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Virtual World Television Products and Practices: Comparing Television Production in *Second Life* to Traditional Television Production

CarrieLynn D. Reinhard

Dominican University, USA

Pooky Amsterdam

PookyMedia, USA

Abstract

The virtual world *Second Life* provides for user-generated content creation as a necessary condition for its construction and sustenance. Through the co-construction of designing the world, in individual and collective acts, *Second Life* users have become television producers. Their ability to produce content analogous to traditional television indicates how the virtual world is a social medium aligned with the paradigmatic shift from consumption to produsage known as Web 2.0. This project analyzes the television production in this virtual world and uses it to define Virtual World Television (VWTV), which is separate yet related to the production activity of machinima. The analysis presented considers how the products, practices, positions and power dynamics of the VWTV producers in *Second Life* are comparable to those of traditional television. The comparisons are made to consider the extent to which VWTV producers are embracing the disruptive capabilities of Web 2.0 to transgress traditional television. The analysis of products and practices indicates that there is no widespread transgression of the content formats of television, or in how television productions are deemed to be successful. In addition, there appear to be numerous overlaps in the practices, positions and power dynamics of production. However, the very act of changing their relationship to television-as-text by engaging with a new form of television-as-technology indicates how the producers are able to transgress traditional television due to the capabilities of this Web 2.0 social medium.

1. Introduction

The emergence of Web 2.0 as an overarching paradigm for the Internet has facilitated video production by amateurs and semi-professionals, allowing them to assume a role traditionally held by television and film institutions. This ability is due in part to Internet-based technologies of distribution reducing production costs. With the rise of virtual worlds as collaborative and user-generated spaces, costs can be further reduced due to new technologies of production. In addition to having these production capabilities, virtual worlds also provide for built-in audiences who can be consumers within the world or participants in a live studio audience; they can also crew and become involved in production. The amateurs and semi-professionals who produce in virtual worlds do so as part of the audience for and users of those virtual worlds, as they themselves did not originate the design of those particular media products. Virtual World Television (VWTV) refers to the production of television programming within virtual worlds by these audiences/users turned producers.

The reported project was undertaken to explore the definitions and practices of VWTV from the perspective of those who have used virtual worlds to create television programming. The intent has been to understand the nature and potential of these productions, as well as how they compare to traditional practices and relationships in television production, distribution, and exhibition. What is being learned from these case studies could provide insight into the wider phenomenon of the Web 2.0 paradigm and the potential for social media to transgress codified practices and power dynamics by facilitating a shift from consumption to produsage (Bruns, 2008). This paper's analysis focuses on VWTV products, practices, positions and power dynamics and how they relate to their analogues in traditional television.

To begin this comparison, we define virtual world television and explain the method for conducting the case studies of VWTV producers. The paper's analysis begins by discussing the nature of various VWTV products and how the producers defined the success of those products. The second part of the analysis considers the processes undertaken to produce VWTV. The final part of the analysis considers the issues of positions and power dynamics between producers and consumers for VWTV. Each analysis is considered in comparison to traditional television. These comparisons are then used to consider where transgressions are occurring that reflect the Web 2.0 paradigm shift.

2. Defining Virtual Worlds Television

Virtual worlds are digital environments in which people, via digital representations or avatars, gather and engage in a variety of social and personal activities (Bell, 2008; Kohler et al, 2011; Schroeder, 2008). Virtual worlds are media products that attempt to replicate aspects of reality through digital (re)construction (Falvey, 2011). Virtual worlds, as digital artifacts and constructions, do not (re)present any aspect of reality unless through conscious design, by a production company and/or the combined efforts of its users. Their formation, population, promulgation, and presentation are wholly dependent upon the actions of people, producers and users. The more common versions of virtual worlds are structured for gaming, such as *World of Warcraft* or *EverQuest*. Others may involve some aspect of gaming, but their primary design is to facilitate social interaction and communication amongst people (Rak, 2009), such as *Blue Mars* or *Habbo Hotel*. The focus on socializing is often cited as a reason people engage with virtual worlds, regardless of their primary purpose (Goel et al, 2013; Golub, 2010), and the phenomenon we are discussing would not be possible without this social interaction.

Across virtual worlds, people have been creating places to produce television programming. Unlike websites like Xtranormal (www.xtranormal.com) or TVML (www.nhk.or.jp/strl/tvml) that offer single users the chance to create computer animated programs, virtual worlds can involve the activities

of multiple users coordinating in real time to produce programming via processes that are similar to television production in the physical world, such as acting, sound recording, sound editing, video recording, and video editing. To be considered television series, these productions have to be multi-part fictional or non-fictional productions that are not intended to be a feature film. The production can be either serial or episodic, and such productions represent a range of genres. There are productions recorded as avatars interact with one another and are then edited in post-production for streaming. These productions are analogous to filmed drama and comedy television series. Then there are productions that live stream the avatars' interactions as they occur, while also recording them for later streaming. These productions are analogous to the variety of live shows on television, from news to sports to special events.

VWTV is not synonymous with machinima. Since the mid-1990s, machinima has been concerned with the use of game engines, virtual worlds, and other digital environments for the production of content that can be characterized as real-time animation or animated filmmaking (Fosk, 2011; Nitsche, 2011). Machinimists utilize the digital spaces, organized performances, screen capture and audio recording software to produce fictional and non-fictional content. Thus, VWTV and machinima share some technologies and practices of production (Lowood, 2011; Nitsche, 2011). Where they differ is in the digital spaces utilized and the type of content produced. First, VWTV is strictly focused on those digital spaces that are definable as virtual worlds, whereas machinima could be produced in any digital space, including specialized animation programs (Fosk, 2011). Second, the discourse surrounding machinima, and how machinimists typically position themselves, aligns more with filmmaking than television production. The term itself represents this discourse, as it is an amalgamation of "machine" and "cinema" (Lowood, 2006), and the products are typically referred to as "movies" or "films". While VWTV and machinima may share similarities in how they are produced, their production locations and end results are enough to differentiate them as related but not synonymous.

Many of these productions appear to follow practices developed in research on television production in collaborative virtual environments. In the United Kingdom, researchers experimented with how to use a three dimensional virtual environment to produce "Inhabited Television" (Benford et al, 1999; Bowers, 2001; Craven et al, 2000). The audience was invited into the virtual environment to participate in the content production, which was recorded to be broadcast on traditional television. In their research, they built the digital environment in which production occurred and defined a framework within which the audience interacted and participated to generate content: the interaction between performers and the audience was recorded to broadcast (Van den Bergh et al, 2007).

This production model replicates a similar procedure found across Web 2.0 technologies, which is understandable as virtual worlds are part of the Web 2.0 paradigm (Rak, 2009). The paradigm shift has involved the creation of online technologies that facilitate people's ability to create content as the production and distribution tools have become more accessible to the general public (Bruns, 2008; Carpentier, 2009). In a sense, these technologies can be seen as sharing a fundamental design philosophy of "build it, and let them create" (Reinhard & Amsterdam, 2011): the technologies provide structures in which people can more actively participate in the production and distribution of content. For example, YouTube was designed to provide a distribution space for people's videos (Jarrett, 2008). The producers of YouTube did not provide content for it; they created the means to make it easier for non-computer experts to distribute their content online. They built the space and let the users create by using it.

Virtual worlds are representative technologies of this paradigm, especially those with higher requirements for user-generated content. For example, created by Linden Labs in 2003 (Gottschalk, 2010), *Second Life* is a social virtual world predicated on user-generated content that permits and

promotes practically unlimited creative expression (Boellstorff, 2010; Kohler et al, 2011). While Linden Labs provides the server space and the basic rules for engagement with/in the world, they are not responsible for the world's content. In order to create content within the world, people have to rent "islands" or server space from Linden Labs. Once the user pays for the island, the user has largely free reign to build on it as desired, creating everything from shopping malls to sex clubs. Unlike worlds designed for primarily gaming purposes, none of *Second Life* would exist if people were not learning and utilizing the rules and building tools created by Linden Labs for their individual and collective purposes.

What makes the activities in *Second Life* unique in comparison to other Web 2.0 technologies is that the virtual world allows for user-generated production, distribution and exhibition of the users' creative visions. Online production has been limited, primarily to text production (i.e. blogging and microblogging), individualized video production (i.e. Xtranormal or Moviestorm) or experimental crowd-sourced production. In *Second Life*, production is expanded to allow multiple avatars to inhabit the same production space and to create, synchronously or asynchronously, audio and video. Such production capabilities afford many types of programming to occur, if the users, individually or collectively, choose to express themselves in that fashion.

VWTV, then, is the utilization of virtual world structures to design spaces and enact practices to produce texts we can identify as television; were they not to resemble any preexisting text, then comparison would not be possible or of critical interest. Thus, VWTV producers are utilizing a social medium to produce content within the provided structure rather than just distributing through it. Such capabilities represent the potential for the Web 2.0 paradigm; the question remains, in what ways are the producers of VWTV capitalizing on this potential, such that they, through their products and practices, are transgressing the practices and power dynamics codified by the history of television in the physical world.

3. Describing the Project

Selection process. In order to determine our case studies, we constructed a database of VWTV productions. We gathered this database through searches of YouTube and other streaming capable websites. We found programming that represents a multitude of worlds, genres and regularity of production. The database contains 68 productions across numerous virtual worlds that have met these criteria; within *Second Life*, at least 54 television series have been produced. Each of the 68 productions was contacted to participate in the project.

However, in the end, only programming created within *Second Life* was included, for several reasons. First, the user-generated nature of *Second Life* includes the ability for the producers to retain intellectual property rights for the series they produce; such IP rights would not occur in a gaming world, where the world's designers hold the creative copyrights, and therefore *Second Life* is an ideal platform for those interested in a tool of self-expression (Partala, 2011). Second, the ability to retain IP rights may be the reason that across the virtual worlds surveyed for this study, *Second Life* contains the highest prevalence of produced and distributed television series: 79% of the located programming occurred within *Second Life*. Third, there exist in *Second Life* a series of broadcast and streaming networks that are analogs to the television networks that distribute series in the physical world: Treet TV (formerly SLCN), Metaverse TV, and Metamix TV. Fourth, as a co-author of this project, Pooky operated as a gatekeeper, facilitating entry to this particular community of producers. For these specific reasons, producers in *Second Life* became the focus of this study.

The interviews. The producers were contacted via email and interviewed via Skype. They were asked to discuss the following: what led them to enter *Second Life* and to create their series; what were their ideas of the series' design and the audience's role for the program; what they were challenged by and learned about; how they were helped and hindered during production; and how they saw virtual world television in relationship to traditional television, as well as its future. As listed in Table 1, 23 producers of 39 productions were interviewed, and their productions have been categorized for their traditional television analogues, which will be discussed further in the following analysis section. Of these productions, 23 are part of the Treet TV network, 13 are with Metaverse TV, one is with Metamix TV, and one is streamed independently. Producers were interviewed as and are referred to by their *Second Life* avatar names to reflect their in-world identities as producers and to maintain any desire for anonymity and distance between their virtual and physical identities.

Table 1: Second Life VWTV Products and Genre Categorizations

Producer's Avatar	Product Title	Product Genre	Streaming Location
Claus Uriza	<i>PopVox</i>	Live Performance Show	http://treet.tv/shows/popvox
Pooky Amsterdam	<i>The 1st Question</i>	Game Show	http://www.the1stquestion.com/
	<i>The Dating Casino</i>	Game Show	http://www.thedatingcasino.com/
	<i>Time Travelers</i>	Drama	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCvktXDi6Z8
RacerX Gulwing	<i>Giant Snail Races</i>	Sports Show	http://treet.tv/shows/snailraces
Lauren Weyland	<i>Lauren Live</i>	Live Performance Show	http://treet.tv/shows/laurenlive
Yxes Delacroix	<i>Shopping Showcase</i>	News Show	http://treet.tv/shows/shopping
Crap Mariner	<i>The Grid's Honest Truth</i>	News Show	http://treet.tv/shows/honesttruth
Twstd Ruggle	<i>The Stream Scene</i>	Live Performance Show	http://metaversetv.com/blog/2009/10/the-stream-scene/
	<i>Music on the Isle</i>	Live Performance Show	http://archive.treet.tv/programs/music-isle
Paisley Beebe	<i>Tonight Live with Paisley Beebe</i>	Talk Show	http://tonightlivewithpaisleybeebe.com/
	<i>Live n Kickin</i>	Talk Show	http://archive.treet.tv/programs/live-n-kickin
	<i>Fabulous Fashion</i>	Design Show	http://archive.treet.tv/programs/fabulous-fashion
Cybergrrl Oh	<i>Real Biz in SL</i>	News Show	http://archive.treet.tv/programs/real-biz-sl
John Zhaoying	<i>Cisco TechChats</i>	Talk Show	http://treet.tv/shows/ciscotalks
	<i>Smarter Tech</i>	Talk Show	(No URL available)
Dousa Dragonash	<i>Grid Wrap</i>	Talk Show	http://metaversetv.com/blog/2010/08/grid-wrap/
	<i>Out and About</i>	News Show	http://www.metaverse-tv.com/outandabout.htm
	<i>Wetaverse</i>	News Show	http://metaversetv.com/blog/2012/03/wetaverse/
	<i>MBC News</i>	News Show	http://metaversetv.com/blog/category/shows/mbc-news/
Frolic Mills	<i>Metaverse Live</i>	Talk Show	http://metaversetv.com/metaverse-live/
	<i>The Frolic Mills Show</i>	Talk Show	http://metaversetv.com/the-frolic-mills-show/
Lucy Eberhart	<i>Styling Forward</i>	Reality Show	http://metaversetv.com/styling-forward/
	<i>Lucy Listens</i>	Drama	http://metaversetv.com/blog/2009/11/lucy-listens/
Malburns Writer	<i>The Real Desperate Housewives of Beaver Ridge</i>	Drama	http://metaversetv.com/blog/2011/08/the-real-desperate-housewives-of-beaver-ridge/
	<i>Grumpy Old Avatars</i>	Talk Show	http://metaversetv.com/blog/2010/10/grumpy-old-avatars/
Phelan Corrimal	<i>Crossworlds</i>	Talk Show	http://metaversetv.com/crossworlds/
Kinte Ferguson	<i>Inside the Avatar Studio</i>	Talk Show	http://metaversetv.com/inside-the-avatar-studio/
Zen Paine	<i>Spotlight</i>	Talk Show	(No URL available)
MarkTwain White	<i>The Daily Pwn</i>	Talk Show	http://treet.tv/shows/dailypwn
Slim Warrior	<i>SailOn</i>	Sports Show	http://archive.treet.tv/sailon
Benton Wunderlich	<i>Amped Up!</i>	Talk Show	http://metaversetv.com/amped-up/
Saffia Widdershins	<i>Music Academy onLive</i>	Live Performance Show	http://treet.tv/shows/musicacademy
Jilly Kidd	<i>Designing Worlds</i>	Design Show	http://treet.tv/shows/designingworlds
	<i>Happy Hunting!</i>	Game Show	http://treet.tv/shows/happy-hunting
	<i>Metaverse Arts</i>	Design Show	http://treet.tv/shows/metaverse-arts
Beyer Sellers	<i>Meet an Author</i>	Talk Show	http://treet.tv/shows/meetanauthor
	<i>Metanomics</i>	Talk Show	http://www.metanomics.net/

4. Analyzing the Products

To consider how VWTV compares with traditional television, a worthwhile place of analytical departure is in the nature of the content being compared. In Table 1, the productions are labeled to describe the nature of their content. The content was identified by sampling episodes, by reading their online descriptions and through the interviews. Of the programming included in this study, most could be classified as representing content and format styles that replicate genre conventions established throughout traditional television’s history: “talk shows” were the most common (38.5%), followed by “news shows” (15.4%) and “live performance shows” (12.8%), which primarily consisted of musicians performing in-world. The only type of productions that do not have a close analogue with traditional television would be the “design shows:” these are series that focus on the design aspects of and designers within the virtual world. An analogue could be programming that focuses on cultural production, from art to cuisine, but there is enough uniqueness in the user-generation in *Second Life* that allows for these productions to be specially bound to the nature of the virtual world.

Three television programs illustrate the primary differences in the content and style of these productions. *Metanomics* was produced, distributed and exhibited in the world as well as streamed to their website beginning in 2007. The series was categorized as a talk show as every episode would feature one or more guests to discuss some aspect of virtual worlds. In addition, the producers actively invited audience members to participate by asking the guests questions during the show. To facilitate this relationship and role of the audience, a television studio was built to resemble those found in the physical world, as seen in Figure 1. Audience members could ask questions via an in-world texting feature called a chatbridge; all viewers in-world and online were connected to each other and the episode’s producers and guests via this chatbridge. Such chatting features have been considered for social interaction with traditional television (see Chorianopoulous & Lekakos, 2008). This texting feature and the studio set have been common design features for *Second Life* productions that are classified as talk shows and game shows. In Figure 2, Pooky Amsterdam’s game show *The 1st Question* is another example of this configuration.



Figure 1: Beyer Seller's Metanomics

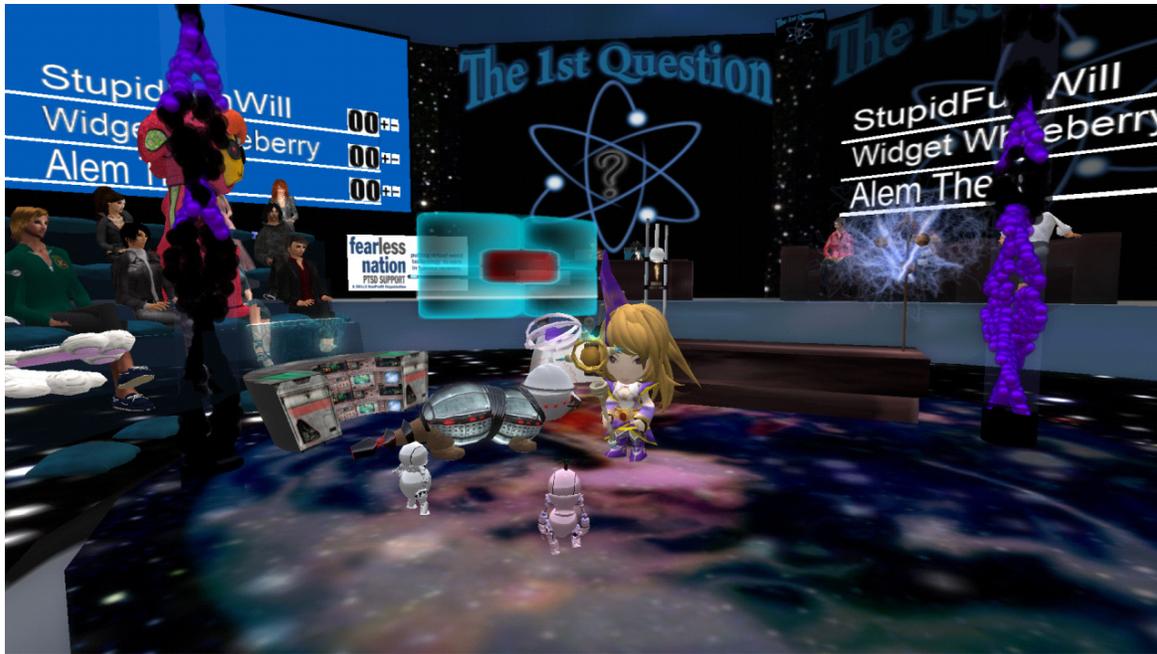


Figure 2: Pooky Amsterdam's The 1st Question

A second example is an ongoing series that differs from *Metanomics* in that the audience does not participate via a chatbridge and it is not recorded in a television studio format. The series *Giant Snail Races*, produced by RacerX Gulwing, is part race, part obstacle course. In this show, *Second Life* users can participate in each episode as contestants that decorate snail avatars to match an episode's specific theme; the contestants control the avatars around a race track / obstacle course as RacerX and his co-hosts narrate their progress. The design of this series, as seen in Figure 3, can also be seen in others sports shows and live performance shows, where in-world inhabitants are most commonly positioned as spectators but have the potential to become virtual athletes or performers.



Figure 3: RacerX Gulwing's Giant Snail Races

A third example replicates programming that would be recorded and edited prior to any audience involvement. In these genres, inhabitants can only participate by being the featured guests of particular episodes, such as live performance shows, news shows, design shows and reality shows, or as hired or voluntary actors in the drama shows. In Figure 4, Lucy Eberhart's *The Real Desperate Housewives of Beaver Ridge* is an example of a production filmed without any audience but with a cast comprised of *Second Life* inhabitants. The narrative follows various characters in the setting of Beaver Ridge, and has some distinctly comedic flair to its scripts, themes, and characterizations. Any major audience involvement occurs during the exhibition and consumption stages.



Figure 4: Lucy Eberhart's *The Real Desperate Housewives of Beaver Ridge*

In replicating the genres of traditional television, each of these three main formats of VWTV programming also replicates the typical style and audience positions of those genres. Talk and games shows have audiences in the live studio audience that may or may not engage with the content. Unless the person is the athlete or performer, people are positioned as spectators in live performance and sports shows, to provide enthusiasm and support for those in the spotlight. Further, unless the person is the focus of the content, such as in drama or new shows, then the audience is positioned as consumer, removed from the production process entirely. However, there are differences with traditional television in the amount of the opportunities for people to engage in and with the content: the snail avatars are not controlled by specialized athletes but by any *Second Life* inhabitant; and the audience of avatars in *Metanomics* does not have to wait to be called upon by the producer to participate. In *Second Life*, the traditional formats do not necessarily remediate traditional audience activities.

5. Analyzing the Criteria for Success

When asked about how they determined the quality and success of their productions and those of others, the producers discussed criteria related to traditional television's criteria. The criteria most directly comparable are the ratings and techniques of the productions. There currently is no system used for VWTV that is comparable to the Nielsen rating system (<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en.html>). Those producers who indicated the importance of a quantitative measurement of success mentioned to the hits

to their online videos or the size of the in-world and online audiences. RacerX Gulwing referred to the “attendance at the track” to have a sense as to how many *Second Life* users were engaging with his production. In agreement was Paisley Beebe, a producer of several productions:

I determine success of the shows by analyzing the after show stats provided by Treet.tv. ... Not having access to other shows' stats, I would look at how many in the in-world audience there was, how many people are logged in to the live streaming software and online chat stream if available.

While numbers were a consideration for some producers, it was a criterion rarely mentioned. A low reliance on quantitative measurements could be due to the restrictions placed on the size of in-world audiences at recordings and the uncertainty of whether or not online views are unique, repetitious or partial.

A criterion more commonly mentioned is the assessment of the series' techniques. For several producers, a program would be considered of good quality if it appeared professional; as Claus Uriza of *PopVox* said, “Shows must be pro and directed like [real life] shows on TV.” If a series is produced professionally, then there would be no technical problems with filming, editing, and sound design. According to Saffia Widdershins, who has overseen various productions:

It's just that I believe that the conventions and language of television has been established over the years – often by trial and error – can be equally valid in a virtual world. So establishing shots, cuts between the principals, foregrounding the interviewees...all this adds quality to TV shows for me.

Others could forgive some technical glitches as long as the content was of a strong caliber. As Phelan Corrimal of *Inside the Avatar Studio* described it:

Unless a program is just completely unwatchable – bad sound, bad recording, etc. – then generally I'll give these types of programs the benefit of the doubt in order to get to the content rather than the whiz, bang, and flash that goes on around it.

The issue of providing engaging content appeared to be the most common criterion the producers had for judging success and quality. The more the program approximates and appropriates the technical quality of traditional television, then the more these producers would be likely to judge that program as worthy of recognition.

Another criterion did not have a direct analogue to traditional television. This criterion dealt with the producers' conceptualization of their audience and the extent to which people were involved with and engrossed in the program. RacerX and Phelan considered the importance of the virtual world as a social medium that permits and promotes audience engagement. Both producers discussed the extent to which people would become involved with and voluntarily attend the production as an important indicator of the series' success. As Phelan described it:

Many of the quality improvements to the show over four seasons has been the result of folks wanting to up the quality of the show and then taking ownership of those production values without having been asked to do so. I think the fact that we have volunteers at all willing to work on such projects speaks to the success of the show.

Engrossment with content is a common criterion applied to more traditional media content, sometimes conceptualized as identification (Cohen, 2001) or transportation (Green, 2004). However, user and audience involvement with the production of content is more indicative of the social media and

Web 2.0 paradigm with “social TV” (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012) as a newer consideration for judging quality and success.

6. Analyzing the Production Practices

In analyzing the series and discussing them with their producers, two production practices have analogues to the production of traditional television: the labors of production and the creative process. The producers reported working with crews that were peopled by *Second Life* inhabitants who handled different production tasks, such as: network executives, co-producers and writers; anchors, interviewers, hosts and co-hosts; assistant producers, directors and stage managers; camera operators, sound technicians, editors and set designers. Each of these crew positions has a direct corollary in traditional television. The production of a complex program can require multiple people performing different tasks so as to not overburden one person with the coordination of the entire production. Following traditional television’s production practices can also allow those who want to develop such skills and experience a way to do so, creating an opportunity for transference from the virtual into the physical. As both involve the same type of multimodal production, we would expect there to be similar crew positions.

A difference between the two can be seen in who is doing the production. First, VWTV producers may be found engaging in various production practices. Oftentimes a producer is in the dual position of being the executive producer of the series as well as its main host or interviewer. Dousa Dragonash, who produces numerous shows for Metaverse TV, serves as producer, writer and interviewer for *MBC News*. Lucy Eberhart produces, writes and directs for her drama *The Real Desperate Housewives of Beaver Ridge*. In traditional television, there is a basic conceptualization of a producer positioned as the creator of the series (Shattuc, 2005). However, it is the rare few that engage in several production practices consistently on their creations. The VWTV producers are positioned as this creative force by taking on additional production tasks within their own series.

More so, the producers can also be found assisting on other producers’ series. And not just the producers, but a number of crew members can be found doing similar or different activities for different programs. There was such an abundance of people working on numerous series that mapping their interconnections became a useful analytic tool. Tuft University’s concept mapping tool Visual Understanding Environment (VUE) 3.1.2 was utilized to show the connections between productions and crew members. In conducting such a mapping, it became clear that the interconnections were primarily dependent upon the television network with which the series was associated.

In Figure 5, the map shows the interconnections of the people who have crewed for various programs organized for Treet TV. The mapping begins with the positions of Treet TV’s creators and network executives, Texas Timtam and Wiz Nordberg, who were connected to the various central series (indicated by green boxes) not only in the capacity as network executives: for a majority of those series they also served as camera operators, sound technicians and/or editors. Starr Sonic shares their color scheme as she also served as a network executive, or liaison between the series and the network. Cybergrrl Oh and Yxes Delacroix, who were interviewed as producers for their own series, also worked, respectively, as host and director for other productions. Beyond them, various crew members (as indicated in pink) worked in a number of capacities for various programs. Among the more active was Petlove Petshop, who crewed for five different series, as co-producer, sound technician, camera operator, and editor.

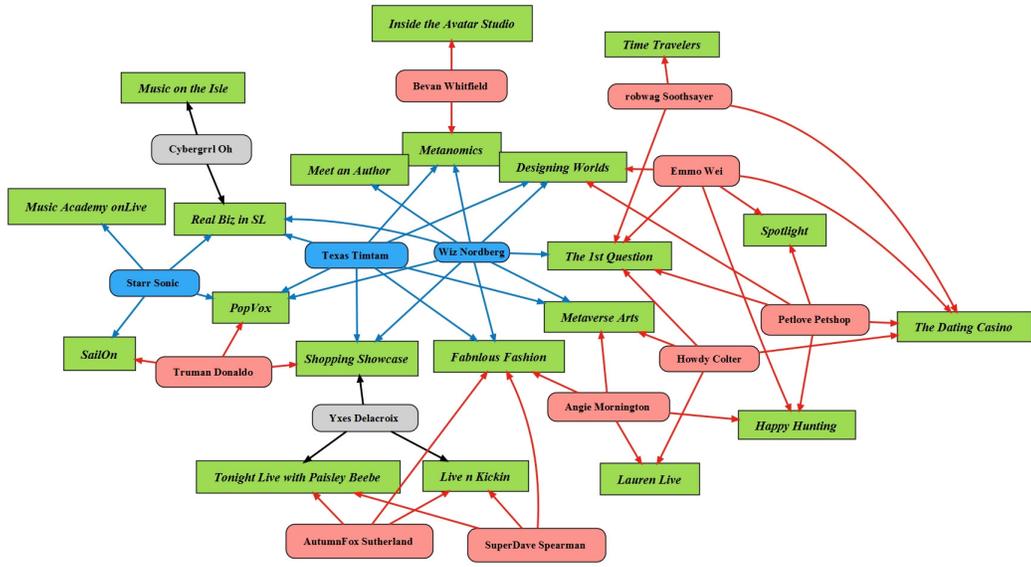


Figure 5: Interconnections of Individuals Assisting Production of Various Treet TV Series

In Figure 6, the map illustrates the various people who have worked on productions for Metaverse TV. As with the map for Treet TV, this map centers around Robustus Hax, a primary figure in the Metaverse TV network; however, it could as easily center around Dousa Dragonash, given the extent to which she was involved with a majority of the series included in this study. While Robustus was considered as a network executive by some of those interviewed, he was often related to the series through his work as a camera operator and editor; he even served as a set designer, building the 3-D digital spaces for *MBC News*, *Metaverse Live* and *Grumpy Old Avatars*. Slim Warrior and Malburns Writer, when not working on their productions for which they were interviewed, served as co-producers, hosts, and writers for their colleagues’ productions. As with Treet TV, a number of crew members worked on a variety of Metaverse TV series. Interestingly, only Ken Alphaville and Sigmund Leominister were not engaged as a set designer for these productions: Ken served as a camera operator and Sigmund as a host and a writer.

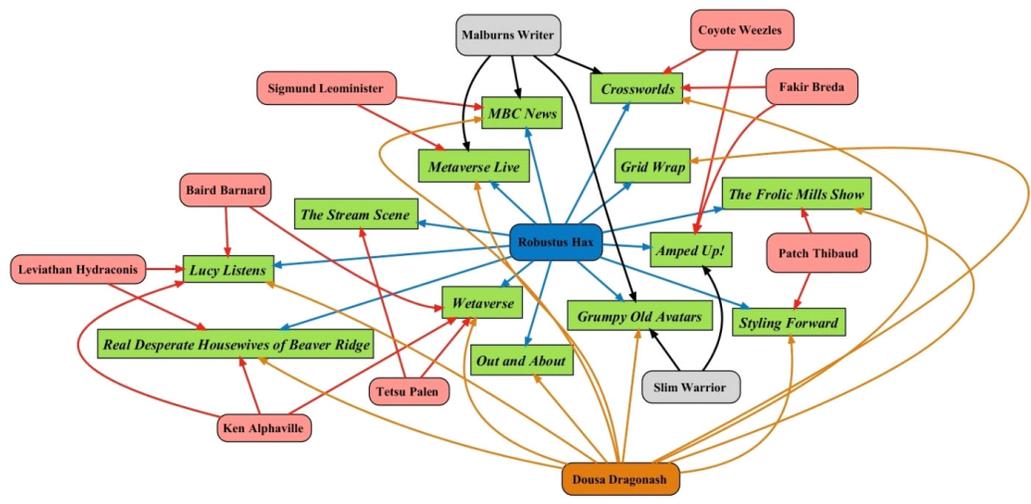


Figure 6: Interconnections of Individuals Assisting Production of Various Metaverse TV Series

When considering these mappings side-by-side, it does appear that Metaverse TV has a more centralized production structure whereas Treet TV does not have the same concentration of production activities. That is, in Metaverse TV, for the series included in this study, two people appear to be doing more for more series than the central two people for Treet TV. This difference could be due to the former being more active as a network at the time of the study. While there were ongoing series associated with Treet TV, the network itself was not as active during the study due to personal reasons that caused the withdrawal of Wiz and Texas from the network they had started. Those still producing for Treet TV had to adapt to the lack of a centralized structure, relying more on each other and new talent to continue their productions.

Another practice in the production process concerned the producers' creative process, either with the help of the virtual world, or as a response to the problems of trying to create in it. The first act focused on how the nature of the virtual world directly contributed to the producers' creative expression. Frolic Mills of several fashion-related series felt the virtual world permitted him to achieve what he could not in the physical world.

[Second Life] is our world, it's our imagination. I think one of the beautiful things about Second Life is that you get to learn and experience things that maybe you never tried in the real world, and if I'm honest with you, it helps. ... It's a place for experimentation, and if you make a mistake, nobody really cares much, and you learn and you grow and you get better.

Pooky Amsterdam has found that, for her dramatic series *Time Travelers*, the creativity expressed by other users in *Second Life* has helped her produce her series: she has been able to travel to different areas in the world created by others just as a location scout searches for the perfect place to film. The difference being that operating in a digital environment means users can generate content that is not possible in the physical world due to the laws of physics. The monetary expense to produce in *Second Life* relative to traditional TV also facilitates content creation in ways that would be cost prohibitive in the physical world.

However, *Second Life* is not without its limitations. The second act focused on the direct opposite of the first. Beyond the learning curve necessary to acquire design skills, there are limitations imposed by these tools: the user must work with the sculpting and programming tools decided upon by Linden Labs. And yet, even this imposition has not completely hindered the producers; the limitation has prompted some to find creative workarounds, or kludge fixes, in order to produce their creative visions in their productions. Malburns Writer of numerous news shows argued for creative expression as being limitless once those workarounds are accomplished: "I bet you can do almost anything in a virtual world, but the way you approach it, the ways around it...all those little things have to be thought of." While some producers may see the limitations of *Second Life* as a challenge they welcome, others may feel it as more of a frustration, one that has to be beaten back in order for their creative expression to be born.

Producers in the physical world working on traditional television, whether they are producing live action or animation, need to negotiate the conditions in which they can express their creativity. Any person seeking to express themselves creatively has to deal with the limitations of the medium through which they express themselves as well as negotiate with the tools they are using, from actors to cameras to computer programs. The difference is that with the virtual world, there is a greater possibility to create a television show as envisioned due to: the freedom from the physical constraints dictated by the laws of nature; the relatively low cost of production; and the ability to add-on computer generated effects as computer-generated imagery is inherent to the virtual world.

7. Analyzing Positions and Power Dynamics

In traditional television, there has been the distinct separation between the positions of producers and audiences, with the audience conceived as “audience-as-commodity” and without power except to passively receive the broadcast content (Smythe, 1977). While there have been indications in recent years of this dichotomy diminishing (Bruns, 2008), it has remained the primary conceptualization: traditional television involves different positions and an unequal balance of power between producers and consumers. The analysis here is concerned with the extent to which that conceptualization exists within VWTV.

To begin, we return to the idea of connections that was breeched in the previous analysis. Here, instead of seeing the interconnections between programs for a specific network, the connections concern how the producer perceives his or her audience. In the interviews, the producers saw these connections occurring because *Second Life* and their VWTV programming served as bridges between them and a diverse range of people: people separated geographically, people with inhibitions, and the traditionally passive audience. Lauren Weyland of *Lauren Live* saw working with/in *Second Life* as allowing for connections with people who might otherwise have been excluded.

One of the greatest benefits of virtual worlds is that virtual worlds break down all the barriers that we have towards getting to know people everywhere – from national boundaries to simply boundaries of distance and boundaries of thought processes.... The greatest benefit of a virtual world is inclusion, not exclusion.

Crap Mariner of *The Grid's Honest Truth* lauded productions for being able to take advantage of the range of talent in the world.

And also you can bring together so many talents that aren't in New York and Los Angeles that – there's kind of a country in-between those ... you have so many talents throughout the world that they can collaborate, too.

These producers and others saw the ability to reach out to people they might not have otherwise been able to. This ability comes from the productions they produce, the technological nature of *Second Life*, and the sociocultural nature of the virtual world that brings together people from around the world.

Since *Second Life* is free to use to people around the world, anyone at any place with an adequate computer and network connection can produce what they wish, and find others who wish to create but may not be able to in the physical world for any number of reasons. The virtual world, and the ability to produce television within it, provides the point of connection between these individuals. While there are undoubtedly people in traditional television who want to connect with those around the world through their productions, the importance of this possibility to VWTV producers indicates a conception of inclusion that is part of the discourse of the social medium they have appropriated for their television programming.

This professed importance of connections was also seen in how the VWTV producers discussed the importance of community within their programs. Producers reflected on how being able to commune with others through the virtual world was involved in the creation and maintenance of their programs. The producers often discussed how they saw their crew as forming a community working toward one goal. Slim Warrior of *Amped Up!* argued that to do a show well, a good crew is necessary:

The importance of doing any show, whether it's real life, whether it's in a virtual world, whether it's online, wherever it may be, is to have great communication with the team that you work with, and to have the same goals and to want the same things. ... Without a communication and a clear

sense of direction, then what would be the point of doing these things? ... If you have good communication, then you understand as a team what you are aiming for.

Many of those interviewed recognized that producing their television programs was not a solitary activity: each episode required a careful choreography of people doing different activities. The communities within each production helped to ensure that the producers' visions were expressed.

The producers also discussed how they saw the involvement of their audiences as forming another type of community. Twstd Ruggles of *Stream Scene* acknowledged that her audience is often filled with people connected to those involved with the series, either as crew or as guests. Paisley Beebe reflected on how her audiences would probably not be able to attend a live television show were it not for *Second Life*.

The audience loved it. They loved that virtual experience of being able to go to a live show. So many of the people that were coming to our shows had never been to see a real live TV show. ... So we tried to create that experience for them, so that they felt they were really in a live TV studio.

Pooky Amsterdam, in discussing her quiz show *The 1st Question*, promoted an audience-centric view towards television that included interaction:

When we do the show, what is so exciting is that the audience is absolutely encouraged to become part of it. ... To speak out and talk out, and give zingers and one liners that other people give zingers and one liners for also. It's a lot of crosstalk, the audience feeds back. ... It's very exciting because the audience becomes a part of the show through things that they are feeding back through the text chat.

As with the ability to connect and to create, the virtual world's nature promotes and permits a type of community of the audience not common to traditional television – a community where the audience directly knows those who produced the series and are able to attend and participate with a live recording in a way the majority of the traditional television audience cannot. *Second Life* is user-generated and user-centered, constructed through and containing multiple communities. Thus, seeing the audience as part of a community involved in their productions comes naturally to these producers, and helps to explain why they see audience involvement as an important criterion for judging the success of their programs.

In comparison, traditional television producers will have a community to assist in their production of a successful series (Shattuc, 2005), and being a member of a professional community can provide for the connections that facilitate job placement and production. However, it has been common practice in traditional television to have a different relationship with the audience: its history has not been one of asking the audience to interact with the production process, to the extent seen with VWTV where audience members can influence the content of the show as it is being recorded. While there are examples of such experimental engagement with modern audiences (see <http://playingwithresearch.com/2013/01/19/cbs-hawaii-five-o-content-interactivity/>), it is not to the same extent. The nature of the virtual world, with the integrated text chat feature and the cultural formulation of community, helps to encourage such audience participation on the VWTV productions that incorporate it.

8. Conclusions

Virtual World Television occurs when users of the virtual world negotiate with the technological, economic and cultural structures inherent to the virtual world to produce programming that bears some

similarity to traditional television. These users are no longer simply positioned as consumers; they have taken steps to become producers. *Second Life* is but one example of the technologies that arose with the Web 2.0 re-envisioning of the Internet, where decentralization and user-centeredness rose to higher prominence than they had before enjoyed. The ability for a community to come together, through individuals connecting to one another, and create something that can then be distributed in that digital space or outside of it, makes *Second Life*, and social virtual worlds like it, well positioned to become spaces where people experiment, such as these producers have been experimenting with television.

However, such experimentation appears to only truly transgress one aspect of traditional television. For the most part, they are not transgressing formats of traditional television, the criteria of success or the production practices. While *Second Life* affords the production of experimental and avant-garde content, no one interviewed has been producing such content, with the closest being the racing of giant snails. As the producers themselves expounded on, people rely on the familiar to understand the new. The familiar in this instance is the codified rhetoric of traditional television formats. Being too dissimilar to that rhetoric might overwhelm an audience already attempting to acclimate to the virtual world. In order to expand and cater to the audience that exists, the producers give people something of what they already expect to encounter with television. In his study of interactive television, Green (2008) discussed a similar penchant for evolution over revolution as new interactive television ventures built upon traditional television practices rather than originate them. And yet the lack of experimentation does indicate, thus far, a lack of transgression with what traditional television has codified as the definition of television.

Additionally, while there is some transgression of power dynamics due to how the audiences are engaged in some VWTV productions, the producers are not truly transgressing the traditional positions of television, since they still occupy and differentiate the identities and positions of producers, crew, and audience. The free-to-play nature and integrated communication tools of *Second Life* promote a type of democratic interplay between producers and audiences that currently is not commonly seen in traditional television. Since they both start from the same position, as users of *Second Life*, the construction of numerous VWTV productions is shaped to, in some way, maintain this equal footing. This positioning of the producers and their audiences can also be seen as reflecting the ideology of Web 2.0, especially the ideas of crowdsourcing and participatory design, where production is decentralized, allowing for an egalitarian rather than hierarchical power relationship. Indeed, the fact that their productions appear to be more of the same in genre and style when compared to traditional television may not mean they lacked the creativity to produce something else, or that their audiences lacked the creativity to appreciate something else. Instead, it can be seen as another indication of the importance of community, as producers have negotiated with audiences to determine what types of productions would be successful, and familiarity in content breeds success, even in traditional television.

However, even if the audience is more involved in some productions, such as providing questions or information to influence the content in real time, they are still the audience, occupying the same space as a physical audience: either in-world in studio seating or online watching through a screen. There is a clear demarcation between who is on stage and who is not, and the audience participation in content creation is more akin to how the studio audience or television audience can be invited to join in through specified communication channels, such as asking questions when allowed by a talk show host or callers being given the chance to participate in a quiz show. The producer designs the structure that the audience consumes in order to participate. When *Second Life* inhabitants enter into viewing the VWTV program, their positions are differentiated just as in the physical world. Thus, while there are actions towards transgressing the traditional activities of the audience, the position of the audience remains as it

has been. However, as discussed above, VWTV can only innovate so far when the constraints of human nature exert themselves through audience expectations; the audience members have had more experiences with traditional television practices than innovative practices. Virtual worlds are already innovative; to layer on more innovation without the audience being ready for it may dissuade participation.

In the end, what the VWTV producers are truly transgressing is the notion that, given their circumstances in the all-encompassing physical world, all they can be is audience. The producers have positioned themselves in-between and in constant negotiation with the dichotomous identities of 'producer' and 'user' (Reinhard & Amsterdam, 2011). The producers' relationship to *Second Life* is as the audience for and users of that particular media product; the same relationship they would have to television produced in the physical world. However, upon entering the virtual world, these users find the ability to connect, create and commune helping them to produce their own television programs. They are no longer just "audience to television," positioned by the power dynamics of traditional television to consume the television as a text (Wood, 2007); they are able to change their position to "producer of television" because of their personal drive and the capabilities for the virtual world to provide for a new form of television production.

Changes in the media landscape and the actions of the audience(s) have been changing the nature of what is television and how we should think of it and those who produce and consume it (Bruns, 2008; Green, 2008; Wood, 2007). What we call television has been deconstructed into the content it relays, "television-as-text", and the technical interface it is, "television-as-technology" (Wood, 2007). The VWTV producers' act of changing their relationship to the concept of television-as-text by engaging with a new television-as-technology indicates how the producers are able to transgress traditional television due to the capabilities of this Web 2.0 social medium. Now, the technology permits this transgressing, but it does not require it. What is required for the transgression is the human desire to connect, to create, and to commune – to be more than they were originally positioned to be. Even if not a consciously transgressive act, at least it is an act of embracing the empowerment provided by Web 2.0 technologies.

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