denoted by the evolution of *non*-phatic virtual communication that can change the course of a community. Videogaming produsage communities – as opposed to other participatory cultures such as social networking sites, Twitter and Facebook – rely more heavily on non-phatic communication because they are based upon a culture of communication where detailed information and applied knowledge is a highly prized commodity – "modding and hacking are practices that demand an effective communication and diffusion network" (Sihvonen, 2011). Collaboratively generated tips, tools and tutorials are a mainstay of produsage communities. But there are other subjects – such as the thorny issue of intellectual property rights – that add an extra dimension to these group communications in that they are formative of the cultural norms of that community and its participants. CTO began its life as a pariah in the Sims community, and its stance on the filesharing issue shaped its growth and its self-perception. jmrcrp admits that much of CTO's early days revolved around the 'rooting out' of 'spies' in their midst, who disapproved of forum members for sharing pay files and files that were not free to share[36]. This self-perception of CTO as a bastion against hostiles was fundamental to the foundation of a community that drew ranks together and quickly developed a deep level of intimacy and trust. It was only as the fileshare issue died down, and CTO grew more popular, that the site struggled to adapt – yet it still managed to survive.

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[35] Phatic communication is used by linguistics to describe communications between people that do not impart any useful information about the world or oneself; they are less about content than they are about connectedness, a way in which humans are able to build relationships with one another through minimal effort, on a par with 'a wave hello'. Miller (2011) sees the rise of phatic communication as endemic to a virtually connected world, where solid, physical gestures have been replaced by phatic, non-informational ones.
[36] In community nomenclature, these are termed 'unavailable' files.

How was this achieved?

It is my opinion CTO was able to develop an initial 'culture of communication' that became the norm within the community. Even when the site struggled to adjust to its growth spurt and the resulting loss of direction, it still continued a basic philosophy of open communication. Whilst some long-term members felt that barriers were being drawn between creators and non-creators, and between administrators and 'regular' members, 'newbies' were still welcomed personally if they chose to post on the forum. If they chose to ask 'stupid questions', they were not ridiculed[37]. If they chose to start creating, there was always someone on hand to help.

Members themselves alluded to this congenial atmosphere within the forum:

I enjoy coming to this community precisely because everyone is so inviting and friendly — Thedabara.

Communication regarding the content here and elsewhere (very active forum), friendships formed (communication within CTO and outside of CTO), contests, and that sense of family that has developed have somewhat overshadowed the files — Arty-choke.

Members respond with welcoming good cheer and enthusiasm… I recently noticed one CTO member (can't remember the name) had not been heard from in awhile. There was a back-and-forth among other members wondering if they should try and find out if this person was OK. I thought that was very sweet and caring — Jonesie.

When [friends] directed me here, and I found my missing (UNAVAILABLE!) files, I also found more people of the same kind - generous, warm, friendly, supportive, funny — moyra21.

This would suggest that there is more to a successful produsage community than the accessibility of shared knowledge, information and creativity, or even a passion for the subject matter. The key would appear to be (to quote Watson again) 'communion', an ingrained culture of communication, where intimate and informal chat is allowed and encouraged. Where this is the social norm, members feel empowered to speak up, to have their questions heard, to have their informational and creative needs fulfilled. Even if the original context for that cultural norm is displaced or removed, its legacy will continue in the following generations of produsers as they absorb the customs of those that came before them – and in turn pass them on (Shirky, 2010).

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[37] An apparently common phenomenon in virtual communities; see for example, Watson (1998), and Gee and Hayes (2010) account of 'harsh' produsage communities (pp. 121-123).

3.0 Conclusions

The aim of this research was to work towards a definition of digital information cultures within the context of computer- and video-gaming domains. Through the virtual ethnographic methods proposed by Hine (2000), a study was conducted into the virtual online community of CTO Sims, a modding community which had congregated around a digital library collecting content for *The Sims*, a virtual life simulator for the PC. CTO Sims is part of a wider Sims-related community which Gee and Hayes (2010) and Sihvonen (2011) have described as participatory cultures, coming together to produse various digital cultural artefacts. The study explored CTO Sims and its members on a more intimate, personal level, engaging with members on their individual roles within the community. It focused on their informational behaviour, seeking to situate the study of participatory cultures from the standpoint of the library and information sciences. This was done via an investigation into CTO Sims' digital library, and into the relationship of CTO members with the digital artefacts that they produse (i.e. produce *and* use).

The following sections discuss the conclusions that have been drawn from the ethnographic narrative reproduced in Chapter 2, and present a projected framework for the further study of digital information cultures within computer- and video-gaming communities.

3.1 Digital information culture and its features

From the study of CTO Sims, several features can be determined about the nature of digital information cultures within the domain of computer- and video-gaming.   These are as follows:

1) The objects of digital information cultures are digital cultural artefacts, symbolic objects which travel via global flows in unrestricted movements that are autonomous of the intentions of the original author.
2) Collections are user-aggregated, and users have the opportunity to contribute to and edit the existing body of information and knowledge available to the community, situating the site and its members within a read-write continuum.
3) A culture of sharing allows information to be disseminated horizontally amongst members of the digital information culture, in contradistinction to being delivered top-down from a single governing agency.

4) The digital cultural artefacts created and collected by a digital information culture are flexibly made and constructed *processes*, and are subject to potentially limitless modification by members of that culture.

5) Digital information cultures act as support networks to users, encouraging members to learn skills through advice, mentorship and tutorials provided and shared by other members.

3.2 Digital information culture, and user relationships with informational content

In addition, members of a computer- and video-game based digital information culture have a unique relationship with the informational content that they produce (produse), which may be outlined as follows:

1) Members of digital information cultures have an *intimate* relationship with digital cultural artefacts, due to a process of individual signification, wherein the user projects their own needs and preferences onto the digital cultural artefact.

2) Users will often develop their own classification conventions in order to organise these digital cultural artefacts.

3) Collections of digital cultural artefacts are *enabled* and their growth driven by the intimate relationship users develop with these artefacts.

4) Users pool resources, skills and knowledge in collaborative projects that are communally owned by the community.

3.3 Digital information culture, and user-user relationships

Lastly, it has been seen that the members of these digital information cultures develop unique relationships with one another, as defined in the following points:

1) Social and knowledge capital are part of the economy of digital information cultures, and freedom of engagement enables such capital to be attainable by all members and in myriad forms.

2) Organisational structures and power flows are heterarchichal, characterised by permeable and fluid networks.

3) Freedom of communication enables the growth of a produsage community as a *virtuous* force, which sustains itself through a shared sense of camaraderie, democracy and altruism.

4) Individuals are not restricted to one role within the community, taking on as many as they choose or are able to at any one time.

3.4 Further research

CTO Sims is only one virtual online community in a sea of many across the internet – even in the niche microcosm of modding for *The Sims*, it is a mere drop of water in the ocean. It need not be said that the results of this study cannot be taken as indicative of other digital information cultures, even of those within the video-gaming genre as a whole. Whilst the study of information usage within virtual gaming communities is a somewhat peripheral concern of present scholarship, it is hoped that this discourse has provided an interesting and useful base for further scholarly endeavour in this domain. Firstly, it would be worthwhile to research similar video-gaming communities – both within and without the domain of *The Sims* – and to discover whether their informational practices bear any resemblance to that of CTO Sims. Secondly, it would also be advisable to ascertain whether the conclusions of the present research are at all applicable to other communities and domains, the results of which may lead to a more rounded understanding of what digital information culture is or might be.

Digital information culture, as it relates to CTO Sims, shows evidence of a wider trend towards participatory, convergent cultures in the networked, information age. These are not merely cultural or societal changes. These denote shifts in the way individuals approach knowledge, information, and the cultural artefacts that were once grounded in a tangible, physical world. The rise of the digital has seen the rise of the bricolage, copycat culture, where the objects of that culture are non-fixed, transitory and incomplete, "repurposing and refashioning the old while using and making the new" (Deuze, 2005). CTO Sims has a casual view on information – everything is up for grabs, everything is subject to change, and anyone is welcome to initiate or contribute to that change. However, this is not a view shared by all, and it would be wrong to think of digital information cultures in utopian terms. Individuals have different opinions on participatory culture, on how they fit into it, and on whether it is even appropriate at all. CTO Sims itself is evidence of the tension within the Sims community, and is representative of a wider conflict between the concept of free culture and that of intellectual property (Lessig, 2004).

It is my suggestion that future research look more closely into the role *individuals* have to play in the growth of digital information cultures. Most of the present research seems to have been given over to the study of the public spaces that digital information cultures operate in. But, as Hine (2000) and Lash (2002) agree, these public spaces cannot be wholly understood without reference to *private* spaces as well. Much of the digital cultural artefacts that are the centrepiece of digital information cultures begin life in the private space of an individual produser. Furthermore, they travel (via public spaces) to the private spaces of *other* individual produsers. It is what happens in these invisible places – and the motivations behind what happens – that colours these artefacts, both culturally and symbolically.

What are the cultural biases, the individual passions, the ethical frameworks and the private idiosyncrasies that drive an individual to become a produser? Is there a template for a produser? Can one say with any certainty that this or that is the hallmark of a produser? Members of CTO Sims *appear* to display a correlation between creative passion, the fan or hacker mindset, a cavalier attitude to copyright laws, and relatively unsettled private lives. It would be interesting to see whether these attributes could be identified in wider produsage circles, and thus lead to a better understanding of the individual phenomena that come together to create the 'ingredients' for a future produser.

It is hoped that this study has provided a more in-depth insight into the inner workings of a produsage community, and into the nature of participatory cultures on a more intimate scale than has perhaps previously been achieved in the field. Moreover, it is hoped that it will pave the way for further work into the development of individuals as produsers.

Online collaborative cultures are by no means a new phenomena, but with the birth of Web 2.0 in recent years, serious study of these groups of people is more timely than ever before. In a world where the latest ICT technologies have given rise to the more vapid, voyeuristic participatory works – typified by social networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook – it is my opinion that current scholarship should explore and encourage the more productive aspects of this collaborative culture, and work towards harnessing the skills, talents and knowledge of the future produser.

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5.0 Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Custom content (CC) – Also User-generated content (UGC). Custom content are game elements produced by the user or player of that game, usually an amateur.

File-Share Friendly (FSF) – A policy allowing the sharing of custom content among users. Originally filesharing was limited to peer-to-peer (P2P) networks, although uploading such content to servers and/or websites is now more common.

First Person Shooter (FPS) – A genre of game, presented in first-person perspective, where the object is to shoot down enemies or other players: e.g. *Doom, Quake*. These games are well-known for their large modding communities, usually comprising young males.

Lurker – In an online context, a person who does not interact with other online personages, and who is thus virtually invisible.

Modding – In videogame parlance, the modification of game elements by a user or 'modder', by the manipulation of the game code, the products of which are known as 'mods'. Mods may range from minor aesthetic changes to major rewrites of the game's programmable code, requiring a varying range of technical expertise.

Newbie – A new member; a novice; a beginner.

RL – 'Real Life'. Used my members of the Sims community to denote life offline.

Skin – A 2D texture or image wrapped around a 3D model. In *The Sims*, changing the skin allows the player to transform facial features, clothing and accessories.

WCIF – An acronym for 'Where Can I Find?'.

Zipping – The compression of files (i.e. custom content) into .zip or .rar format using the WinZip of WinRAR programmes. This is the most prevalent form of file exchange in the Sims community.

Appendix B: Dissertation proposal (sans appendices)

The Sims as Resource – A Proposal for a Virtual Ethnography Evaluating the Concept of Information Culture in the Gaming World

Introduction

This is to be an emic, virtual ethnographic study of an internet site, CTO Sims (of which I am an administrator), which incorporates a digital library and a forum, and serves as a community for people who play the PC game, the Sims (Maxis, 2000). The Sims is a customisable simulation game in which players create their own characters (known as 'Sims'), determine their personality and appearance, and create the world in which their Sim is to live. The mechanics of the game allows players to create custom content (CC) which they can load into the game and play with.

The Sims is an old game, and many of the sites that once provided CC have now disappeared. Much of CTO's existence revolves around rescuing and preserving this lost content for the game's existing fanbase. Much of this content is donated and contributed from site members, and is inappropriately organised. This study has two aims – to investigate the CTO Sims digital library, and how it may improved; and to look into the psycho-social behaviour of the site participants, and to explore how they see themselves as part of an 'information culture'.

Aims and Objectives

As stated above, the aims are twofold – to look into the practicalities of maintaining a crowd-aggregated digital library, and to look at the motivations and needs of the community that contributes to and maintains it.

Regarding the first aspect, the CC library has grown largely in reaction to the users' needs and therefore suffers from several problems:

1. A lack of appropriate metadata, which makes retrieval inefficient;
2. Unsuitable and inconsistent categorisation and cataloguing of items;

3. Errors generated by uploaders who have an imperfect understanding of upload rules;

4. No standardised guidelines for the organisation of files and the creation of appropriate metadata.

Regarding the second aspect, the study aims to explore the idea of an 'information culture' in a virtual community, and how such a culture is created, how it influences community members, and what are the characteristics that can be said to define it. As such, the following objectives have been laid out:

- To investigate the shortcomings of CTO Sims' digital library, and how it can be improved;
- To investigate the attitudes of community members towards the preservation of custom-content and how preservation may be better achieved;
- To explore the concept of an 'information culture' and how this might be defined in relation to CTO Sims and its community;
- In relation to the idea of an information culture, to look at the generation of 'social capital' amongst site members and how this affects their experience.

The purpose of the study is partially practical – in order to find a more effective way of creating and maintaining user-aggregated digital libraries; but to a larger extent it hopes to work towards a definition of an 'information culture', within the gaming world on the one level, and within a virtual community on the other.

In summary, the ultimate goal is to develop a *narrative* of the site as an information culture, based around: a) use of the digital library, and; b) the social and creative use of information between members acting as the driving force behind the community.

Scope and Definition

The study will take place completely within the internet site, CTO Sims. This means that the members of the site will be the research participants, and that technically the entire research population will be accessible. The study will be contained largely to the site, though some personal interviews with certain members may take place outside of the site, for example, via email, instant messaging, or Skype.

CTO Sims consists of approximately 2,200 members, with about 50-60 regularly active members. As such, the scale of the study will be small. Whilst any findings from the study may have some relevance to other, similar communities on the internet, they will clearly only have real applicability to CTO Sims itself. Results cannot be taken as indicative of internet fora and/or digital libraries in general. Likewise it is accepted that CTO Sims reflects a niche interest, yet it is hoped that the findings will have some relevance to other virtual, internet-based communities that run user-aggregated digital libraries or collections, as these have become more prevalent since the advent of Web 2.0.

In the study, the terms 'members' and 'users' will be used interchangeably, as users of CTO's digital library are, by definition, site members – although most of them join the site in order to access the library, the large majority do not participate in the forum and its activities.

A large part of these activities include 'modding' – that is, the modification of game content by users in order to create custom content (variously known as user-created content) to load into their game. Modding is an important part of the community, and its fruits may be considered the 'currency' of the site and its 'social capital'. Thus, it will be discussed heavily in the study.

Research Context and Literature Review

As yet, most research in this area has been conducted by researchers in the domain of Game Studies. Whilst these have generally focused on the behaviour of game players, and the effects of gaming on both individuals and gaming communities, there has been some investigation into the way gamers deal with and use information. For example, Sihvonen, in her 2011 study of 'modding' within the Sims community, looked at the idea of 'social capital' amongst gamers. For example, this involved the creation of CC, and the knowledge of where to find CC, acting as a marker of status within the community. Creators are highly regarded within the community, as are the 'gatekeepers' – people who know where to find custom content or how to perform certain technical procedures related to gameplay or CC creation. At CTO Sims, this exchange in information, data, knowledge and custom content is the foundation of the community. The idea of social capital is very much in play, and much of the members' interactions are based on this reciprocal give and take.

This also ties in with the concept of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2003), convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006) produsage, and prosumers (Bruns, 2008). Whilst these terms have been

used to describe new business models, and the blurring of boundaries between producers and consumers of cultural objects, they are also to a large degree applicable to the CTO Sims community. This is because there is a communal sense of ownership of the resources collected by and for the community. Many resources are contributed by the community; likewise, many resources are created in reaction to community and user needs. There are also many collaborative efforts between members in the creation of resources, from CC to tutorials, from glossaries to active site lists. These activities and their wider implications will be a large focus of research within the study, and may provide a framework towards a definition of 'information culture', which as yet has no one, single, clear definition.

For the research methodology, the work of Christine Hine will be useful in setting up a virtual ethnography. Mann and Stewart's *Internet Communication and Qualitative Research* (2000), will also be useful in this context. For research into gaming communities and modding practices, the Sihvonen study gives a comprehensive list of references that will be of use. The online journal of computer game research, GameStudies.org, should also be a valuable resource.

The work of Bruns and Jenkins will be used to flesh out ideas on participatory culture. This will also include more generic work on digital cultures in order to get a wider perspective on virtual communities. Current works being read in the area are *Understanding Digital Culture* by Vincent Miller (2011), and *Digital Information Culture* by Luke Treddinick (2008).

Methodology

The study will be conducted as a virtual ethnography, using Christine Hine's *Virtual Ethnography* (1999) as a guiding work. The approach taken will be largely emic, as the intention is to allow the study to be guided by the responses and suggestions of the users, whilst the study's aims are to serve as a general guide. The intention is not to make assumptions as to the nature of an information culture, how users regard their community or the running of CTO's digital library. For instance, it may be that site members do not consider the concept of participatory culture as relevant to their community. Whatever members consider a defining element of the community and its sharing of resources will be explored. Any inclination to 'shoehorn' certain concepts into member responses should be avoided at all costs.

The reason for choosing to carry out an ethnographic study is based on the fact that CTO Sims is a community, and the ethnography is uniquely suited to studying the socio-cultural aspects of a group of people. In order to understand the informational behaviour of the members, it is

important to understand the social meaning they attach to their own behaviour, by observing their normal, everyday interactions within the community environment. An ethnography may be deemed as the best approach to gain such an understanding.

Secondly, as an administrator at CTO Sims, I am already a participant in the forum, and therefore am in a good position to conduct an ethnography, as participation in the community itself is a vital aspect of an ethnographic study. Already being an active member precludes the possible problems one might face with joining the community, getting to know the participants, gaining their trust, 'learning the ropes' and successfully 'fitting in'. This should sufficiently reduce time spent 'finding one's bearings' on the site, time which is anyhow restricted due to the strict timeframe allotted for the project.

As a community, CTO Sims a very active site with information being exchanged between members every day. It averages about 200 posts a day. Whilst the community is small, it is very involved, holding contests and special events every month. The site itself is led largely by the user population. This is not only in terms of donations to the digital library. Users also contribute to contest ideas, collaborate on artistic projects, and share knowledge on which sites to go to to find the best custom content. In the past fortnight, one member has started a forum thread collecting game-related terms, which all members of the site are invited to contribute to. The group is fluid, and events may shape the growth of the community and its members. Likewise, different aspects of the site grow in importance to its members over time. The study aims to reflect this.

As always, there are possible problems. It is possible that the research participants will guide the study into unexpected areas that may be unrelated, or require further domain research. It is also possible that there will be a low response to requests for interviews etc. Lastly, the study may necessarily be biased against site 'lurkers' – those members who can access the library, but choose not to interact with other forum members. The motivations and needs of these users will most likely remain unknown to the study.

A final reservation is dependent on the participants themselves. It is possible that they may be intimidated by an administrator and not want to participate, or they might consider the study too intrusive. Knowing that they are being 'observed' may cause them to behave differently on the site. If participants 'clam up' it may greatly affect the study. However, since I have been part of the community for a long while, and am regularly active and seen about the forum, the level of trust between myself and the participants may be such that any change in behaviour may avoided as I am already 'one of them'.

Work Plan

The study has been loosely planned in the following stages:

1. Firstly to conduct an initial survey of active members, asking for their age range, sex, country of origin, etc., and which will include optional free-text questions outlining their attitude towards the community and CTO's digital library. The initial questions will help to give a picture of the core user base of the community. The free-text questions are intended to help guide the following stage of the study, namely;

2. Based upon the survey results, an emic approach will be used to pinpoint relevant issues to be explored within the community.

3. Generally, interviews will be conducted with participants as to their experiences on the site. As wide a range of participants as possible will be interviewed, from administrators, moderators, creators, players, and if possible, lurkers.

A Gantt chart for the proposed project is presented in Appendix A. Dates given in the chart represent the absolute deadline for each task set. An incomplete sample survey is presented in Appendix B, illustrating the nature of the survey that will be presented to site members.

Some interrelated tasks will be conducted concurrently. For example, survey data will begin to be analysed during the period that surveys are being filled out by participants and collected by myself. Observation of the forum will be conducted throughout the majority of the project period, as will the writing of the study's 'narrative' – that is the narrative of CTO Sims as an information community. Much time will be devoted to this as notes will most likely be voluminous and require much editing and analysis.

It is difficult to pinpoint exact time frames for much of the work, as the nature of an ethnography is led by the participants themselves. Events may occur that necessitate data collection at unexpected periods. Therefore, the timetable of activities is left purposely ambiguous for some tasks, with a timeframe that may encompass almost the entirety of the project. It is therefore important to be prepared for unexpected if necessary changes in time management, and aware that tasks need to be consistently monitored and maintained over long periods of time.

Resources

Required resources are minimal. They include:

- A good broadband internet connection (needed for any potential video/voice messaging)
- A Skype account (or similar software)
- Survey creation software (e.g. SurveyMonkey)
- Possibly qualitative data analysis software (e.g. Weft QDA)

No travel costs are required as the study will be conducted online. There may be costs involved in obtaining the above software. If there are open source alternatives these will be used. The use of data analysis software in order to process the qualitative data will be carefully considered and researched before downloading/purchasing. It is possible that it may not be needed.

Ethics

At the start of the study, the site as a whole will be informed via the front page news that the study will be undertaken. This will include the likely duration of the study, its nature, purpose, and how it will be conducted. Members will be informed of their invitation to participate in the surveys and/or interviews. They will be informed that their participation will be voluntary, and of their right to leave the study at any point they wish. It will be stressed that any and all information will be treated as confidential, and not be passed onto a third party. Participants will be assured of their anonymity, and of their right to withdraw consent to the use of any information they provide.

The study is not high-risk, and the research population are not considered vulnerable in any way. The subject matter is non-controversial and is not expected to cause any anxiety or distress to participants. Information of a sensitive nature, e.g. medical data, personal data, is not intended to be collected for the purposes of this study.

An Ethics Checklist is presented in Appendix C.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is as important in the virtual world as it is in 'real world'. Despite the Internet's conduciveness to openness, people still value their privacy. At CTO Sims, as at many sites that feature fora, people choose to operate under pseudonyms or usernames. As an administrator, I have access to certain personal information about the members that it would clearly be inappropriate to divulge without prior consent. Throughout the study, the following steps will be taken to ensure participant confidentiality:

- Personal names will not be disclosed and usernames will be used consistently to identify individuals, unless the participant wishes; a) to remain anonymous; b) to be known under an alternative pseudonym .

- Other personal details available to administrators, such as email addresses, will not be disclosed in the study.

- Private and/or sensitive disclosures from individuals will be treated with the strictest confidence, and will not be related in the study; or, if pertinent to the study in some way, may be referred to obliquely (with prior consent), and without pointing to any specific individual.

- It is possible that sensitive data may come to light during the study. Therefore, consent forms will be presented to participants to fill out, which will be handed in with the finished dissertation at the end of the study. Due to these being handed out and filled in electronically, full names will have to be given instead of signatures.

- Participants and members will be given the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns throughout the duration of the study.

A sample consent form is presented in Appendix D.

Appendix C: CTO Survey

C.1 CTO Sims Usage Survey

CTO Sims Usage Survey
PAGE 1

Dear fellow CTO member,

I am currently conducting preliminary research into the CTO community and its use of Sims-related data for my Masters degree in Library and Information Science. Since I am in the beginning stages of the project, I am trying to get a feel for what is important to you as CTO members and Sims 1 fans. I would be very grateful if you could take a moment to answer the questions in this survey. The results will be used to help determine the aspects of the community that require more in depth exploration.

Please be assured that your details will remain anonymous and will not be revealed, unless you choose to make your identity known. In such cases, your information will remain completely confidential and will not be shared with any third party. As a participant, you also have the right to withdraw from the research without prejudice, and also ask to be informed of any findings published in the final report. If you have any queries, please feel free to PM Ludi_Ling, or email me at ███████████████████

Thank you for your participation!

-Ludi

Q1

1. Your CTO Username (optional)

Q2

2. Age

☐ 20 and under	☐ 36-40	☐ 56-60
☐ 21-25	☐ 41-45	☐ 61-69
☐ 26-30	☐ 46-50	☐ 70+
☐ 31-35	☐ 51-55	

3. Gender

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Other

4. Nationality

☐ Australia	☐ Germany	☐ New Zealand
☐ Canada	☐ Japan	☐ UK
☐ China	☐ Korea	☐ USA
☐ France	☐ The Netherlands	

☐ Other (please specify)

[ ]

5. How often do you use CTO?

☐ Every day	☐ Once a month	☐ Over a year
☐ Once a week	☐ Once every 6 months	☐ This is my first time here
☐ Once a fortnight	☐ Once a year	

☐ Other (please specify)

[ ]

6. Why do you use CTO? (You may choose more than one)

☐ To download items	☐ To participate in the forum	☐ To participate in contests and challenges
☐ To share creations (of any kind)	☐ To participate in chat	

☐ Other (please specify)

Q7

7. Please rate your experience at CTO

Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Terrible	Don't Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒

Please explain your answer (Optional)

Q8

8. What things do you like best about CTO? (You may explain your answer)

Q9

9. What things about CTO do you think need improvement? (You may explain your answer)

Q10

10. Do you use any of these other sites that are similar to CTO? (You may choose more than one)

☐ STS (Saving the Sims) ☐ Sims Cave ☐ Other Yahoo Group sites

☐ N99 (Neighborhood 99) ☐ The Wayback Machine

☐ Other (please specify)

C.2   Results of CTO Sims Usage Survey

Response Summary

Total Started Survey: 77
Total Finished Survey: 77 (100%)

1. Your CTO Username (optional)		
	answered question	**59**
	skipped question	**18**
		Response Count
		59

2. Age		
	answered question	**77**
	skipped question	**0**
	Response Percent	Response Count
20 and under	2.6%	2
21-25	6.5%	5
26-30	7.8%	6
31-35	7.8%	6
36-40	10.4%	8
41-45	14.3%	11

	Response Percent	Response Count
46-50	3.9%	3
51-55	**26.0%**	**20**
56-60	9.1%	7
61-69	11.7%	9
70+	0.0%	0

3. Gender

	answered question	77
	skipped question	0

	Response Percent	Response Count
Male	14.3%	11
Female	**85.7%**	**66**
Other	0.0%	0

4. Nationality

	answered question	77
	skipped question	0

	Response Percent	Response Count
Australia	6.5%	5
Canada	3.9%	3

	Response Percent	Response Count
China	0.0%	0
France	0.0%	0
Germany	5.2%	4
Japan	2.6%	2
Korea	0.0%	0
The Netherlands	1.3%	1
New Zealand	1.3%	1
UK	3.9%	3
USA	61.0%	47
Other (please specify)	14.3%	11

5. How often do you use CTO?		
	answered question	77
	skipped question	0
	Response Percent	Response Count
Every day	66.2%	51
Once a week	11.7%	9
Once a fortnight	5.2%	4
Once a month	1.3%	1

Once every 6 months	1.3%	1
Once a year	0.0%	0
Over a year	0.0%	0
This is my first time here	0.0%	0
Other (please specify) Show Responses	14.3%	11

6. Why do you use CTO? (You may choose more than one)

	answered question	77
	skipped question	0

	Response Percent	Response Count
To download items	**92.2%**	**71**
To share creations (of any kind)	37.7%	29
To participate in the forum	80.5%	62
To participate in chat	16.9%	13
To participate in contests and challenges	29.9%	23
Other (please specify)	33.8%	26

7. Please rate your experience at CTO

	answered question	77
	skipped question	0

Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Terrible	Don't Know	Rating Average	Response Count
70.1% (54)	23.4% (18)	3.9% (3)	1.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.3% (1)	1.42	77

Please explain your answer (Optional)	39

8. What things do you like best about CTO? (You may explain your answer)

answered question	**70**
skipped question	**7**

Response Count	
	70

9. What things about CTO do you think need improvement? (You may explain your answer)

answered question	**61**
skipped question	**16**

Response Count	
	61

10. Do you use any of these other sites that are similar to CTO? (You may choose more than one)

answered question	**77**
skipped question	**0**

	Response Percent	Response Count
STS (Saving the Sims)	**75.3%**	**58**
N99 (Neighborhood 99)	44.2%	34
Sims Cave	26.0%	20
The Wayback Machine	41.6%	32
Other Yahoo Group sites	67.5%	52
Other (please specify)	39.0%	30

C.3   Results of CTO Sims Usage Survey - Diagrams

Age

■	20 and under
■	21-25
■	26-30
■	31-35
■	36-40
■	41-45
■	46-50
■	51-55
■	56-60
■	61-69
■	70+

Gender

■	Male
■	Female

Nationality

- Australia — 7%
- Canada — 3%
- Germany — 5%
- Japan — 3%
- The Netherlands — 1%
- New Zealand — 1%
- UK — 4%
- USA — 62%
- Other — 14%

How often do you use CTO?

- Every day — 66%
- Once a week — 12%
- Once a fortnight — 5%
- Once a month — 1%
- Once every 6 months — 1%
- other — 15%
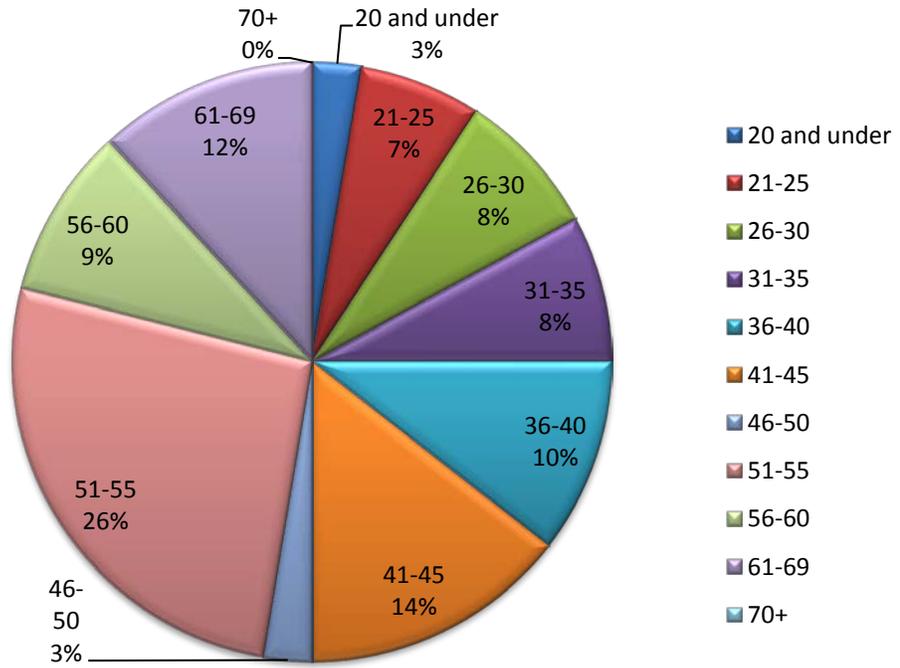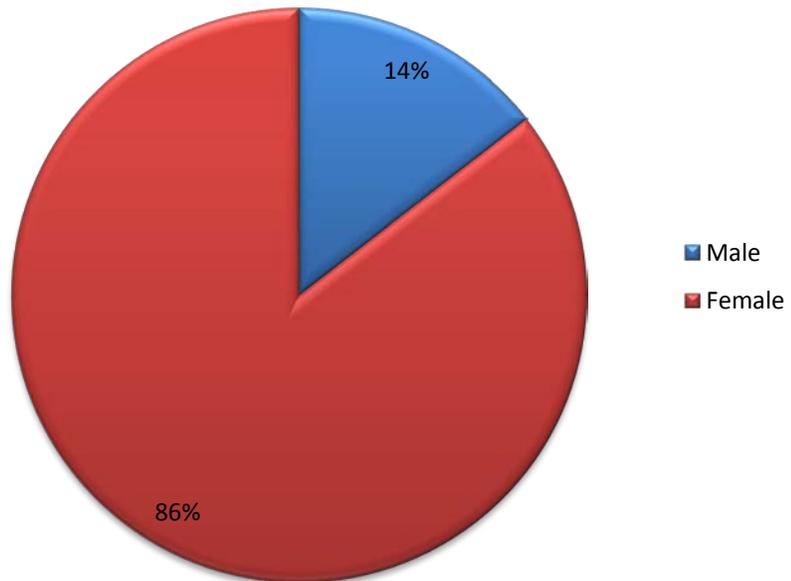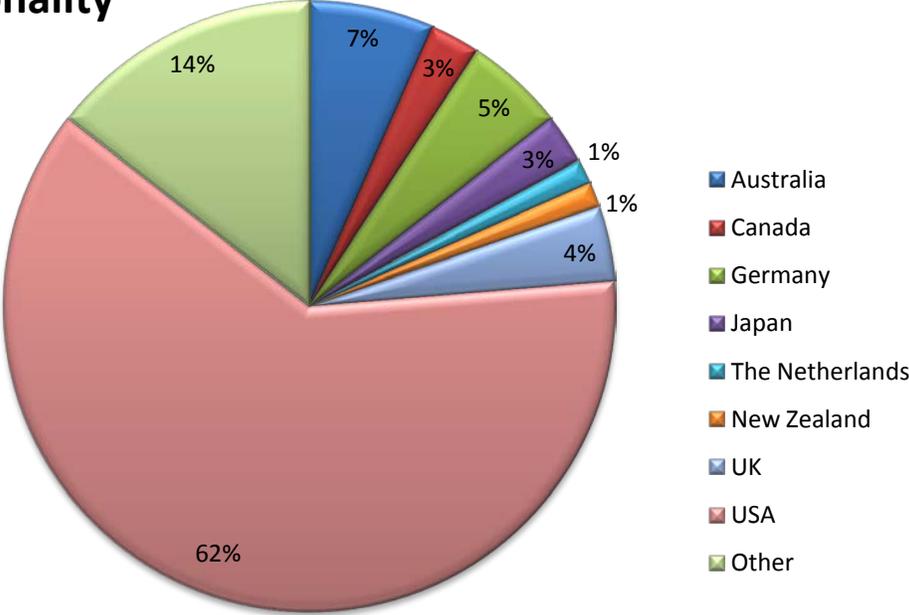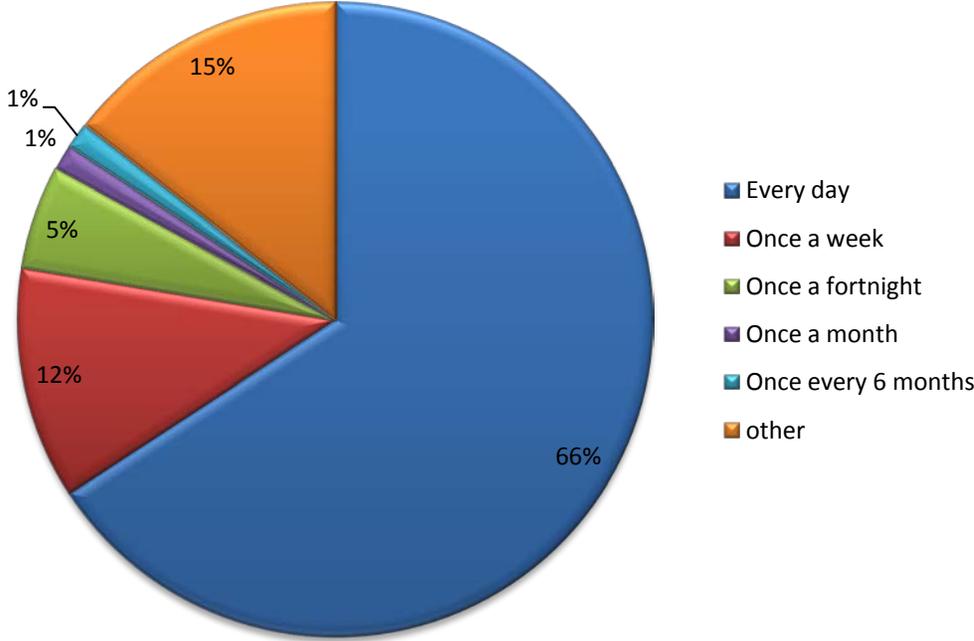
C. 4   Summary of the CTO Survey

The following was presented to CTO members on the CTO Sims website after the closing of the survey.

What the CTO Sims Usage Survey found

Below is a summary of results from the CTO survey. 77 members responded to the survey over a period of 2 weeks. Only 18 of these did so anonymously.

Questions 6, 8, and 9 give samples of respondents' in-depth, free-text answers (when these were filled in). They do not reflect the entirety of these answers, merely highlight aspects that were the *most frequently recurring* from the pool of respondent answers.

2. Age

The majority of users are 51-55 years old, with members coming from all age groups, primarily between the age range of 40-70 years. None of the respondents were over 70 years old.

3. Gender

The majority of users are female. Roughly 17/20 respondents were female, with roughly 3/20 male. This reflects previous studies suggesting that the majority of Sims 1 players and modders are female.

4. Nationality

The majority of users – just over 60% - are from the USA. The next largest contingent came from Europe, though as a group this came far behind the USA. Respondents hailed from every continent including Asia, Africa, Australasia and South America.

5. How often do you use CTO?

50% of respondents use CTO every day. This may be explained by a bias in survey participants – regular, active users in a community are more likely to take part in and be aware of a study due to their higher rate of activity and greater investment in the study outcome. No respondents highlighted using the site less than once every 6 months. A few respondents noted that their use of the site changed according to their needs and/or interest levels.

6. Why do you use CTO?

Over 90% of respondents used the site to download items. This supports the idea of CTO's file section being the crux of the site. 80% of respondents used the forum. Many respondents expressed a myriad of complex reasons for using the site. Some examples are given below.

To help keep the Sims 1 community alive
To keep up on news
To check out the forum and new posts
To download items
To find out an answer to a question
I like to share my creations
To share what I know

8. What things do you like best about CTO?

Positive experiences mainly revolved around the large number of files available in the site archive, and the sense of community in the forum. These appear to be the greatest strengths of CTO, with most respondents commenting favourably on the friendliness and helpfulness of the members, the creative output, and the impressive file collection. Examples of other aspects respondents approved of were: -

The open share policy
Friendly and polite members
Friendships
The number of files
Diversity
Willingness to help
WCIF section
Chat
Easy navigation
Willingness to share
Sense of community - It's like a family
Scope of knowledge
Virtually no trolls
The contests and challenges
We can talk about anything
Creative members

9. What things about CTO do you think need improvement?

CTO's areas for improvement were mostly technical in nature. A large number of respondents to this question expressed dissatisfaction with the site's search facility, citing it as 'inaccurate' and 'tedious'. Other issues that frequently came up were file organisation, thread organisation and server problems. Other examples follow: -

The way the files are organized
The file-uploading system of CTO - errors
The forum structure is unsatisfactory; not user friendly

The search function provides inaccurate results

A more consistent maintenance routine

Look What I Have Found thread moves too fast

Integrity of uploads (are they the original zip? Have they been repackaged? Etc.)

Slow server; inability to load

I'd like to be able to choose whether to download individual files.

10. Do you use any of these other sites that are similar to CTO?

All respondents said that they used other TS1 archiving sites. Saving the Sims was the most used at 75%. Other most used sites that respondents mentioned were: -

Swarm, Simblesse Oblige, TSR

Appendix D: Interview Material

D. 1   Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Title of Project: The Sims as Resource – A Proposal for a Virtual Ethnography Evaluating the Concept of Information Culture in the Gaming World

Name of Researcher: Ludovica Price

Please tick to confirm

☐ I confirm that I have read and understand the information that has been

provided to be about this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions

and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to

withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, from the study.

☐ I understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by responsible individuals from

City University London, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research.

☐ I give permission for these individuals to have access to data provided by myself.

I agree to take part in the above research study.

_____   _____

Name of Participant   Date

_____   _____

Researcher   Date

D. 2 Interview Excerpts

These are excerpts of interviews with CTO members. The material presented gives context to the passages quoted throughout the paper, as well as that deemed of most interest to the reader. Non-essential or personal information have been edited out of these excerpts.

Email interview with bogies

1b) On Tue, Jul 3, 2012 at 1:31 AM, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ < ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ > wrote:
Hi Ludi!

Q1. How long have you been a member of CTO? Three years.

Q2. What do you think about CTO's file section and its efforts to preserve Sims 1 content? I love it! Other than yahoo groups which can disappear at any time, CTO is the only place trying to preserve all these files. The file section is very easy to use and you don't have to depend on people emailing files to you.

Q3. As a member, how would you describe your role at CTO? I was a member for a couple of years before becoming a mod. I enjoy helping out, love downloading files as well as adding to the files whenever I can.

2b) On Thu, Jul 5, 2012 at 1:27 AM, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ < ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ > wrote:

[…]

As to why CTO is different that the other sites and forums, I think it's because of our attitude, the friendly atmsophere (compared to the "battles" in some of the old forums we should get a medal lol!), and the way eveybody looks out for each other (and I'm not just referring to sharing files)! Unlike the other sites still around, we have become a family. I go to the forum at least twice a day - and it isn't to dl files (altough I admit to grabbing new files while I'm there). I'm sure some people come just to get the files, but CTO is much more than that to the rest of us!

I loved the forum - I made new friends, learned new things, and yes - got new files. That's why I volunteered to become a mod - I wanted to give something back. I'm not a creator, so this way my way to give.

I should also mention that CTO is also very popular because it's so easy to dl files. Everything is right there, well organized, alphabetical, very much like a library - only for files instead of books […]

3b) On Wed, Jul 11, 2012 at 1:11 AM, ████████ < █████████████████ > wrote:

If I could create I would definitely make and share my stuff at CTO. Since I can't, I do what I can - I love the forum and want to help out. I give back by modding, helping where I can, and sharing my collection of sims files. I think it all evens out in the end, but I do think it takes more time, effort, creativity, and energy for the creators to make the wonderful things they do!

I originally joined CTO because I heard about the downloads policy and all the files available. But, there is just so much more to the forum for those of us who stick around!

4b) On Wed, Jul 18, 2012 at 12:42 AM, ████████ < █████████████████ > wrote:
I think creators put a lot of time and effort into their creations, but I don't think they put more effort into CTO itself than the rest of us (at least the core members). It's a great bonus to have all you wonderful creators at the forum, but that's not why we joined! Actually, I'm not sure if any of the members were creating when I first joined. This may be off course, but I think most of the new creators started making stuff because of all the help and encouragement they got at the forum.

[...]

5b) On Thu, Jul 26, 2012 at 1:04 AM, ████████ < █████████████████ > wrote:

[...]

To answer your question, yes I do think CTO is a good resource for creators - especially new ones. As to me, if I had the time I'd like to try to create, but the good programs don't work for Mac users (I can't even find one that will allow me to look at skins before putting them in my game - the program I had doesn't work with my current OS)! I can clone, etc. using iff snooper (and recolor if I get around to reading the how-to), but wouldn't know where to begin to actually make something lol!

I'll leave the creating to the experts and just enjoy having all these beautiful objects (and skins) in my game. I hate almost all of the maxis stuff and wouldn't even play without the custom content! Not to mention the total lack of historical content.

[...]

6b) On Tue, Jul 31, 2012 at 1:22 AM, ████████ <████████████████> wrote:

"Do you think that there is too little support and information for Sims players who are Mac uses?" - hell yes!

I'd love to see a Mac help area at CTO - we just lost the one at N99 (███ was the mod and she was a great help, but they closed down some areas that weren't getting enough traffic). Is there a Mac expert at CTO that would be willing to take on the task? And, how many members are using Macs - is it worth the time and effort? If I get really stuck I go to SSOW or to the iffsnooper group.

As to creating, if all the great pc programs were available to Mac players, I might try to get into creating one day […]

Email interview with darckn1ght

2b) On Thu, Jul 5, 2012 at 2:57 AM, Darc Kn1ght < ██████████████████ > wrote:

I am very particular about what I download, I am not one to grab a whole site. If I see something I like I grab it, if it does`nt appeal to me I leave it. If I can`t see it, I don`t know what it is. I feel I am wasting time downloading a lot of things I probably won`t keep. As far as the origin of the photos, it does`nt matter as long as it is an accurate depiction of the object.

2a) Not really, my health issue probably just make me visit a little more than I normally would, I check CTO anywhere from 5 to 10 times a day as is, if I were still able to work and do other things my health prevents me from doing, I more than likely would only check 3 to 5 times a day.

2b) CTO has done many things for me. The most important thing is the friends I have made here, if not for some of the people here, […] I may have went crazy. I was extremely depressed and some of the folks here helped me through my time of need. Then there are the downloads, so many I could never dream of collecting them all, they make my game play more interesting. Also people here have taught me things I would have never been able to learn on my own, technical things, skinning, recoloring, etc etc. not that I`m any good at either, but I was able to try and find out that they were`nt my strong points.

[…]

3b) On Tue, Jul 10, 2012 at 7:15 PM, Darc Kn1ght < ██████████████████ > wrote:

[…] I believe CTO is very therapeutic. The friendship and the caring are the true foundations that makes CTO what it is. No other forum I have ever belonged to or seen has these virtues. Of course there are times of isolation, but that stands to reason since there are so many members, in these cases it would be the persons own fault. You can always find someone to be there if you simply speak up. I get bored a lot and wish (as you know) that chat was more active. That has been my pet for a long time, though I never really figured out the answer to the problem. We tried Town hall meetings to no avail, and a couple other ideas. […]

[…] I have always enjoyed making GIFS. I`ve been doing them for years. Well what happened was I asked JM and Sidhe if there was anything I cold do to help and be more apart of CTO. Well I had in the past made a few GIFS for a couple of random people here and I guess they were noticed, anyway Sidhe asked if I`d be interested in making a couple until she was able to start making them, I did this and they hit I guess so she asked if I would like to do them all. I of course accepted. […T]here are times when I have to make myself stop doing other things to focus on them, as real life sometimes gets in the way. I would not however give up doing the blinkies for any reason, other than a disaster.. It makes me feel needed and wanted when I don`t feel it in other points in my life. […]

Email interview with deekitty31

1b) On Tue, Jul 3, 2012 at 2:33 AM, Dee <█████████████████> wrote:

Q1. How long have you been a member of CTO?
I've been a member since the Forum opened.

Q2. What do you think about CTO's file section and its efforts to preserve Sims 1 content?
I think it's a wonderful idea, but needs some work. I believe a greater effort needs to be made to preserve the integrity of the creators original files (i.e: original zips whenever possible). I like to see the files organized as closely as possible to the creators original site, also. I know that isn't always possible, but it makes it easier. I like to see sets uploaded as sets. I don't want to have to go searching and picking through hundreds of files to find everything. If the creator didn't upload them as a set on the site, then the uploader can always package them as sets, as long as they note in their entry that it was repackaged and that the original zips are inside. It just makes it easier for us collectors.

Otherwise, I think we are on the right track, as far as alphabetical listing of sites with as much information about the original site noted with each listing.

Q3. As a member, how would you describe your role at CTO?
I've always tried to help and contribute as much as I can. Usually , I do that with providing needed files from my collection. I have always been willing to share what I can. My work at other forums puts me in a position where I can help in that manner.

I'm not as socially active as a lot of members, I tend to be reserved and stay out of the more personal postings, unless it directly involves me. So, I really don't see myself as a "key" member, in that way. I'm more of a behind the scenes person. I'm always willing to offer help and advice when asked, or if I feel that I am uniquely qualified to do so (if not asked...lol). [...]

My recent promotion to Moderator, has opened a door to be more involved and I am becoming more comfortable with making suggestions and offering my opinion. I'm sensing that JM and the Admin team are pretty open to constructive suggestions and I am really appreciating the "openness" that is coming back to our forum. I will admit when I first returned, I didn't feel that CTO was the same place that I had left the year before, but it is slowly getting to a place where I am feeling more comfortable.

As far as my role. I'm just a little worker bee. :)
[...]

2b) On Sun, Jul 8, 2012 at 12:00 AM, Dee <████████████████████> wrote:

[…]

Some time in 2007, I finally became curious enough to check out this Big Bad Pirate Forum that everyone talk about. SFV (Sims File Vault). […] I decided that it was up to me what I did with the files that I purchased and downloaded. […]

I often helped pass on files that I had received from other SFV members, and became "hooked" on the sharing aspect. It felt good to help other people complete their collections. I had already belonged to several forums where files were shared, with permission, and gifts were passed around, and I liked that, but this was different. I felt that I was helping to provide a community service, in a way. I even spent a small amount of money for some subscriptions, so that I could help out with the harder to get files. When I paid for a subscription, I decided that I needed to get my money's worth, so I would download everything from the site. That is when I revised my organization yet again. All files were categorized according to Site Name>Creator>Room/Category. I became a stickler for keeping the original files from the site. No matter what changes I made to the file myself, I always kept the original. I felt, that in that way, I was helping to keep credit where credit was due. It also helped with weeding out duplicates.

[…] The announcement was made that SFV would close. […] That was when Joan started talking about opening a forum. […] CTO was very small then. Basically, it was the few active members of the SFV Sims 1 section. Because it was a smaller group, I became very comfortable with the people. I posted and chatted more than I ever had at any other forum. We had a common goal and became a family. We had to be very careful about who joined, due to the huge target that was painted on us by the "Anti-Pirate" people. We had more than a few trouble makers slip through the cracks and Joan was afraid of being taken offline. […] She sought out our input and vented to us. We gave our opinions and support, but always felt that the final decision was hers, because it was her site....her baby, so to speak..that was at risk. But, she shared openly with us, we knew the trials, the tribulations, the hate and we gave her love and support. We were a family. […]
I worked closely with Joan in regards to the file section. We chatted about how we felt it should look and how we wanted the files organized and arranged. (Sets instead of individual pieces, site info to post, etc) Of course, I wasn't the only uploader, but I wanted to be sure that what I uploaded was to her specifications.

I continued to collect sites, downloading anything and everything that I could get my hands on. Due to the growing popularity of the Sims 2, Sims 1 sites were becoming inactive and began closing, so I felt a desperate need to get what I could. […] Right before SimsHost closed, they made their sites free for a period of time and I spent hours upon hours downloading, for the sole purpose of sharing with others. (I uploaded a few of those sites to CTO).

In September of 2009, I became addicted to another game. Second Life. […] I was involved with Second Life for almost a year […] Then I was forced to quit. At that time I came back to the Sims Community.

[...]

When I returned, I checked at only a few. One of those was CTO. I started reading posts, popping into chat, re-aquainting myself with the environment. There were a lot of new faces, and a lot of old faces were missing. So, I was back to being the lurker...reserved....keeping quiet...just watching in the background. I met a few people that I have become close to, but the close knit family feeling just isn't there anymore. The CTO anchor was missing as well....Joan. She would pop in and out. Go missing for extended periods of time. [...]

CTO had grown, and with that growth, the intimacy that the original group had shared, was gone. The openness and communication with the members had nearly stopped. There was a clique-ish feel to the posts. As if only certain people were permitted to respond, and if others did respond, their input was not as welcome as other's might be. There seemed to be a social order, with the Admin and Creators reigning at the top and the "simple" members were just peasants. The "vibe" that I was getting left me feeling pretty heartbroken, but I felt that I needed to give it time and wait it out. So, I delved back into my collecting and sharing, hoping to get the old feeling back.

During this time, I became involved more with N99 and STS. I had been one of Genie's Angels at N99, before disappearing, so I resumed that role and joined the STS girls in their mission to preserve Sims files. Even though their policies are not directly in line with those at CTO, I felt that I was, once again, doing a service and jumped full ahead into collecting Sims sites. I discovered some programs and, once again, fine-tuned my downloading routine. I began saving entire websites and webpages, to preserve as much of the feel of the original site and get as much information as I could, so that, when sharing these files, I could provide a more complete picture. I went back through some of my old files and began updating and completing my current collection, as much as I could. [...]I also resumed my uploading to CTO, and found that my new habits made it much easier to make neat and accurate postings. I did my best, in the beginning to make sure that the posts had pictures and were neat and descriptive, but my new habits made it much easier.

Things at CTO were continuing to change. Joan was absent more and more. Hyp had pretty much taken over, but her RL kept her busy and before long, things were falling apart. The separation between the "classes" of members became more defined and more obvious. There were problems popping up with the forum software and the staff was struggling with balancing everything. I started to get very concerned about the well-being of CTO. I have a lot invested in the forum, time and energy and love mainly, since I can't really afford to help financially. And the direction it was taking broke my heart. For a while, I considered leaving completely, but I just couldn't. I felt that I needed to stay and see what would happen, one way or the other.

More staff was added and the struggle to make decisions in Joan's absence fell on them. I watch the struggle and wished that there was more I could do to help, but there was still that separation and I didn't feel that suggestions would be readily accepted. So, I sat back and watched the struggle. I soon found out that I wasn't the only person who was noticing issues. Several of the

long-time members and a few of the more recent members began commenting, and it became obvious that something needed to be done. I was very close to quitting and had withdrawn even more from the forum, in general. The straw that almost broke the camel's back, was the apparent turn to attempt to run CTO as a business venture, instead of a "home". (Had that happened, I would have left!) I was almost out the door, when Joan returned and decided that some help might be needed.

Once again, I offered my assistance. This time it was accepted and I began helping with the file section and took on a role as a Moderator. I have been/am a moderator/admin at several forums, but each one is different. The basic knowledge helps, but I am still at a loss as far as knowing the goal of CTO and my role in reaching it. The goal, in the beginning was simple...Preserve the Sims files and provide a safe haven for Sims 1 fans who like to share. Now, due to the growth of the forum and the changing mindset of the Sims Community in general, I think the goal has changed a bit. I, personally, would like to see that goal more clearly defined.

Initially, being a Moderator seemed nothing more than a title. I felt that we really had very little to do and even less as far as say in anything around the forum. Since Joan has returned again, I am seeing this change. It started back when she decided to do the fund drive. I was all for this, had even mentioned it to another member. I really feel that if we take a few steps back toward the openness and communication that we had in the beginning, that the members will feel like they are as important as everyone else ...equals ....family, and will step up. I know there were a few people who made sizable donations during the drive, but I really felt like everyone was trying to help, like we were pulling together and I think that if we continue on the current path, CTO will thrive. Of course, there are going to be people who will take and not give, but I really think the active members at CTO will do what they can to keep their home alive. Because, they really do consider it home.

[…]

3b) On Tue, Jul 10, 2012 at 8:15 PM, Dee < ████████████████████ > wrote:

[…]

Having a Chain of Command is important. Those at the top of that chain should present a unified front...be on the same page. Their job is to guide those lower on the chain in their duties and keep the overall goal foremost in everyone's mind. Those lower, in turn, guide the flow of the forum. All of this needs to be done without the abuse of the power. We need to keep in mind that we are still equal to and no better than those we guide. There should be no abuse of power, no "I'm better than you or more important than you because I have a title" attitude. That kind of attitude tends to drive people away.

Since Joan has returned, it has changed. Lessened. I think her example, thus far, has shown people where she thinks things should be. And she has demonstrated a willingness to evolve herself. It's a slow process, but I do see things changing. So, I'm in a wait and see mode.

For a while, we were getting that attitude from some creators, too. Mainly the newer arrivals who were used to that mentality in other forums and brought it with them, but, I believe, that they have adjusted their mentality to be more suited to our goals. We are about saving the passion for the Sims 1 game. That passion, the fire to play and create, has to be fed and encouraged. We didn't have many creators in the beginning, but as we grow and more join, I believe they are seeing that one big way to keep the Sims alive is to encourage new creators, to be supportive and help as much as they can. Seeing this, I believe more and more new creators will come forward. People who were afraid to try before because they didn't think they could ever be good enough.

[…]

Email interview with jmrcrp

1b) On Thu, Jul 5, 2012 at 1:57 PM, Joan ▮▮▮▮ < ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ > wrote:

Answers:

Q 1: 4 years + 6 months, since the day the site opened

Q 2: The file section is vital to the site, and is really the main purpose of the site's existence, though the forum has perhaps become more important to active members than the file collection. I feel that most new members are joining to have access to the files. I like the way the files are organized, by original Sims 1 websites, in alphabetical order. However, this does pose some problems, as some creators made custom content for more than one site, and we should have the files cross-referenced to indicate that. It would be possible to do so, since the DOCman software does allow for more than one listing for each file. We've just never done it.

The main problems I know about are simply that the collection is so large (18,000 documents) that it is difficult to manage. In the past we have allowed people to upload files in ways that are really contrary to our goals, and this has resulted in a lot of extra work for the administrators and other members who help us try to keep the files orderly. For example, we have allowed large archive files to be uploaded, when what we really wanted was files separated into sets or individual items. We want each listing document to show a picture of what is in the file, and this has been a big problem. Many members just can't seem to figure out how to include a picture in their listing document (despite having more than one FAQ on the site showing them how to do it), or they just won't take the time to do it. They seem to expect that the administrators will "fix up" their listing documents after they upload a file. In addition, many files are uploaded to the wrong category. Sometimes we end up with duplicate files. This happens when someone has a file with a slightly different filename from the one we already have. The system will not allow files to be uploaded when a file with the same name already exists, but many times these files have been re-packaged and re-named over the years. With 18,000 files, it is very difficult to weed out the duplicates, especially when they end up in different categories.

[…]

So in essence, I feel that the problems with our file system are user-related and software (system)-related. Some of the software and system problems will be solved when we move to the new re-built site, but there seems to be no way to teach our members how to add to our collection in the manner we want them to.

In general, I like the way our listing documents are organized. Most of the main categories (the Sims site from which the files came) are broken down into sub-categories to assist users in finding what they are looking for. In addition, a search function is available, which displays results as listing documents, complete with pictures, if one is in the document.

[…]

2b) On Tue, Jul 10, 2012 at 2:47 PM, Joan ▮▮▮▮ <▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮> wrote:

[…]

Yes, DOCman is probably not intended for such large collections of files. But I recall asking the creators of DOCman if there was a limit to how many it could handle, way back when we were at about 1000 files. They told me it was unlimited, but large numbers of files might slow down searches and the ability to pull up the files list or orphan list (which has turned out to be true). There are probably better systems out there for collecting and maintaining such a large library. But I stick with DOCman for 3 reasons: 1. It is a perfect and seamless fit for Joomla. It is meant for Joomla sites, and Joomla is the site software I prefer. 2. It is the one system I found that is easy or even possible for users to directly add to the collection (upload files). Most of the other ones are meant for only the SuperAdministrator to add files to the collection. This was very important to me, and I think it helps make CTO what it is - a community effort where everyone contributes to what we have. 3. It is very flexible in its configuration possibilities. You have no idea how much tweaking I have done to the DOCman configuration to make it work for our needs as well as it does. […T]here is the capability of creating "groups" and specifying which group can see and download individual files. This was originally done to make it so that "spies" (I hate that word, but that's what they were) couldn't come in, see the payfiles and other "non-shareable" files, and make a stink about them. We figured that participation in the forum was the best way of weeding out the "hit-and-run" users.

[…]

My advice to someone who is considering starting a user-aggregated library would be this: Know your subject matter before you begin! I made many mistakes in the beginning. To be honest, I never knew there were so many Sims 1 sites and so much custom content that had been created. My personal experience had been with, at the most, maybe 20 sites, if that many. Believe it or not, I started out with 3 main categories: Objects, Skins, and Build. It wasn't long (maybe a week) before ▮▮▮▮ suggested that we organize the files by site, rather than by type of file. Then we had to create categories by site name, and re-categorize all the files we already had. We have changed a lot of things since then, as you know. Someone starting to create a library should know a lot about the type of items that will be in the library, and have very strict and clear-cut rules as to what users can contribute, and in what form. This would have saved countless hours of work if we had done this in the beginning. In addition, the person should create the library with the idea of presenting as much information as possible about the items it holds. We have had thousands of files uploaded with bad titles (people don't understand that DOCman inserts the file name as the listing document title, unless they change it) and no pictures, so we had no idea what the file was. I remember a few years ago when someone uploaded a ton of stuff with German filenames and no information about what the object was. We had to enlist

Martha's help in translating the German filenames to English, then edit the listings and add pictures. I would also suggest that each category have a description on it. I have tried to do this, as I think it's important to say a little bit about the Sims site, such as when it opened, when it closed, what kind of files it had, who the creators were, etc. But we have never completed the task of adding such information to every category. I would suggest that they do this from the start.

I think it would be very difficult to create a large, user-aggregated library without spending some money. Free hosting for such a site is non-existent. Cheap hosting such as GoDaddy and others, just cannot handle the server resources that such a library requires. This is the main reason we are forced to use the more expensive VPS (Virtual Private Server) hosting. The DOCman system, and any other similar system, requires a LOT of processing power. If we were just a forum, without files and not using Joomla, we could still be on cheap shared hosting. Forums do not require such a large amount of processing power. But the amount of uploading and downloading of files on our site requires a large amount. The techical explanation for this is that uploading and especially downloading require a large amount of "calls" to the server, so they use a lot of server resources.

I'll try to answer your last question as best I can. As you know, I suffer from ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Couple that with the periodic demands on my time from RL, and you may be able to understand why I sometimes "disappear" for a while. And truthfully, there have been periods of total burnout where I wish the whole thing would just go away and I wouldn't have to deal with it anymore. Sometimes it feels like an albatross around my neck, and I resent the amount of my own money that I have spent over the last four years (over and above the donations we have received) to keep it going, at times when I had no interest in it. I spent literally hours a day on CTO for at least the first two years, to the detriment of my mental health and home life. In the past year or so, I have gone through spells where I just didn't want to deal with it. I have felt so guilty about doing that, and leaving it in the hands of the other Admins, but I knew you all were doing a good job, and if you were more interested in it than I was as the time, I would leave it to you. [...]

Email interview with Jonesie

1b) On Tue, Jul 3, 2012 at 12:11 AM, ▮▮▮ < ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ > wrote:

Hi Ludi,
   Thank you for allowing me to participate. I had to reply in this separate email because Yahoo! was being uncooperative when I tried to reply to your original email.

Q1. How long have you been a member of CTO?
Q2. What do you think about CTO's file section and its efforts to preserve Sims 1 content?
Q3. As a member, how would you describe your role at CTO?

My Answers:
Q1. I've been a member for approximately 3 months.

Q2. […] I think it's wonderful that there's a great deal of effort being made to preserve Sims 1 content. It reminds me of how certain toys and games I enjoyed as a kid - back in the non-tech era of the 1950s - are still enjoyed today because of the efforts of The Faithful to preserve and promote them - like Monopoly, Slinky, Etch-a-Sketch, and so on. 50 years from now, there will be young people who haul out Great-Grandma and Grandpa's "vintage" Sims 1 game (including all the CTO downloads the old folks collected way back when), and have a ball with it.

Q3. My "role" at CTO? Not being super-tech savvy, or highly creative, I'm pretty much an Observer and a Cheerleader.
      That made me feel like I wasn't offering very much in return for the benefits I receive from CTO. So, it's why I came up with the idea of creating a definitions Wiki, why I take the time (when I can) to say hello to new Members, and why I provide positive input to other Member's helpful advice and creative contributions when it's appropriate to do so. […]

2b) On Tue, Jul 3, 2012 at 2:05 AM, ▮▮▮ < ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ > wrote:

[…] There were so many words, abbreviations, etc. that I read and was totally clueless as to what they meant. I was very sure I was not alone. I knew it was something I could assist in creating, and thus was born my *quid pro quo* [The CTO Wiki]. […]

3b) On Sat, Jul 7, 2012 at 10:28 PM, Jo Anne ▮▮▮ < ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ > wrote:

[…]
      Q: What do you think of the CTO community so far?

      Half the joy of being a part of any group is coming up with new (serious or fun) ideas, and urging people to pitch in. It's a good way of getting to know each other, finding "kindred spirits," and keeping the whole forum endeavor moving forward.

I have not had a lot of experience with forums – but I am currently a member of two others.
One is dedicated to preserving the history of the San Francisco District I grew up in […]

The other forum is a group of adults who all grew up in the same neighborhood and attended the same grammar school (kindergarten through 8th grade) […] CTO was an <u>extremely</u> different forum for me. As you can tell from the above, those forums have personal meaning and continuity – a familiarity among members due to shared territories, past experiences and history, plus friends and families, going back many years in the same geographical area (even unto our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents).

CTO, as we American Colonists say, was a "whole new ball game," […] When I saw people talking about "being a family" – that also made me a little wary. I thought….."cult." I am happy to admit I was very, very wrong. In a short period of time (less than a week) I stopped being overly-cautious and suspicious, and became quite comfortable. […]

I initially joined to learn more about Sims 1, and also to see what files were offered which I had not seen elsewhere. While perusing the various threads at random – I saw it wasn't just about sharing files, creations, and game advice. It was also about people (from all over the world) who had initially connected due to their devotion to Sims 1, and then started making friends and being supportive in many areas - creatively, technically and personally.

All of this impelled me to start contributing ASAP in order to "help row the boat." I'm happy that the Wiki thing will take fruition […]

More importantly, I observe that the CTO community is like a surrogate family for some members (and probably even more members than I am aware of at the moment). Without naming names, I sense that certain members live lives that are not as happy as they wish they could be (because of finances, chronic illness, family difficulties, isolation, past childhood issues and traumas, etc.). CTO has provided an important creative outlet for them, and also the freedom to tell their stories and share opinions without fear of being made fun of or rejected – as long as they do not "cross the line." I came to CTO at a time when a member was getting banned because she went over that line – said banning which I understand is very, very rare.
[…]

4b) On Wed, Jul 11, 2012 at 9:16 PM, Jo Anne ▮ <▬▬▬▬▬▬> wrote:

[…]

CTO also offers a marvelous variety of threads, from the technical – which addresses the primary theme of CTO, to the "just plain fun," which allows members to connect in ways not directly related to Sims 1 (e.g., "I've Got A Joke for You," and "Does Anyone Watch 'Once Upon a Time?'"). […]
I <u>have</u> noticed a few posts from people who say "I've been away for awhile because [fill in personal situation here] and now I'm glad to be back!" Members respond with welcoming good cheer and enthusiasm. […]

I recently noticed one CTO member (can't remember the name) had not been heard from in awhile. There was a back-and-forth among other members wondering if they should try and find out if this person was OK. I thought that was very sweet and caring.

7b) On Wed, Aug 1, 2012 at 12:15 AM, Jo Anne ▮ <▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮> wrote:

[…]

As a Newbie, I have been following the thread where people are asking Joan many questions about the transition. Lately, I note several members referred to it as the "sinking of the Titanic," information-wise. I smiled, but I understood. They don't seem to be saying this in a sarcastic manner, but rather because they are genuinely concerned that not all of the site info can be saved.

Since I have only been able to skim the surface of the current site's information (there are just so many hours in a day!) I am unable to grasp the full significance of the transition in the way the long-term members see it. E.g., I can't miss something when I don't even know what it is I'm supposed to be missing!

[…]

At the same time, I DO have faith that Joan and her admirable volunteers will preserve the important things. Maybe it's like seeing a library on fire, with no way to quench the flames. You rush in, save what you think will be the most valuable - then hope for the best after the new library is constructed, and the re-stocking of lost knowledge can begin again.

[…]

Email interview with Katt

1b) On Thu, Jul 19, 2012 at 3:37 PM, ███████████ <████████████████████████> wrote:

QUESTIONS

#1   I've been a member for a little over 3 years.

#2   I believe that CTO is very important in saving and making available "unavailable" files from sites that have closed and are not file share friendly. It is also a place where Sim 1 players, both ones that have been playing since the game was released and ones who have just discovered the game can feel comfortable asking questions and looking for new things for their Simmys.

#3   I believe that everyone who joins an interactive web site has a responsibility to add to that site, at CTO to answer questions (if you can help) to help find files others may be looking for, to add files to the site if you have them and to send any files yoy may have that others are looking for. And to help financially if possible.

████████████   (katt)

Email interview with ripmagnum

1b) On Tue, Jul 10, 2012 at 1:25 PM, ███████ <████████████████████> wrote:

[…]
Q1. How long have you been a member of CTO?
 Answer: Rougly 10 months at time of this interview.

Q2. What do you think about CTO's file section and its efforts to preserve Sims 1 content?

  Answer: The site is very user-friendly, and at last check, over 15,000 files available for download. This is extremely incredible when you consider that what we gamers refer to as 'Custom Content' which is files not included by Maxis or EA Games that enhances gameplay of The Sims is rapidly disappearing. […] But, it is this spirit of sharing these files that brought me to this site---and moreover, the reason that I have stayed a member as long as I have. One really nice feature at CTO, is that quite a few sections in the 'Downloads Area' or more precisely, entire Sims 1 websites are displayed as they were when they were independent sites before they were forced to close. Now that, by it's very definition, is true file preservation.

Q3. As a member, how would you describe your role at CTO?

  Answer: […] I guess my role is a somewhat goodwill ambassador of sorts. Lately, I seem to be spending more time 'chatting' in the forum than collecting downloads (which is very ironic when you consider that I came to CTO just for the downloads)   I guess my CTO experience could be summed up as... "I came for the downloads, but I stayed for all the friends that I made..."   All in all, CTO is a great site that has a lot of hard-to-find files, but it's the people that really make this site great. And great people like the ones I found are an even harder find.

2b) On Fri, Jul 20, 2012 at 12:49 AM, ███████ <████████████████████> wrote:

[…] I am not a moderator/administrator type, so I do not control policy issues on the site. So, I don't have a role in those aspects of the site---and believe me, I quite frankly wouldn't want to be. That is as thankless a task as I could imagine. But having said that, I have the greatest respect for those at CTO who do shoulder that burden. And as for creative talents, I have absolutely zero talent in making Sims-anything. […] I also have the greatest respect for the many talented Sims creators who reside at CTO, I once refered in one of my forum posts that spending time with them (the creators) was not unlike hanging-out with 'The Rolling Stones' at a barbeque. In terms of talents and abilities, I would have to say that I don't contribute at all at CTO---and I feel terrible about that. But, out of the 2500+ members, I am hardly alone in that distinction. […]
I do participate in the forum, I share my ideas, greetings, friendship, comfort, and even sharing files with the other members. That is what the overwhelming majority of the active members do at CTO. In many respects, the forum is the beating heart of this site, and the downloads more of a really nice door prize for coming to the party.

Email interview with simtonic

1b) On Sat, Jul 7, 2012 at 11:14 PM, Simtonic < ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ > wrote:

 […]
Because of it's unrestricted sharing conditions, the pleasant atmosphere and the convenient access to the files, CTO seems to have got a leading position among the collector's fairs.
At the moment it has the widest range of Sims 1 files of all categories, the file section is well assorted, the illustrations are a helpful reminder.
Due to the steadily increasing number of members new content can be added nearly every day - even if the exchange of files has shifted to a more private level, caused by temporarily space problems.
I personally think that CTO is the most important transfer point for the target group of Sims 1 players, there is no comparable lively place to visit.

2b) On Fri, Jul 13, 2012 at 3:02 PM, Simtonic < ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ > wrote:

One main focus of playing Sims 1 is on creating and shaping a social system.
In a certain way CTO is a mirroring of this system.
Its open communication culture encourages the exchange of ideas, knowledge and assistance in daily life – regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin or disabilty.
That's what I like about CTO most.
On a personal level it's also a compensation. Since a hearing loss I had to quit up my job in the field of youth and family welfare and have to overcome feelings of void and social isolation. CTO helps me to cultivate social contacts because the focus is on the written word and I can participate in any discussion.
Originally I joined CTO because of the Sims files that were unavailible at other places but I have remained because of the unique good atmosphere.

I don't feel like an exceptional member. In point of fact it's a stable group of people that are very motivated and show an extraordinary amount of commitment towards CTO and the CTO community […]

A substantial percentage of members are only interested in the huge collection of files.
The minority which is involved in the community enjoys also the social contacts and the diversity of topics. CTO is a very friendly place, nearly everyone respects the basic rules of politeness and shows tolerance.
No question is deemed to be too stupid to find an answer and everybody provides help and advice. That creates an emotional bond bewteen CTO and its members.

3b) On Thu, Jul 19, 2012 at 11:38 AM, Simtonic < ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ > wrote:

Years ago I've found an illustrated anim8or tutorial (written in German) that enabled me to do my first Sims 1 objects.

I thought doing something similar for my CTO friends would be an initial help because some of them had expressed a genuine interest to learn creating for Sims.

With help of many pictures and step-by-step instructions I wanted to break down barriers because it's not too difficult to make Sims objects out of pre-made 3d models.

It was a success – several new creator sites resulted from this tutorial and I'm happy about this.

There is no official hierarchy at CTO (nearly all admins act as normal members) – but there is an "inner circle" of those members that take an active role in the forum.

Those members get a greater deal of attention if asking a question or initiating a project, they get more information (because of more communication), they get more social attention (for example gifts) and they have a decisive influence on the development of CTO.

There is a permeability for new members to join this "inner circle" but all in all the group of people with a predominant role hasn't changed evidently during my membership.

4b) On Sun, Jul 29, 2012 at 3:44 PM, Simtonic <███████████████████> wrote:

1) Do you see the 'inner circle' as a *fixed* or *fluid* entity?

Over the years CTO has undergone fundamental changes.

During the first years the community was attacked from outside and had to depend on a sense of solidarity. New members were first viewed with suspicion because they might have been spies. At that time a new member it took a while of considence until a new member became part of the "inner circle".

Today CTO is a place-to-go, no one is hiding behind psedudonyms anymore and there is a high acceptance from outside.

Complexed subjects are now only being addressed on the side and the former diversity of themes has been lost - the main focus is on using CTO as a pure exchange service.

This makes it easy for new members to start the conversation because this way the inhibitions to talk to long-established members are not so big.

Keen attitude towards communication and cooperativeness open the door - age, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, income, religion or political affiliation play no role.

So I think The "inner circle" has become a fluid entity but at the same time the significance of feeling as a part of the group has decreased.

An elimination criterion ist he lacking of language skills - even the most efficient translating program can't be a substitute.

All Non-American members of the „inner circle" speak nearly fluently English.

[…]

In the following my perceived inofficial roles:
1. I give help and advice so I'm an *advisor*
2. I own a vast amount of files and I'm willing to share it so I'm *a point of contact for requests*

3. I do voluntary community work – so I'm a *helper*
4. I've provided creating tutorials – so I'm a kind of *coach/teacher*
5. I provide financial support on a regular basis so I'm a *donator*
6. I have many private contacts to friends (even if in a social internet network like CTO the term friend should be placed in quotation marks because nearly anyone is a friend) – so I'm a *friend*
7. I benefit a lot from CTO (amusement, Sims files, etc) so I'm a *beneficiary*
8. Sometimes I feel responsable to create a good mood – so I'm a kind of *class clown*
9. Sometimes I also take the role of a *critical voice* because I'm one of the few members that express openly a   critical view.
10. I would like to have seen my role as a *mediator* in the conflict concerning the exclusion of ███████ (and would have been able to fulfill it) but there was no interest on the part of the adminship of CTO.

Email interview with vetavestal

1b) On Sat, Jul 28, 2012 at 2:17 AM, ████████ <████████████████████> wrote:

[…]
I think that CTO's efforts to preserve Sims 1 custom content is laudable. It may be a game which has progressed hugely over the space of twelve years with talk of SIMS 4 on the horizon. However, the original format was pretty ground breaking at the time. Certainly it is a cultural product which should be preserved. […] I have no specified role at CTO Sims . However as a bemused bystander is what I do best .Asking questions about game play or a game crashing may seem rather simplistic to the serious simmer but other people who are not so good at it appreciate the answers.
[…]

<u>**Chat interview with Arty-choke**</u>

Chat with ██████████████████████████

██████████████████│█████████████████   Jul
                                                                         23

to me

[...]
 me: Great! So if you're comfortable let's start. :)
10:37 PM OK, you mentioned in your answers to the preliminary questions that there was something of a 'divide' between old members and new members - that they see things differently. Can you explain that a little more?
10:39 PM ████████████: The older members have a history they share with each other. The are familiar with the types of interactions that occur and communicate as if they were longtime friends (which they are). The new members seem, at times, to be a bit intimidated by this - which is natural.......
10:41 PM Some take just a little while to get with the flow, others it takes a little longer. The do see things differently as they do no have that history to rely upon......
 *they
10:42 PM **me**: Where do you think you come into this? Do you see yourself as a 'old' or 'new' member? Or neither?
10:45 PM ████████████: Neither. I have read a great many of the older posts and have a feel for what it was like before I joined. I also remember what it was like to be a new member and trying to fit in... establish myself (mainly in the forum). Perhaps I see myself as a bridge between the old and new members.
10:46 PM **me**: Interesting. I remember we started to get active about the same time. Do you think that was about the time that CTO started to change? Or was it before?
████████████   Before that
10:47 PM **me**: What makes you say that?
████████████   Reading the old posts and communicating (chat) with some of the older members.
10:48 PM **me**: Do you think the change was inherently bad for CTO?
10:51 PM ████████████: The older members seemed to think so. CTO was evolving - the small community was growing. The free discussion of any and all issues was no longer taking place in the forum. Some of that can be attributed to a "breakdown" in the..... for lack of a better phrase, the command structure [...]
10:56 PM There did not seem to be well defined duties for anyone. I know that's changed now, but that the time it appeared there were no goals, to structure, so well-defined chain of command.
 me: yup
████████████: *but at that time
10:57 PM *no structure
 me: Gotcha :)
████████████: *no well-defined
 CTO just seemed to continue on momentum only.
 me: So that affected the community negatively? or did they just get on with it?

10:59 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮: The membership as a whole just got on with it, but there were many who were able "see" that things were beginning to deteriorate without that all-important command structure performing as it should

me: Right

what kind of strategies do you think the community employs to keep itself going.

?

11:03 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮: The forum is THE means of communication (obviously) - there was little occuring from the "top" down. So the community keeps on doing what it always did in the hopes that some change would occur. Some voiced these concerns privately amongst themselves, some posted in the forum in an indirect manner that things were not as they should be. Some tool it upon themselves to attempt to "do something". There was a lot of wait and see going on.

*took

11:04 PM me: If you don't mind me asking, which one of these groups did/do you fall into?

▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮: back to the new members . old members divide - the new members probably had no clue there were any issues

me: Yeah, I can imagine they wouldn't

11:06 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮: To answer your last question - private communication and the group at the ready to attempt to do something. I did not voice any concerns within the forum

11:07 PM In retrospect - that created yet another divide - the formation essentially of a "hidden" group - just he opposite of what was trying to be "corrected"

11:08 PM me: Another 'clique'?

11:10 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ not so much a clique, but not communicating openly - transparency - all issues that concern CTO use to be openly discussed - and here we were doing just the opposite - at the time it seemed necessary, but counter-productive. Not totally, as some good came from it when communication with "the" top was initvated.

*initiated

11:11 PM me: I see.

But what you did was very important to you?

▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮: yes

11:12 PM The idea was to improve communication between ALL of the membership - and I think we're heading in that direction very nicely. I have no idea if any of it is a direct result of what "we" did, but I like to think so. :)

11:14 PM me: I find it interesting that communication is such an important aspect of the community for you. For many people, they would pick the 'family atmosphere' of CTO, the files, the people... Not to say those aren't important to you - but no one else has talked about communication in quite the same way as you.

Can you elaborate any more on that?

11:15 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Communication is all we have. Words on a screen. Those words (with real people behind those words) are what create that sense of "family"

11:16 PM me: So it's the glue that binds us together...

11:17 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ In my opinion yes. We all share the interest in the "game" - The SIms - it and the files are what brought all of us here, but without that communication it's just a repository for files

11:18 PM me: Right. Part of what I'm trying to entangle is CTO as the family, and CTO as the

repository. And I find it incredibly difficult to do so!

11:19 PM ████████████ : Communication is the key

 me: I can definitely see nopw how communication is the thing that binds us together.

11:20 PM One thing I'm interested to ask you about, since it's popped up so much in my research - Hierarchies. Is there anything you have to say on hierarchies within CTO?

████████**19**: Are you referring to that command structure - chain of command?

11:21 PM **me**: I'm referring to CTO in general - however you choose to define it, or apply it.

[...]

11:26 PM There is a hierarchy within CTO - has to be, should be.

 me: In a command structue sense?

  *structure

████████████ : right

11:27 PM Without it, CTO would slowly fall apart

 It would not run very smoothly

 True of any organization

[...T]here is a balance and again communication is key to maintain that balance and for the group to function smoothly

11:31 PM Those that have duties to perform need to know where they are within that hierarchy

 What is expected of them

 [...]

████████████ : There is the assumption that CTO is important - that we all want to see it continue - to exist

 me: Do you think that is an erroneous assumption?

11:38 PM ████████████ : "talking" with others - no

 we all place a degree of importance on many things in our lives for various reasons

 CTO is just one of many

11:39 PM If it dies, the world would not end

 But many of us do consider it an important part of our lives

11:40 PM **me**: On this point - do you think CTO is a 'real' community?

11:41 PM ████████████ : yes, but, stating the obvious as I usually tend to do, we define the terms real and community based upon our own needs and desires

 It is a community - we have come together to share

 to be apart of something

11:42 PM in that sense it also real

  * a part - not apart... LOL

 [...]

 me: ████ , can I ask, do you think there is a hierarchy between members - as there would be in any community?

 Maybe hierarchy is not the right word. Maybe differences?

████████████ : of course

11:44 PM one example.....

 and this may be a sideways hierarchy....

 me: Ok...

████████████ : creators - and we seem to have more of them than ever before

11:45 PM **me**: That's true!

███████████: I don't place then higher or lower, if that's what you mean - we all have several "roles" here

11:46 PM there are those that create, those that play, those that build, etc - many do all of these things

me: Do you think there is a perception that creators are 'better' or higher up in the hierarchy than everyone else?

11:47 PM ███████████: I can only speak for myself - I don't see it that way.... however....

they do get a lot of praise - more than the other members

11:48 PM the perception that you speak of may exist

11:49 PM **me**: But you don't see it yourself?

11:50 PM ███████████: I see the thank yous (and I thank anyone that has contributed to the "community" in any way), but I do it because I choose to do it. I suspect, there may others that see it differently

me: Right.

11:51 PM So what other ways do members have of 'proving their worth' if they are not a creator?

11:52 PM Or to phrase it better - in what ways do members who are not creators choose to give back to the community?

11:53 PM ███████████: Interesting questions - phrased either way........

11:54 PM I choose to help with questions that members have - technical (computer related), game play problems, etc.........

11:55 PM I choose to show some of what I have done - builds mostly - and many do - we all learn a lot by sharing those - and using those creations the creators have provided - stating the obvious again, if no one used them, they were merely exercises in creation

me: Two questions:-

11:56 PM do you feel that people value what you give them?

11:57 PM And, since you also create objects etc, what form of 'community giving' do you personally feel gives you most satisfaction?

11:58 PM ███████████: answering the first question - yes - I receive a lot of thank yous for the help - probably give more help than most realize - I get a LOT of pm's, questions that never make it to the forum

11:59 PM as to the second - probably the same - helping when I can

12:00 AM **me**: So helping with the tech information side of things is something that you feel really contributes a lot to CTO?

12:03 AM ███████████: mmm..... I help in other ways - I'm not sure if I know how much any of it is of value - some value certainly - I guess what I'm trying to say is there are a lot of members that contribute is many many ways and they are all of value

12:04 AM that probably didn't answer your question - I think I see it a bit differently - I help when I can with whatever I can

me: I see. But of all the things you contribute, is it your role as a 'tech guy' that gives you the most personal satisfaction - makes you feel most worthwhile.

12:05 AM No, it's fine, different perceptions are good. I think maybe I'm not being clear enough!

12:06 AM ███████████: I don't have much need for being "worthwhile" - I just enjoy being able to help whenever possible - I don't attach a value to it [...]

Chat with ██████████████████

██████████████ <██████████████>   Sat, Jul 28, 2012 at
2:33 AM
To: ████████████████

[...]
10:59 PM **me**: :) What do you think in terms of the moving of the files and information on the actual forum?
11:01 PM ████████████: It appears the files will be moved just fine (I hope) and some of the issues we've had with them will be dealt with during the move. A bit of an extra bonus there......
  the forum......... whole different situation!
  I suspect 99% of it will be lost
 me: I can imagine! How are you doing with that?
11:02 PM ████████████: Finishing up the last of the Non-CTO sharing section - down to the last child board - worked on that today - should be another day or two and done
11:03 PM the Game Play Help section, which I volunteered to salvage what I could - well, I 'll get what I can get - unknown at this ponit
11:04 PM **me**: On the point of so much information being lost - what do you feel about that?
11:07 PM ████████████ A lot of it doesn't matter - of those 146,000+ posts, I'd say most will not be missed. There will many that contain good how-to info, links, etc that will be lost - no way we can find and salvage all of them in the time allotted. Some will miss the history (myself included) - the posts that reflect the evolution of the site - those are can't be salvaged - the entire forum would need to be migrated
11:08 PM Most will NOT miss them as most have not read them
 me: This is true. But what is lost will be part of the history of CTO; and as you say, there are some posts related to the evolution of the site that will be lost.
11:09 PM Do you think we are jettisonning that part of CTO in the right way?
11:12 PM ████████████ Jm says she can't put the old forum on the new site. There is no right or wrong, It just is
[...]
11:15 PM **me**: I have only just thought about this surprisingly. It is important for me to know what people think about transplanting the site and consequently losing a lot of information
  How do people see it? As a sacrifice, or as something that simply needs to be done?
11:16 PM What's your stance ?
11:20 PM ████████████: [...]
11:22 PM As to how people see it - most probably don't care as long as CTO survives in one form or another. A few do. One in particular that I communicate with (you know who) is going to consider this move as a sacrifice. I see the logic of a new site, volunteered to salvage what I could of the forum leaving the files to others. We'll get what we can get.
[...]
 me: To pick up on something you mentioned before - how about chat?
11:28 PM ████████████: In a word - this new one is horrible - too basic - we will lose many functions
  two of us are going to give it a good test drive this weekend
11:29 PM **me**: Great idea.
Is chat one of the most important functions for you?
11:31 PM ████████████: I use it a lot. If the new is not up to my expectations (and I'm not alone in this), we'll go elsewhere. We'll keep a CTO tab open, a chat elsewhere - see if any log into the CTO chat and invite them to where we are if they wish. We'll deal.
11:32 PM **me**: Do you think it will have a negative impact on your CTO experience if you have to go elsewhere?
████████████: no

11:33 PM but it makes sense to have a feature full chat at CTO
 We chat there because we wish to easily chat with others that wish to chat alos
 *also
 I chat with some CTO'ers elsewhere already
11:34 PM **me**: I see.
 ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮: The preference would be, as I said, to keep chat at CTO
11:35 PM **me**: Why do you think that is?
 ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Why do I chat with some others elsewhere?
11:36 PM **me**: Sorry, I wasn't clear. :)
Why would the preference be to keep it on CTO?
 (And if you don't mind answering why you chat with others elsewhere, that'd be great too) ;)
 ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ LOL... ok
11:38 PM I have become good friends with several at CTO. Often the chat, if it had been at CTO, would have been a private one anyway, so easier to really keep it private and not be at CTO
 as to the preference of keeping it at CTO.......
11:41 PM those chats often tend to be just friendly chatter with others of the community and it's easy for anyone interested to just drop and feel comfortable and not feel as if they are interrupting anything - most often the chat is sim related, sometimes not - doesn't matter - just friendly conversation and convenient to have a chat room at CTO for any that care to join in
 *drip in
 LOL- drop in
11:42 PM and the current CTO chat software is versatile enough to handle any situation
 me: I see - having members drop in is something you wouldn't get outside of CTO
11:43 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ right - it could be done, but not easily
11:44 PM yes - some of us have given it some thought - just in case

[...]
 me: Do you feel you work hard?
11:48 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮: I don't consider it work - and wish I could do more
 there is a however to that
 me: So you are willing to give up your time for what some might consider work?
 Oh, what is that? ;)
11:49 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮: there are some things that I have volunteered to do - some simple moderator duties - those I take seriously, but I also enjoy doing them
11:50 PM some might consider that work, I don't
 so "yes" to your question
 me: You'd consider it a labour of love then?
11:51 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ yes, I guess that would be a good phrase for it
11:52 PM Certainly not getting paid, are we?.... lol

[...]
I also volunteer as a locomotive engineer at a tourist railroad. That is nowhere near as visible.
11:56 PM **me**: Wow! That's brilliant!
11:57 PM Do you consider that voluntary work at the railroad comparable in any way to what you do on CTO?
11:58 PM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮: While they are totally unrelated as to what is involved - one is a lot physical labor, the other is not, I do both because I enjoy doing both.
11:59 PM and they both involve interaction with others - there is a lot of satisfaction in that - providing something that others will also enjoy

[...]
12:02 AM **me**: OK. Last question - if you got paid to work on CTO, would that change your perception of the site and the community?
12:03 AM ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮: yes - that would change the dynamics - paid members, unpaid members
 [...]
we do not need to create that distinction - we have enough on our hands to keep it all on a level

basis as it is

12:06 AM This tourist railroad as a few that are paid - that has created a few issues - minor, but there

 *has

 me: what kind of issues, if you don't mind me asking?

12:08 AM ███████████: Some of the volunteers do more than the paid members - the ones that are paid ARE paid because they do possess certain technical expertise - the issue arises because some of the unpaid members also possess the same expertise - they just happened to have joined at a late date

 *later

12:09 AM **me**: I see - how to think having paid members would affect the dynamics on CTO?

12:10 AM ███████████: I guess the question would be why are they paid and why not someone else who is just as capable and just as willing to do the job

 me: Do you think for you, personally, it would take away the passion for your role on CTO?

12:11 AM ███████████ It doesn't at the railroad and I doubt it would at CTO, but there would also be that overhanging issue I just asked in my last comment

12:12 AM favoritism?

 we don't need or want that

 me: No, I think that would make many people leave

███████████ agreed

12:13 AM and some did leave the railroad, so I am sure the same would happen here - and here you lack the face-to-face interaction - much easier to leave

 me: Definitely.

 Easier to get together - easier to break up

12:14 AM ███████████ exactly

12:15 AM CTO is a work in progress - it is 4+ years old, yet a majority of the membership has been at CTO far less time than that...........

 me: Yes - and for a long time I think it will be a work in progress

12:16 AM ███████████ It will - I have seen signs of it improving, I have seen signs of it evolving, I still see many things that need a lot of work

12:17 AM **me**: And I suppose - is that not the nature of a growing community?

███████████ You got it!

[...]

<u>**Chat interview with Hypnotiq**</u>

Chat with Hypnotiq ███████████

Hypnotiq ███████████ Hypnotiq ███████████   Jul
31

to me

[...]

10:40 PM so first thing I wanted to ask you was what you thought about the moving of CTO to the new server. There's going to be a lot of information lost from the forum. What are your thoughts on that?

10:42 PM **hypnotiq** ███ I think moving the forum is exciting from a technological aspect (we'll have more room for files, we'll have better software, etc.) but I for one will be sad to lose all the history of our forum. So much has happened in the last 4 years in the sims community and we have been on the front lines.

 me: Do you think it's important to preserve that history?

10:43 PM **hypnotiq** ███ I would try to preserve as much history as possible, but from a time and resources standpoint it makes more sense to save a few important things and dump the rest. We have a great team, but we don't need (or want) to run them into the ground over this move!

[...]

10:46 PM **me**: Why do you think all this 'historical' information is so important when actually most newcomers won't really care?

10:49 PM **hypnotiq** ███ Because I think history is fascinating. I have read links posted on other forums, to discussions long forgotten, and learned much about the people that make up this diverse community. Sometimes I learn more than I would like, but I am interested in the past, present and future members of the Sims community. Simmers (as we are known) are a very different group of people from many other gamers. We are more posessive of our files and content than almost any other community out there!

[...]

 me: What's your take on the whole pay vs free file debate?

10:52 PM **hypnotiq** ███ Back when bandwidth was a major issue I can understand people making donation items to help out with site costs.

 (brb my children are squabbling)

 me: sure :)

10:54 PM **hypnotiq** ███ Now that there are plenty of places that offer free hosting, I'm not as sympathetic with those who still request donations to keep the site running.

10:55 PM If people want to donate to a particular artist of their own free will as an extra special way to say thank you I'm not opposed to that, but offering special donator's packs is against everything that Maxis stood for in making tools available for users to create content;it was meant to be shared.

10:58 PM **me**: The brings up an interesting point for me - the fact that Maxis wanted to make their game more 'interactive' for consumers. Simmers like you are not just consumers - they're creators too. What's your thoughts on Will Wright letting us share in the creation of his own creation?

11:00 PM **hypnotic**▆ I think Will Wright is a genious. I grew up playing or watching friends play several different sims games. I think it speaks volumes for his character in not only letting, but encouraging the community to create. And this is also where I think it's a bit unfair to run a paysite. Here these tools have been offered free of charge, and certain people want to make a profit on what really isn't theirs to begin with. The tools were created by Maxis (or those closely associated with Maxis in the case of T-mog and rug-o-matic).

[...]

So being that we use Maxis technology to create anything on our own, really means from a legal stand point that Maxis (or now EA) owns anything we create anyway. I believe the Sims 2 and 3 EULA's actually state something to the effect of "You can not create items and charge for them because we own everything anyway".

me: Really? I don't know much about Sims 2 and 3... but I'm pretty sure people still charge for their stuff!

11:06 PM **hypnotic**▆ And making money off someone elses hard work (Maxis/EA)is a little bit unethical. Think of all the furor The Sims Resource has caused in the sims file sharing community.

11:07 PM Yes there are still Sims 2 and 3 paysites. There always will be because EA does not enforce their rules on way or the other.

11:08 PM This is partially why I think, that we know we won't get in trouble for sharing files from dead sites whether pay or ffree.

free*

me: Yes - I find it hard to believe that we could possibly get into trouble for something so benign in the first place.

11:09 PM Bearing in mind the fact that CTO is (or has been) considered 'anti-pay', how did that affect the CTO community in the past?

11:10 PM **hypnotic**▆ There are quite a few threads in CTO's early history that have all out wars in them (despite JM trying to keep things civil).

11:11 PM I believe this conflict actually drew us closer together as a community

[...]

11:14 PM So thinking about the CTO community - do you think that it is very different from other Sims communities you belong to or know of?

11:18 PM **hypnotic**▆ I think each community has members that feel like they are "home" when they visit. It has always been my goal and the goals of teh other admins to make CTO feel as much like home as possible. Our members are by and large, not judgemental, they don't try to make themselves look better than everyone else, they are not rude to new members and they are more than happy to share anything that someone may want.

*instead of slapping an "unavailable" label on it

11:19 PM **me**: So CTO is not special in the way that it is very opening and welcoming as a community?

hypnotic███: It IS special that way

11:20 PM Even though other communities are open and welcoming, I'd say that CTO is the most open and welcoming forum in the Sims community today.

[...]

11:35 PM **me**: [...]

11:36 PM Can I ask - do you think there is a hierarchy of members at CTO?

hypnotic███: Yes I do.

11:37 PM I think the more active members get the most attention and the creators that create the most objects get more praise than those who only create skins.

11:38 PM However, I really don't think it's a snobby hierarchy.

me: Can you elaborate on that?

Do you mean it is a 'fair' hierarchy?

11:40 PM **hypnotic███** Probably so. I mean, if you are more active in a forum you are going to get more notice. But just because you are active and people notice you doesn't mean that you will get a lot of personal attention. Take for instance the gifts. People are making gifts for certain members all the time. I almost never get gifts (of course I rarely make gifts either).

11:41 PM Even when I was active I almost never got Gifts (You and a few others being the exception)

me: I see... So it's a sort of reciprocal thing?

hypnotic███: I'm thinking so. [...]

11:42 PM I don't judge my worth or value as a creator by how many gifts I do or do not get though. I just find it interesting.

So yes, there is a hierarchy but I don't see it as threatening in any way.

[...]

11:44 PM **me**: [...]

I find your response interesting. You are both a creator and an admin, so you are higher up the food chain, so to speak. I wasn't expecting you to place yourself as low on the hierarchy as you say (if that makes sense)

11:46 PM **hypnotic███** From looking at other admin's and mod's at other forums I'm surprised I'm a little lower on the hierarchy as well, but as I have said, it's not a big worry to me. I have far more important real life things to occupy my time with than if someone has not made me a gift yet. It also proves to me that I need to be the one to make the first step if I feel that I want people to make me more items. hehe!

11:47 PM I am an admin because I love the community and I love to create--not because I'm a power hungry witch

:)

[...]

11:57 PM **hypnotic███** I think that CTo is the most open and warm community out there and we have attracted lots of people who would not normally be forum goers

When people feel comfortable and relaxed they are more prone to let down their guard and show who they really are.

11:58 PM **me**: Right

hypnotic███: This can sometimes be really good or really bad. Kind of like in Psychology--a

child will act out at home because they feel comfortable and know their parents won't ditch them, but may be on their best behavior with strangers

11:59 PM ditch=abandon*

██████████████████

 me: Do you think that's what happened with ████?

12:01 AM **hypnotic**████ More than likely. She felt very akward in real life and CTO was the one place where she could open up and vent and we would only give her a "swat on the hand" or "time out", instead of totally disowning her.

12:02 AM I dont' agree with any of the horrible tantrums she threw and I would have banned her long before JM did, because just like with my own children I'm not going to be treated like dirt (or worse) and still be expected to wait on her emotionally hand and foot

12:03 AM And in reality she was not a "child" where time outs and swats might have worked

12:04 AM **me**: It's a shame that the community couldn't have helped her, where it appears to have helped so many others...

12:05 AM **hypnotic**████ Right. She is the second member to be banned in the history of CTO. The only other person was █████████████ She was too paranoid of the greater sims community and I believe that was her downfall (but that was before I joined CTO)

Appendix E: Forum Excerpts

E.1 Retro Bowling Alley

Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ███████ - 2012/02/02 14:35
_____

Does anyone know where I can find a bowling alley set like the ones in these pictures? The Colorized Sims one is WAY
too contemporary/modern.:(
http://img600.imageshack.us/img600/2082/1949vintagebowlinglanes.jpg
http://img268.imageshack.us/img268/6420/6073733620392a855552.jpg
http://img857.imageshack.us/img857/8667/pioneertown1.jpg
http://img848.imageshack.us/img848/578/460345resize.jpg
==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ██████ - 2012/02/02 17:52
_____

I dont know of one for Sims, sorry, but that is exactly what I am looking for.
I didnt like the Colorised Sims one - just personal taste - so hopefully there is one like this out there somewhere.
==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by MadameRosa - 2012/02/02 18:34
_____

Looks like a job for ██████ !
==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ██████ - 2012/02/02 18:48
_____

It is not retrotic, -- although -- how is it here?
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SimsFileShare_Colorized_Sims5/files/SPACE%20BOWL/
http://ctoccasions.com/images/fbfiles/images/obj_spacebowlanim.gif
==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ██████ - 2012/02/02 20:28
_____

MadameRosa wrote:
Looks like a job for ██████ !
LOL. I'd do it, but making bowling lanes is still beyond my capabilities. I could probably do tables, chairs, counters, and
the like, though.:dry:
██████ wrote:
It is not retrotic, -- although -- how is it here?
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SimsFileShare_Colorized_Sims5/files/SPACE%20BOWL/
http://ctoccasions.com/images/fbfiles/images/obj_spacebowlanim.gif
That's the set I mentioned in my post. Again, it's WAY too contemporary for my game.
==
 […]
Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ██████ - 2012/02/02 23:03
_____

██████ , have you thought about recolouring the Colorized one? No programming/hacking skills needed!
==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley

Posted by ████ - 2012/02/03 00:43
_____

██ wrote:
██, have you thought about recolouring the Colorized one? No programming/hacking skills needed!
Wouldn't I have to worry about special animations/props?:huh: (I'm assuming it uses those.)
UPDATE: I just realized that TS2 came with some more "retro-looking" bowling alley stuff:
http://www.simtopia.net/forum/index.php?PHPSESSID=a806ecdac81855f3041aac9dfd5ac37e&topic=469.0
The pictures aren't that great, but look for the following:
1. Vintage Retro Classic Dining Table
2. American Tableau Table
3. Rack-master 850 Bowling Ball Rack
4. One Pin Two Pin
5. Dancing Fiend Jukebox
6. Five Diamonds Wall Light
7. Diamonds Forever Wall Light
8. Pin-master 300 Bowling Alley
Granted, I don't have TS2 installed on my computer, and even then, conversions are outta my league. Plus, I imagine
that a bowling alley would be a massively hard conversion.:S
===

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ████ - 2012/02/03 01:14
_____

It looks like the ball that the sims is throwing is already black not neon green...and the pins look regulation colors. It is the lane and seating that needs to be recolored - that's all.
===

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ████ - 2012/02/03 01:21
_____

██ wrote:
██ wrote:
██, have you thought about recolouring the Colorized one? No programming/hacking skills needed!
Wouldn't I have to worry about special animations/props?:huh: (I'm assuming it uses those.)
As long as you keep the Colorized animations, you wouldn't have to worry about making new ones. The cloned object would look for the original anims, like when you clone a podium, but not the staff NPCs (it'll use the default). And props are easy - just clone them, too. You'd have to do some minor hacking (tell the new prop what texture to look for), but its super easy.
If you've never done any of this before, but want to give it a shot, I'd be more than happy to help you. :)
===

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ████ - 2012/02/03 11:41
_____

██ wrote:
It looks like the ball that the sims is throwing is already black not neon green...and the pins look regulation colors. It is the lane and seating that needs to be recolored - that's all.
Well, I would only need to recolor the lane--I can find better, more accurate seating elsewhere.
██ wrote:
As long as you keep the Colorized animations, you wouldn't have to worry about making new ones. The cloned object would look for the original anims, like when you clone a podium, but not the staff NPCs (it'll use the default). And props are easy - just clone them, too. You'd have to do some minor hacking (tell the new prop what texture to look for), but its super easy.
If you've never done any of this before, but want to give it a shot, I'd be more than happy to help you. :)
Thanks for the offer!:cheer:

I'll do any necessary recolors if you can do the necessary hacking. (I'm completely hacking-illiterate.:S)
And, what do some of you think of those TS2 objects I linked to? Those tables and wall lights are exactly what I'm looking for.

==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley

Posted by ▮▮▮ - 2012/02/03 15:11

_____

Sim Dream a Little has bowling lanes, I used them with Colorized sims bowling set and it worked I had to use the actual bowling part that looks like a bookcase anyway the lanes are already made if you want to use those.
http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/Sim_a_Little_Dream_a_Lot/

==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley

Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/02/03 20:15

_____

▮▮▮, I'm at work right now, so I can't check them out. I will when I get home, and let you know.
And I'd be happy to hack. Once you know what to change, it takes no time at all.
[...]

==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley

Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/02/04 00:33

_____

▮▮▮, I found much larger pics of everything on your list (plus a few more!). It all looks good to me. (I can send them to you, if you like - what's your email?)
It might be worth seeing if anyone in the Sim-verse has the "Nightlife" EP, and if they'd be willing to extract the sprites (or sending them to another that would/could). Then it would just be a matter of converting them (easier said than done in most cases, but still worth the effort).
Or doing your own recolours, of course. The wall lights and furniture aren't necessarily anything too spectacular (nothing you couldn't top ;)), so maybe just the alley, ball rack, and jukebox as conversions? You could probably do the ball rack, too.
And I couldn't find those other bowling lanes...

==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley

Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/02/04 01:57

_____

▮▮▮▮▮ wrote:
Or doing your own recolours, of course. The wall lights and furniture aren't necessarily anything too spectacular (nothing you couldn't top ;)), so maybe just the alley, ball rack, and jukebox as conversions?
That would be nice.:cheer: Also throw in one of the tables and wall lights, though--they look exactly like the ones I've seen in pictures. Plus, I need a base before I can recolor anything, lol.
The rest--chairs, counters, vending machines, etc--I can probably already find bases for. And, the walls/floors will be no problem.:)

==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley

Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/02/04 03:01

_____

Do you use any kind of 3d modelling program? I have some nice mid-century style lighting that may look good in the alley.
Also, I have some sign models (that I would like to make). Here's a little mock-up image I did (doesn't have to be that logo for the sign, or those colours):
http://ctoccasions.com/images/fbfiles/images/mock_sign.jpg
I have 2 other shapes for the signs.

==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley

Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/02/04 11:25

_____

▮▮▮▮▮ wrote:

Do you use any kind of 3d modelling program? I have some nice mid-century style lighting that may look good in the alley.
Also, I have some sign models (that I would like to make). Here's a little mock-up image I did (doesn't have to be that logo for the sign, or those colours):
http://ctoccasions.com/images/fbfiles/images/mock_sign.jpg
I have 2 other shapes for the signs.
Oh, just that one preview has me estatic!:cheer:
I'm totally clueless with 3d programs, unfortunately. So, the most I could do with any of these is recolor them after a more "skilled" creator has already turned them into objects.:lol:
===

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by MadameRosa - 2012/02/04 16:35
_____
What a great project! I've always wanted to be able to use Savage Sims neon bowling wall sign and it looks like this may fit the bill. Thanks for taking this on!
http://ctoccasions.com/images/fbfiles/images/savagets2to1paintingneonbowlingpins.jpg
===

[…]
Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ███████ - 2012/02/06 12:20
_____
███████ just kindly sent me a ton of pictures for ideas!:cheer: To help get this set better "organized," I'm posting pictures of the stuff I want.
TS2 Conversions:
http://i1232.photobucket.com/albums/ff364/CharmedBetty/Sims%20Stuff/bowlingalley3.jpg
http://i1232.photobucket.com/albums/ff364/CharmedBetty/Sims%20Stuff/vintageretroclassicdiningtable.jpg
http://i1232.photobucket.com/albums/ff364/CharmedBetty/Sims%20Stuff/rackmaster850bowlingballrack.jpg
http://i1232.photobucket.com/albums/ff364/CharmedBetty/Sims%20Stuff/moldedsectionalbyworldMold.jpg
http://i1232.photobucket.com/albums/ff364/CharmedBetty/Sims%20Stuff/fivediamondswalllight.jpg
http://i1232.photobucket.com/albums/ff364/CharmedBetty/Sims%20Stuff/dancingfiendjukebox.jpg
With this sign:
http://i1232.photobucket.com/albums/ff364/CharmedBetty/Sims%20Stuff/billboardretro.jpg
Using this graphic that I made:
http://i1232.photobucket.com/albums/ff364/CharmedBetty/Sims%20Stuff/AtomicBowling.jpg
===

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ███ - 2012/02/06 12:49
_____
That is so cool :woohoo: I hope someone can make it :)
===

[…]
Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ███████ - 2012/02/07 13:06
_____
Do you have colour preferences for the sign?
===

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by MadameRosa - 2012/02/07 13:25
_____
I looked at that pic and the first thing that popped into my head was Schlitz beer.:laugh: The ball rack would be easy ███ all you have to do is replace the books and such in a low shelf with the bowling ball graphics. You don't have to mess with the As or Zs because the balls would be entirely covered by the bookcase graphic.
===

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ███████ - 2012/02/07 19:18

_____
███████ wrote:
Do you have colour preferences for the sign?
Oh, thank you so much for making this!:cheer:
The green parts in the preview pic would look better as, maybe, a pastel teal. The beige parts, on the other hand, should be the same color as the background on the "Atomic Bowling" picture I made.
==
[…]

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by █████ - 2012/02/08 11:45
_____
socrstchik wrote:
No probs. Let me know if you need (or want) help making the other stuff. :)
Well, someone else will have to do the TS2 conversions. I don't have TS2 installed on my computer, and even if I did, that kind of creating is still out of my league.
My skills are pretty much limited to recolors and and walls/floors, so that's the most I can create for this set.
==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ██████ - 2012/02/08 13:24
_____
Well, I still want to make the bowling skins, and a little concession stand with NPC. I don't have TS2 either. :(
Any of you TS2'ers, would you be willing to extract some sprites for us? :begging:
==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ripmagnum - 2012/02/10 01:01
_____
Well, my sister has Sims 2 on her computer--she has "Nightlife" "Free Time" & "Apartment Life" I would be happy to send you the sprites in a zip or rar--if you can walk me through what I need to send you (& most importantly—which folders I need to look in) I would love this set & since I can't hack/recolor to save my life--I figure sharing files is my small contribution to the effort. :)
==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ██████ - 2012/02/10 01:08
_____
Hey, thanks, rip!
From another thread:
Olena Dub wrote:
Sims 2 objects are a 3D models, which have to be extracted by SimPE program and then rendered in Anim8or to make sprites. But for using SimPE you have to have The Sims 2 installed on your computer.
As far as which sprites, that would be up to ████ Olena's quote is from where I needed something, and I asked for the P sprites since I knew I would be doing some rather serious editing on them first.
But ████ may want all sprites.
Miss ███, what would you like? :lol:
==

Re:Retro Bowling Alley
Posted by ██████ - 2012/02/10 13:25
_____
███████ wrote:
Well, I still want to make the bowling skins, and a little concession stand with NPC. I don't have TS2 either. :(
Oh, I can make the skins. That's one thing you WON'T have to do, lol.:laugh:
You might have to do the concession stand, though, unless we can find one of those SSOW bases where the NPC is bundled with the object.
socrstchik wrote:
As far as which sprites, that would be up to ████ Olena's quote is from where I needed something, and I asked for the P

sprites since I knew I would be doing some rather serious editing on them first. But ███ may want all sprites.
Miss ██ , what would you like? :lol:
I'm assuming we'll need all sprites, although P-sprites are really the only ones I can work with.:dry:
==
[…]

E. 2 The CTO Sims Wiki

CTO Sims Wiki Contributions - Definitions? Jonsies Thread
Posted by sidhe - 2012/05/06 07:09
_____

Hi Everyone!
This thread is for everyone to make their contributions to our latest project:
The CTO Sims 1 Wiki
Please post any ideas you have about words, phrases, or abbreviations that have to do with Sims 1 and the Sims 1 community.
You can view the actual CTO Sims 1 Wiki Here:
http://ctoccasions.com/index.php?option=com_fireboard&Itemid=28&func=view&catid=36&id=1374 03#137403
==
Definitions ? Do we have an on-site dictionary or glossary?
Posted by Jonesie - 2012/05/04 20:59
_____

I've poked around "search," but cannot find any special page that defines words a lot of members use - that some of us more out-of-the-know folks don't understand (like "hack," "mesh," "base," etc).:S
I myself, being VERY low on the "Sims food-chain-of-terminology," wonders if there is any website out there that provides a comprehensive dictionary/glossary of terms?
If not, I would be MORE than willing to assist in setting one up on the CTO site. As I have previously confessed, I do not have the tech-expertise or artistry to create houses, lots, objects and so on to contribute to CTO.
However, I COULD do something like this....maybe collecting Member- contributed definitions, creating a dictionary/glossary (on my own computer), and then submitting my findings to the Administrators to format into a dedicated page on this site??:detective:
This is just a wild idea...so please treat it accordingly... :sorcerer:
==
Re:Definitions ? Do we have an on-site dictionary or glossary?
Posted by ███████ - 2012/05/04 21:21
_____

I think that's a decent idea. I can start us off:
hack: to alter the innards of an IFF file, for the purposes of changing restrictions (to allow on home lots, for example), to increase or decrease emotions or skills, and/or to set restrictions. Also - to alter the innards to point to custom-made NPCs or props.
mesh: the frame (shape) of a Sim character's body or prop. Corresponds with the texture, the physical image (appearance) of a Sim or prop.
base: any thing (usually an object, but not always) from Maxis (or on some occasions a creator) that allows a creator to define the purpose of the object. Example: I used the MM toadstool as a base for the bowling alley chair. (Cloning the toadstool tells the game I want a seat of some sort, with 4 different rotations.)
==
Re:Definitions ? Do we have an on-site dictionary or glossary?
Posted by Jonesie - 2012/05/05 01:26
_____
CTO Sims - CTO FireBoard Forum Component version: NEW VERSION GOES HERE Generated: 4 September, 2012, 10:04
Excellent!! And thank you SO much!:clap:
My other reason for suggesting this was it might save our very kind and helpful Adminstrators from having to explain these words - on an individual basis - over and over again. It might be easier if they could just send them to CTO specific link dedicated to definitions.
I have copied and pasted your very fine definitions into a temporary MS Word file on my computer. I will designate it as "CTO Glossary" and I will continue to add any contributions as they come in. Eventually, I may have a nice dictionary/glossary that could actually be useful???
BTW Your definition of "base" was very helpful to me, personally. Awhile ago, I downloaded an adorable Golden Retriever. Much to my bewilderment, he showed up in my Lighting folder!! Now, I

finally understand he was created from a lamp/lighting base - and thus the term "base" is no longer a mystery to me. :lol1:
POWER TO THE CTO PEOPLE!!! :dancing:

===
Re:Definitions ? Do we have an on-site dictionary or glossary?
Posted by ▉▉▉▉▉ - 2012/05/05 03:35
_____

Always glad to help. :)

===
Re:Definitions ? Do we have an on-site dictionary or glossary?
Posted by viv - 2012/05/05 07:00
_____

Let's see...
prop: Additional item which can be attached to a skin, but is a separate file. Removing it from the skin will still leave the skin intact, so it's more of an extra feature to your skin (examples: hats, umbrellas, necklaces, etc.)
conversion: Using an already existing item from (mostly) another game and make it so it is playable in (this case) the Sims 1. (examples: making objects from Sims 2 playable in the Sims 1)
skin: Files which make your sims give their outward appearance. There is a minimum of 3 for every skin: - the mesh (3d model), which ends in .skn
- the texture (the coloured picture), which ends in .bmp
- the .cmx, which is a text file which is needed to connect the mesh and texture
poly count: 3D models consist of dots and triangles (polygons!). The more dots and triangles the smoother the model is.
However, it does mean that the model will strain your pc more. The poly count will give you an idea of how heavy the model is, it's the number of polygons in the model. If it says high poly, your computer might have troubles with it. For Sims 1 this only applies to meshes for skins though.

===
Re:Definitions ? Do we have an on-site dictionary or glossary?
Posted by Jonesie - 2012/05/05 13:52
_____

Bless you, Viv!! :yourock:

===
Re:Definitions ? Do we have an on-site dictionary or glossary?
Posted by sidhe - 2012/05/05 14:59
_____

Jonsie, I think this is a great idea!
:idea: :clap: :idea:
Lets get together and talk about this.
How would you feel about spearheading a project to create a CTO Sims Wiki?

===
Re:Definitions ? Do we have an on-site dictionary or glossary?
Posted by Jonesie - 2012/05/05 19:34
_____

Sidhe My Dear...
I would be happy to help in any way I can. :lol23:
Makes me feel less like a "Help Vampire" - that is, someone who is constantly trying to get others to resolve their problems instead of figuring stuff out by themselves, before asking for help. :evil:
Especially since, in the short time I've been a member, SO many people have been SO helpful to me.
One problem - I am not a tech-savvy person...so I would have NO idea on how to set up a Wiki.
BUT I could cheerfully collect the definitions, sort them in alphabetical order, and then send them to you and your Fellow Gurus to work with.
I can Private Message you with my personal email address if you need it....
Let me know...
:rose:

===
Re:Definitions ? Do we have an on-site dictionary or glossary?
Posted by ▉▉▉▉▉ - 2012/05/05 20:34

_____
Clone:
Is an object that looks the same and behave the same as the object it was cloned from in Transmogrifier BUT has a NEW ID number (GUID) so it will not conflict with the object it was cloned from in game. Usually the creator recolours or make new graphics on the clone later.
Recolour
The object or Skin bmp is only changed in the colour NOT in the Shape.
Example: Turning the Flamingo green instead of pink.
Example Skin: Changing the colour of a red dress to blue.
New shape Object
Clone a chair and then change how it looks from the Werkbunst red to a modern diningchair.
Both colour and SHAPE is changed to something else.
It still funtions as a chair object and no programming of the file is changed.
GUID / ID number
Every object has an unique id number inside called the GUID. The game loads iff / object files by their numbers- NOT by their names! Having 2 different objects with the same GUID / ID number can cuase a ID conflict and can lead to many strange things in game and even crashes!
Larger objects that takes up more than one tile in game has an Master GUID and also GUID numbers for each tile.
==
[…]

Re:CTO Sims Wiki Contributions - Definitions? Jonsies Thread
Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/05/06 13:54
_____
I found a site via whoobsa containing several technical abbreviations. Maybe this is also useful. It describes the shortcuts when you open an .iff-file with the iff-pencil
http://simtech.sourceforge.net/tech/info_resources.html
==

Re:CTO Sims Wiki Contributions - Definitions? Jonsies Thread
Posted by Jonesie - 2012/05/06 14:52
_____
Awesome ▮▮▮▮▮▮ ! :thankyou:
Sidhe - do you want to copy that information over to your Wiki-in-the-making site, or should I just add it to my collection for the time being?
Regardless - I think this should be under a separate heading: "Technical Abbreviations" rather than incorporated alphabetically into the main "dictionary."
==
[…]

Re:CTO Sims Wiki Contributions - Definitions? Jonsies Thread
Posted by sidhe - 2012/05/08 10:23
_____
:) This looks like a great start. lets keep the ideas flowing here and I will contact you on the weekend Jonsie and we will make a plan. OK? :)
==

Re:CTO Sims Wiki Contributions - Definitions? Jonsies Thread
Posted by Ludi_Ling - 2012/05/08 10:27
_____
Wow! Such a cool idea! If anyone needs any help with anything, please let me know! :woohoo:
PS - Here's my contribution ;)
The Wayback - also known as the Wayback Machine, the public search interface for the Internet Archive. The Wayback is a way to search for dead websites that have been archived that are no longer around. Just type in the URL and you will be able to find snapshots of the website going back into the past. It's a great but unreliable way to find lost Sims goodies - it all depends on whether the goodies were archived at the time, and more often than not, you may find they weren't.
==

Re:CTO Sims Wiki Contributions - Definitions? Jonsies Thread
Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/05/08 11:46
_____

WCIF = Where Can I Find?
Expansions:
UL - Unleashed Expansion Pack
HP - House Party Expansion Pack
LL - Living Large Expansion Pack
CTO Sims - CTO FireBoard Forum Component version: NEW VERSION GOES HERE Generated: 4 September, 2012, 10:04
HD - Hot Date Expansion Pack
VC - Vacation Expansion Pack
SS - Superstar Expansion Pack
MM - Makin' Magic Expansion Pack
CC - Complete Collection (All games on a 4-disk set)
Tools:
IFF Pencil - An editing tool for creating/modifying objects (Essential for most hackers/creators)
Script Station - Another editing tool, similar to IFF Pencil.
GIMP - Photo/graphic editing program, used to recolor and/or create new graphics
PSP - Paint Shop Pro - Another photo/graphic editing program
FarX/FarOut - Used to extract objects from .far files within the game.
Far Files - Several files compressed into one large file. Most of the game objects/textures are compressed into .far files.
There's barbeque shrimp, baked shrimp, broiled shrimp, fried shrimp, lemon shrimp, shrimp stew, shrimp salad, shrimp sandwich, shrimp burger.... that's about it
==

[…]

E.3 Anim8or Laboratory Tutorial

anim8or laboratory
Posted by Simtonic - 2011/01/05 19:10
_____

I've finished the first part of the anim8or tutorial.
It treats the basics based on pictures and a practice example.
The main focus lies on conversion of a pre-made 3d model into a Sims 1 model.
I taught the most things myself what I needed to know and so it's my personal and individual way to make a 3d model "sims-able" and I'm thankful for every hint leading to an improvement.
This Anim8or tutorial is intended for absolute beginners.
There are no stupid questions - even if a question seems to be a bit illogical or just funny I hope that together we will be able to manage all problems that might arise.
Learning with others is fun and also provides support and encouragement.
You will find part 1 (as a PDF) here:
http://www.mediafire.com/?13mra3ab89jgqpy
part 2 (changing colors, using textures, turning in maxis-rotations) will follow as soon as you have digested the first part and send out a signal *gg
part 3 (Typical problems with pre-made 3d models, using the scene modus for a better result and more) will complete the lecture series.
and now: on your marks, get ready, go! :highfive:
==

Re:anim8or tutorial part 1 - basics
Posted by Olena Dub - 2011/01/05 19:46
_____

YAY! :woohoo: Everything is perfect, dear Martha! It's such a pleasure to read your simple and detailed explanations.
Congrats on a great work you've done, my friend! :applause2:
Really your tutorial will be useful not only for a complete newbies... My way to simmify pre-made 3d models is very different from yours and tomorrow I will try it on practice.
==

Re:anim8or tutorial part 1 - basics
Posted by Hypnotiq - 2011/01/05 19:50
_____

Thank you Martha! :woohoo:
==

Re:anim8or tutorial part 1 - basics
Posted by Simtonic - 2011/01/05 20:03
_____

lol ... only CTO is crazy enough that a Russian reads a tutorial in an American forum written by a German in a highly doubtful pidgin :laugh: :laugh: :laugh:
==

Re:anim8or tutorial part 1 - basics
Posted by mmarie - 2011/01/05 20:03
_____

:clap: Thank you so much! :clap:
I can't wait to try it! :woohoo:
==

Re:anim8or tutorial part 1 - basics
Posted by ████████ - 2011/01/05 20:41
_____

Thank you Simtonic! You are awesome!!! B)
I am going to give it a try this weekend... I am so excited.
==

Re:anim8or tutorial part 1 - basics
Posted by jessmasjus - 2011/01/05 20:58
_____

YAYAYAYYAYAYAY you made my day!!!! So excited!! can't wait to dive in!!!

http://ctoccasions.com/images/fbfiles/images/thursday.jpg
==

Re:anim8or tutorial part 1 - basics
Posted by deekitty31 - 2011/01/05 23:42
_____

Thank you, Martha. It has been so long since I have cracked open my anim8or program, and since I was a beginner when I stopped creating, I have forgotten nearly everything. I plan to make great use of this!
Thank you!
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by Simtonic - 2011/01/06 07:46
_____

I've renamed the thread so we have all Anim8or matters on one place.
If you search for simple training objects - look here:
http://www.sweethome3d.com/importModels.jsp
You don't have to install Sweet Home 3D to download these models and they are ideal to practice with.
Thank you for your kind words.
At archibase 900 sites with objects are waiting for us - the 3d world is wide enough for us all!
But as a precaution I will make a list with the ones that are reserved ONLY for me :laugh:
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by Olena Dub - 2011/01/06 10:51
_____

Thank you for the link, Martha! It's a real treasure trove! :woohoo:
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮ - 2011/01/06 11:06
_____

Martha - thank you for taking on this task of (hopefully) turning some us into proficient anim8or users. My goals for this are rather ambitious, but I am completely new at this and must learn the basics first. These tutorials should help immensely.
Thank you so much :)
I also have 3DS Max 2011, but unfortunately the minimum specs for this program are beyond my current computer's capaiblitites. Time to upgrade to a new machine, I guess
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by taure - 2011/01/06 11:12
_____

Danke schön! Making tutorials is very time consuming and I'm very grateful you've been willing to help others by creating this. There will be a sudden influx of blue lamps now here at CTO I'm afraid... :silly:
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by Simtonic - 2011/01/06 16:06
_____

There will be a sudden influx of blue lamps now here at CTO I'm afraid...
:lol27:
▮▮▮▮▮ ... wow ... 3DS Max 2011 ... I read somewhere that it needs 14 GB only for the temporary files while uploading
:laugh:
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by MadameRosa - 2011/01/07 09:42
_____

Awesome! Thank you so much Martha for taking the time to do this and for the great new model site. I can't wait to see all the new sites that pop up from this class.
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by ████████ - 2011/01/08 02:37
_____

Well I tried your tutorial Simtonic.... It was very easy to follow! B)
Thank you again for doing this and I can't wait to learn more from you.
I still need to practice a bit, but here's how my lamp turned out, As you can see, I need to get the
right side a little bit smoother.
http://i1007.photobucket.com/albums/af191/SpaceCadet123/Lamp.jpg
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by █████ - 2011/01/08 02:50
_____

Looks great !
Thanks So much for this awsome tutorial!:cheer:
==

[…]

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by Ludi_Ling - 2011/01/08 11:25
_____

Thank you, Martha. I haven't had a chance to have a look at the tutorial yet, and I don't know when I
will, but it is very heartening to have this resource close to hand. Again, thank you so much. :hug3:
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by Simtonic - 2011/01/08 11:34
_____

Thank you :)
We don't have a peer pressure, everyone can have an own rhythm and we have enough time to
clarify all open questions - in the good tradition of CTO that we work all together :-)
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by jessmasjus - 2011/01/08 12:29
_____

Ok - I already have a problem... when i opened the lamp zip it has 2 files in it.
*.mtl and *.obj - they are not together and if i open the obj file my lamp is not blue like yours... What
did i do wrong already...??
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by Simtonic - 2011/01/08 12:49
_____

first: don't panic :)
Sometimes it happens that the informations of a pre-made object will not be uploaded.
Just close it and try it again or try the alternative way with "import". You did nothing wrong :-)
Important: the two files .obj and .mtl should be together in one folder while opening, because
the .mtl file gives the necessary material informations to the .obj file.
==

Re:anim8or laboratory
Posted by jessmasjus - 2011/01/08 12:56
_____

GOT IT!!!! lol
:laugh: :laugh: :laugh: :laugh: :woohoo: but those zaggedy edges really bug me... and yes i have
done the blur in the A sprites... didnt help much... but overall..
#1 - Simple and easy to use tutorial... I did the Sprite steps but I am so used to doing them in Gimp
by myself that I will probably keep doing them that way but Anim8or did really good sprites...
#2 - I understood every thing you wrote Martha!
#3 - Whats next... as long as we dont have a test I will be fine and it is GREAT to have the step by
step to refer back to...
http://ctoccasions.com/images/fbfiles/images/lamp-6c3367f9cbfa35c703fa46844e123b7b.jpg
==

[…]

E.4 "Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?"

Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by simtonic - 2012/08/03 05:59
_____

Ha ha - I thought a spectacular headline would lure more people to read :laugh:
The actual heading should be: are we a good community?
Since Ludi asked me for her diploma some questions about the history and state of CTO a lot is going on inside my head!
Is CTO really a good community or do we just live off the "golden days"?
At present there may be at the utmost (!) 50 members (including our busy CTO-team) that participate actively and sort, prepare and upload the files, do all work that has to be done, arrange help, communicate about Sims 1 and other things and take this way care of a friendly climate.
Are these 50 people our community?
The majority of CTO benefits from this group but is not visible after having 10 postings.
Are they anyway also part of our community? Would it be a difference if we would throw them out?
Or should a good community accept above-average passive members?
What defines a good community?
Where is the point when an imbalance turns into exploitation and you have too much of this good thing?
What could be done to reinforce a community spirit?
You all can see: good old Martha has her philosophic day :-)
[…]
==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ██████ - 2012/08/03 06:23
_____

[…]
Hey Martha does this mean I'm going to be banned 'cos all I can do is WCIF?:blush: :eek: :holymoly:
Have a great evening folks :oops: for some of you that will be have a great morning I guess.
==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by simtonic - 2012/08/03 06:28
_____

I'm thinking here only of the members that has worked off their ten posts and then have disappeared completely.
WCIF's are communication and this is of course a part of community life.
So you are not on the list, ██████ :P
==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by Sultan418 - 2012/08/03 06:31
_____

:thankyou2:Martha
==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by simtonic - 2012/08/03 06:47
_____

Your posting was helpful, I've extended the originally text :)
==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by jmrcrp - 2012/08/03 08:26
_____

Martha, I just sat down at the computer this morning, still half asleep. I saw the subject of this thread in my email and nearly fell off my chair! Yes, you got my attention! :laugh:
The first thing that comes to my mind is a twinge of guilt - since I have been back, I have been so focused on the technical aspects of the site, and building the new site, that I am probably not "living amongst us" as Ludi is. [..] I have also talked with Ludi about this in her interviews with me. I feel like an outsider in a way, for many reasons. As I told her, I feel like a mama who provides the home

and keeps it running (with a lot of help) but rarely gets down on the floor and plays with the children and their toys. Don't misunderstand, I don't think of you all as children!
:laugh: But in a sense, I do feel like a mama sometimes. :)
But to get back to your question - it makes me think of the society we have here in the US. Did you know that only about 30% of the people in our country who are eligible, actually vote in our elections? This thing that Americans worked so hard to build, is taken for granted by so many people. The vast majority of our citizens just go about their business, paying their taxes and reaping the benefits of our society, but never taking an active part in the running of the country.
Should we kick them out? Should we say, "you can't use our roads, infrastructure, law enforcement, fire protection, etc., because you don't vote and don't participate in the process" ? They may (and do) say, "well, I pay my taxes, isn't that enough? "
Here at CTO we don't ask for "taxes" (force people to pay if they want the files) so in a sense, we have created a community where non-participation is perfectly acceptable. Our main goal was to have a place where old Sims files could be stored and saved for posterity, and could be made freely available to anyone who wants them. Participation is voluntary, and most Americans don't care to participate, they just want to reap the benefits. I suspect that many of our members in other countries don't participate because of the language barrier.
* Speaking of that, I've found a translator program for the new site that automatically translates every page, even the forum! *
We are doing all we can to encourage participation. The 10 post rule at least gets them started, and many decide to stay after quickly becoming comfortable here. I've heard many members say "I've never been active in a forum until I came to CTO"
We try to keep the articles on the home page fresh and personal, so that it is obvious that there are real people here, not just a nameless, faceless repository of Sims files.
Having said all that, I conclude with the short answer - no, we can't exclude them, or that would take away from the whole purpose of CTO - to provide these files to anyone who wants them.
Thanks for giving me some things to think about this morning.
==

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ███████ - 2012/08/03 08:55
_____

Whow, Martha! This is a difficult question I think, and I think it is even more difficult to answer it. :plotting:
Anyway, I want to try it.
First of all: No, I don't think that members with only ten posts should be excluded. I think that anyone has a different understanding of a forum. Some might be in that forum only because of the DLs, others because they have problems with their game and only look for a solution others have. Many members may simply be to shy to write anything because they don't know where to start. I was this way, too.
When I started here, I thought: Oh my god, how to make 10 post here? Well, it was easy since the only thing you have to do to say "welcome" to 10 new members. I did not spend any thought on posting anywhere else than into the birthday greetings, welcomes and the WCIFs. Why should I? My english is not that good at all I don't know anyone here at all, and finally, about what could I talk with so many brilliant creators?? It was very hard for me, I can tell.
The next thing is that not everyone wants to take part in every conversation. Again, I want to take me for example. I am member of so many communities, even german communities dealing with my job. Those communities are made for asking questions and answering them. That's all. This community is very different from others, so I think this could be the reason why some members don't take part in the whole conversation like some here.
Finally, it might be because of their priorities. Sure, we have facebook!!(:X) Everybody wants to express himself there.
But not everyone. Some people migt prefer talking to friends or spending their time with them instead of sitting at his computer and typing endless phrases into his keyboard. In fact, I hated that, too :laugh:. Others might have more interesting hobbies are not that interested in a simple computer game those people here, that even spend hours and hours with creating stuff for that game.
But it is also some sort of interesting communicating with people from all over the world, that's why I decided to go on.

Now I've learned that it is a wonderful thing, talking with people about finding objects, creating and so on. Since I am in this community I've learned so much... that might not be everybody's cup of tea. Maybe some of the members only need time. I've experienced in a german forum, that the admin gives an advice to them if they didn't post for over half a year and that a community lives only by the posts of it's members. Maybe some of the members only need a little kick like that??

===

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?

Posted by vetavestal - 2012/08/03 09:09
_____

:) Perhaps at the new site we could have a novice's nook which would let new members ask questions however stupid. At least it would break the ice and perhaps encourage newbies to become more confident in the forum. Speaking as an member from the beginning I still find it a little unerving to venture into a debate.We should encourage people to stay. Explain how to enter contests by uploading photos from a photo sharing site. How do you do that? I am still intimidated by that hurdle. Perhaps have new creators' efforts praised and advice how to improve. It could be we are not considering newbies enough. I am playing devil's advocate here.:S

===

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?

Posted by simtonic - 2012/08/03 09:22
_____

JM, it's strange that ████ ██████ and you (all with active roles) feel attacked by my posting.
Maybe my thoughts are not being properly reflected due to my unsatisfactory English.
I just wanted to ask: is CTO really a good community? And what marks a good community?
Everyone is saying ... "ohhhh CTO is such a good community with friendly people" ... but these friendly people make up only about 10 or 15 percent of the total membership.
In my eyes we are more a "good small community" within a large crowd of anonymous members.
Of course no one should be thrown out - this was only a shocker :laugh:
The outstanding significance of CTO is to make all sorts of Sims 1 files availible - to each and everyone and for free.
What I wonder is: will the good community spirit of a few people be sufficient in a long term? The CTO group of motivated people has not grown - quite the contratry! - but CTO itself is growing nearly every day.
Vestaval is right - we should search for a way to get new members better integrated. Maybe we have changed too much into a "private club".
New active members would be a blessing for CTO.
The blame lies with Ludi - she made me thinking about CTO. :P

===

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?

Posted by ██████ - 2012/08/03 09:32
_____

Hello,
This has made interesting reading and a lot of food for thought.
It may interest you to know that I have never ,ever participated in a forum or group such as this before.
Initially I persisted as I am interested in Sims 1,and was hoping to find new things for my game as most of what is available,has been around for a very long time and very little new stuff rarely gets added to Yahoo sites (Some of which are older than me!! and poorly maintained generally)
When I stumbled across CTO I struck gold!! Literally
Lots of old creations that I had forgotten about or could'nt find elsewhere.
Also Active creative people who have no problem sharing their work with dummies like me who would not know where to begin regarding creating.
This is why I try hard with WCIF's as it's the only thing I can contribute to the group.
I'm no good at creating!!
I suppose what I am trying to say is as a group CTO is unsurpassed.
By this I mean ,I don't know ,where do I start?
Content,Sharing,Helpfulness,Friendly members,New creations offered by members,where do I end.!
I think that,especially once the new CTO is up and running,you will find a lot more people participating,I have already noticed in "Say Hello" posts that many people comment that"I had heard about this site from a friend" so obviously people are talking even before the new site launch.

Personally I am not gregarious,and do not converse easily in new situations,but have always felt very comfortable here.
I understand the reasoning behind eliminating non participating members,but I think it would tarnish CTO"s great reputation once word got around.
That I think would be a terrible shame
[…]

==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by jmrcrp - 2012/08/03 10:05
_____

Martha, in no way was I offended at your post. I hope it didn't sound like I was. Your opinions and feelings mean so much to me, and you simply gave me something to think about. The fact that it made me consider my own shortcomings, well, that is probably a good thing, and I don't feel insulted at all!
If anyone has the right to ask these questions, it would be you. You have been such an integral part of CTO in so many ways, ever since you joined.
The idea of having a novice section of the forum is a good one. It would somewhat duplicate some of the boards we already have, such as Site Help, Game Play Help, etc., but I still think it would be a good thing. I'll add it to the new site as soon as possible. (Would you like to be the moderator of that section? :P)
I also like the idea of contacting inactive members. In a way we have been doing that already. ████████ sends an e-mail to everyone on their birthday, whether they are active or not, and writes it in a personal way. He encourages inactive members to come back.
I hope Ludi reads all of this; she may find more information here that would be good for her Master's dissertation.
[…]

==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ███████ - 2012/08/03 10:18
_____

Simtonic didn't really mean that she would consider throwing people out; she just wanted us to be shocked and read the thread to see what was going on....lol. I was, and I immediately read her post. I was scared at first to comment because I couldn't believe that creators were at this forum. People that ACTUALLY create objects for the Sims were just regular folks!
This is the situation that caused me to be comfortable at CTO.... I asked a question that, well um ....Don't laugh, I was SOOOO embarrassed!!!! Okay, I can't remember who answered it, but I was devastated because The Sims page had been shut down and I had always downloaded their families. I had downloaded skins from everywhere but I couldn't get them to show up in the game. So, I got my nerve up and asked where I could find pre-made families...Someone asked, why don't you make your own?...........Well, I didn't have enough sense to use the arrows on the create a sim page to change the clothes or their heads.:blush:
So after I "had been caught with my pants down" there was nothing to be shy about anymore. You all laughed with me, not at me....I knew I was home.:silly:

==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by Hypnotiq - 2012/08/03 10:41
_____

I think CTo is a fantastic community and I am thankful for the wonderful members we have here. I really enjoy getting to know the ones who post frequently. I hope that just because we lose a few members in the move, that doesn't mean that CTO will lose value in the eyes of it's members. I know it won't in mine. This is the first community where I have actually felt at home. I have gotten to know several of the members on a fairly personal level. I consider the good friends here of as much worth as those I know in real life (this is real too of course, but you know what I mean).
I am so glad that creators and players can intermingle and that creators are not "unreachable" people.
I really do love this place and the poeple who make it what it is. :)

==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by simtonic - 2012/08/03 10:42

_____
I guess I'm the typically family worker - I never hesitate to intervene :laugh:
Joan, you are right - we surely have a lot of "dead end users" and our total membership will be more down-to-earth after having started new CTO.
████ is caring in a great way for our new members and I don't think that we will need a special novice-support, maybe only a small section "you are new and have questions?" because I see many new members beginning their postings with "I'm not sure if this is the right place ...but ..."
I agree with ████████ - we cannot reach anyone. Everyone should have the opportunity to move freely at CTO.
At the other hand no one should forget that much work and enthusiasm (and not at least money) are in this great place.
CTO is so much more than a self-servce-shop!
I will go to my garden now - Martin Luther said " preach whatever you want but don't preach longer than ten minutes" ...
a clever man! :laugh:
==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by MadameRosa - 2012/08/03 10:52

_____
The old introvert vs extravert question? There are lurkers I'm sure there are people who come every day and follow certain threads religiously but feel they have nothing to add or don't feel comfortable speaking up. I'd hate to think we're cliquish or exclusionary here. We've bashed other forums for that...:ohmy:
==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by Jonesie - 2012/08/03 10:59

_____
Well....this certainly is an interesting thread!!!
Our Fearless Leader has honed it down to a fine point - the transition to the new site, which will require everyone to reregister, will go far to tidy up the current membership list. This way, no feelings will be bruised! The members who haven't checked in in a looooong time won't even notice the transition, and the shy ones will quietly come back without feeling like they are under scrutiny. As many pointed out - every community has its active participants, and its quiet ones who are happier not having a light shone upon them. If we were throwing a Real Life party, we would see many guests keeping the conversations going while other guests would simply be basking in the energy and fun of the party without feeling pressed to offer up a comment or introduce a new topic. CTO seems to have a nice balance...:)
==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by Hypnotiq - 2012/08/03 11:04

_____
Yes it takes all kinds of people/personalities to make a forum. I'm very outgoing (and I'm quite sanguine) so I love mingling and being a talker (my post count should prove THAT haha!!). I also appreciate those who are not so talkative but make meaningful, well thoughtout posts at the right times.
I'd hate to think we're cliquish or exclusionary here. We've bashed other forums for that...:ohmy:
So very, very true MadameRosa! In real life I love hosting parties and events and I want to make sure everyone is invited. I dislike cliques/exclusiveness on forums and in real life.
==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ██████ - 2012/08/03 11:19

_____
I actually feel that this CTO is the most welcoming and inclusive forum there is active right now. This is the only forum other than Swarm back in its heyday where I feel every member is equally important, whether they are a creator, a WCIF expert, a joke teller, or a regular poster contributing what they can.
And I love that the only real rule here is to behave nicely, even when we are debating. I like that old posts can be bumped, people aren't chastised for posting in the wrong forum, the Welcome and Birthday and Contest threads have members actively posting, and so many other things.

I also appreciate those who are not so talkative but make meaningful, well thoughtout posts at the right times.

I was actually thinking the same thing the other day. The thing that I could never figure out is how many members come here for the files but never make 10 posts so never see all we have in the Files section.

The other thing that saddens me is the wonderful creators out there who because they have preconceived ideas about who we are (ARG - Pirates!)are missing out on a whole world of creative ideas and advice that makes this forum special in a different way. If you look at the new sites that have opened in even the last year, I would venture to say the vast majority came to be form here at CTO!

So in other words, KUDOS to us.

:blahblah: :blahblah: --> is me :laugh:

I meant to add I am actually a very shy person in real life, it takes me a long time to warm up...it took me 7 years at N99 to make 1,200 posts, and look at me here, I can't shut up.
:blush:

===

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by sidhe - 2012/08/03 11:20
_____

:) Ah Martha, I cherish you raising and exploring philosophic points again. Sometimes I think we start to shy away from the "hard questions" because we are too busy, or because we are no longer sure what is a 'politically correct' subject to discuss in public anymore. but as you know, I always love the intellectual stimulation.

Your thoughts are actually very central to what many businesses are discussing today. Especially in terms of marketing and public relations. What does constitute an online community? How can we tell the active from the inactive? And how do we measure the value of each?

There is a great book that provides some very interesting statistics about this topic and you might enjoy reading it. It is called "Groundswell" and was written by Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff.

This book explores many facets of the online community, including the value of active vs inactive participation. For instance, these authors group internet users in a number of ways, one of which is by how they participate when using the internet. They categorize us as: Creators, Conversationalists, Critics, Collectors, Joiners, Spectators, and Inactives.

Each category displays certain trends and characteristics and each have been found to play a vital role in the online community. As a matter of fact, depending on the type of website, there is sometimes a higher percentage of Spectators and Inactives...yet they are the driving force that keeps the website alive. […]

===

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/08/03 12:45
_____

I've been in lurker mode for this thread. Most threads of this nature I revert to that position. Of course it helped that when Martha started this thread was also about the time I logged out after being here most of the night (that's my usual night owl routine), so late to the party anyway.

Oh ---and I get to follow one of our community wordsmiths - Hi, sidhe! :)

I had a 2 part "live" interview with Ludi and she asked me about community - are we a community? My answer was a simple "of course we are". In defining it I stressed one aspect of it that I considered to be the "key" to the whole concept of an internet community. Communication. It's all we have here. Words on a screen. She put it a slightly different way - it's the glue that holds us together. As sidhe pointed out, there are those that write the words and there are those that read the words. Some do both. I read every post and have done so since I joined and apparently I write a few as well. I also agree that we almost qualify as a social media channel. I freely admit I post a lot of what I call "nonsense", fun stuff, interacting in a warmhearted "we are friends" manner. It takes time to reach a point that one feels comfortable within the community to do that. That's why I took on the moderator job for the Hello and Birthday categories - "Hello, welcome to our community... have fun... enjoy... we ARE glad you have joined us". As others have mentioned, it can be a bit intimidating when first joining a well-established (yet always evolving) community. We really don't "know" one another.

Just those words on the screen (people behind those words, but we only see the words). No face-to-face interaction.
There are advantages and disadvantages of joining such a community. Easy to join. Easy to be "faceless". Easy to not participate. Easy to leave. Much more rewarding to create a virtual face for yourself and participate.
Ok... I was starting to ramble and have forgotten what this thread was all about. :laugh:
Nothing more to add really. Just that I appreciate each and every member of this community. I'm glad you're all here. I always look to see who is logged in and often I will see a name I don't recognize and wonder who that is and then check the profile. I've probably checked more profiles than most - the birthday mod has to do that every day and decide what type of email to send. I keep them very simple and short, but hopefully that bit of "communication" adds a little more of that glue that holds us together.
==

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by simtonic - 2012/08/03 13:08
_____

Ludi had a (in my eyes) fascinating thesis that one aspect of the openess of a group would be that group members are free to take on as many roles as they wish or as less roles as they wish (I hope I've got her right with this).
I for my person came up to 9 1/2 roles! :blush:
Accordingly CTO could be characterized as a very open group culture.
Age, gender, looking, ethnicity, disability, income, religion or political affiliation play no role and everyone is free to decide if he wants to appear externally or stays in the background.
I'm a member of a 3d-model-sharing-community where you have to leave if you write nothing over a longer period. So nearly every comment is "thank you" ... only these two words and again and again ... thank you, thank you, thank you.
I sometimes have the impression that I'm a zombie amongst zombies at this community *lol
Communication is always on a voluntary basis, that applies also for CTO.
It is in no one's interest if members feel pressed to say something.
The only thing that we can do is remaining open for everyone who is seeking entry to our community and extend her/him a warm welcome.
Having friends is wonderful but becoming cliquish is the death of a community.
By the way: I was welcomed by Sidhe ... she gave me the feeling as if I had always been at CTO and that was a really good feeling :laugh:
Thank you for your thoughts!
==
[…]
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ██████████ - 2012/08/03 13:38
_____

I don't quite no what catagor i fall under in this group. I go for long streches where im MIA and now since i actually am going to start playing again i feel like i can be more active.
==
Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by jmrcrp - 2012/08/03 14:09
_____

I'm pretty much repeating some of what I said to Ludi in our latest interview. I feel that CTO is a community in that it is a group of people who have grown to know and trust each other. I feel that you all are truly my friends, as much as I do my RL friends. And yes, they get concerned when I disappear for a while, don't call anyone, or don't show up at the places we like to hang out. Just like you all apparently do. I'm so sorry I'm like that - when I get depressed or am having problems, I turn inward and shut the rest of the world out. I should trust my friends, both RL and online, to support me and comfort me no matter what is going on in my life.
I often find myself in conversation with my RL friends or family, saying things like "My friend Martha in Germany thinks that..." or "I have a friend near London who says..." as if they are real people to me. But that's because you are! I expect that once the new site is built, and things calm down a bit for me, I will be more active here in places other than Site News and Site Help. It would help me if I took the time to actually play the game. That's a funny thing - since I started CTO I haven't played at

all. My "simming" time is taken up with this website, and I don't have time to play the game anymore. Is anyone else out there not playing the game, but stay at CTO for the community?

I think perhaps what I will do is to change the wording of the descriptions of some of the sections in the forum, to make it sound more welcoming to new people. I will also look carefully at the Forum Help and Forum Rules pages, which I have on my task list to write, to be sure they are directed toward newcomers.

I am so accustomed to the camaraderie and general "tone" of our forum, that I sometimes forget that other forums are not like this. I have been spending a lot of time in support forums as I build our new site. For the most part, their forums consist of people asking questions about software and trying to find answers. They have no use for the little "niceties" that we take for granted here. I think I am frowned upon in some of them because I speak in a more casual manner.

They don't appreciate the use of the :P smilie. When I started asking questions trying to figure out a way to show our smilies on the new forum (they've taken that out of the software for some unfathomable reason) I got a few answers that were like "what do you need smilies for, anyway? "

[…]

I think that 2 new things on the new site will also help to solidify the sense of community that we have. The translator is one thing. Please, everyone, be prepared to be reading posts here in other languages. You can use www.translate.google.com to translate someone's post, then answer it in English and the site will translate it back to that person's language. I really feel that this is important. A lot of people in countries other than the US are still playing Sims 1, and we need to make CTO a place where they can get involved.

The other thing is the member map. It's such a cool feature; I can't wait for all of you to be on it! I set it up so that you can choose one of 3 sets of markers - online, offline, or All. You can see who lives near you, and each marker is a link to the person's profile so you can send them a PM. One set of options I had available that I decided not to use (could have used it on this site as well, but chose not to) was the "connections" feature in the user management software. It allows members to create connections to each other, in a private way. You could have things on your profile that only your connections could see, or you could send a message only to the people on your connections list. To me, that defeats the purpose of an open community, and invites cliques to form. If you are spending your time here only communicating with a small group of people, you are not contributing to the larger community. So that's why I decided to disable that feature.

We have a lot on this site, and even more on the new site, that I hope encourages people to get involved.

===

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ▮▮▮▮ - 2012/08/03 14:27
_____

I must admit I have a real serious addiction to SMILIES! So thanks for saving those!

Also, I am glad you chose not to use the Connections option. There were many Sims 1 forums in the past I only lurked at because the cliques and the "inside jokes" were so obviously out there to make people like me feel like an outsider.

I do the same as you Joan. I will say my friend ▮▮▮▮ in Texas, or someone I know in Germany, or England etc. also. Makes me sound so well traveled :laugh:

Also like madhatter I was gone for quite a few months. But here at CTO I knew when I returned I would be welcomed back, and that is something very unusual in the online forum world, IMO. :kiss: :kiss: :kiss:

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[…]

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ▮▮▮▮ - 2012/08/03 14:45
_____

vetavestal wrote:

:) Perhaps at the new site we could have a novice's nook which would let new members ask questions however stupid...:S

My father once told me that the only stupid question is the one you DON'T ask!!

I have always tried to live by that, too.

I was once one of those "hanger-ons", but got pulled out of my shell by the wonderful, helpful people here, some of which are now personal friends as well.

:thankyou2:

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[…]

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/08/03 17:02
_____

I am not a "talker" in real life so would likely be quiet here as well. I dont feel a need to add my two cents to every conversation and would likely only make a comment if I felt I had something to contribute however useless my contribution may be :laugh:
I have only been a member here for a short time and I thought this forum was different in many ways to some I remember from years gone by.
I am not a creator either by a long stretch, Ive made a few paintings for my own game using the old favourite (Art Shop) but I havent tried to create any using bases. I wouldnt even know where to start!
I think the term "stupid question" could be misunderstood by some and may turn them away from asking anything? There are no stupid questions, if you dont know something then the only way to find out is ask or as was stated by ▮▮▮▮▮▮ shown where to find the answer if its been asked before. Remember some people dont know where to find things and how to search for things in forums.
Lets not forget alot of people are very guarded as to what they say or do online for security reasons. I myself wouldn't give out anything personal or private about myself online for that very reason.
Many people begin as lurkers and then start to venture into the forum itself. I guess like me they "test the waters" first to see what kind of forum it is and how people react to situations and each other in general.
I think CTO does a great job of preserving the sites that have closed or arent functioning properly anymore (broken links for example) and that would be its biggest attraction for people to join. I would also think it would be the main reason people come here - for the stuff they missed out on or lost.
Not everyone wants to or is able to be here all day every day for various reasons, some may only want to check in every now and then and some are here whenever they have free time. So thats my useless comment on it :laugh:

==

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by vetavestal - 2012/08/03 17:30
_____

[…] I was really gratified when I first joined and still even now that I can ask questions which most members old or new would think daft.So please I didn't mean to infer that only new members are without much sim know-how ;I am a very old member who will still post queries which most others might say'Surely she knows that?'.The great thing about CTO is I don't feel like a dunce here:S

==

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/08/03 17:45
_____

I notice questions asked every day here that I haven't a clue as to what the answer might be - much less even realize there was a question that could be asked in the first place :blink2:
Fortunately for all of us, the questions get asked and the questions almost always get answered!
What a place we have here!
B)

==

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ - 2012/08/03 18:11
_____

It can be quite amazing sometimes when someone joins a forum and they are "new" that you dont know who they may be yet they know about the subject than anyone else there!
A newbie to a Sims forum could be a creator or hacker from way back and they have a wealth of knowledge to share, you never know. It isnt me by the way - I was just a player nothing more. You could also have long time members still learning things. So I think forums need to be more friendly than some of them are.
Here I read questions being answered in helpful ways and from different peoples viewpoints which also is important and useful. There are things you can do in the game that I never knew of - an

example would be several installations. I did not know you could that and the thread was very useful.

Soemtimes just lurking in the background and reading whats already out there can be the best way to pass an hour or two :laugh:

I know this has likely already been said but could some people who dont have English as a first language be perhaps a little shy of this? Afraid to post in case they are not understood or maybe even made fun of? Perhaps its happened to them before somewhere?

I have seen that happen in a Sims forum a few years ago. People were ridiculed for their poor English (even though you could still work out what they were asking) and some who did speak English as a first language were treated like dirt over a simple typo. Typos can happen to anyone and no reason to be nasty in my opinion. And a persons attempts at English should never be ridiculed, it might be difficult for them and they dont know the right words to use for what they want or they may be using an online translater which can sometimes be not so accurate. I have not seen anyone treated badly for these things at CTO which is good.

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Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ▉▉▉▉ - 2012/08/03 19:00
_____

I started replaying The Sims about 1 1/2 years ago (after several computer changes). I was able to "restock" many of my old favorites after finding this site. You guys ROCK !!!! I am not very outgoing in real life so I don't participate in the forums very much. But I do read them and have learned bunches from you guys - amazing how much you can forget about Sims !!!

==

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by Thedabara - 2012/08/03 19:06
_____

I enjoy coming to this community precisely because everyone is so inviting and friendly. I would participate a lot more if I was a creator, but alas, that talent has never reached me, so I participate in topics that I am familiar with, or in the off chance I have some helpful advice!

[…]

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Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ▉▉▉▉▉ - 2012/08/03 19:31
_____

Hi Guys,
All good stuff
Communication,freedom of expression,Good humour,Help and support,Willingness to share, Good advice and Ideas,friendliness,no Race,Gender,age discrimination. it's all here !
Would'nt it be AWSOME if the world was like that?

▉▉▉▉

Your father sounds like my Dad
He once told me "There is no such thing as a bad dog,Only a bad owner" and he was absolutely right:cheer: !

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Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by Ludi_Ling - 2012/08/03 19:41
_____

I just wanted to say how the fact that we are so openly talking about issues that have been brought up in private interviews is a testament to just how open we are as a community, and it makes me very happy. :)

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Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by jessmasjus - 2012/08/04 09:17
_____

I love this wonderful, zany, eclectic, intellectually stimulating, mind blowing, loveable and likeable, never a dull moment, mish mash of international comraderie!!!!

Sometimes I DO feel like a lurker here myself, unlike the almost 2 years when i was jobless and I was here all day every day to keep my sanity, I grab bits and pieces when I have a few hours off from work or not babysitting my granddaughters, to try to keep up with all that is going on here.

I also didnt do any creating back then either and if Martha had not unravelled the mysteries of Anim8or for me I would still just be recoloring bits and pieces. Instead, she gave the Key to the Kingdom of Kreating to me and I am now so addicted I never even shut OFF Anim8or.... so many things I want to do and try I truly cannot stop.

Since I remote work from home now except for 2 days a week when I travel in, I have the same quandry there when there is a bunch of new people, they don't know who I am and I don't know who they are...lol I have to reintroduce myself almost every week, get to know them and visa versa since we are part of the same Team - I just am not a Visible part to most of them..only through our IM while working etc.

Its become the same here for me which causes me distress at times, I don't seem to have time to post or build or make conversations like I used to, I miss going waybacking for hours trying to find elusive files - I do make sure I know what is going on and try to keep up. I haven't even BUILT a house in over a Year!!! OMG... I would fervently hope that no one thinks I have abandoned or forgotten anyone or CTO ever!

Helping out with the Transfer Team doing files is the MOST FUN I have had for ages..Making pics, finding pics on the wayback, Organizing sets..so much fun and the amount of files is mindblowing!

I thank God everyday for CTO and JM and each and every one of you amazing friends - and yes.. my daughter gets a kick out of me saying "Oh, I was talking to my friend in Germany, New Zealand, Great Britain, Holland or wherever...." she thinks its a HOOT that I spend more time "talking" to you than I do with my next door neighbors!! […]

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[…]

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by Jonesie - 2012/08/04 17:49
_____

Allow me to throw in a few words...

I've only been a member for a few months, and I'm somewhat active right now. Maybe, later on, I will go on hiatus fromtime to time, when RL stuff demands my full attention.

I have recently discovered (like within the last week)that CTO can also act as a therapeutic tool. Occasionally when I'm feeling grumpy, or down, or bored, or annoyed, I notice I divert to CTO - just to read the latest threads, look at creations, do a little research to learn new things,etc. but don't feel the need to communicate.

I think of it as the equivalent to taking a walk in pretty nice park, or going window-shopping, or watching an old movie on TV - in other words, a way of getting over being grumpy, bored, etc. I ALWAYS find something that perks me up, or captures my interest, or educates me.

So, thank you Simtonic/Martha for posting such an intriguing question! :rockon:

==

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?
Posted by ripmagnum - 2012/08/04 19:18
_____

[…] This site is friendly & inviting---and I have seen countless members fall by the wayside, many have left, some come back, but many haven't.

I will use myself as an example---as I really can't speak for others. I have been a member lo these 10 months, and my story could be anyone's out there. When I joined, I had no intention of staying beyond the required 10 posts, and whatever time it took to grab the downloads and run. I didn't know any of you---and quite frankly, I didn't care. It was all about me & what I thought I wanted. But then, something strange happened---I got to know a lot of you. And even more, I began to make friends with many of you. And that was the real thing I was looking for from CTO. I came for the 'Sims Levettown' files & I stayed because I had found a home. I am still trying to get the files all these months later (well, that recent hard drive crash did slow me down as I was quite a ways along with the downloads---the D's I believe) my point is that after over 500+ posts, numerous contests, and all the friends, I no longer feel the need to just move along.

Some members have not posted as much as I have, many have yet to enter a contest/challenge, and many are the way I used to be---just 'grab-and-go' with the files. They might be lurkers and/or users just out for themselves. Who can honestly say? And, for that matter, does that even matter? Not really.

I have made no secret that I CANNOT make any Sims creations to save my life, and while that bothers me that I can't contribute to enrich the lives of so many who have enriched mine---that

doesn't make my humble contributions to CTO any less significant than to the handful of members who have made Sims content. I told Ludi in my interview (and sorry Ludi if I wasn't supposed to mention this) that I see my role here at CTO as one of many 'goodwill ambassadors'. I have taken time to greet many new members and help them learn about CTO---as so many of you had done for me when I was new. I have sent birthday/well-wishes, and tried to offer comfort where I could.

And please note, the above is not a testament to my great deeds of kindness in any way---in fact, I hate to bring these things up. But, as I said, I am using myself for an example---and to mention these random acts is all the more significant when just a paragraph ago, I mentioned how I wasn't trying to get involved in the first place. This site changed how I felt.

And that is the message.

So, even someone who can't do BIG things for this site might try to repay it by doing small things. So my answer to Martha's question is---yes. This is a GOOD COMMUNITY that does good things because we have good people. And maybe not everyone can do what others can---and maybe they ultimately do nothing but lurk & grab. But, I was once a lurker too---and look how that turned out???
B)

==

Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?

Posted by moyra21 - 2012/08/04 21:23

_____

I came here for the files, whilst on a team hunt with ▓▓▓▓ (▓▓▓▓) and ▓▓▓ (Jessmasjus) from N99: there I had learned to look for files and to chuck the humour back and forth with people I had never met but felt I ended up knowing. When they directed me here, and I found my missing (UNAVAILABLE!) files, I also found more people of the same kind - generous, warm, friendly, supportive, funny. I would never in a million years ever said I would get so involved in an online community, I would look sideways in disbelief at those who admitted how much time they spent playing networked computer games in the middle of the night. All of you are real people, real friends to me. Some of you talk a lot, some of you come and go, just like a real community. Im thinking that the ones that are interested, will all re-register with the new site, to carry on this ring of friendship. If we know of any missing in action friends, we should urge them to come on over and catch up.

My two pennies worth. […]

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Re:Should we exclude passive members from new CTO?

Posted by pumpkin - 2012/08/04 22:18

_____

Let me say first, I think this is a great community, I just don't have a clue where I fit in at, and I have been here for 3 years. It bothers me that I can't create; I don't participate in any of the contests, and I am not good at WCIF's, I don't feel I offer anything to CTO. But I still come here, because it's like home. I first came here for the files, but it has been 3 years and I am still here. I will be here forever just lurking in the background.

But there is one thing I know for sure, when you are on the outside looking in, you can see, that there is a lot of love and caring here at CTO.

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[…]

Appendix F: Reflection

We are used to living in a world where information is a commodity, where it is passively consumed from various media outlets – the television, the press, the radio, books, magazines, even the internet. In more recent years, more attention has been given to the phenomenon of 'participatory culture' and its related forms – 'commons-based peer production', 'produsage', 'bricolage', and so on. These focus on the consumer as producer – or 'produser', to use Bruns' nomenclature. No doubt this phenomenon has grown with the advent of the internet and its the greater opportunity it affords for 'interactivity' (perhaps 'connectivity' is the better word here – we always 'interact' with a computer however we use it); but in fact, the thread of participatory cultures has been with us for a longer period of time. History gives us examples with the fanzines, amateur radio and the underground press, to name but a few. It seems that the internet has merely opened up more opportunities and channels for participation where there were fewer before.

Having come across the term 'information culture' in class, I was interested to research further. To my mind, this phrase implied a higher, intellectual purpose to information exchange, something of artistic and/or social importance. I wished to know what an information culture was; indeed, if it existed. Initial research was somewhat frustrated and thus I became ever more compelled to work towards my own theory.

Primarily, it is the collaborative nature of consuming and (re)producing information that is of interest to me, having myself been engaged in the remediation of cultural objects since before the World Wide Web went mainstream. However, it was through the internet that I was able to meet other 'produsers', collaborate on fanfictions and create fanart as part of a group of artists. Later, when I was introduced to CTO Sims, I came into contact with a group that had created its own user-aggregated library of digital objects, that was creating its own information resources, and pooling the knowledge of its own members in large-scale creative projects. Each member contributed according to his or her own strengths, however large or small – and the product was communally owned by the community.

The huge amount of work that went into these projects, and into the maintenance of the library, was astonishing to me – yet to the great majority, it was merely a labour of love. Further research concluded that this was not an isolated circumstance. There were other internet-based communities that worked as participatory cultures. I began to wonder whether such communities could also be called information cultures.

The terms 'participatory culture' and 'information culture' do not necessarily go hand in hand. But the nature of CTO Sims was such that I wished to research whether one might imply elements of the other. In particular, whether participatory elements might help describe an information culture, and whether participatory cultures could be described in terms of information. What I found in CTO Sims was somewhat of a conflation of the two, which I named 'digital information culture' – but the scope of the research is narrow and cannot really be applied outside of CTO Sims or similar gaming communities.

The study of CTO Sims itself was of great interest, though, in my opinion, of insufficient length to be anything more than basic ground work. As it was, the initial proposal objectives were not entirely fulfilled, as very little space could be given over to a discussion of CTO's digital library, owing to the fact that the direction of the research was guided more by the information and remediation practices of the members themselves. But as far as a Masters level paper could allow, the results were generally satisfactory.

I have learned that my interest in this area extends much further than the 20,000 or so words that comprised this dissertation, and that there was far more I wished to have said (and explored) in the project. The subject is of great interest, and the study of information culture (such as it may be) is certainly worthy of further research.