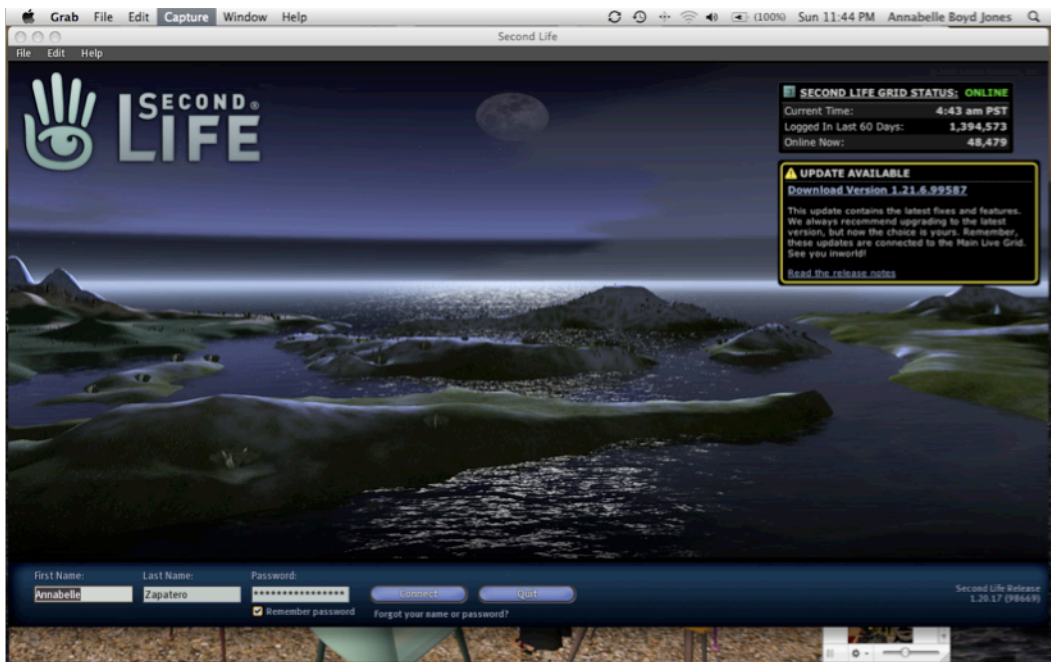


THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN JOURNALISM AND GOVERNANCE

A Critical Analysis of the Interaction of Journalism and Governance in the Virtual World Second Life.



Second Life Client Interface – The Entrance to a Virtual World.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the interaction of journalism and governance in the virtual world Second Life. It examines the structure, practices and influence of journalism in Second Life and explores the nature and communicative aspects of governance in this virtual world. As virtual worlds attract growing numbers of subscribers and social interaction increasingly moves towards the online environment, it is crucial to understand the practices and conventions which structure human interaction in these spaces.

To explore these concerns, a close critical analysis of Second Life was conducted, based upon academic literature, interviews and a content analysis. Eight interviews with significant journalists in Second Life were conducted and a content analysis of thirteen publications was undertaken. Yochai Benkler's theory of social production provides a theoretical base which frames the nature of Second Life as participatory, collaborative and networked, and defines the relationship between media and governance using the concept of a networked public sphere.

Practices of journalism in Second Life display a combination of traditional, professional, gatewatching and participatory, networked, gatekeeping characteristics, and it perform numerous roles in mediating communication. Second Life publications facilitate active and abundant conversation between residents, facilitating a networked public sphere. Linden Lab uses a variety of strategies to communicate governance discourses to users. Despite the similarity between normative and Second Life journalism, it has a negligible influence over the structure and direction of governance.

The disconnect between journalism and governance in Second Life raises questions about individual freedom and collaborative production in virtual worlds, challenging existing understandings of online interactions.

Statement of Original Authorship

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief;

- i. incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii. contain any material previously submitted or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- iii. contain any defamatory material.

Signed:

Date:

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Hiro is approaching the Street. It is the Broadway, the Champs Elysees of the Metaverse... It does not really exist. But right now, millions of people are walking up and down it... When Hiro goes into the Metaverse and looks down the street and sees buildings and electric signs stretching off into the darkness, disappearing over the curve of the globe, he is actually staring at the graphic representations of a myriad different pieces of software.¹

This is Neal Stephenson's vision of the metaverse, the metaphysical universe, as imagined in the influential novel *Snow Crash* in 1993. The metaverse exists as computer code on a server, yet when rendered as screen images and inhabited by humans this space becomes a place of work, play, socialising, trade, culture, creativity – another stage for the enactment of human life. The metaverse has no national borders or geo-political restrictions like the physical world; the only passport required is your internet connection.

Although Stephenson's vision resembles a science fiction plot, it has already been realised, many times over, in the form of virtual worlds. Computer networked, three-dimensional (3D) worlds such as World of Warcraft, Everquest and Second Life² have been visited by millions of people. Indeed some visitors become so enraptured they

¹ Stephenson, N. (1993). *Snow Crash*. London: New York, Penguin, pp23-24.

² See: www.worldofwarcraft.com, www.everquest.com and www.secondlife.com.

decide to stay and live most of their lives in these environments through their avatar, a personalised graphic representation of themselves.³

Second Life (www.secondlife.com), a world owned and operated by the private company Linden Research Inc (hereafter Linden Lab),⁴ has attracted widespread media and academic attention in recent years and appears to host a thriving, growing society. At the time of writing, October 2008, Second Life had over 15 million registered residents, of whom more than 1.2 million had actually logged on in the past 60 days.⁵ Second Life plays host to thousands of different interest groups including fan, social support, sexual fantasy and religious groups. There is a thriving economy, structured around land and property, fashion and hospitality (night clubs and red light districts) markets, and an in-world currency (Linden Dollars, or L\$). According to Linden Lab, user-to-user transactions totalled L\$8,941,800,000 in August 2008 (equating to approximately US\$33.9 million) and residents owned 1,834,000,000 square metres of land.⁶

Second Life has its own media industry, in the form of virtual world publications including the *Second Life Herald*, *New World Notes*, *Metaverse Messenger*, *Metaverse Journal* and *Reuters Second Life Bureau*, and hundreds of blogs which report the happenings of this

³ Edward Castronova undertook a survey of users of the game Everquest and found that 20% of users perceive themselves as 'living in' Everquest, and another 22% would spend all their time there if possible. See: Castronova, E. (2001). "Virtual Worlds: A first hand account of market and society on the cyberian frontier." CEsifo Working Paper No. 618 Accessed: 22 March 2008, 2008, from <<http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=294828>>

⁴ See: www.secondlife.com and www.lindenlab.com.

⁵ Linden Lab. (2008). "Economic Statistics." Accessed: 31 October 2008, from <http://secondlife.com/whatis/economy_stats.php>

⁶ Linden Lab (2008). "Second Life Virtual World – Key Metrics", Accessed: 17 October 2008, from <http://static.secondlife.com/economy/stats_200808.xls>

place.⁷ Virtual world radio, television, podcasting, film (called machinima) and photography add to the wealth of media activity.⁸ James Wagner Au, one of the first journalists reporting on Second Life, estimates that nearly half of the readers of his blog have their own blog sites.⁹ Au was hired by Linden Lab in an explicit attempt to encourage in-world journalism. Philip Rosedale, founder of Second Life, reportedly believed that “as journalism emerged in Second Life it would be a sign that we were doing something right [and a] useful way for this new world to be explained to its residents.”¹⁰ Journalism has gone beyond this sponsored beginning, to become an important aspect of the Second Life experience, providing a means for residents to communicate.

Research Question

This thesis is specifically concerned with how journalism and governance interact in Second Life. It explores the structure, practice and influence of journalism in this virtual environment and analyses how these compare to existing conceptions of journalism in Western democracies. The thesis also documents the nature of governance in Second Life, by analysing the communicative aspects of Linden Lab’s governance. Although

⁷ See: www.secondlifeherald.com, www.nwn.blogs.com/nwn, www.metaversemessenger.com, www.metaversejournal.com and www.secondlife.reuters.com for examples.

⁸ See: www.slcn.tv, www.metanomics.new, firstlife.isfullofcrap.com, www.metaverse-tv.com and slpodcast.net for examples.

⁹ Au, W. J. (2008). *The Making of Second Life: notes from the new world*. Collins, New York. p172.

¹⁰ Rosedale, P. quoted in: Totilo, S. (2007). "Burning the virtual shoe leather: does journalism in a computer world matter?" *Columbia Journalism Review* Vol. 46 Iss. 2, p40.

Second Life is ostentatiously a libertarian society, strict controls and conflicting interests are found to significantly constrain and misrepresent the nature of this world.

The research uses legal scholar Yochai Benkler's seminal work, *The Wealth of Networks*, as a broad theoretical base to understand both the nature of Second Life and the relationship between media and governance. Benkler proposes that a new mode of production within a networked information economy is emerging, facilitated by a "communications environment built on cheap processors with high computational capabilities, interconnected in a pervasive network."¹¹ He defines social production as;

*"Radically decentralised, collaborative, and non-proprietary; based on sharing resources and outputs among widely distributed, loosely connected individuals who cooperate with each other without relying on either market signals or managerial commands. This is what I call 'commons-based peer production'."*¹²

Benkler also states that social production is a desirable outcome for society, with its liberating potential forming the cornerstone for his book. He states that an embrace of these collaborative, participatory and social forms of creating and exchanging information, knowledge and culture can "offer individuals greater autonomy, political communities greater democracy and societies greater opportunities for cultural self-reflection and human connection."¹³ The research will also examine Benkler's conception of the public sphere, as a lens through which to analyse the political, communicative aspects of media and the operation of governance in a new form of advanced, capitalist society.

¹¹ Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: how social production transforms markets and freedom*. New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, p3.

¹² *ibid.* p60.

¹³ *ibid.* p473.

Virtual world journalism is found to be a hybrid of traditional, hierarchical and professionalised practices of old mass media industries and participatory, open and interactive methods of networked communication. It creates a networked public sphere where residents discuss and debate issues of concern to their community. However I will argue that there is a fundamental disconnect between the public sphere and governance in Second Life, as the in-world journalism, and any opinions formed within the fledgling public sphere it engenders, do not have significant influence over governance decisions. The breakdown of the relationship between journalism and governance in Second Life raises questions about the utopian view of virtual worlds, seen as desirable, collaborative, progressive experiences within a social production framework. The particular nature of governance and user participation becomes an important problem as more people begin to live more of their lives online, and are subjected to the subtle and not so subtle controls of private companies. Something is rotten in the state of cyberspace.

What is a Virtual World?

The virtual world is described by new media economist, Edward Castronova, as a “synthetic world: an expansive, world-like environment made by humans, for humans, and which is maintained, recorded and rendered by a computer.”¹⁴ There remains considerable debate about its defining characteristics, particularly what separates them from other virtual environments or spaces such as interactive web sites, text-only chat rooms or social networked sites. However the computer rendering of the world, its

¹⁴ Castronova, E. (2005). *Synthetic worlds: the business and culture of online games*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p11.

persistent material existence, use of avatars to represent users and the synchronous multi-user nature of the software, place Second Life firmly within agreed definitions of virtual worlds.¹⁵

A number of technological and social shifts have impacted the development of virtual worlds. Digital virtual worlds developed from non-digital forms of imaginative and gaming worlds,¹⁶ expressed through fictional literature, board games and role-playing social games, such as Dungeons and Dragons.¹⁷ Two separate strands of technological development coalesced in the mid-1990s to enable the growth of viable, mainstream MMORPGs (Massively, Multi-Player, Online, Role-Playing Games).

The first strand concerns computing power. From the 1970's computers have demonstrated the exponential increases in information processing capability predicted by Moore's Law.¹⁸ At the same time they have also shrunk in size and cost, moving computing access out of institutional, restricted sites and into domestic use. The second strand involves the video game industry. While textual and object-orientated worlds have existed online since the beginning of the internet,¹⁹ mass mainstream audiences for

¹⁵ See: Bell, M. (2008). "Toward a definition of virtual worlds" Journal of Virtual Worlds Research, vol. 1, iss. 1, Accessed: 25 October 2008, from <<http://journals.tdl.org/jvwr/index>>, Schroeder, R. (2008). "Defining Virtual Worlds and Virtual Environments" Journal of Virtual Worlds Research, vol. 1, iss. 1, Accessed: 25 October 2008, from <<http://journals.tdl.org/jvwr/index>> and Virtual worlds research listserv (2008). 'Virtual worlds: a definition thread', June 2008, Accessed: 25 October 2008, from <<https://utlists.utexas.edu/sympa/arc/vw-research/2008-06/thrd1.html>>

¹⁶ Lastowka, G. and Hunter, D. (2004). "The Laws of the Virtual Worlds." California Law Review Vol. 92, Iss. 1, Accessed: 15 January 2008, from <http://ssrn.com/paper=402860>, p14-29.

¹⁷ Dungeons and Dragons was a popular role-playing game invented in the 1950's, and basely loosely on J. R. Tolkein's imagined world of The Lord of the Rings. It was also one of the first games to be translated into the digital environment, and founded an ongoing genre of the fantasy quest world.

¹⁸ See: Ethan Mollick, "Establishing Moore's Law," IEEE Annals of the History of Computing, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 62-75, Jul-Sept, 2006.

¹⁹ One of the first online games was *Adventure*. Created in 1972 it was used to test a computer's capability: "If a computer could run Adventure without crashing, it could run anything" See: Ludlow, P. & Wallace,

MMORPGs were built first through arcade gaming then by linking gaming with an established medium – the television – through the video game console in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁰ Numerous authors now estimate that approximately 100 million people globally have some affiliation with virtual worlds.²¹

From the outset, scholars began to categorise virtual worlds as ‘adventure’ worlds and ‘social’ worlds. Internet scholar Elizabeth Reid describes adventure worlds as having strict hierarchies of power, ability and status whereas social worlds share powers more widely amongst users and encourage interaction not competition.²² Hundreds of virtual worlds exist online and some worlds have millions of active subscribers. The largest virtual world currently is *World of Warcraft*, a fantasy adventure world set in ‘Azeroth’ with over 10 million active subscribers.²³ Other popular environments include adventure worlds *Everquest*, *Lineage* and *EVE Online*, social worlds such as *There*, *Habbo*, *Active Worlds* and the newest entrant, Google’s *Lively*.²⁴

M. (2007). The Second Life Herald : the virtual tabloid that witnessed the dawn of the metaverse. Cambridge, Mass, The MIT Press, p21-2.

²⁰ Kline, S., Dyer-Witheford, N., et al. (2003). Digital play: the interaction of technology, culture, and marketing. Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press.

²¹ See: Au, W.J. op. cit., Castronova, E. op. cit. “Synthetic Worlds...” pp51-56., Taylor, T. L. (2006). Play between worlds : exploring online game culture. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press. and Yee, N. (2006). "The Demographics, Motivations and Derived Experiences of Users of Massively-Multiuser Online Graphical Environments." PRESENCE: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments Vol. 15, Iss., (309-329). Accessed: 20 April 2008, from <<http://www.nickyee.com/index-papers.html>>.

²² Reid, E. (1998). CyberSociety 2.0: Revisiting computer-mediated communication and community. (ed). S. Jones. Thousand Oaks, California, Sage Publications, p109-111.

²³ Blizzard Entertainment. (2008)"World Of Warcraft®: Wrath Of The Lich King™ In Stores Starting November 13, 2008". Blizzard Entertainment – Media Alert, 15 September 2008. Accessed: 16 September 2008, from <<http://www.blizzard.com/us/press/080915.html>>

²⁴ Everquest: <http://www.everquest2.station.sony.com>, World of Warcraft: <http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/index.xml>, Lineage: <http://www.lineage2.com>, There: <http://www.there.com>, Habbo: <http://habbo.com.au>.

Second Life is a social world, driven by open-ended social interaction and collaborative cultural production. Linden Lab provides the physical, spatial constructs of the world, such as land, wind, gravity and light, and relies on user-created content to ‘fill’ the world. They also provide the server space that stores and renders the world, and the software client that allows access to the world (which includes content creation tools), however their business model is rooted in selling in-world ‘land’, effectively virtual property rights, and premium membership services. In a departure from the normal economic structure of virtual worlds, Linden Lab granted residents first world intellectual property (hereafter IP) rights over their in-world creations.²⁵ This strategy simultaneously encourages strong links with first world laws, economies and culture and facilitates resident innovation, creativity and the “rapid evolution of user-created content”.²⁶ Although the legal validity of the Terms of Service (ToS) that grants these rights is debatable,²⁷ the acknowledgment of IP rights enabled a significant amount of trade to occur, for instance in clothing and avatar enhancements. IP rights also allow content creators to feel protected from fraud and theft – nonetheless there are no formal or enforced mechanisms of dispute resolution or contract enforcement as Linden Lab refuses to get involved with most resident-to-resident transactions.

Benkler argues that Second Life is a commons-based peer product “where the commercial provider offered a platform and tools, while the users wrote the story-lines,

²⁵ Linden Lab. (2008). "Terms of Service." Accessed: 20 April, 2008, from <http://secondlife.com/corporate/tos.php> and Linden Lab. (2003). "Second Life Residents To Own Digital Creations." Accessed: 14 June 2008, from <http://lindenlab.com/pressroom/releases/03_11_14>

²⁶ Ondrejka, C. (2004). "Escaping the Gilded Cage: User Created Content and Building the Metaverse." *New York Law School Review* 81 Vol. 49 Iss. 1, p2.

²⁷ These click-through Terms and Service are seen as contracts of adhesion, and their validity to grant or withhold rights (such as property or free speech). have not been tested in a court of law. See: Jenkins, P. S. (2004). "The Virtual Worlds as a Company Town: Freedom of speech in massively multiple online role playing games." *Journal of Internet Law* Vol. 8 Iss. 1, p10.

rendered the 'set', and performed the entire play."²⁸ Indeed Cory Ondrejka, formerly the Chief Technology Officer at Linden Lab, indicates that the realisation of Stephenson's metaverse vision "will be so enormous that only distributed approaches to creation have any hope of generating its content, thus users must build the world they live in."²⁹ This grand vision has motivated the founder of Second Life, Phillip Rosedale, who has said, "I'm not building a game, I'm building a new country."³⁰ Five years into the history of Second Life, widespread 'user-generated content' creation has contributed to making Second Life one of the largest and most successful virtual worlds.³¹ At a granular level, production within the world of Second Life is often organised using cooperative and participatory methods. Au observes;

"None remembers exactly how Nexus Prime took shape, and all of them are generally hazy about who worked on what aspect of it. [...] They would work together on separate parts of the city in small groups, or sometimes alone, until their individual pieces met; at that point they'd improvise ways to mesh the parts together."³²

This research elaborated in this thesis supports the claim that the existence of intellectual property rights and the ability to easily create content in Second Life has allowed new and transformative modes of production to emerge. However the nature of these manifestations of social production require ongoing analysis, beyond the legal and

²⁸ Benkler, Y. op. cit. p75.

²⁹ Ondrejka, C. op. cit. p28.

³⁰ Rosedale, P. quoted in: Terdiman, D. (2004). "Fun in Following the Money" Wired, 5 August 2004, Accessed: 25 October 2008, from <<http://www.wired.com/gaming/gamingreviews/news/2004/05/63363?currentPage=all>>

³¹ For example Second Life won an award for User Generated Content – Game Modification at the 59th Technology and Engineering Emmy Awards (see http://www.emmyonline.org/mediacenter/tech_2k7_winners.html)

³² Au, W. J. op. cit. p44-46.

economic aspects examined by Benkler, of the deeper structures of politics and governance, power and communication.

Justification and Objectives

The importance and impact of virtual worlds are commonly dismissed through the misperception that they are not real or that they are 'just a game'. Yet the interactions that occur in Second Life are no less real than the interactions which occur in a child's playground. The businesses and trades which occur are no less real than the businesses and trades of companies such as iTunes and Amazon. They involve real world resource expenditure and real world emotional investment. Simply put, "Second Life is real. Real creation, real business, real communities all created by real people."³³

Once virtual worlds are regarded as 'real', as an extension of human experience, understanding them through rigorous and methodical academic study becomes urgent due to their unique character and potential impact upon the 'outside' world. Castronova eloquently states that it "is not that you should care about the ogres and elves running around in cyberspace, but that you should care about the fact that there *are* ogres and elves, millions of them, running around in cyberspace."³⁴ Furthermore there is a need to further our understanding of these worlds when private, commercial game developer companies have governmental and social control over millions of users' lives through their participation in a virtual world.

³³ Ondrejka, C. (2007). "Collapsing Geography: *Second Life*, Innovation and the Future of National Power." Innovations Vol. 2 Iss. 3, p31.

³⁴ Castronova, E. op. cit. "Synthetic Worlds..." p251.

In relation to the research question of this thesis, there is a twofold dearth of knowledge: there is no academic research or detailed discussion of journalism in virtual worlds and only limited academic research into issues of governance arising from these phenomena. Such literature as there is approaches these areas from a legal perspective or governmental perspective,³⁵ leaving an opening for a media studies approach, based on political economics and cultural studies.

The incomplete knowledge of virtual world media and politics is evidenced not only through a lack of published work but also through repeated calls for more research by academics and game developers already working in this field. Cory Ondrejka says, "As games continue to transform players and society, they must be studied both to understand their main impacts and to make better games."³⁶ For instance, David Bray and Benn Konsynski outline possible research topics related to virtual worlds including the importance of body, virtual property and taxation, virtual laws and law enforcement, labour, citizenship and first world boundaries. Bray and Konsynski suggest that "for the most part, any conclusive answer to questions regarding the nature and overlap of real worlds with virtual worlds remain unanswered."³⁷

History also teaches us that the conditions and structures of new media are often set early in their development, providing a limited window of opportunity to optimise their

³⁵ The most visible and influential scholars in virtual worlds research include Edward Castronova and Robert Bloomfield (economists), Dan Hunter, Gregory Lastowka and Jack Balkin (lawyers), Richard Bartle (game developer) and TL Taylor and Thomas Malaby (sociologists).

³⁶ Ondrejka, C. (2006). "Finding Common Ground in New Worlds." Games and Culture Vol. 1 Iss. 1, p111.

³⁷ Bray, D. A. and Konsynski, B. (2007). "Virtual Worlds, Virtual Economies, Virtual Institutions." Working Paper Series Accessed: 6 March 2008, 2008, from <http://ssrn.com/paper=962501>, p27.

future shape.³⁸ The patterns of use and structures of governance for virtual worlds are being negotiated now, both within the worlds themselves and in first world³⁹ government and business policy-making organisations. Virtual worlds have the potential to make significant contributions to a variety of activities including business, trade, education, scientific and economic experimentation, librarianship and communication. A more thorough understanding of these phenomena will contribute to better decisions about the future development of these environments. This thesis will argue this is importance because the current state of governance and journalism in Second Life falls short of the liberal democratic ideals of fairness, freedom and accountability.

This research aims to contribute to furthering the field of knowledge about new media, specifically virtual worlds, through a descriptive account of the form and practice of specific aspects of this media, namely journalism and governance. A more comprehensive analysis of these concerns will amplify this descriptive account and provide a deeper understanding of the structure of communication and control in Second Life. The challenges facing Second Life are not unique to virtual worlds, indeed they apply to many online places. Second Life is also indicative of social, collaborative production and can illuminate the challenges of commons-based, peer production. Insight into the specific obstacles facing Second Life can further the development of the theory and practice of social production and improve our online lives.

³⁸ de Sola Pool, I. (2006). The new media theory reader. R. Hassan and J. Thomas. Maidenhead, England; New York, Open University Press, p19-26.

³⁹ This thesis will refer to the 'real' world as the first world, in contrast to the 'second' world of Second Life. Although many scholarly articles and users of virtual worlds use the term 'real life', this implies that the virtual world is not real, an implication that this research does not wish to make.

Chapter Outline and Methodology

The thesis has three clear objectives: to situate a critical analysis of Second Life within a field of study, to map the practice and structure of journalism in Second Life and to analyse the communicative aspects of governance in Second Life in the context of social production theory. These objectives form the basis for three distinct chapters.

Chapter Two provides a conceptual foundation through a literature review of relevant academic and journalistic sources, situating the research within the existing scholarship of the field. Since specific literature on virtual world journalism or governance is scarce, this chapter will draw upon pockets of research, including digital gaming histories, online community, internet law, theories of online and participatory journalism and the public sphere. A comprehensive analysis of Yochai Benkler's theory of social production is an important 'conversation partner' of this research, which both relies upon and critiques his notions of the networked information economy, participatory production, increased autonomy and the networked public sphere.

Chapter Three maps the shape of journalism in Second Life, as published in print media publications. Second Life has an advanced media industry with publications in print, radio, television, photography and machinima mediums. However this research only considered print media, as these publications are established, more widely read and more numerous than other media. This chapter will analyse the structure, practice and influence of journalism in Second Life in comparison to traditional practices of journalism in the first world, and assess how the networked nature of Second Life media creates a form of public sphere of communication.

Chapter Four explores the structure of governance in Second Life, by analysing the communicative strategies of Linden Lab and the role and impact of journalism and the public sphere on governance. It critiques the communicative strategies of Linden Lab, revealing tensions between communication and control, the virtual and the real and the corporate and civic. This chapter argues that a disconnect exists between journalism and governance in virtual worlds.

The Conclusion will draw together the overarching argument of this thesis in a short summary. The structure of journalism, governance and communication in Second Life has implication for the future of virtual worlds, the values of society and the coherence of social production theory.

The critical analysis of this research relies upon data gathered through online research and interviews. The online research was conducted in early September 2008, and analysed the archives of virtual worlds and Second Life media publications for the month of August. In all cases except one, digital archives and online information provided comprehensive records of the published content and sufficient facts to provide an overview of the particular publication. A total of twelve publications were analysed and mined for information such as the format, tone, style, average weekly size (number of articles posted), presence of advertising and average user comment frequency.⁴⁰

In addition, Alexa site rankings were used to gauge the popularity and presence of a particular site. Alexa is a web information company which provides public information about website traffic rankings, and was used in this research as it appears to be the traffic ranking tool of choice amongst the Second Life community. A number of the interviewees referenced their Alexa ranking. Although traffic ranking for websites can be

⁴⁰ See: Appendix One for a list of these publications and short summary of this information.

determined through a variety of methods to obtain vastly different results, the independently determined statistics from Alexa were only used comparatively to obtain the most consistent and reliable analysis possible.

A total of eight interviews were conducted with journalists practising in Second Life.⁴¹ These interviews covered a range of topics including: how the subjects *did* journalism in Second Life, how they perceived their role, how they understood the governance of Second Life, what they thought about the attitudes of Linden Lab towards journalism and governance, and how they interpreted the impact of journalism on Second Life residents. The observations and opinions elicited from the interview subjects were analysed in conjunction with the online research to discern the practices of journalism and the lived experiences of governance and communication in Second Life. In addition, material from the Second Life website and Linden Lab corporate publications were used in lieu of an interview with Linden Labs.⁴² The critical analysis of the information from these primary methods provides supporting evidence for the argument and conclusion of this research, namely that there is a disconnect between journalism and governance in Second Life.

⁴¹ See: Appendix Two for a list of these interview subjects and questions.

⁴² Despite concerted and ongoing efforts by the researcher, Linden Lab was not available for an interview. Although numerous Linden Lab employees were contacted and I received a few willing responses, this never resulted in any interviews.

Summary

This thesis examines the interaction of journalism and governance in Second Life, using a framework of social production and governance to critique the current state of virtual world communications and balance of power between residents and world developers. Due to the expanding influence of virtual worlds upon human experience and current lack of research in this field, it is hoped that this work will break new ground. The next chapter will situate this research within wider traditions of internet studies, law, governance and journalism through a comprehensive review of relevant literature.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

Although current virtual worlds, such as Second Life, appear to be new phenomena, they have not sprung into existence lacking context or history. There is a growing body of work on virtual worlds in academic disciplines including computing, internet studies, law, media and communications, cultural studies and political economy. Key research foci include virtual world economics,⁴³ community creation,⁴⁴ identity formation⁴⁵ and teaching and learning.⁴⁶ However the concerns of this study – in-world governance and journalism – have not been studied with any depth or comprehensiveness.

⁴³ See: Yee, N. (2006). "The Demographics, Motivations and Derived Experiences of Users of Massively-Multiuser Online Graphical Environments." Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments Vol. 15, Iss., (309-329). Accessed: 20 April 2008, from <<http://www.nickyee.com/index-papers.html>>,

Castronova, E. (2001). "Virtual Worlds: A first hand account of market and society on the cyberian frontier." CESifo Working Paper No. 618 Accessed: 22 March 2008, 2008, from

<<http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=294828>> and MacInnes, I. (2006). "Property rights, legal issues and business models in virtual world communities." Electron Commerce Res Vol. 6, (39-56).

⁴⁴ See: Rheingold, H. (2000). The virtual community: homesteading on the electronic frontier. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, Taylor, T. L. (2006). Play between worlds: exploring online game culture. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press and Zheng, N. (2007). "Your World, Your Imagination: Community Construction in Online Multiplayer Game Second Life". Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association. San Francisco, Accessed: 6 March 3008, from <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p170038_index.html>

⁴⁵ See: Holmes, D. (1997). Virtual politics : identity and community in cyberspace. London: Sage Publications and Turkle, S. (1997). Life on the screen : identity in the age of the Internet. New York:, Touchstone.

⁴⁶ See: Roussos, M., Johnson, A., et al. (1999). "Learning and Building Together in an Immersive Virtual World." Presence: Teleoperators & Virtual Environments Vol. 8 Iss. 3, (247-263) and Braswell, R. and Childress, M. D. (2006). "Using Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games for Online Learning." Distance Education Vol. 27 Iss. 2, (187-196).

This chapter will explore two areas of scholarship to establish a conceptual foundation for the research. Firstly it will outline aspects of online community governance, illustrating that fundamental tensions between commercial and civic imperatives and between code and convention make virtual governance problematic and often inconsistent. Secondly, numerous theories of journalism practice, including normative ‘fourth estate’ journalism and post-internet modes of journalism, are analysed to provide a reference point for the research into Second Life journalism. Finally, the concept of a networked public sphere will be explored as a framework for understanding the relationship between journalism and governance in Second Life.

Governance

There are two primary levels of internet governance, network governance and site-specific or community governance. Network governance refers to the technical ordering of the internet that provides the foundation for the web’s global operation; the debates over standardisation and regulation of code, the creation of top-level domain names and assignment of Internet Protocol addresses. Site-specific governance involves the enforcement of particular ethical standards or social conventions within an online community. Sites that enable users to talk to each other, whether they are blogs, email listservs, forums or live chat sites, may appoint a moderator to monitor and filter user’s comments. In a more hierarchical and codified manner, commercial websites such as Second Life now require users to agree to Terms of Service (ToS), a contract that determines the legal uses of that site, before allowing access to their sites or applications.

These ToS generally reserve the right to ban a user, or their IP address for any reason or no reason.⁴⁷

This research uses the Bourdieuvian definition of governance used by Sandra Braman, a communications and politics scholar: “governance includes the formal and informal institutions, rules, agreements and practices of institutions of state and non-state actors, the decisions and behaviours of which have a constitutive effect on society.”⁴⁸ An emphasis on governance draws upon the political economic approach, that “does not draw a line between the public and private sectors, or between the market and state; it recognises that markets themselves can constitute powerful governance structures.”⁴⁹

The level of non-state based control is evident in Second Life, as the future and shape of that society was changed by the 2003 decision to abandon the existing ‘all rights reserved’ intellectual property (hereafter IP) rights regime and grant users the IP in their creations.⁵⁰ This transformative decision was made by a private company that is not beholden to Second Life residents in any other capacity than as a service provider, as they continually emphasise and indeed state in the second clause of the ToS: “Linden Lab is a service provider, which means... that [we do] not control various aspects of the

⁴⁷ See: Terms of Service for Second Life: <<http://secondlife.com/corporate/tos.php>>; Facebook’s Terms of Use: <<http://en-gb.facebook.com/terms.php>> and YouTube’s Terms of Use: <<http://au.youtube.com/t/terms>>

⁴⁸ Braman, S. (2004). “The emergent global information policy regime” in The emergent global information policy regime, S. Braman (ed), Houndsmill, UK: Palgrave, Macmillan. p13.

⁴⁹ Flew, T. (2008). New media: an introduction. South Melbourne, Vic. :, Oxford University Press, p221.

⁵⁰ Linden Lab. (2003). “Second Life Residents To Own Digital Creations.” Accessed: 14 June 2008, from <http://lindenlab.com/pressroom/releases/03_11_14>. See (for a discussion of the importance of this decision): Ondrejka, C. (2004). "Escaping the Gilded Cage: User Created Content and Building the Metaverse." New York Law School Review 81 Vol. 49 Iss. 1, and Au, W. J. (2008). *The Making of Second Life: notes from the new world*. Collins, New York.

Service.”⁵¹ This research will examine Linden Lab’s governance and communication, to explore the nature of in-world governance.

There are many conceptions of how governance *should* function and what values it should embody but the work of US law professors Yochai Benkler and Lawrence Lessig has been influential. They both follow John Stuart Mill’s mission,⁵² grounded in the liberal philosophical tradition and valuing freedom, equality and justice, which emphasises the protection of user freedoms from both state and market forces: “more than government can threaten liberty, and that something can be private rather than state action.”⁵³ Linden Lab, as website administrators, can exert significant controls over user’s lives, and thus their actions should be examined against these ideals of liberty and justice.

Surprisingly given the philosophical roots of his research, Benkler does not address the issues of community governance online in his treatise on social production. This oversight constitutes a significant gap in his theory of peer production, particularly in our understanding of virtual worlds as collaborative, communicative efforts. This research will detail the forms of governance that control users’ experiences in Second Life focussing on the communication of governance and how that interacts with journalism and public sphere debate.

⁵¹ Linden Lab (2008). “Terms of Service” Accessed: 31 October 2008, from <<http://secondlife.com/corporate/tos.php>>

⁵² Lessig, L. (2000). Code and other laws of cyberspace. New York:, Basic Books. p85, and Benkler, Y. op. cit. epigraph.

⁵³ Lessig, L. op. cit. p85.

Code Versus Convention: Social and Technical Aspects

Howard Rheingold defines virtual communities as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, and with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.”⁵⁴ Jodi Dean, following Allucquere Stone, highlights that as virtual communities were formed, they were forced to confront issues of governance, such as privacy and identity as “many who ventured onto the electronic frontier discovered not the friendly and engaging free-for-all of The Well, but a whole new field of danger and uncertainties.”⁵⁵ One of the first recorded debates about virtual governance is the infamous Mr. Bungle rape incident of 1993, in which a player in the LambdaMOO textual community took control of another user’s avatar and forced it to perform sexual acts without that user’s consent. The community of users was outraged, but unable to take any action themselves. A game ‘wizard’⁵⁶ eventually ‘toaded’ Mr. Bungle, terminating his LambdaMOO existence and account permanently, in an individual act of punishment.⁵⁷ As Stone concludes “in practice, surveillance and control provide necessary adjuncts to maintaining order in the early virtual communities.”⁵⁸ Clay Shirky identifies these moments of crisis as important

⁵⁴ Rheingold, H. (2000). The virtual community : homesteading on the electronic frontier. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, p xx.

⁵⁵ Dean, J. (2000). Unspun : key concepts for understanding the World Wide Web. (ed) T. Swiss. New York: New York University Press, p10.

⁵⁶ A ‘wizard’ is the title given to game players or developers who have administrator level powers over the world, for example the ability to ban users, delete offensive or inappropriate content or restrict access to parts of the world.

⁵⁷ See: Dibbell, J (1993). “A Rape in Cyberspace”, The Village Voice, 21 December 1993, pp36-42, Accessed: 10 June 2008, from <<http://loki.stockton.edu/~kinsellt/stuff/dibbelrapeincyberspace.html>> and Curtis, P (1996). “LambdaMOO takes a new direction” Accessed: 10 June 2008, from <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/classes/AY2001/cs6470_fall/LTAND.html>

⁵⁸ Stone, A. R. (1995). The war of desire and technology at the close of the mechanical age. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press. p118.

developments in the formation of a community, since reference points and conventions are negotiated and set in these ‘bootstrap’ moments.⁵⁹

Beyond social conventions, code is another aspect of governance that structures the physical environment of virtual worlds and permissible actions of avatars and objects. Most scholars emphasise the importance of code, stemming from the work of Lawrence Lessig who transformed our understanding of the natural state of the internet by theorising the relationship between computer code, regulation and individual use of the internet. Lessig countered the early utopian idea that the internet is un-regulable, a place of freedom and liberty arguing that, through architectures of code, the internet is highly susceptible to control and is quietly and thoroughly being regulated.⁶⁰ Control over the code of virtual worlds nearly always lies with the developers⁶¹ as it constitutes the proprietary information that creates, stores and continually renders the world. However the existing code, and any changes in that code, affects the activities of every user. The ability to save chatlogs of all communications is a Second Life feature that assists journalists in their practice. Changes in the code can also affect users who work within and around the existing code features, such as businesses whose revenue model was based upon gaining rewards for being a ‘popular place’ until Linden Lab decided to remove the ‘popular places’ tab from the Second Life client’s search function.

The dichotomy, between social and technical, convention and code, structures the nature of governance in virtual worlds. The necessary combination of the social and technical

⁵⁹ Shirky, C. (2004). “Nomic World: By the players, for the players” [Networks, Economics and Culture mailing list](#), 27 May 2007, Accessed: 25 July 2008, from <<http://www.shirky.com/writings/nomic.html>>

⁶⁰ Lessig, L. op. cit.

⁶¹ Control of the code may also lie with the owners of servers which store a world, however that owner of servers and developer of the world are nearly always one and the same. There is one open source virtual world project, called OpenSim (http://opensimulator.org/wiki/Main_Page) however this project is still in the first stage of testing.

creates a multi-layered model of governance, whereby the world developer must not only govern the community within its virtual world, but also make decisions about the structure and conditions of life of that virtual world. This power to intervene is what prompts many scholars to liken a developer's status to that of a divine being; "gods operate by changing the laws of physics ... virtual world designers need to be considered gods, not governments."⁶²

Some scholars, such as Timothy Burke and James Grimmelmann, have instead compared the process of governance as a political struggle between competing interests.⁶³ Grimmelmann's analysis posits each change to the world, whether socially or technically based, is a political decision with winners and losers. This analysis echoes Jurgen Habermas's seminal concept of the public sphere as an environment of debate, "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed."⁶⁴ As Habermas and many other scholars have placed media as central to the contest of opinions within a public sphere, this logically provides an opportunity to discuss the role of in-world media yet Grimmelmann's account does not consider this aspect. This thesis specifically addresses this gap by examining Second Life media and its role in governance. The research will consider how both in-world and first world media play a role in representing and enforcing particular definitions of the 'public interest' and in the process of governance.

⁶² Bartle, R. (2006). "Why Governments aren't Gods and Gods are Governments." *First Monday*, special issue number 7, September 2006. Accessed: 11 June 2008, from <http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_9/bartle/index.html>

⁶³ Grimmelmann, J. (2006). Virtual Power Politics. in *The State of Play: Law, Games and Virtual Worlds*. J. M. Balkin and B. S. Noveck. New York & London, New York University Press. pp146-157.

⁶⁴ Habermas, J. (1974). "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article" *New German Critique*, no. 3, Autumn 1974, pp49-55. Translated by; Sara Lennox & Frank Lennox, Accessed: 31 October 2008, from <www.jstor.org>

Legal Aspects

In addition to the social and technological aspects of governance, there is a legal dimension to virtual governance and much research into questions of internet law, including taxation,⁶⁵ criminal law,⁶⁶ and the development of internet law.⁶⁷ The most important tool in the legal governance of virtual worlds is the ToS, or End User License Agreement. Whilst these contracts are commonly used in internet transactions, Peter Jenkins has raised questions about how binding they might be, due to the users' lack of opportunity for negotiation and contractual bias in favour of world developers.⁶⁸ One clause concerning arbitration requirements in Second Life's Terms of Service has been ruled "procedurally and substantively unconscionable and therefore invalid" by a Federal District Court in the US in a suit brought against Linden Lab.⁶⁹ Apart from numerous observations about the erratic enforcement of this contract, there is no analysis of how developers or users might use the ToS to enforce social conventions. The research will examine how the ToS is used as a governance tool, to impose Linden Lab's view of the 'public interest' and delimit the practices of residents.

⁶⁵ Camp, B. (2007). "The Play's the Thing: a Theory of Taxing Virtual Worlds." SSRN Working Paper, Accessed: 14 July 2008, from <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=980693>>

⁶⁶ Kerr, O. (2008). "Criminal Law in Virtual Worlds" University of Chicago Legal Forum: GWU Public Law and Legal Theory Paper No. 391, forthcoming, Accessed: 25 June 2008, from SSRN: <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=1097392>>

⁶⁷ See: Crowley, J. and Mayer-Schonberger, V. (2006). "Napster's Second Life?: The Regulatory Challenges of Virtual Worlds." Northwestern University Law Review Vol. 100 Iss. 4, pp1775-1826 and Koster, R. (2000). "Declaring the Rights of Players." 27 August 2000, Accessed: 5 July 2008, from <<http://www.raphkoster.com/gaming/playerrights.shtml>>

⁶⁸ Jenkins, P. S. (2004). "The Virtual Worlds as a Company Town: Freedom of speech in massively multiple online role playing games." Journal of Internet Law vol. 8, no. 1, p10.

⁶⁹ See: Christ, R. and Peele, C. (2008). "Virtual Worlds: Personal Jurisdiction and Click-Wrap Licenses." Intellectual Property & Technology Law Journal Vol. 20 Iss. 1, pp1-5.

Much internet legal scholarship is grounded in the first life law of the United States, and thus fails to address a crucial issue of online law – territorial jurisdiction. Goldsmith & Wu argue that national governments impose their local laws upon the internet through their physical control over local companies, noting, “local intermediaries are a defining, and therefore ineliminable, aspect of the Internet.”⁷⁰ Indeed the threat of strict legislation or breach of existing legislation is cited as a motivation for some of Linden Lab’s unpopular policy decisions, such as the gambling ban in July 2007 and the banking ban of January 2008.⁷¹ On the contrary, there is still a strongly idealistic camp that believes the internet is not, and should not, be restricted by national laws and argues for a ‘new sovereignty’ of the internet.⁷² Given the contested and unresolved nature of territorial jurisdiction, it remains highly problematic to conceptualise virtual world laws as subordinate to first world national laws. This research will consider the influence of first life governments and laws upon virtual world governance, in the context of the opposing opinions and problems concerning territorial jurisdiction over global online activities.

⁷⁰ Goldsmith, J. and Wu, T. (2006). Who controls the Internet?: Illusions of a borderless world. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, p71.

⁷¹ Linden, Robin & Linden Lab (2007). “Wagering in Second Life: New Policy” Official Second Life Blog, 25 July 2007, Accessed: 21 October 2008 from <<http://blog.secondlife.com/2007/07/25/wagering-in-second-life-new-policy/#more-1106>> and Linden, Ken D. & Linden Lab (2008). “New Policy Regarding In-World Banks” Official Second Life Blog, 8 January 2008, Accessed: 10 July 2008 from <<http://blog.secondlife.com/2008/01/08/new-policy-regarding-in-world-banks/>>

⁷² See: Barlow, J. P. (1996). “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace” Accessed: 14 May 2008, from <<http://homes.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html>>, Ludlow, P. (ed). (2001). Crypto Anarchy, Cyberstates and Pirate Utopias. Cambridge, Mass. London, MIT Press. and Lastowka, G. and Hunter, D. (2004). “The Laws of the Virtual Worlds.” California Law Review Vol. 92, Iss. 1, (73) Accessed: 15 January 2008, from <<http://ssrn.com/paper=402860>>

Journalism

History and Context

As the previous chapter indicated, Linden Lab propagated the growth of journalism in Second Life by hiring Wagner James Au to be an ‘embedded reporter’ to inform and observe the community. Au says that his reporting was intended as both a form of marketing, “for how else do you tell people about a service that is literally being created every moment of the day”⁷³ and a fourth estate role as a “cross between historian, ethnographer and sole reporter of a frontier-town newspaper.”⁷⁴ The Second Life mediascape quickly expanded and hundreds of blogs and other media forms have sprung up about Second Life, creating a complex and varied media environment.

In order to describe and analyse this environment and the practices of virtual world journalism, I begin by contrasting conceptions of normative, Western mass media journalism with networked, participatory journalism. These conceptions form the foundation for the research into Second Life journalism, providing a theoretical and historical context for the analysis in Chapter Three. The concept of the public sphere, and the role of journalism within this sphere, is also reviewed as the framework for understanding how journalism and governance interact.

There appears to be no academic literature about journalism within virtual worlds, although Stephen Totilo, an MTV reporter, provided a descriptive account of the press within Second Life, focussing on the emergence of in-world journalism and the practice of journalism within a virtual environment.⁷⁵ There are also two non-academic sources

⁷³ Au, W. J. (2008). *The making of Second Life: notes from the new world*. New York:, Collins. p xvii.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p xvii.

⁷⁵ Totilo, S. (2007). "Burning the virtual shoe leather: does journalism in a computer world matter?"

Columbia Journalism Review Vol. 46 Iss. 2, p38-45.

that discuss virtual world journalism. The book written by Peter Ludlow and Mark Wallace, who run the *Second Life Herald*, provides insight into the unique challenges facing in-world journalists.⁷⁶ Wagner James Au also describes his reportorial experience in Second Life, but focusses on the evolution of the world itself rather than his role as a journalist.⁷⁷ Although these works begin to map the Second Life media ecology, they do not engage in any critical analysis of the practices, roles or impacts of journalism. This cannot be done without understanding how this activity has been conceptualised historically, as a professionalised, mass media activity and how it might operate in a networked online environment.

Normative Journalism

Journalism developed numerous roles in the twentieth century, from information provision to social catalyst.⁷⁸ The most pertinent role is its public service function as a “fourth estate... a quasi-constitutional role as ‘watchdog’ on the workings of government.”⁷⁹ The adoption of this social responsibility led to professional values and practices, such as ethical standards, which legitimised journalism’s claim to this role. Mark Deuze outlines five key elements that distinguish journalism from other forms of writing: public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy and ethics.⁸⁰ These have given rise to traditional conventions and practices including; an authoritative and impersonal

⁷⁶ Ludlow, P. and Wallace, M. (2007). The Second Life Herald: the virtual tabloid that witnessed the dawn of the metaverse. Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press.

⁷⁷ Au, W. J. op. cit.

⁷⁸ Tapsall, S. & Varley, C. (2001). “What is a journalist?” Journalism: Theory in Practice, (eds) Tapsall, S. & Varley, C. South Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.

⁷⁹ Harcup, T. (2004). Journalism: Principles and Practices, London; Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, p3.

⁸⁰ Deuze, M. (2005). “What is journalism?” Journalism, vol. 6, iss 4, p447.

tone, prioritising by news values (e.g. timeliness, conflict, impact and proximity⁸¹), attribution and verification and privileged access to politicians and information.

The professionalization of journalism occurred within a particular institutional structure, the mass media. Journalism became enclosed in this structure, because the high cost of publishing results in an “economic structure typified by high-cost hubs and cheap, ubiquitous, reception-only systems at the ends.”⁸² The concentrated and commercial nature of mass media has induced a number of criticisms of professional journalism: particularly its limited intake of information, concentration of power in the hands of media owners and the degradation of programming due to the need to attract larger audiences.⁸³ Each of these critiques returns to mass media’s ability to control what information is reported – the act of gatekeeping. Axel Bruns links gatekeeping with the institutional structure of mass media, noting that “industrial news production must necessarily impose a strict model of gatekeeping on its processes. Gatekeeping selects the stories to be covered in the products of mainstream journalism from the totality of all news currently available in the world.”⁸⁴ However the growth of the internet, and the articulation of criticisms of gatekeeping, has facilitated different journalistic practices that occur outside the professional institution and attempt to provide a diversity and quality of information.

⁸¹ Conley, D. and Lambel, S. (2006). The daily miracle: an introduction to journalism. Melbourne, Oxford University Press. p38-58.

⁸² Benkler, Y. op. cit. p179.

⁸³ *ibid.* p197.

⁸⁴ Bruns, A. (2008). Blogs, Wikipedia, Second life, and Beyond: from production to produsage New York:, Peter Lang. p71.

Participatory Journalism

Participatory journalism refers to these new practices of reporting, commenting, analysis and information dissemination occurring mostly outside the established journalism profession and mostly online. This research uses Bowman and Willis's widely accepted definition of participatory journalism:

“The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.”⁸⁵

They emphasise conversation as the “mechanism that turns the tables on the traditional roles of journalism and creates a dynamic, egalitarian give-and-take ethic”⁸⁶ Following Clay Shirky, they also indicate that the editing function is a fundamental differential between normative and participatory journalisms. Shirky, a professor of media and internet studies, asserts that while traditional media follow a ‘filter, then publish’ model, participatory journalism follow the ‘publish, then filter’ model.⁸⁷ However there is no requirement that journalism published online conforms to all the principles of participatory journalism; in reality most sites use a mixture of collaborative practices.

The most pertinent feature of participatory journalism is the involvement of the audience; Dan Gillmor, one of the first practitioners of participatory journalism, says “there was a cliché that journalists write the first draft of history. Now I think these

⁸⁵ Bowman, S. and Willis, C. (2003). "We Media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information." Accessed: 18 June, 2008, from <<http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/>> p9.

⁸⁶ *ibid.* p9.

⁸⁷ Shirky, C. (2006). *Here comes everybody : the power of organizing without organizations*. London:, Allen Lane. p81-108

people [the audience] are writing the first draft of history.”⁸⁸ Benkler argues that widely available, participatory publishing tools fundamentally transform the communicative capacity of individuals “from passive readers and listeners to potential speakers and participants in a conversation”.⁸⁹ As Second Life is founded on participatory values, this research will examine whether journalistic activity within this world also adopts these principles and practices and allows the audience to transcend their passivity.

There is an important distinction to be noted between the blog – a publishing format – and participatory journalism – a theory and practice of reporting. Key elements of blog design are dated entries posted in reverse chronological order, hyperlinks and blogrolls which link posts to original sources, points for discussion and other blogs, columnar layout and space for user comments.⁹⁰ While blogging has influenced the construction of an active audience, not all blogs choose to engage in conversation and participatory networking, thus enacting practices closer to normative, professional journalism.

Journalism and the Public Sphere

Any discussion of the public sphere must begin with Jurgen Habermas and his seminal concept of ideal public sphere, based upon the coffee houses and salons of nineteenth century Europe where citizens critically and rationally debated issue of public important

⁸⁸ Gillmor, D. (2006). We the media: grassroots journalism by the people, for the people. Sebastopol, CA, O'Reilly Media. p xxi.

⁸⁹ Benkler, Y. op.cit. p213.

⁹⁰ Morris, M. (2008). The Form of Blogs: The Cultural Context of a Design Genre's Creation, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, CA, May 23, 2007. Accessed: 22 June 2008, from <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p172300_index.html>

and formed coherent public opinions.⁹¹ Calhoun notes that “Habermas’ two-sided constitution of the category of public sphere [is] simultaneously about the quality or form of rational-critical discourse and the quantity of, or openness to, popular participation.”⁹² A number of critiques of Habermas’ conception of the public sphere have emerged, particularly concerning the exclusion of minorities and females and the definition of common, public concerns.⁹³ However the public sphere remains an enduring concept in humanities research.

Habermas also discusses the role of media in the public sphere, ultimately arguing that the public sphere has been undermined by the commercialisation of mass media, which transformed the public from debaters to consumers. Despite this pessimistic conclusion, media industries and journalism remain central elements in the public life of most advanced capitalist societies. Bennett and Entman note that “many polities have reached a point where governance, along with a host of related processes such as opinion formation, could not occur in their present forms without various uses of media”⁹⁴ due to their size and complexity.

Benkler proposes that new structures of communication, such as online participatory journalism, are transforming the construction of the public sphere.⁹⁵ He outlines a model of the networked public sphere comprised of a public of *possible speakers*, rather than passive readers, where information is synthesised at various levels of interest and filtered

⁹¹ Habermas, J.R. (1989). The structural transformation of the public sphere, translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

⁹² Calhoun, C. (1992). Habermas and the public sphere. Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press, p4.

⁹³ See: Fraser, N. (1992). “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” Habermas and the Public Sphere, Cambridge Mass.: MIT press, pp. 109–142.

⁹⁴ Bennet, W. L. and Entman, R. (2001). Mediated politics: communication in the future of democracy. Cambridge, UK; New York Cambridge University Press, p1.

⁹⁵ Benkler, Y. op.cit. p212-272.

up to prominence through the practice of linking and the ‘publish, then filter’ model of online journalism. Benkler proposes five key characteristics that define the “minimal set of desiderata that such a platform must possess”: universal intake, filtering for potential relevance, filtering for accreditation, synthesis of public opinion and independence from governmental control.⁹⁶ The key insight of Benkler’s theory is the integration of participatory journalism and publics, demonstrating how collaborative and decentralised forms of media can contribute to creating public deliberation and action. The concept of the public sphere, specifically Benkler’s networked public sphere, will be used to determine whether Second Life media constitute a public sphere, how they perform this role and how they impact and interact with governance.

Media Power

Beyond the existence of a public sphere, the mechanisms whereby the debates and opinions discussed therein are translated into political action must also be examined. The media’s central role within the public sphere imbues it with power to affect the outcomes of that discussion. Couldry, following Bourdieu, notes that media power is an ability to frame and present information in different ways and thus affect individuals’ perception of the world and their experience.⁹⁷ Yet the importance of different perceptions of events stems from the democratic nature of our society, which holds persons accountable for their actions and where information has consequences. Benkler identifies this crucial foundation noting that the media, its subjects and audiences “ultimately also constitute the body that votes and converts the opinion that emerges

⁹⁶ *ibid.* p182-5.

⁹⁷ Couldry, N. (2000). *The place of media power: pilgrims and witnesses of the media age*. London; New York, Routledge. p3-8.

into a legitimate action of political authority.’⁹⁸ The media, and indeed any individual, are only powerful due to the potential for consequences that a democracy provides, whereby public disapproval or support translates into election results, legitimacy and effectiveness. This research analyses how media influence governance, exploring how media exert power and how the public sphere effects consequences.

Conclusion

This literature review has demonstrated two foundational arguments relevant to this research; firstly that governance is an important facet of virtual communities and crucial to understanding their nature; secondly that journalism is important to governance both through, in its newer participatory forms, empowering people to speak and through facilitating communication in a public sphere. Yochai Benkler’s conception of the networked information economy will be used as a theoretical foundation for conceptualising Second Life, particularly his understandings of collaborative production and the networked public sphere. The next chapter will analyse the practice of journalism in Second Life.

⁹⁸ Benkler, Y. op. cit. p181.

CHAPTER THREE – JOURNALISM AND THE NETWORKED PUBLIC SPHERE

Introduction

In order to understand the relationship between journalism and governance, this chapter will provide a detailed analysis of journalism in the virtual world. The structure of Second Life journalism will be described, first defining in-world journalism and then analysing the impact of the publication format, an online blog. The elements of practice, including information gathering, editing and the business model, will then be analysed and compared with the existing conceptions of journalism outlined in the previous chapter. The influence of journalism, as shown by user's engagement, will be analysed. These concerns will be addressed through a close analysis of Second Life, drawing upon interviews with reporters and editors and a content analysis of thirteen publications.

Benkler's work on the networked public sphere provides the focus point for this analysis: while he does not directly address the practice of journalism, concentrating instead on the structure of mass media, his theory of social production accords with the principles of participatory journalism. The characteristics of participatory journalism, as reviewed in the previous chapter, are aligned with the model of the networked public sphere. The more closed, hierarchical and professionalised practices of normative journalism are positioned in opposition to the participatory ethos of the networked public sphere. The chapter will conclude by assessing the analysis of Second Life journalism against the five

characteristics of the networked public sphere as proposed by Benkler: universal intake, filtering for relevance, and accreditation, synthesis of public opinion and independence from governmental control.

Structure

Definition and Methodology

Before analysing the structure, practice and influence of journalism in Second Life, it is necessary to first define what is meant by Second Life journalism: how does journalism ‘in’ Second Life differ from journalism ‘about’ Second Life? As most Second Life media publications are in fact *not* published within Second Life but rather on the world wide web, the location of publication is an inaccurate indicator of which journalism is ‘indigenous’ to Second Life. For the purposes of this research, media were categorised as indigenous Second Life news media if their primary audience was clearly existing users of Second Life or other virtual worlds. Media publications were excluded from the research if they didn’t target an audience of Second Life users or were small, niche publications (such as the wide range of Second Life fashion, education, librarian or freebie blogs) that lacked general news, any element of reporting or commentary, or any discussion of political issues.

Thirteen publications were selected according to the above criteria, and a content analysis of these websites was undertaken. Journalists and editors of these publications were contacted for interviews, and eight interviews conducted. Table 3.1 outlines the thirteen publications and the positions of the interviewees on these publications. Although, as

noted in the previous chapters, Linden Lab originally funded *New World Notes*, this relationship has since ceased. As none of the publications analysed have financial or formal institutional links with Linden Lab (who constitute a form of governmental control) and since media are published outside of the Second Life client, Second Life's public sphere is independent from direct governmental control or censorship.

Table 3.1: Publications and Interviewees.

Publication	Interviewee	Description
Virtually Blind	Benjamin Duranske (RL name)	Specialised blog on legal issues in Second Life.
Virtual Worlds News	Joey Seiler (RL name)	Virtual worlds blog with business focus.
SLNN (Second Life News Network)	Garret Bakalava (SL name)	General Second Life news in wire service style.
Second Life Herald	Pixeleen Mistral (SL name)	General Second Life news in sensational, tabloid style, popular and controversial.
Metaverse Journal	David Holloway (RL name)	Australian based news on Second Life.
Metaverse Messenger	Katt Kongo (SL name)	General Second Life news in weekly pdf format.
Reuters	Eric Krangle (RL name)	Bureau of Reuters, general Second Life news with a business focus.
Massively	Tateru Nino (SL name)	General virtual worlds news.
Terra Nova	-	Academic and news blog about virtual worlds.
Your Second Place	-	Multi-author blog about Second Life.
Second Thoughts	-	Personal blog of Prokofy Neva discussing Second Life news and politics.
New World Notes	-	General Second Life news, strong community focus.
AvaStar	-	General Second Life news in tabloid style.

Online Blogs

As Second Life exists in the online environment, all the media publications also exist on the internet. Despite the range of formats available online, all publications analysed bar one used a blog format. Rebecca Blood, a leading blogger, describes this form as;

*“A frequently updated web site, with posts arranged in reverse chronological order, so new entries are always on top. [...] Hypertext is fundamental to the practice of weblogging. When bloggers refer to material that exists online, they invariably link to it.”*⁹⁹

Although seven of the thirteen publications used software designed to present a typical blog, such as Typepad or Wordpress, not all adhere strictly to all blog conventions; for example, *Reuters*, the *Metaverse Journal*, *Massively*, *AvaStar* and *SLNN* have news layouts on the home page, altering the convention of reverse chronology posts as the home page. *The Metaverse Messenger* is unique in publishing weekly as a portable document file (pdf) on its website. Katt Kongo, the editor and founder of this publication, believes the pdf format presents advertising and content better, “I know from my own experience how easy it is to ‘tune out’ ads on a web page versus the experience of reading an article left to right and having your eyes encounter an ad. I don’t want to publish a blog. I want to publish a real newspaper.”¹⁰⁰

Due to the widespread use of the blog format, the availability of comment space is almost universal. Excluding *The Metaverse Messenger*, all publications allowed readers to comment on individual stories. However there was a high degree of variation in the amount of comments each publication received ranging from *The Metaverse Journal’s* 1.1 comments per story to the *Second Life Herald’s* 26 comments per story. Publications were

⁹⁹ Blood, R. (2002). “Weblogs and journalism: Do they connect?” *Neiman Reports*, Vol. 57, No. 3, p61

¹⁰⁰ Kongo, K. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Yahoo Messenger, 16 September 2008, on file with author.

grouped into three tiers according their average numbers of comments, considering the incidence of both articles and comments, as shown by table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Frequency of comments for *Second Life* print publications.

Publication	Average articles per week ¹⁰¹	Average comments per post	Average comments per week	Comparative site traffic ranking
Highly commented: over 50 comments per week				
Second Life Herald	8	26	208	5
New World Notes	23.75	4.6	109.25	4
Second Thoughts	5.5	18	99	9
Moderately commented: between 15 and 50 comments per week				
Virtual Worlds News	30.5	1.5	45.75	3
Your 2 nd Place	3.5	9.6	33.6	12
Massively	4.5	7.3	32.85	2
Terra Nova	1.75	13.9	24.33	6
Lightly/rarely commented: less than 15 comments per week				
Reuters [^]	3 ¹⁰²	3.6	10.8	1 ¹⁰³
Metaverse Journal	9	1.1	9.9	11
AvaStar	4.75	1.4	6.65	8
Virtually Blind	3.5	1.5	5.25	7
No comments/unmeasurable				
SLNN ¹⁰⁴	-	-	-	10
Metaverse Messenger	n/a	n/a	n/a	13 ¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ All figures for 4-31 August 2008 unless otherwise stated.

¹⁰² For 21 April – 25 May 2008.

¹⁰³ Alexa rankings only give traffic rankings for top level domain names, thus this is the ranking for *all* of reuters.com. Although this is thus not indicative of secondlife.reuters.com’s ranking, nonetheless it is presumed to be close to this position regardless due to its high visibility in Second Life and first life media.

¹⁰⁴ SLNN does not have chronologically organised archives therefore comparative data, based upon weekly numbers of articles and posts, was unable to be retrieved.

¹⁰⁵ As the *Metaverse Messenger* is a pdf download, they may in fact be widely read than this ranking portrays as it receives less traffic as the reader only needs to visit their website once weekly to read their publication.

It is unclear, without surveying users, to discover what might account for the variation in comments and thus what drives user interaction with a particular site. As evident in the table neither the popularity of a site, as judged by traffic ranking, nor the size of a site, judged by frequency of articles, appear to have any impact upon the level of interaction.

However the interviews revealed different attitudes towards comments, mirroring the differences between normative and participatory journalism. Some journalists valued this interaction stating that; “the comments are the whole point of the Herald”¹⁰⁶ and “user comments are wonderful.”¹⁰⁷ This attitude accords with the ethos of participatory journalism, which characterises conversation and user contribution as defining elements. For a few journalists the user interaction through comments is “peripheral.”¹⁰⁸ Taking a similar attitude as normative journalism, these journalists did not view comments as vital contributions to a conversation but rather added sources of leads or information.

The online environment of these publications immediately places them within the bounds of Benkler’s conception of the networked public sphere. The internet affords the growth of cheap and widely accessible means of publishing, meaning that the possibility of practising and publishing journalism in Second Life is universal. This capability and the ubiquitous use of comments by existing publications satisfies the first characteristic of the networked public sphere; universal intake. The specific blog format of most Second Life publications also situates this journalism within a network. The conventions

¹⁰⁶ Mistral, P. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Second Life, 17 August 2008, on file with author.

¹⁰⁷ Nino, T. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Second Life, 14 September 2008, on file with author.

¹⁰⁸ Krangle, E. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Skype, 16 September 2008, on file with author.

of hypertext linking, regular updates and user comments work to connect the different Second Life publications and create a network of discussion and sites.

Practice

Information Gathering

Leo Bowman and Stephen McIlwaine emphasise the importance of the news-gathering process to journalism's authority and credibility, noting that "journalists' claims to knowledge rest with the ability to define and investigate a subject rather than with pre-existing knowledge of its substantive properties."¹⁰⁹ Second Life journalists appear to follow two dominant methods of information gathering which shape their practice; firstly immersion in Second Life using the software client to enter the world and secondly observation and investigation of stories outside the Second Life client.

Immersive reporters emphasise the importance of being in Second Life to their role as a journalist;

*"The way I do journalism is I go talk to people and I constantly save chatlogs and take pictures, partly so I can prove things really happened... sometimes I interview outside Second Life... the best thing is to see it or hear it yourself."*¹¹⁰

Engagement with the Second Life world requires journalists to develop the same skills as other residents, from technical capabilities in navigating the world to social capabilities in

¹⁰⁹ Bowman, L. and McIlwaine, S. (2001). "The importance of enquiry" in Journalism: theory in practice. C. Varley and S. Tapsall. South Melbourne, Australia, Oxford University Press, p102.

¹¹⁰ Mistral, P. op. cit.

forming relationships. David Holloway, who runs the Australian publication *The Metaverse Journal*, notes that his news gathering practices changed over time as he developed contacts and credibility;

*“Initially it was [about] spending time there [in Second Life], usually only an hour or two a day, getting to know it and reporting on things as I saw them. Once I became known as the guy that covers Australian events, like any publication [it] develops its own momentum.”*¹¹¹

Although some journalists indicated they did not spend much time in Second Life performing journalism, they all had a level of experience with the Second Life environment and a reputation as journalists in that world.

A second method of doing Second Life journalism relies upon source-based information gathered outside Second Life. Tateru Nino, who covers Second Life for the virtual worlds blog *Massively*, did not always enter the world when researching a story;

*“I have probably four hundred RSS feeds at the moment that I track. Many people and businesses send us press releases of varying utility. Among our thousands of readers people are constantly sending us tips and fragments of information.”*¹¹²

Journalists may conduct most of the legwork for a story outside Second Life, and go in-world for a specific purpose; “A lot of what I do, I don’t actually have to be in Second Life. Many times I go in just to get art for the stories.”¹¹³ A journalist may also use Second Life to conduct an interview, using the software client solely as a

¹¹¹ Holloway, D. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, in person, 12 August 2008, on file with author.

¹¹² Nino, T. op. cit.

¹¹³ Duranske, B. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Skype, 22 August 2008, on file with author.

communications platform. Joey Seiler, editor of *Virtual Worlds News*, says he uses Second Life as “a networking tool and as a communication tool like Skype or email.”¹¹⁴

Working with Sources

Verification of identity is perceived as a crucial issue for Second Life journalists as the manipulation of identity and anonymity has been a central concern in the history of online communications.¹¹⁵ Eric Krangle, a reporter for *Reuters* Second Life Bureau, uses his institutional allegiance to imbue his avatar with a professional identity, credibility and recognition, appearing as Eric Reuters in-world. As an integral part of his professional identity, Krangle judges the reputation and accuracy of his information by evaluating a source’s first life identity: “When I quote someone I ask them their real name or I put in my story ‘declined to be named in real life.’”¹¹⁶ However Pixeleen Mistral has the opposite attitude, asking for only a Second Life name as verification, especially when sensitive information is exchanged: “There is no way I’m going to get a person doing virtual pedo-play to give me their RL info.”¹¹⁷ Indeed Mistral’s own first life identity is unknown within the Second Life world, unlike that of many prominent residents and journalists.

The different preferences for source evaluation and interviewing illustrate different levels of commitment to participatory and collaborative practices of journalism. A key element

¹¹⁴ Seiler, J. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Skype, 31 August 2008, on file with author.

¹¹⁵ See: Turkle, S. (1997). *Life on the screen: identity in the age of the Internet*. New York: Touchstone and Jones, S. (1997). *Virtual culture: identity and communication in cybersociety*. London; Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.

¹¹⁶ Krangle, E. op. cit.

¹¹⁷ Mistral, P. op. cit.

of participatory journalism is the accreditation of information after the fact by the community; the principle of ‘publish, then filter.’ Mistral demonstrates a faith in these processes, as Second Life identity is created in the collaborative social networks of the virtual world and reputation is thus judged on contributions to that society. Conversely Krangle shows a reluctance to embrace this method, preferring instead to rely upon first world identity, which is not dependent upon that person’s contribution to Second Life but rather defined by static, first world attributes such as status, age, location and gender – an approach consistent with normative journalism.

Interviewing and Access

Pixeleen Mistral raises an important problem about quoting in-world conversations, such as a textual exchange in the virtual *Second Life Herald* offices. She notes that “the ToS is restrictive about using chat without permission... all it would take is one person saying ‘I didn’t consent’ and it is a bannable offense.”¹¹⁸ She did not give an example of this occurring but argues some discussion must take place outside of the software client to avoid censure: “the first rule of Second Life journalism is some things are said via channels Linden Lab does not run.”¹¹⁹ This attitude was also encountered in the interviews for this research: only two of the eight interviews took place in Second Life and both these subjects flagged that there might be things they wouldn’t want to discuss over Second Life chat.

A pattern of inconsistency of access to Lindens emerged in the interviews with some journalists finding Linden Lab responsive to interview requests and others finding

¹¹⁸ Mistral, P. op. cit.

¹¹⁹ Mistral, P. op. cit.

interviews or information were not forthcoming. Katt Kongo, the publisher of *The Metaverse Messenger*, says “I set it up through Robin Linden. I tell her what is needed, and she connects us to the appropriate person to interview.”¹²⁰ Eric Krangle links the style and tone of publications to their ability to access Linden Lab for comment, saying that “they are talking to me because I write for reuters.com and they typically don’t talk to other bloggers.”¹²¹

However Krangle’s statement is contradicted by the lack of access Tateru Nino claims she gets, despite the fact that *Massively* is owned by AOL/Time Warner and is staffed by paid writers:

*“We heard less and less from them after [they hired a new general counsel] and nowadays they won’t even send us press-releases. [...] When they have something to say, they choose how and when to say it and exactly who to say it to. If you want any more than that, you’re largely out of luck.”*¹²²

There is a widespread belief amongst the journalists interviewed that Linden Lab chooses whom to talk to based on the publication and the uncritical attitude of the journalist. Mistral says that “tame [Linden] Lab pets like Hamlet Au get preferred access in exchange for never asking very hard questions.”¹²³

The perceived need for caution in quoting sources and the inconsistent access to interview with Lindens highlights the impact of Second Life governance structures on journalism practice and the constraints under which reporters work. The lack of protection for journalistic practice with regards to quoting sources and the lack of

¹²⁰ Kongo, K. op. cit.

¹²¹ Krangle, E. op. cit.

¹²² Nino, T. op. cit.

¹²³ Mistral, P (2008). Personal Communication, 17 September 2008.

privileged access to news-makers places Second Life journalism at odds with normative journalism and begins to challenge the independence of media in their public sphere role from governmental control or censorship. However Linden Lab does not starve unfriendly publications of all information; they communicate instead with their whole resident population, bypassing the mediation of journalists.

Editing

In contrast to the online environment and the blog format of these media, most interviewees noted that they edit articles before publication. They indicated their aims mimic those of the traditional editor; checking for tone, objectivity, newsworthiness, spelling and accuracy. A key characteristic of participatory publishing online is the absence of an editorial filter before publication; indeed Bowman & Willis, following Shirky, emphasise this 'publish-then-filter' model as indicative of the conversational, collaborative and egalitarian nature of participative communities.¹²⁴ The persistence of this traditional practice, based upon the principle of closed gatekeeping processes, illustrates the influence of normative journalism on Second Life media.

Advertising Supported Business Model

Nearly all Second Life publications rely upon the normative model of advertising based business models. Eleven of the thirteen publications studied were supported by advertising, in the form of banner ads for virtual world related products, Google

¹²⁴ Bowman, S. and Willis, C. (2003). "We Media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information." Accessed: 18 June, 2008, from <http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/>, p12.

advertising¹²⁵ and syndicated advertising. There were two exceptions: *Reuters* and *Terra Nova*. *Reuters* is a first world news agency service, and was reporting in Second Life as a experimental project and to watch business development in the virtual world.¹²⁶ *Terra Nova* states that the blog is run by a group of academics, but as I did not interview anyone from this publication, the funding of this site is unknown.

However this business model barely covers publications costs and does not provide income for journalists: “Mostly I pay for hosting through Google ads but that’s about all,”¹²⁷ “I’m not making any serious money out of it”¹²⁸ and “the *Second Life Herald* is barely a break even operation right now.”¹²⁹ This tenuous business model appears to be a significant hurdle facing the journalism sector in Second Life. Joey Seiler, editor of *Virtual Worlds News*, is the only interviewee for whom reporting on Second Life constituted a full time job.¹³⁰ Yet he says, “the point of the blog is to advertise for our [virtual worlds industry] conference. The conference is really the money maker for our company.”¹³¹ The subsistence nature of most publications aligns virtual world journalism with participatory journalism, which is characterised by volunteer and amateur contributions.

¹²⁵ Google ads provide websites with contextual advertising, which earns money each time a user clicks on the ad from your website. See: https://www.google.com/adsense/login/en_AU/

¹²⁶ See: Newman, A. (2006). “Reuters enters domain of the geeks” *International Herald Tribune*, 15 October 2006, Accessed: 15 November 2008 from <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/10/15/business/reuters16.php>

¹²⁷ Duranske, B. op. cit.

¹²⁸ Duranske, B. op. cit.

¹²⁹ Mistral, P. op. cit.

¹³⁰ Although Eric Krangel and Wagner James Au state that Second Life journalism provides a substantial income, both have additional sources of income – Krangle freelances for first life publications as well as writing on other subjects for Reuters and Au has published a book and runs a virtual worlds consultancy.

¹³¹ Seiler, J. op. cit.

Freelance and Reader Submitted Articles

Only three publications openly said they accepted freelance articles, whilst another seven indicated they would consider publishing a submitted article but did not ask for or encourage freelance articles. Several publications encouraged the submission of ‘tips’ and media (such as photography) whilst others required a formal application and ongoing commitment from prospective writers. Two publications explicitly did not accept freelance articles: the news agency *Reuters* only publishes articles from its employed journalists and *Second Thoughts* is a single-authored, personal blog.

It is unclear why virtual world publishers have not embraced freelance articles. It is even more puzzling given that many owners of publications in Second Life lament the lack of interested and skilled journalists and the difficulty of retaining journalists to work permanently for their publication; “I would love if I had five or six regular writers, it’s just hard to get people to commit.”¹³² The modest payment available for journalism in Second Life may be factor in publishers’ difficulties maintaining regular writers. Although this staffing problem would appear to provide motivation to relax their intake procedures, and encourage more participatory forms of input, owners appear to be attached to traditional conceptions of journalism as a restricted profession with formal editorial and filtering checks.

This closed approach to publication intake contradicts the principles of participatory journalism, however the structure of the industry as whole, situated in the online environment, mitigates this effect somewhat. Clay Shirky notes that “asking whether there is inequality in the weblog world (or indeed almost any social system) is the wrong question, since the answer will always be yes. The question to ask is ‘Is the inequality

¹³² Duranske, B. op. cit.

fair?”¹³³ The openness of the media sector is evidenced by the existence of hundreds of individual, small-scale blogs about various aspects of peoples’ Second Lives, ranging from fashion freebies to educational blogs.¹³⁴ The apparent scope for expansion of journalism in Second Life strengthens the argument for viewing its mediasphere as participatory and open.

The practice of journalism in Second Life is diverse and complex. Some journalists adhere to a participatory ethos, engaging with the Second Life world, trusting in-world reputation, publishing in a blog format online, effectively operating as a volunteers and practising without special treatment, access or protection. Others use elements of normative journalism including the use of interviewing and source materials, the persistence of editorial control, an advertising led business model (although unprofitable there are no other models) and little encouragement of freelancing. Second Life journalism is a hybrid mix of traditional, professionalised journalism and participatory, open, community journalism. However the online structure of these publications does somewhat mitigate the influence of these centralised, professionalised practices.

¹³³ Shirky, C. (2003). “Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality” Clay Shirky’s Writings About the Internet, Accessed 25 May 2008, from <http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html>

¹³⁴ This size of the Second Life blogosphere can be deduced from the length and diversity of blogrolls on various sites; many sites link to up to 50 related sites and those, in turn, link to smaller blogs. See the blogrolls at: <nwn.blogs.com/nwn> and <www.secondlifeherald.com>

Influence

Conversation and Connections

The influence of journalism on the wider Second Life community can be analysed by examining user interaction with journalism. In the highly and moderately commented categories of publications (see Table 3.2), there is a high degree of interaction and interaction *within* comment threads. The highest commented *Second Life Herald* article in August received 93 comments; of these 44 comments directly referenced previous comments, either addressing the author directly or quoting a section of text (as is the custom of blogging threads). Nearly all comments showed evidence of having read previous comments and engaged appropriately in the conversation even if they didn't directly address a previous comment. This pattern is representative of blog publications and of the Second Life media analysed.

Additionally, Second Life media create a network of dialogue, through extensive use of hyperlinks and cross-references. Earlier in 2008, When Linden Lab changed its trademark policy around the use of the name 'Second Life' in March 2008, hyperlinks and cross-comments by various media publications began to create a broader picture and wider debate on this contentious issue. For example, in Wagner James Au's blog *New World Notes*, an article on this issue linked to six different sites with relevant information and in the comments further links to four more articles emerged, as well as cross-posted discussions that linked back to previous conversations on other sites.¹³⁵

The official Second Life blog, blog.secondlife.com, also often functions as a central reference point as most articles link back to the original announcement post on this blog.

¹³⁵ Au, J. W. (2008). "Second Life™ Trademark Turmoil Continues" *New World Notes*, 27 March 2008, Accessed: 17 August 2008 from <<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2008/03/second-lifetm-t.html>>

These links are not simply incidental; as David Holloway notes, “we all watch each other’s sites. Usually one person picks up something and within three days, most of them are running the story, with attribution. We all listen to each other.”¹³⁶ Eric Krangle also notes that “I write stories and then people on their blogs are saying that ‘Reuters reported XYZ’ and then they are talking about things and it spawns more discussions on the Second Life forums or unofficial forums.”¹³⁷

The comments and connections created by Second Life journalism create the conversational element that is fundamental to participatory journalism. Comments after stories link not only to the story, as letters to the editors have traditionally done, but also to other commenter’s and to other sites. Benkler employs the principle of interaction in his conception of the networked public, noting that the increased ability of individuals to exchange ideas and contributions makes the ideal citizens “participants in a conversation.”¹³⁸ However it is not simply the conversation but the decentralised and multi-directional nature of that conversation that he argues is the definitive change: “the fundamental elements of the difference between the networked information economy and the mass media are... the shift from a hub-and-spoke architecture with unidirectional links to the end points in the mass media, to distributed architecture with multidirectional connections among all nodes.”¹³⁹ This network is beginning to emerge through the links between publications and conversations in Second Life media.

The emergence of the distributed, networked connections between Second Life publications also contributes to establishing the characteristics of filtering, both for

¹³⁶ Holloway, D. op. cit.

¹³⁷ Krangle, E. op. cit.

¹³⁸ Benkler, Y. (2006). The wealth of networks: how social production transforms markets and freedom. New Haven, Conn, Yale University Press, pp 212-272.

¹³⁹ *ibid.* p212.

relevance and accreditation, in the networked public sphere. The multitude of articles and stories posted on various topics provide Second Life residents with choices about who to read and who to link to. Those choices are the filtering mechanism, and by the emergence of networks of dialogue, made possible by hypertext links, this filtering mechanism is working in Second Life. A recent example highlights how journalism is evolving and recognising the need for more filtering; Linden Lab recently announced a price hike for particular regions, resulting in resident protests and uproar.¹⁴⁰ In the five days since the announcement, *New World Notes* has twice published articles providing links to pertinent or remarkable posts on the topic.¹⁴¹ This form of linked filtration is typical of numerous Second Life sites, such as the weekly Friday wrap up from *New World Notes*¹⁴² which provides links to Second Life articles from the week.

Public Opinion

Some Second Life journalists believed that their reporting contributed to the formation of a common understanding;

“Well, I certainly _hope_ so! ☺ Particularly with a lot of my opinion pieces, the goal isn’t to put forward a specific opinion (heck, half the opinions aren’t necessarily even mine, and many I

¹⁴⁰ Linden, Jack & Linden Lab (2008). “Openspace Pricing and Policy Changes” Official Second Life Blog, 27 October 2008, Accessed: 2 November 2008 from

<<http://blog.secondlife.com/2008/10/27/openspace-pricing-and-policy-changes/>>

¹⁴¹ See: Au, J. W. (2008). “Open Form: What Are The Best Blog Posts On The Openspaces Pricing Controversy” New World Notes, 31 October 2008. Accessed: 15 November 2008 from

<<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2008/10/open-form-what.html#comments>> and Au, J. W. (2008).

“Openspaces, Open Opinons: Five Essential Blog Posts On The Openspaces Rebellion” New World Notes, 1 November 2008. Accessed: 15 November 2008 from

<<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2008/11/openspaces-open.html#more>>

¹⁴² See: New World Notes <<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/>> every Friday.

*might not personally agree with), but to arm the reader with information and encouragement to form their own opinions.”*¹⁴³

Whilst this opinion was widespread amongst the journalist’s interviewed, the evidence from an analysis of the content of publications was mixed. For example *New World Notes* has consistently run articles throughout 2008 discussing the problem of bots, pre-programmed avatar that are created by land owners to artificially inflate their traffic statistics.¹⁴⁴ Although this is a problem that affects all residents, and contradicts the values of fairness and rewarding creativity, there does not appear to have been any widespread discussion or debate across Second Life media. Although some publications did pick up the story, such as the *AvaStar* (who claim to have run a campaign against avatar bots and caused Linden Lab to act despite receiving barely any user comments)¹⁴⁵ it did not become a topic for public opinion and consequently there has been no action from Linden Lab against avatar bots. Linden Lab did announce a new search function that did not feature popular places, however search results are still ranked by traffic retaining the incentive to use avatar bots.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Nino, T. op. cit.

¹⁴⁴ See the following articles: Au, J. W. (2008). “World of the Undead? Lindens say Bot Population is Negligible” *New World Notes*, 17 January 2008, Accessed: 27 September 2008, from <<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2008/01/world-of-the-un.html>>, Au, J. W. (2008). “Still Un-Alive: A landowner defends her use of bots” *New World Notes*, 24 January 2008, Accessed: 27 September 2008, from <<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2008/01/still-un-alive.html>> and Au, J. W. (2008). “Metaverse Bots: How to spot them, what to do with them?” *New World Notes*, 13 February 2008, Accessed: 27 September 2008, from <<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2008/02/bots-how-to-spo.html>>.

¹⁴⁵ See: Nagy, C. (2008). “AvaStar campaign prompts Lab move” *The AvaStar*, 2 May 2008, Accessed 27 September 2008, from <<http://www.the-avastar.com/second-life/news/2008/may/avastar-campaign-prompts-lab-move/article/avastar-campaign-prompts-lab-move/>>

¹⁴⁶ See: Linden, Jeska & Linden Lab (2008). “Second Life Showcase, Popular Places and the Future of Traffic” *Official Second Life Blog*, 28 April 2008. Accessed: 31 October 2008 from <<http://blog.secondlife.com/2008/04/28/second-life-showcase-popular-places-and-the-future-of-traffic/#more-1958>>

In contrast, on other issues Second Life journalism has contributed to refining public opinion. Linden Lab's new trademark policy announcement caused confusion among residents about the exact terms and implications of the new policy, expressed via various blogs.¹⁴⁷ Two days after the original policy announcement, Gwyneth Llewelyn, a prominent individual in Second Life, posted an open letter to Linden Lab requesting clarification of the new policy echoing the questions being asked by many residents across many sites.¹⁴⁸ Media publications then linked to Llewelyn's letter and eventually Linden Lab responded, one week later, with further clarification of the new policy.¹⁴⁹ The combination of hyperlinking, multiple conversations and questions and finally a concrete action from a prominent resident created a synthesis of public opinion that Linden Lab could respond to. The synthesis of opinion, although not always successful, demonstrates the Second Life media have the capacity to create a networked public sphere, exhibiting the basic characteristics of Benkler's model.

¹⁴⁷ See: Ganesvoort, H. (2008). "Linden Lab 'Tightens' Trademark Control (?)" [Around the Grid](#), 25 March 2008. Accessed: 10 October 2008, from <<http://harperganesvoort.wordpress.com/2008/03/25/linden-lab-tightens-trademark-control/>>, Nino, T. (2008). "Linden Lab asserts control of names and images" [Massively](#), 25 March 2008. Accessed: 10 October 2008, from <<http://www.massively.com/2008/03/25/linden-lab-asserts-control-of-names-and-images/>> and Duranske, B. (2008). "Second Life® Brand Center Launched, Thousands of Business and Organization Names Subject to New Trademark Guidelines" [Virtually Blind](#), 26 March 2008. Accessed: 10 October 2008, from <<http://virtuallyblind.com/2008/03/26/sl-brand-center/>>

¹⁴⁸ Llewelyn, G. (2008). "Second Life® Bloggers Require Clarification" [Gwyn's Home](#), 26 March 2008, Accessed: 10 October 2008, from <<http://gwynethllewelyn.net/2008/03/26/second-life-bloggers-require-clarification/>> and Second Life Left Unity. (2008). "Open letter to Linden Labs" [Second Life Left Unity](#), 29 March 2008. Accessed: 10 October 2008, from <<http://slleftunity.blogspot.com/2008/03/open-letter-to-linden-labs.html>>

¹⁴⁹ Linden, C & Linden Lab. (2008). "More on the Trademark Policy" [Official Second Life Blog](#), 1 April 2008. Accessed: 10 October 2008, from <<http://blog.secondlife.com/2008/04/01/more-on-the-trademark-policy/>>

Conclusion: The Networked Public Sphere

This chapter has analysed the structure, practice and influence of journalism and made observations about how these characteristics form a networked public sphere. Using the Benkler's criteria, reviewed in the previous chapter, all the characteristics of his model are evident in Second Life media. Firstly, the blog format, comment space and online location of all these media allow for universal intake of opinions, statements, information and ideas. Secondly, the distributed, connections formed by cross-posting, hyperlinking, conversational interaction and attribution act as filters on the content, for relevance and accreditation, allowing potentially political and actionable topics to generate debate and opinion. Thirdly, this networked structure also allows for the synthesis of public opinion by allowing viewpoints to be exchanged and options debated. Lastly, the independent nature of all publications, as none are funded by Linden Lab or published in-world, liberates Second Life media from governmental control. The example of the trademark policy announcement illustrates all these characteristics and demonstrates that Second Life media publications have the capacity to facilitate a networked public sphere. However the avatar bot issue, which has not been resolved, exposes the fledgling nature of this sphere; it is not firmly established and nor all encompassing.

Second Life journalism uses a hybrid of normative and participatory structures and practices, however a closer analysis reveals that the collaborative, decentralised and conversational elements of publications results in a broadly open, socially produced industry. These elements contribute to the formation of a networked public sphere in Second Life, allowing residents to debate critical issues and form collective opinions. The

next chapter will examine the influence of this fledgling public sphere in the context of governance and analyse the challenges of virtual world governance.

CHAPTER FOUR – COMMUNICATIVE ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

Introduction

This research is concerned with the interaction of journalism and governance in Second Life and has so far explored relevant existing literature and analysed the structure, practice and influence of virtual world journalism. This chapter will provide a comprehensive account of how communication and journalism contribute to governance in Second Life by analysing how governance strategies are communicated and what role journalism plays in governance processes. It will first describe the nature of governance in Second Life, before analysing the communication strategies of Linden Lab. Next, the chapter will show that the growth of media publications means journalism plays an increasing role in communicating Linden Lab strategies and announcements, mediating between the company and residents, but also that in-world journalism has very little influence over governance, in contrast to first life media, which exerts considerable influence over Linden Lab.

Second Life Governance

Governance in virtual worlds is characterised by a combination of social conventions, technical code and legal conditions. The research found that the enactment and enforcement of governance in virtual worlds is arbitrary, as first observed by Castronova: “the typical governance model in synthetic worlds consists of isolated moments of oppressive tyranny embedded in widespread anarchy.”¹⁵⁰ Pixeleen Mistral observes that “Linden Lab is a fascist state – a nice looking one, but a fascist state nonetheless... they change the way the world works to maximise their profit. Phillip Linden destroyed the existing society to chase the ad dollar.” Linden Lab define the rules of Second Life in the Terms of Service (ToS) and the code of the client software, but their enforcement of these rules is inconsistent and oppressive. Since Linden Lab introduced stricter age verification requirements, numerous stories of sudden account bans have emerged, ostentatiously because the user was under age. In one such example, one resident claims a number of his avatars have been suspended or banned from Second Life, and his attempts to prove his age to Linden Lab were ignored.¹⁵¹

Linden Lab is extremely reluctant to intervene in disputes, generally refusing to actively discipline or police the Second Life society. According to journalist Benjamin Duranske;

“Linden Lab for a long time didn’t do anything in terms of intervention in resident disputes or conflict between residents or crimes committed by residents or anything like that. They took a

¹⁵⁰ Castronova, E. (2005). Synthetic worlds: the business and culture of online games. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p207.

¹⁵¹ See: Mistral, P. (2008). “Elwood Abernathy: How LL Will Keep Their Customers?” Second Life Herald, 21 August 2008, Accessed: 20 November 2008, from <<http://foo.secondlifeherald.com/slh/2008/08/elwood-abernath.html>>

*really, really hands off role. They basically said 'we just make the grass and the mountains, you guys make whatever you want here and we won't stop you.'*¹⁵²

Philip Rosedale recently confirmed this hands-off philosophy saying, “we need to really redouble our efforts to regulate and create central policies as little as possible.”¹⁵³ Linden Lab maintained this policy throughout 2007, refusing to mediate any resident disputes over banking problems, although stories of fraud and loss were frequent. After a number of months, and as unfavourable stories began to seep into first life media coverage Linden Lab announced the new banking policy, effectively banning all in-world banks, on their blog in January 2008. Linden Lab stated that they were banning all banks as they did not wish to intervene constantly: “Linden Lab can't and won't become a virtual banking regulator. Banking regulation, whether in the real or virtual world, is complex and intensive, and is a government activity.”¹⁵⁴

However Linden Lab’s banking policy still constitutes an intervention in the Second Life society, as indeed has occurred since the beginning of Second Life when larger disputes have threatened the stability of the grid as a whole. The Tax Revolt in 2003, where landowners and creators staged a mock protest against the land and object taxes, is one such instance where Linden Lab actively changed the technical structure of the world. Tateru Nino notes that Linden Lab’s governance approach “seems to be in considerable

¹⁵² Duranske, B. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Skype, 22 August 2008, on file with author.

¹⁵³ Philip Rosedale quoted in: Bloomfield, R. (2008). “Philip Rosedale: Ruling with a Light Hand” Metanomics, 19 September 2008. Accessed: 13 October 2008, from <<http://metanomics.net/19-sep-2008/philip-roosedale-what-its-be-president-and-ruling-light-hand>>

¹⁵⁴ “FAQ’s on Policy Regarding ‘Inworld Banking’”. (2008). Second Life Knowledge Base, 17 July 2008, Accessed: 27 September 2008, from <<https://support.secondlife.com/ics/support/security.asp?questionID=4899>>

flux at the moment.”¹⁵⁵ Numerous journalists observed that the policy decisions in age play, gambling and banking made throughout 2007, signalled “a marked philosophical change in perspective at the Lab.”¹⁵⁶ Jack Linden, Director of Customer Relations, recently confirmed their new attitude saying “we’ve had a very hands-off culture previously, but that is changing. The mainland is *our* estate, it needs to reflect the best that Second Life can be. So we will do whatever is necessary to make that a reality.”¹⁵⁷

Linden Lab is faced with opposing pressures: to intervene in the world to ensure it continues to conform with their vision of Second Life and *not* to intervene in line with their participatory, collaborative ethic. These tensions result in arbitrary and inconsistent governance, as Linden Lab struggles to balance their corporate imperatives to operate legally and profitably with philosophical and civic imperatives to build a new world.

The growth of Second Life has led to more visibility and publicity, in both first life media and in a proliferation of indigenous media. This attention has forced Linden Lab to confront and resolve some of the governance problems in Second Life: “without the surge, most of the decisions of 2007/2008 would never have happened.”¹⁵⁸ However beyond simply calling governance arbitrary, inconsistent or ‘fascist’, this research will analyse the role and impact of communication, by Linden Lab and journalism, on governance to reveal a nuanced understanding of this process.

¹⁵⁵ Nino, T. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Second Life, 14 September 2008, on file with author.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Jack Linden quoted in: Au, J. W. (2008). “More From Jack Linden On Ad Farming Policies: Does It Change Your Opinion?” New World Notes, 14 September 2008. Accessed: 13 October 2008, from <<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2008/09/more-from-jack.html>>

¹⁵⁸ Bakalava, G. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Yahoo Messenger, 23 September 2008, on file with author.

Linden Lab Communication Strategies

Linden Lab uses various means to communicate with residents, particularly in relation to governance. It communicates its strategies and policies to residents primarily through the Second Life website (www.secondlife.com). This has information about what Second Life is, how to join and buy land, a showcase of in-world content, FAQ, tutorials and the companies blog, the *Official Second Life Blog* (hereafter *OSLB*). Linden Lab can also communicate with users through the software client, for example to notify residents of changes to the Terms of Service (ToS) when they login.

The *OSLB* is how Linden Lab communicates software developments, policy changes and important information to current users. Throughout July 2008 various Linden Lab employees (known as ‘Lindens’), including Catherine, Torley, Jack, Zee and M, posted to the *OSLB* on topics ranging from interoperability with other software, new viewer client features, land supply, economic statistics, Second Life’s fifth birthday, live updates on server upgrades and a letter from the new CEO, M Linden.¹⁵⁹ Linden Lab has used the *OSLB* to announce major policy decisions, including the ban of in-world banking

¹⁵⁹ See: Linden Lab. (2008). “Archive for July 2008” Official Second Life Blog, Accessed 25 October 2008, from <http://blog.secondlife.com/2008/07/>

services,¹⁶⁰ gambling ban,¹⁶¹ and the most recent revised pricing for OpenSpace regions.¹⁶²

The use of individually authored blog posts by various Linden's suggests an embrace of a participatory, online approach to public communications. The *OSLB* allows Linden Lab to speak directly to users, without the mediation of the journalism, and allows users to talk back directly and immediately. However, while Linden's post to the *OSLB*, they rarely return to comment in the ensuing conversations. In August 2008, six different Lindens posted a total of nine articles to the *OSLB*; five articles were open for comments, receiving 320 responses. Lindens made nine of these 320 responses but they mostly answered specific technical questions or corrected wrong information. Journalists are sceptical about their use of a blog noting that "we now have the 'official LL blog' and they can control it better, turn off comments, restrict comments."¹⁶³

Linden Lab also restricts and filters incoming requests for comment, interviews or information. The website directs all enquiries to the public relations firm "Lewis PR", and does not provide any direct email addresses for Linden staff.¹⁶⁴ Although some Lindens have listed their company email on their in-world Second Life profile, any requests for comment sent to those addresses are referred to the PR agency. The

¹⁶⁰ Linden, Ken D. & Linden Lab (2008). "New Policy Regarding In-World Banks" Official Second Life Blog, 8 January 2008, Accessed: 10 July 2008 from <<http://blog.secondlife.com/2008/01/08/new-policy-regarding-in-world-banks/>>

¹⁶¹ Linden, Robin & Linden Lab (2007). "Wagering in Second Life: New Policy" Official Second Life Blog, 25 July 2007, Accessed: 21 October 2008 from <<http://blog.secondlife.com/2007/07/25/wagering-in-second-life-new-policy/#more-1106>>

¹⁶² Linden, Jack & Linden Lab. (2008). "Openspace Pricing and Policy Changes" Official Second Life Blog, 27 October 2008. Accessed: 2 November 2008, from <<http://blog.secondlife.com/2008/10/27/openspace-pricing-and-policy-changes/>>

¹⁶³ Bakalava, G. op. cit.

¹⁶⁴ See: <<http://lindenlab.com/pressroom>>

difficulties encountered by some journalists in gaining access to Linden Lab for comment, discussed in the previous chapter,¹⁶⁵ indicate that they wish to control and restrict all outgoing information. Tateru Nino links Linden Lab's restrictive, closed approach with protection of their business imperatives, "It seems to be part of a calculated strategy. Information has value and they seem to be trying to maximise the release of it for best effect. It seems hard to blame them for trying to make the most of an asset."¹⁶⁶

Linden Lab also conveys information and perceptions about governance through their marketing and rhetoric. Promotional materials position Second Life as a new world, stating that it is "an online 3D virtual world imagined, created, and owned by its Residents... Second Life is not a game, instead it's the next evolutionary stage of the Internet."¹⁶⁷ Phillip Rosedale has compared the project of creating Second Life to building a new nation on numerous occasions.¹⁶⁸ In particular the name of this virtual world, and its heavily used tagline "Your Imagination, Your World" fosters the particular discourse of 'Second Life as a new world'. Wagner James Au believes that "by contextualising [the IP right policy] as the progress of a nation, the Lindens created a sense of patriotism and collective destiny that would not otherwise exist."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ See: page 44.

¹⁶⁶ Nino, T. op. cit.

¹⁶⁷ Linden Lab (n.d.). "Factsheet: What is Second Life?" Accessed: 3 October 2008, from <<http://lindenlab.com/pressroom/general/factsheets/sloverview>>

¹⁶⁸ See: Terdiman, D. (2004). "Fun in Following the Money" Wired, 8 May 2004. Accessed: 14 June 2008, from <<http://www.wired.com/gaming/gamingreviews/news/2004/05/63363?currentPage=all>> and Sklar, U. (2004). "Interview with Second Life CEO, Philip Rosedale" Second Life Herald, 21 June 2004. Accessed: 14 June 2008, from <http://www.secondlifeherald.com/slh/2004/06/interview_with_.html>

¹⁶⁹ Au, W. J. (2008). *The Making of Second Life: notes from the new world*. Collins, New York, p136.

Journalists also believe that Linden Lab has encourages a particular discourse about Second Life:

*“They said this is your second life. You can be someone else, have a different name, do things you can’t do in your regular life. I think that with that freedom people did bring a set of baggage and assumptions about things they would be able to do.”*¹⁷⁰

Many residents of Second Life do view this world as a new separate environment, and thus bring different expectations of their rights to participate in the governance of this place: “I think residents believe they have the right to free speech, and expect to be listened to. The frustration they express when they are NOT listened to affirms this.”¹⁷¹

In addition to marketing rhetoric, Linden Lab also appears to embrace a humanitarian ideal in the organisation of their company. Linden Lab promotes a corporate ethic of participation and transparency, encapsulated in their guiding principles, the “Tao of Linden”,¹⁷² which include “working together, showing initiative, making day-by-day progress, being transparent and open, having fun and approaching tasks with panache.”¹⁷³ Indeed they state their corporate mission is to “connect us all to an online world that advances the human condition.”¹⁷⁴ The creation of this discourse forms a key plank in Linden Lab’s communication with users, as it works to set the conditions within which governance occurs and the appropriate reading of Second Life.

¹⁷⁰ Krangle, E. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Skype, 16 September 2008, on file with author.

¹⁷¹ Kongo, K. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Yahoo Messenger, 16 September 2008, on file with author.

¹⁷² Linden Lab. (n.d.). “Tao of Linden” Accessed: 12 October 2008, from <<http://lindenlab.com/about/tao>>

¹⁷³ Linden Lab. (n.d.). “Culture” Accessed: 12 October 2008, from <<http://lindenlab.com/about/culture>>

¹⁷⁴ Linden Lab. op. cit. “Tao of Linden”

A Historical View

These specific communication methods have not always characterised the way Linden Lab interacted with residents. In the early history of Second Life, Lindens were more personal in their approaches to governing and communicating their decisions. In the Jessie War, which took place as the US invaded Iraq in April 2003, rival groups of military combat residents waged a battle in the Jessie regions over messages written on a wall.¹⁷⁵ Linden Lab reacted to this episode on a personal level, acting as a conflict mediator between warring factions and intervening individually in the conflict, resolving the specific issues fuelling the dispute rather than making broad policy.¹⁷⁶ Prominent Lindens, notably Phillip Rosedale and Cory Ondrejka, used to hold Town Hall meetings to discuss issues with residents,¹⁷⁷ however the last meeting was in 2006.

Linden Lab also previously hosted the Second Life forums, which acted a central focal point for the community to discuss and exchange information. Garret Bakalava says, “[they] were the place we all went, some like me didn’t post much but I read them daily. There was always a lot of controversy but also a lot of basic community, knowledge and opinion.”¹⁷⁸ Linden Lab closed this communication method in August 2006, to focus on other avenues of dialogue.

Linden Lab’s communication strategies are constantly evolving; in August 2008 they announced they were re-evaluating their blog and remaining forums, “making changes to enhance dialogue with [residents] through adding better tools and organization along

¹⁷⁵ Au, W. J. op. cit. p104-117.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.* p109, 112.

¹⁷⁷ See: <http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Town_Hall>

¹⁷⁸ Bakalava, G. op. cit.

with fewer constraints.”¹⁷⁹ While this policy is still being formulated, the proposed new features, such as the use of logins to comment on the blog, indicate that the new communication strategies are moving towards traditional, closed methods of interaction.

The Role of Journalism in Governance Communications

Linden Lab acknowledged the role of journalism in creating discussion when they closed the forums in August 2006, citing the growth of “Resident-run blogs and forums... offering a wealth of discussion choices” as alternatives.¹⁸⁰ As Linden Lab’s direct communication with residents has diminished, the number of media channels available has grown. The exponential growth of Second Life’s community has also driven the growth of media publications. Resident registrations began to explode in October 2006¹⁸¹ and nine of the thirteen publications analysed were started after that date. Although it is difficult to ascertain how important in-world media publications are in providing information to Second Life residents without asking a broad spectrum of residents, some of the functions of journalism are evident in its content.

Second Life journalism performs some of the functions of fourth estate journalism, as outlined in Chapter Two.¹⁸² It disseminates public information from Linden Lab, particularly when that information affects the in-world experiences of residents, working

¹⁷⁹ Linden Lab (2008). “Linden Lab Blog Changes to Give Residents More Choices” Official Second Life Blog, August 27th, Accessed 25 October 2008, from <http://blog.secondlife.com/2008/08/27/linden-lab-blog-changes-to-give-residents-more-choices/>

¹⁸⁰ Linden, Robin & Linden Lab (2006). “Forums Take a New Turn” Official Second Life Blog, 10 August 2006, Accessed: 28 October 2006, from <http://blog.secondlife.com/2006/08/10/forums-take-a-new-turn/>

¹⁸¹ See: Linden Lab (n.d.). “Economic Statistics: Graphs” Second Life. Accessed: 2 November 2008, from <http://secondlife.com/whatis/economy-graphs.php>

¹⁸² See: page 27.

towards creating an informed readership. Journalists frequently hyperlink back to the official blog in any articles that mention official policies or Linden Lab announcements: when the banking ban was first announced, ten of the thirteen publications studied by this research quoted and hyperlinked to the official blog post. Journalists also obtain information and content from other sources, as analysed in the previous chapter,¹⁸³ expanding and interpreting the topics raised on the official blog. After the recent Openspaces re-pricing announcement was made, many publications ran human-interest stories exploring how the changes would personally affect individual residents, and what different opinions residents had about the impact upon them.¹⁸⁴

Media publications perform the traditional watchdog role of media, running articles that have not been prompted by a Linden Lab announcement, but that may be related to governance issues, as seen by the continual coverage of bot traffic problems or content theft in numerous publications. The *Second Life Herald* often exposes perceived wrongdoings in the world,¹⁸⁵ and the *AvaStar* has previously run activism campaigns.¹⁸⁶ Katt Kongo emphasises that Linden Lab is not the only object of scrutiny: “[journalism]

¹⁸³ See: page 41-43.

¹⁸⁴ See: Dechou, T. (2008). “Trim Editorial: OpenSpace Sims” *Rez Magazine*, 28 October 2008. Accessed: 2 November 2008, from <<http://rblog.rezmagazine.co.uk/2008/10/trin-editorial-openspace-sims.html>> and Au, W. J. (2008). “Null And Void: Despite Openspaces Price Revision, Some Continue Their Departure Plans” *New World Notes*, 11 November 2008. Accessed: 15 November 2008, from <<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2008/11/null-and-void-d.html#comments>> and Mistral, P. (2008). “Who Will Save Paris 1900?” *Second Life Herald*, 11 November 2008. Accessed: 15 November 2008, from <<http://foo.secondlifeherald.com/slh/2008/11/who-will-save-p.html>>

¹⁸⁵ See for example: <http://foo.secondlifeherald.com/slh/oped/index.html> (Second Life Herald Editorial Opinion index) and http://foo.secondlifeherald.com/slh/legal_issues/index.html (Second Life Herald Legal Issues index).

¹⁸⁶ Aya, N. (2008). “AvaStar bot campaign a success” *The AvaStar*, 25 May 2008. Accessed: 15 October 2008, from <<http://www.the-avastar.com/second-life/opinion/2008/may/avastar-bot-campaign-a-success/article/avastar-bot-campaign-a-success/>>

reports on those who are unethical... Many people own businesses in Second Life, and if they are unethical (stealing design ideas or content), they WILL be picketed.”¹⁸⁷

Journalists in Second Life are aware of these functions, imagining a normative role for themselves as “the critical, sceptical press that dredges up some truly horrific things at times.”¹⁸⁸ Some Second Life journalists also saw their publications as information services for the community: “I would say more of an information service role... just to be a wire style news service, information (although I think the plan was always to have more opinion but it never worked out).”¹⁸⁹ The Metaverse Messenger and New World Notes both have sections on upcoming events and featured residents or regions, contributing to the flow of information.

Second Life Versus First Life – Influence on Governance

Despite the growth of media outlets and their increasing role in communication, indigenous Second Life media appear to have very little capacity to influence or affect the decisions of Linden Lab. Although there are two well-known events in Second Life’s history where in-world media and resident protest changed decisions made by Linden Lab, the Tax Revolt in 2003¹⁹⁰ and the CopyBot Affair in 2006,¹⁹¹ this research found a

¹⁸⁷ Kongo, K. op. cit.

¹⁸⁸ Mistral, P. (2008). Personal Interview. Interviewed by: Annabelle Boyd Jones, on Second Life, 17 August 2008, on file with author.

¹⁸⁹ Bakalava, G. op. cit.

¹⁹⁰ See: Grimmelman, J. (2004). "The State of Play: On the Second Life Tax Revolt." Accessed: 14 April, 2008, from

<<http://web.archive.org/web/20040401205102/http://research.yale.edu/lawmeme/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1222>>

widespread disillusionment about the power of indigenous media to influence governance.

There is a perception that Linden Lab does not listen to indigenous media closely. Seven of the eight journalists interviewed believed that Linden Lab read their publication but not really any others; “I think we are unique in that we get Lindens responding to some of the stories.”¹⁹² Despite these claims, Linden Lab has a negligible presence on Second Life media; this research did not encounter any comments or responses from Linden Lab in a cross-section of articles in the publications studied. Journalists also believed that, even though Linden Lab may be reading their publication, they were not concerned with the opinions or information published therein: “they [Linden Lab] don’t really care too much about SL press, though they do keep their eye on it.”¹⁹³ Benjamin Duranske observes that “it would be absurd of me to think that I have a great deal of influence on Linden Lab policy.”¹⁹⁴

The lack of influence of indigenous media becomes evident upon a closer analysis of Linden Lab’s response to media coverage of issues affecting Second Life residents. Content theft is a crucial issue in-world, particularly for the fashionista business. Throughout 2008 the problems of content theft and protection have been reported widely and consistently in indigenous media. A group of content creators launched a media campaign, featuring naked avatar photographs, to raise awareness amongst residents.¹⁹⁵ One resident even brought a first life lawsuit against another resident for

¹⁹¹ Au, W. J. op. cit. pp 130-139.

¹⁹² Mistral, P. op. cit.

¹⁹³ Bakalava, G. op. cit.

¹⁹⁴ Duranske, B. op. cit.

¹⁹⁵ Caligari, N. (2008). “Content Theft” *nyte’n’day*, 29 February 2008. Accessed: 13 October 2008, from <<http://nytenday.blogspot.com/2008/02/content-theft.html>>

theft of his sexual animation products, eventually settling out of court.¹⁹⁶ These events and the wider issue of theft have not received significant attention in first life media and thus can be considered exclusively in-world issues.

Yet despite the importance of content protection and intellectual property rights to the ideology, economic stability and community development of Second Life, Linden Lab has done very little to address the problem. Their response to these concerns has been to refer residents to first life mechanisms of accreditation and enforcement, specifically US copyright legislation. Linden Lab posted an article to the *OSLB* advising residents to inspect content themselves to determine if it was stolen, reminded residents that copying was illegal in the ToS, and referred to their DMCA Policy.¹⁹⁷ However this response has not restored confidence amongst content creators in Second Life, instead undermining existing in-world forms of trust. Many residents have expressed frustration with the DMCA process, complaining that Linden Lab doesn't act on all DMCA notices, they don't remove all copies of infringing content and that the DMCA filing process is complex.¹⁹⁸ Content theft is an ongoing issue in Second Life,¹⁹⁹ and although the

¹⁹⁶ Duranske, B. (n.d). "Archive for the 'Eros v. John Doe' Category" [Virtually Blind](#). Accessed: 2 November 2008, from <<http://virtuallyblind.com/category/active-lawsuits/eros-v-john-doe/>>

¹⁹⁷ Linden, LauraP & Linden Lab. (2008). "Protecting Your Copyrighted Content" [Official Second Life Blog](#), 11 April 2008, Accessed: 16 November 2008, from <<http://blog.secondlife.com/2008/04/11/protecting-your-copyrighted-content/>>

¹⁹⁸ See: Falken, V. (2008). "Protecting Your Copyrighted Content (according to Linden)" [VintFalken.com](#), 15 April 2008. Accessed: 15 November 2008, from <<http://www.vintfalken.com/protecting-your-copyrighted-content-according-to-linden/>> and Linden, L. & Linden Lab. (2008). "Protecting Your Copyrighted Content" [Official Second Life Blog](#), 11 April 2008. Accessed: 15 November 2008, from <<http://blog.secondlife.com/2008/04/11/protecting-your-copyrighted-content/>> and Duranske, B. (2008). "Second Life DMCA Statement Raises Question: Does Provider Expediently Remove Infringing Material?" [Virtually Blind](#), 15 April 2008. Accessed: 15 November 2008, from <<http://virtuallyblind.com/2008/04/15/linden-lab-dmca/>> and Vg, M. (2008). "Linden Lab's 'stand; on intellectual property says..." [Second Arts](#), 11 April 2008. Accessed: 15 November 2008, from <<http://secondarts.wordpress.com/2008/04/11/linden-las-stand-on-intellectual-property-says/>>

coverage in Second Life media shows that residents are concerned, Linden Lab has not acted further upon this issue.

Many journalists believe that first life coverage has more influence over Linden Lab than indigenous Second Life media. First life media disseminate information about Second Life to both current and prospective users, as well as first life businesses, governments and communities. Articles about Second Life or any virtual world clearly comprise a minority of articles in mainstream publications, even in technology-focussed publications such as *Wired*.²⁰⁰ Nonetheless a close analysis of the timing and discussions around a number of recent policy announcements, such as the banking policy, reveals that this coverage plays a significant role in Second Life.

Since as early as November 2005, indigenous Second Life media had been discussing problems in the banking sector, in particular throughout 2007 as a number of prominent banks collapsed, most notably Ginko Financial.²⁰¹ However there had not been any particular coverage in the few months before Linden Lab's announcement on 8 January 2008 – instead the bad press was coming from first life media. Numerous interviewees linked motivation for the decision to the negative coverage in-world banking was causing in mainstream first world media including MIT Technology Review, The Economist, The Banker, Wired, Business Week, The New York Times and The Sydney Morning

¹⁹⁹ See: Fairweather, H. (2008). "FashCon Content Theft Policy" *Fashion Consolidated*, 27 May 2008. Accessed: 15 November 2008, from <<http://fashcon.com/2008/05/27/content-theft-policy/>> and Bailey, J. (2008). "Content Theft and Second Life" *Plagiarism Today*, 12 March 2008. Accessed: 15 November 2008, from <<http://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2008/03/12/content-theft-and-second-life/>>

²⁰⁰ See: <<http://www.wired.com/>>

²⁰¹ See: Duranske, B. (2007). "Archive for 'Ginko Financial' Category" *Virtually Blind*. Accessed: 2 November 2008, from <<http://virtuallyblind.com/category/virtually-blind-series/ginko-financial/>> and Jonas, D. (2005). "Anshe Declares War on Ginko: "It's a Ponzi Scheme!" (Lindens block discussion. Transparency is first casualty.)" *Second Life Herald*, 20 November 2005. Accessed: 2 November 2008, from <http://www.secondlifeherald.com/slh/2005/11/anshe_declares_.html>

Herald.²⁰² Duranske, who exposed some of the fraudulent banking practices, observes, “I don’t know what motivated the timing... There were some pretty high profile articles and I think that Linden Lab probably started to feel like it was getting a black eye over this finance industry and it wasn’t making very much money out of it. So why keep using it as a risk for such a small return.”²⁰³

Second Life media cannot exert much influence over Linden Lab as they are relatively powerless politically. As chapter two explored, media power is intricately linked to the democratic mechanism, as information has consequences for legitimacy and authority. Second Life media are able to effect two consequences; resident protest and departure from the world and coverage in mainstream media. Commentators on virtual worlds have noted that users have a powerful leverage tool over world developers, in the form of their subscription payments. Grimmelmann notes that “ultimately, player’s power over designers depends on their ability to go nuclear, to stop playing and stop paying. It’s a powerful threat, but costly for the player who has built up substantial in-game wealth or status.”²⁰⁴ In the case of Second Life, the cost of exit is far greater for a resident than for Linden Lab, particularly as their business model is reliant upon land sales and taxes,

²⁰² See: Naone, E. (2007). “Money Trouble in Second Life” *MIT Technology Review*, 8 August 2007. Accessed: 3 June 2008, from <http://www.technologyreview.com/read_article.aspx?id=19193&a=f>, Gardiner, B. (2007). “Bank Failure in Second Life Leads to Calls for Regulation” *Wired*, 15 August 2007. Accessed: 3 June 2008, from <http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/news/2007/08/virtual_bank>, Hutcheon, S. (2007). “Jitters in Second Life as bank shuts doors” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 August 2007. Accessed: 3 June 2008, from <<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/08/10/1186530581488.html>>, Boss, S. (2007). “Even in a Virtual World, ‘Stuff’ Matters” *New York Times*, 9 September 2007. Accessed: 3 June 2008, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/09/business/yourmoney/09second.html?_r=2&adxnln=1&oref=slogin&pagewanted=1&adxnlnx=1212693892-fCL/h6VzGrfsWWh8Q7rYPQ&oref=slogin>

²⁰³ Duranske, B. op. cit.

²⁰⁴ Grimmelmann, J. (2006). *Virtual Power Politics. The State of Play: Law, Games and Virtual Worlds*. J. M. Balkin and B. S. Noveck. New York & London, New York University Press, p156.

not subscriptions. Thus the threat of exit is not an effective or powerful action against Linden Lab, and indeed does not work towards resolving the underlying governance issue.

Second Life journalists are highly aware that their most influential effect is to prompt mainstream media coverage, noting, “we can make them change sometimes – if they think it might hit the RL media.”²⁰⁵ Tateru Nino says this is linked to the greater reach of mainstream media: “I think the Lab is timid about bad press anywhere. What concerns them is a story that goes big and makes them look bad. Not many pieces on the [Second Life] Herald or on personal blogs are going to get that sort of broad media attention.”²⁰⁶ Journalists emphasised that Linden Lab does and has to care about first life media coverage as they reach an audience who are not current users of Second Life – and thus are also potential future customers.

An audience of non-residents is unfamiliar with the internal values, features and politics of this virtual world; “I think they have to care more about [real life (rl)] media because rl media is seen, heard and read by people who are not already in Second Life, so they don’t have an understanding of it.”²⁰⁷ Mainstream media coverage can influence the perceived need for regulation of virtual worlds amongst first life communities and governments. Pixeleen Mistral observes that “LL was getting hit with bad publicity and appearing to be a target for regulation... underage sex and gambling are big hot buttons.”²⁰⁸ Indeed in March 2008 a US Congress subcommittee investigated virtual

²⁰⁵ Mistral, P. op. cit.

²⁰⁶ Nino, T. op. cit.

²⁰⁷ Kongo, K. op. cit.

²⁰⁸ Mistral, P. op. cit.

worlds, specifically concerned with “any policy issues raised by virtual worlds that may need to be addressed or monitored.”²⁰⁹

However journalist and lawyer Benjamin Duranske notes, “it would be pretty hard to bring a law suit against Linden Lab for something a user did by defrauding another user with a bank or something.”²¹⁰ Nevertheless Linden Lab operates as a company in the first world, physically located in San Francisco, California and is therefore vulnerable to regulation from first world governments. Compliance with first life laws has been an emphasis in recent policy announcements by Linden Lab, in contradiction to the discourse of a new world previously promulgated: “please remember that Resident compliance with real world laws has always been an integral part of our Terms of Service.”²¹¹ Katt Kongo notes that “they have realised that they need to make sure people do not break the law in real life by playing Second Life.”²¹²

Mainstream media coverage is also a concern for Linden Lab as they are concerned with their image amongst prospective users. Rosedale has stated that he wishes to expand Second Life to encompass the global population; “What would feel like success? Not money – but I will look back and say, did we do as much as we could to reach as many people as possible? Can we reach a billion people? That would be cool.”²¹³ Some

²⁰⁹ See: Reuters, A. (2008). “Rosedale, other virtual world execs to testify before Congress” Reuters Second Life Bureau, 31 March 2008. Accessed: 13 August 2008, from <<http://secondlife.reuters.com/stories/2008/03/31/rosedale-other-virtual-world-execs-to-testify-before-congress/>> and for more information about the hearing:

<http://energycommerce.house.gov/cmte_mtgs/110-ti-hrg.040108.VirtualWorlds.shtml>

²¹⁰ Duranske, B. op. cit.

²¹¹ Linden, Robin & Linden Lab. op. cit. “Wagering in Second Life...”

²¹² Kongo, K. op. cit.

²¹³ Philip Rosedale quoted in: Maney, K. (2007). “The king of alter egos is surprisingly humble guy” USA Today, 5 June 2007. Accessed: 5 September 2008, from <<http://secondlifegrid.net/spt/resources/fact-sheet/lindenoverview>>

journalists believe that this focus on new users comes at the expense of current users: “they’ve shown a trend (particularly recently) toward growth in new users rather than existing users. In theory, if they can ramp their growth high enough they could afford to be rid of all existing users.”²¹⁴

These two concerns, with possible regulation and potential customers, imbue first life mainstream media with significantly more power over the direction and structure of Second Life than indigenous media. The fourth estate role of Second Life media, which journalists perceive they are performing and this research argues is emerging, is qualitatively different to a normative conception of the fourth estate. Indigenous media are able to report upon governance issues freely, expanding and critiquing official policy statements by Linden Lab. They also contribute to creating a networked public sphere, as the previous chapter argued, prompting and linking debates and opinions from across the Second Life. However their power to perform the watchdog function is limited and indirect; indigenous media can only exert influence through mainstream media, which has a different audience, mission and context. Second Life media’s lack of influence over governance signals a disconnect between residents and Linden Lab and between expectations and reality in the virtual world.

Conclusion

Communication plays an important role in Second Life governance, not only conveying the policies and decisions of Linden Lab but also providing a broader discourse about

²¹⁴ Nino, T. op. cit.

the nature of the world itself. This discourse contributes to particular perceptions of Second Life, particularly related to resident's expectations about governance. Although in-world journalism plays a number of important roles in Second Life, as a fourth estate and information source, it is unable to influence Linden Lab's governance decisions. The next chapter, the Conclusion, will summarise the findings of this thesis, and explore the questions arising from this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSION

Many works on virtual worlds conclude with glittering descriptions of the metaverse of the future, full of optimism about the opportunities for humankind that these technologies offer. Although this thesis began with a similar quote, from the original visionary of the metaphysical universe Neal Stephenson, it will close with some sobering conclusions about the current nature of virtual worlds. The previous chapters have explored how journalism and governance interact in a virtual world, through a critical analysis of Second Life. This final chapter will draw together the different strands of this thesis, summarising the overarching argument and posing questions for further research arising from this work.

The preceding chapters have presented a comprehensive and detailed analysis of virtual world journalism and governance in Second Life, situated in relation to existing fields of study. The research has established that the structure, practices and influence of Second Life journalism are characterised by a combination of normative and participatory features. These characteristics, particularly the blog format, networked connections and active discussion, help Second Life media fulfil the criteria of the networked public sphere, as proposed by Yochai Benkler.

The previous chapter also established that, although virtual world governance is arbitrary, Linden Lab utilises a variety of communication strategies to interact with residents and foster a particular discursive perception of Second Life, namely as a new world,

imagined, created and owned by the users. Yet a close critical analysis reveals that Second Life journalism has a negligible influence over Linden Lab's governance decisions. This lack of influence is due to the conflicting governance pressures that Linden Lab faces, and the absence of democratic structures that imbue media, and thus the public sphere, with power in advanced Western societies.

The first conclusion of this research is that governance is an important aspect of social production in the networked environment. This thesis has shown that governance, defined as institutional strategies to influence user conduct that have a formative effect on society,²¹⁵ plays a crucial role in shaping online interactions within a virtual world. Linden Lab controls social, technical and legal aspects of the world, and exercises that control to shape and influence the in-world activities and experiences of residents, such as journalism. Although the creation and growth of Second Life is rooted in the principles of collaborative, networked, participatory social production, arbitrary and opaque processes of governance persist: Linden Lab intervenes in the virtual world because of tensions between commercial and civic imperatives. Benkler's theory of social production does not consider governance in any depth; the conclusions of this research have identified this significant gap. Further research is required in order to comprehensively understand what role governance plays in social, peer-production environments and how it impacts the structure of these environments and the experiences of these communities.

The second conclusion that this thesis offers is a challenge to the dominant discourses about Second Life as a world of collaboration and freedom. Second Life is widely understood as an example of social, peer production: Benkler uses it as a definitive

²¹⁵ Braman, S. (2004). "The emergent global information policy regime" in The emergent global information policy regime, S. Braman (ed), Houndsmill, UK: Palgrave, Macmillan. p13.

example in his treatise on commons-based, peer production; Linden Lab propagates the discourse of Second Life as a new world imagined, created and owned by the users; and participatory, collaborative, peer production practices are evident across Second Life. Journalists interviewed for this research observed that residents themselves subscribe to this perception, bringing expectations of rights, freedom and service to their interaction with Second Life. However the nature of governance in Second Life contradicts the principles of social production. Linden Lab uses the tools of virtual world control - social conventions, technical code and laws – to enact arbitrary and opaque governance, imposing their particular vision for Second Life without consultation or participation from users.

The structure, practices and influence of in-world Second Life journalism also challenge the potential of social production within the virtual world to enhance freedom and autonomy. This research found that journalism performs a normative fourth estate role in Second Life, facilitating the emergence of a networked public sphere. The public sphere provides a crucial legitimacy for democratic governments, allowing individuals, through the synthesis of public opinion, to influence the process of governance in their society. Benkler argues that the networked public sphere, and more broadly social production, provides a mechanism for individuals to participate meaningfully in governance, thereby enhancing the liberty of individuals and the democracy of society.²¹⁶

However the findings of this research reveal that journalism in Second Life, and the networked public sphere it facilitates, are disconnected from governance. In-world media and the opinions of residents have little influence on Linden Lab, and are not a significant factor in the governance process. This disconnect challenges the proposition

²¹⁶ Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: how social production transforms markets and freedom*. New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, p272.

that Second Life contributes to individual autonomy: although residents are able to create their own stories and content, they have very little influence over important decisions that change the direction and nature of their world. The underlying conditions of their online existence are beyond their control. Benkler's social production theory is grounded in the liberal democratic tradition, which values freedom, equality and justice. The present structure of Second Life, where individuals are unable to influence the conditions of their experience and are subject to arbitrary control by a private company, does not uphold these values. Further research and experimentation with different models of governance is required for virtual worlds to progressively contribute to the human condition.

The conclusions of this thesis challenge our broader understanding of social production and communicative power in the online environment. As virtual worlds attract growing numbers of subscribers and social interaction increasingly moves towards the online environment, it is crucial to understand the practices and conventions which structure human interaction in these spaces.

APPENDIX ONE – CONTENT ANALYSIS

Publication	Description & Ownership	Editor	Number of Journalists
AvaStar	General Second Life news in tabloid style. Owned by German media corporation BILD digital GmbH & Co. KG and is a part of Bild.de.	Rowan Barnett (RL)	29 - Listed on website
Massively	General virtual worlds news. Owned By Weblogs Inc, a commercial blog network.	Elizabeth Harper and Barb Dybwad	21 - Listed on website
Metaverse Journal	Australian based news on Second Life. Independently, individually run.	Lowell Cremorne (SL)	4 - Listed on site and interview with Editor
Metaverse Messenger	General Second Life news in weekly pdf format. Independently run.	Katt Kongo (SL)	Approx 30 - Interview with Publisher
New World Notes	General Second Life news, strong community focus. Independently, individually run.	Wagner James Au (SL: Hamlet Au)	1 - Single author blog but other contributors
Reuters - SL Bureau	Bureau of Reuters, general Second Life news with a business focus.	Eric Krangel (SL: Eric Reuters)	2 - Listed on website & Interview with Journalist
Second Life Herald	General Second Life news in sensational, tabloid style, popular and controversial. Independently run by group of owners.	Pixeleen Mistral (SL)	29 - Listed on website
Second Thoughts	Personal blog of Prokofy Neva discussing Second Life news and politics.	Prokofy Neva (SL)	1- Single author blog
SL News Network	General Second Life news in wire service style. Independently run.	Garret Bakalava (SL)	10-20 - Interview with Editor
Terra Nova	Academic and news blog about virtual worlds. Run by group of academics.	Edward Castronova, Julian Dibbell, Dan Hunter, Greg Lastowka	28 - Listed on website
Virtual Worlds News	Virtual worlds blog with business focus. Owned by Show Initiative, a virtual worlds media company.	Joey Seiler	1 - Interview with journalist
Virtually Blind	Specialised blog on legal issues in Second Life. Independently, individually run.	Benjamin Duranske (SL)	5 (guest and regular contributors) - Listed on website & Interview with Editor
Your 2nd Place	Multi-author blog about Second Life. Independently run.	Taran Rampersad and Nobody Fugazi	11 - Listed on website

Appendix One – Content Analysis

Publication	Establishment Date (first article)	URL	Format	Tone
AvaStar	21 December 2006	www.the-avastar.com	Previously PDF Publication (Dec 2006-May 2008), from May 2008: Blog	Journalistic. Tabloid.
Massively	November 2007	www.massively.com	Website: Blog	Formal blogger, bit journalistic but quite personal too.
Metaverse Journal	29 Nov 2006	www.metaversejournal.com	Website: Blog: Based on Wordpress software	Journalistic blogging - quite personal.
Metaverse Messenger	23 August 2005	www.metaversemessenger.com	PDF Publication: Newspaper layout	Journalistic, formal. Columns and opinion also.
New World Notes	22 April 2003	www.nwn.blogs.com/nwn/	Website: Blog: Based on Typepad software	Community Newsletter,
Reuters - SL Bureau	October 2006 (early-mid).	http://secondline.reuters.com	Website: Blog	Journalistic, quite formal. Slight business bias?
Second Life Herald	23 October 2003 (Alphaville Herald) May-June 2004 (SL Herald)	www.secondlifeherald.com	Website: Blog: Based on Typepad software	Tabloid journalism mostly. Ironic, immersive.
Second Thoughts	February 2008	www.secondthoughts.typepad.com	Website: Blog: Based on Typepad software	Personal blog with rumours/news. Incendiary.
SL News Network	October 2006.	slnn.com	Website: News Feed style blog	Journalistic - claims AP style.
Terra Nova	11 September 2003	terranova.blogs.com	Website: Multiple Author Blog: Based on Typepad software	Academic & blog - personal yet reflective.
Virtual Worlds News	17 February 2007	www.virtualworldsnews.com	Website: Blog: Based on Typepad software	Journalistic - business and industry focus.
Virtually Blind	21 January 2007	www.virtuallyblind.com	Website: Blog: Based on Wordpress software	Legal, journalistic, quite formal.
Your 2nd Place	May 2007	www.your2ndplace.com	Website: Multiple author blog	Personal news blog.

Appendix One – Content Analysis

Publication	Accept freelance articles	Comments enabled	Requirements to comment	General impression of comments
AvaStar	On application. Calls for 'citizen media' i.e. pictures, tips etc.	Yes	Register & login	0-3, usually none.
Massively	No - paid, hired bloggers only. Accept tips	Yes.	Email & Confirmation	5-10 on average.
Metaverse Journal	Yes - says no pay, but DH said payment.	Yes	Optional: email	Average 0-10, spikes to 30.
Metaverse Messenger	Doesn't say.	No	n/a	None
New World Notes	Yes - no pay	Yes	Email & Name	Average: 4.6, between 0-15 usually, spikes to 40ish.
Reuters - SL Bureau	No (appears not).	Yes. But not for all stories, indefinitely.	Email & name	Comments closed for many stories.
Second Life Herald	Yes - L\$1000-2000 per story.	Yes.	Email & Name - Moderated	Between 10-100+
Second Thoughts	No.	Yes.	Email & Name	Average 18, between 1-50
SL News Network	Yes - L\$800-1200 per article.	Yes.	Email & Name & Code	N/A (Chronological archive unavailable)
Terra Nova	No - guest authors on application.	Yes.	Email & Name	5-30
Virtual Worlds News	Not sure - accepts 'news' and tips but appears not articles.	Yes.	Email & Name	0-10, usually 0 or 1.
Virtually Blind	On application.	Yes.	Email & Confirmation	0-5, spikes to 50ish
Your 2nd Place	On application.	Yes.	None	1-20, spikes to 40-50

Appendix One – Content Analysis

Publication	Average number of posts per week (4-31 August 2008)	Average number of comments per post (4-31 August 2008)	Average number of comments - weekly (4-31 August 2008)	Advertising on page	Traffic ranking: 3 months average from Alexa
AvaStar	4.75	1.4	6.65	Yes - but very little (e.g. 1 ad per page). Run by RL media company...	236,834
Massively	4.5	7.3	32.85	Yes.	17,843
Metaverse Journal	9	1.1	9.9	Yes	371,238
Metaverse Messenger	28 pages of pdf			Yes	1,016,319
New World Notes	23.75	4.6	109.25	Yes - federate media 'author', so syndicated advertising.	81,899
Reuters - SL Bureau	3 (21 April – 25 May 2008)	3.6 (21 April – 25 May 2008)	10.8 (21 April – 25 May 2008)	No	284 - rank for all reuters.com
Second Life Herald	8	26	208	Yes	133,570
Second Thoughts	5.5	18	99	Yes	299,958
SL News Network				Yes	
Terra Nova	1.75	13.9	24.33	No.	152,893
Virtual Worlds News	30.5	1.5	45.75	Yes.	78,245
Virtually Blind	3.5	1.5	24.33	Yes.	205,860
Your 2nd Place	3.5	9.6	33.6	Google ads yes.	493,137

APPENDIX TWO - INTERVIEWS**Interview Subjects**

Journalist – Second Life Name	Journalist – Real Life Name	Publication	Date and Location of Interview
Lowell Cremorne	David Holloway	Metaverse Journal	12 August 2008, Wollongong, NSW. (in person).
Pixeleen Mistral	Unknown	Second Life Herald	17 August 2008, Hyperborea, Second Life.
Benjamin Noble	Benjamin Duranske	Virtually Blind	22 August, Skype.
Joey Seiler	Unknown	Virtual Worlds News	31 August 2008, Skype.
Tateru Nino	Unknown	Massively	14 September 2008, Second Life.
Eric Krangle	Eric Reuters	Reuters	16 September 2008, Skype.
Katt Kongo	Unknown	Metaverse Messenger	16 September 2008, Yahoo Messenger.
Garret Bakalava	Unknown	SLNN	23 September 2008, Yahoo Messenger.

Interview Questions

- How do you practice journalism?
 - How are your stories sourced and written? By whom?
 - What editing or filtering of stories do you do? By whom? On what criteria?
 - Is there payment for freelance? Do you have staff writers?
 - How would you describe the type of journalism you are practising? For example as tabloid, blogs, participatory, fourth estate, credible...
- Business model of publication:
 - Do you operate as amateur, non-for-profit, advertising supported, donation supported...
 - What size is your publication? How many permanent journalists or casual/freelance contributors do you have?
 - How frequently would you post stories? How many on average per week. How many hits per story, or number of hits on the whole site?
 - Where and how do you publish?
 - How long have you been publishing? How did you get started?
- How is your relationship with readers structured?
 - How do you think your readers find your stories?
 - How do you try to attract readers?
 - Can readers comment on stories? Can they contribute stories? How often and how much do they? Is this interaction important to you?
 - Is credibility important to you? How do you try to establish credibility with your readers?
- How would you describe your role in the Second Life society?

- For example as the Fourth estate, gate watching, gate keeping, narrator, public opinion, debate/forum place, etc...
- Do you think your publication is noticed by Linden Lab? Does the opinion/coverage have any effect on them?
- Does the opinion/coverage have any effect on Second Life society? On particular groups of society? On the outcome of the events/conflicts reported?
- Do you think the role or practice of journalism in Second Life has changed? How and why? (i.e. crucial events, growth, are people more open or shy?)
- Talking more generally about Second Life, how do you think Linden Lab govern?
 - For example hands-off, arbitrary, consumer-producer relationship, PR, citizen-government...
 - Do you think users of Second Life bring any expectations of rights/obligations to Second Life? Or acquire them in the process of joining the Second Life society?
 - Do you think Linden Lab feel any obligations towards users? Do those obligations position users as citizens or consumers?
 - What other processes of social control exist? Where does journalism fit in with these?
 - Have you ever been censored by LL? Or by another Second Life group?
- Communication between LL and users?
 - How does LL communicate with users? With you as part of the Second Life media?
 - What form does this communication take? Citizen-government, consumer-producer, corporation-public?
 - Do you think journalism plays an important role in Second Life?
 - Who do you think has more influence with Linden Lab: indigenous Second Life media or real life media or users?

APPENDIX THREE – IMAGES OF SECOND LIFE



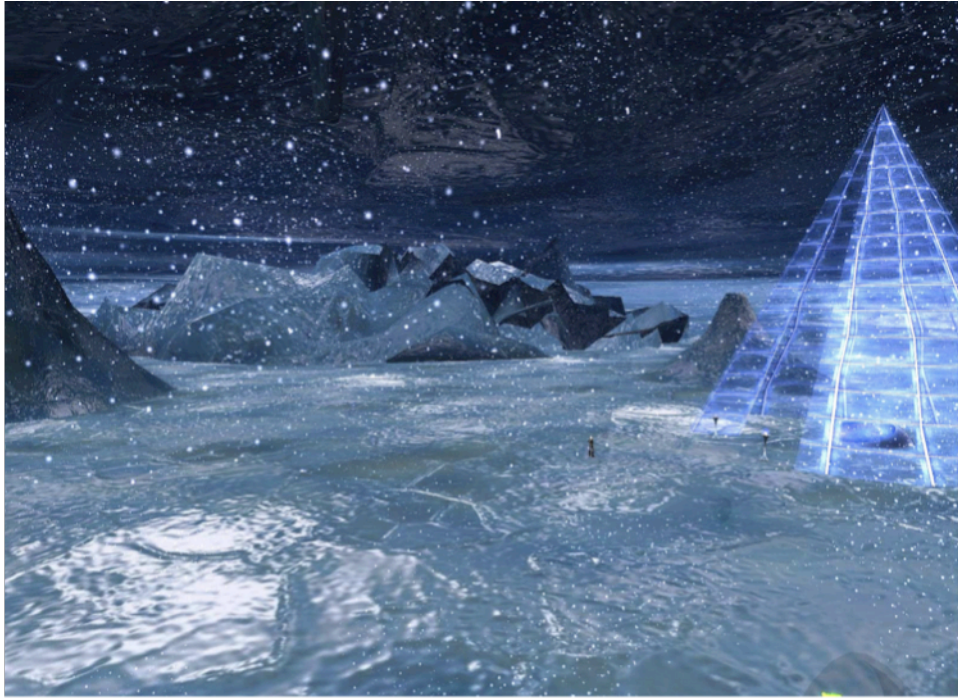
Aimee Weber's Rezday Party – Jan 26 2008

Linden, Pathfinder. (2008). "Aimee Weber's Rezday Party – Jan 26 2008" [Flickr](http://www.flickr.com/photos/pathfinderlinden/2222566255/), 27 January 2008. Accessed: 20 November 2008, from <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/pathfinderlinden/2222566255/>>



Hanging out at University of Kansas art booth

Linden, Pathfinder. (2008). "Hanging out at University of Kansas art booth" [Flickr](http://www.flickr.com/photos/pathfinderlinden/3036100408/), 16 November 2008. Accessed: 20 November 2008, from <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/pathfinderlinden/3036100408/>>



A vast glacial environment

Tizzy, Bettina. (2008). "A vast glacial environment" [Flickr](https://www.flickr.com/photos/bettinatizzy/2603855490/in/set-72157604963157779/), 23 June 2008. Accessed: 20 November 2008, from <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bettinatizzy/2603855490/in/set-72157604963157779/>>



Meeting with Grad Students in Second Life

Linden, Pathfinder. (2006). "Meeting with Grad Students in Second Life" [Flickr](https://www.flickr.com/photos/pathfinderlinden/157712296/), 31 May 2006. Accessed: 20 November 2008, from <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/pathfinderlinden/157712296/>>



Touring the Garden on Lumiere's Noir's beautiful Fleur de Lys vehicle

Tizzy, Bettina. (2008). "Touring the Garden on Lumiere's Noir's beautiful Fleur de Lys vehicle" [Flickr](http://www.flickr.com/photos/bettinatizzy/2504681654/in/set-72157604963157779/), 18 May 2008. Accessed: 20 November 2008, from <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bettinatizzy/2504681654/in/set-72157604963157779/>>



Piano – Eve region (Legend City)

Tizzy, Bettina. (2008). "Piano – Eve region (Legend City)" [Flickr](http://www.flickr.com/photos/bettinatizzy/3038883441/), 17 November 2008. Accessed: 20 November 2008, from <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bettinatizzy/3038883441/>>

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