

ADVANCED DOCTORAL DISSERTATION DEFENSE

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Roskilde University, Department of Communication, Business and Information Technologies

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INTRODUCTION

Together with a group of European researchers, in 2002, I joined the virtual world of Active Worlds to build a 3D Agora-world. Some of the findings from these studies, 2002-2004, have encouraged my further study of virtual worlds. These findings are, among others: 1) the attachment between user/actor and avatar can be strong, 2) there need to be a balance between the recognisable and the explorative, and 3) it is very hard to communicate and construct things and places together in-world if more than 2-3 avatars are collaborating.

These are some of the findings that have led me to continue my research until the present defense of the advanced dissertation about virtual worlds: *Ways of Virtual World-making: Actors and Avatars*.

Framing the presentation: EverQuest and Second Life

To follow up on the studies of Active Worlds, I was inspired by my colleague associate professor T.L. Taylor at the IT University Denmark, and the stories she published in 2002 about her personal experience with the game of EverQuest. This world therefore was an obvious choice, when I decided to study also the large massively multi-user online role-playing games. I spent some time building up knowledge my about these games and worlds from 2004-2005, the year when the blockbuster World of Warcraft was launched.

Therefore, as a first step, let me take you to SONY's current EverQuest II introduction video. The world is portrayed as an adventure game with a mythological atmosphere. <http://www.everquest2.com/videos>

Second Life is a quite different world, a world of user-generated content. It was launched in 2003. I entered this world in late 2006 alongside my EverQuest studies, and from January 2007 to March 2008 extensive ethnographic studies were conducted. The aim of these studies was to select the places, businesses, actors, and projects for in-depth case studies.

The company Linden Lab portrays their world as a glamorous world of freedom and creativity, a world at peace and with no conflicts.

<http://secondlife.com/?lang=en-US>

The case studies of the advanced dissertation have been chosen mainly from the virtual worlds of Second Life and EverQuest.

Questions that will guide this defense

The questions that will guide this oral presentation are simple and straightforward: What did I research? How did I research it? What are the results?

I. WHAT DID I RESEARCH?

The overall question that has guided my research is:

In what ways do actors make sense of situations of engagement with virtual world-making?

This question articulates the aim of study as well as the way in which I have approached the study.

The opening *in what ways* signifies the descriptive and empirical approach of the study. I do not seek behind or dig a level deeper than the observable and expressed phenomena, rather, what I seek to understand are the connectednesses; the way in which actors, human and nonhuman, connect and form networks. In this, my research is inspired by actor-network theory and the ideas of keeping what we study at the same level, keeping it flat, keeping the social flat as the sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Latour would say.

In what ways do actors; the question further emphasises the empirical approach: the agents of the question are human actors, not a theory, but gamers and residents, and, of course, me as a researcher. And the verb of this agency is *to do*. In other words, the overall research question is concerned with what human actors do. The answer to what they do is, as it is suggested by the research question, that they strive to *make sense*.

The notion of actors is used throughout the dissertation partly to signify the reference made to actor-network theory, but also to emphasise that the human actors and participants are seen not as users of a digital system, that is, as someone defined by their usage of such a system, rather, what I aim to study is human agency, interpretation and experience and the ensuing actor-networks as formed by human actors with their nonhumans such as digital technologies and media.

Sense-making is seen as an active engagement and construction, something to be made whereas action "is". Or, with communication researcher Brenda Dervin's words, the actions of making sense are provoked when we face the many gaps of living and moving through our lives, through situations of discontinuity, alternating between chaos and order, hence, basically, the making of sense are the many bridges, metaphorically speaking, which we build to be able to continuously act and move; the gap-bridgings.

Choices, gaps, and disturbances are situational, which means that they appear in actual life situations that urge us to choose and bridge gaps. The overall research question therefore continues as it points to the making of sense in *situations of engagement*, which means that active involvement is at the centre of interest.

Finally, the situations of engagement refer to active involvement with virtual worlds as articulated by the verbing *world-making*. This verbing emphasises the constructivist approach and the interpretive understanding of virtual worlds as not only a tool but also the active making of sense, that is, the connectednesses of potentials and affordances with the active construction of sense. But, this verbing also refers to an ontological and philosophical understanding of the relations between virtuality and reality, as it is briefly dealt with in the dissertation.

Five foci have been formulated to organise the research: 1) the co-construction of content and conditions, 2) the choice of avatar(s), 3) the building of relationships, 4) expressions of self, and 5) the navigation of daily life.

II. HOW DID I RESEARCH IT?

Ways of virtual world-making is a qualitative study, it does not aim to generalise or produce typologies. Rather, the aim of study is to *exemplify* and to do so in a way that allows us to look for situated *uniquenesses*.

The methodological approach borrows from grounded theory method and from ethnographic studies with the endeavour to “follow the actors – human as well as nonhuman,” as suggested by Bruno Latour.

It has led me to follow some of the online communities of online game worlds, and to do literature and website surveys, but virtual ethnography and video interviews are the main methods of research as presented in this dissertation.

Virtual ethnography

From January 2007 to March 2008, ethnographic studies were conducted in Second Life. This time span was subdivided into 3 phases: I and III about 3 months each, and phase II for approximately 1 year. Field notes, snapshots and keywords were gathered and organised in 38 tableaux, which describe the 3 periods of the ethnographic studies

Phase I

Phase I was characterised by observational studies. Many different places were observed, I chatted with avatars, used the in-world camera to make snapshots of places and avatars, and concurrent field notes were made and summarised by keywords.

Fig. 1

Figure 1. Examples of in-world snapshots from Phase I (observations in The House of Youth; following Second Life TV2 News)

Phase II

In phase II, I fully engaged with the virtual world, taking part in in-world arrangements and meetings but also actively engaged with the arrangement of events together with some of the projects and cases simultaneously observed.

Moving in to furnish a house of my own profoundly influenced the understanding of “being and acting” in a virtual world. During these activities and engagements, I decided to participate in the daily life in the Wonder DK business case, and, in particular, the virtual island owned by the business team.

Fig. 2

Figure 2. Snapshot examples from Phase II (avatar meeting, communication workshop with teacher avatar Chenet Shan, Christmas event in the Wonder DK business island)

Phase III

In phase III, again, the attention turned to international projects that had proven successful.

Fig. 3

Figure 3. Snapshots examples from Phase III (the Metanomics interview show, metanomics.net)

Immediacy and hypermediacy

The in-world ethnographic studies, however, only allowed me to follow the actors with their avatars, their design of places, their chat, meetings, tradings, etcetera, not the actors in their daily life. And, the view of the world obviously depends on the angling and viewpoint: with and in-world perspective, the immediacy of the immersive experience clearly dominates the picture, as exemplified below by the in-world snapshots of digital design and avatars skilfully animated.

Figure 4. Snapshots that show animations, which serve the purpose to generate a sense of immediacy and immersion.

From a different perspective, the experience of engaging with the virtual world is quite different. When seen from a by-the-interface instead of an on-the-interface point of view, then, what we meet is the complexity of hypermediacy: chat-windows, instant messages (IMs), content list of inventories, scrutiny of other avatars profiles, link-up to other media, streaming on blogs, etcetera, suddenly come to dominate the picture, thus creating a quite different impression and experience. And, the two different views are equally important for the understanding of experience and sense-making.

Fig. 5

Figure 5. Snapshots that show the hypermediacy of engaging with virtual worlds when seen from a by-the-interface view.

The actors of the studies continuously navigate these views in their daily engagement with the virtual worlds. Shifting between different angles. And, the more experienced, the more often the view is dominated by hypermediacy as the observational stance gradually develops and turns into active involvement and engagement, hence, the use of many in-world and other digital tools.

Situated, open, and in-depth video interviews

To capture these different views, and to concurrently discuss with the actors their engagement, the method of video interviews is employed.

In situated interviews together with the actors, while they are acting, showing, and commenting on their actions, video recordings have been made alongside open and qualitative in-depth interviews. In this way, situated interpretations are produced in dialogues and live images; they are the main data collections of the empirical analyses.

Snapshots from a video interview

The snapshots below derive from one of the video interviews; they serve to illustrate this approach.

Fig. 6

Figure 6. A sequence of a reversed storyboarding process. It illustrates the angling of the video interview recordings and the selection of keyframes (the bold and black frame around one of the snapshots).

The snapshots show a sequence of an in-world meeting in the Literary project; a meeting between the project team and some of their professional colleagues from

different locations in Denmark. The angling of the video recordings aim to cover both on-the-interface and by-the-interface perspectives.

The recordings and the dialogues are subsequently transcribed in words and images, and then they are annotated with reference to the five foci mentioned: co-construction of content and conditions, choice of avatar(s), the building of relationships, expressions of self, and the navigation of daily life.

Fig. 7

Figure 7. Transcription and annotation of interviews and recordings.

On the basis of a huge amount of visual data, the analyses then starts by selecting scenes of analytical interest according to the research questions and the actants of theory.

Keyframes selected from reversed storyboards

From each of the 76 storyboards thus constructed, a keyframe is selected, as indicated by the bold and black frame around one of the video frames in the sequence of a storyboarding process from the Literary project.

From each case, with reference to the analytical foci, 76 storyboards are constructed, and keyframes are selected from each of these. Such keyframes are the stepping-stones of the analyses, as subsequently I will show.

I denote this method the *video interview reversed storyboarding method* to indicate the processes of deconstruction and construction that are at the core of the method.

Case studies

The video interviews from the EverQuest and Second Life studies include a generalist case covering many different MMORPGs, a loner's case from EverQuest II and a guild from EverQuest I; a virtual start-up business case in Second Life, a virtual branch of a large international company, and a public institution project both of which from Second Life.

III. WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

(Larger versions of figure 8-20 can be found in the appendix)

76 storyboards and 19 analytical inscriptions form the main part of the empirical data analyses. I have chosen 3 inscriptions for today's presentation.

The examples are: The virtual business case Wonder DK, which exemplify the co-construction of content and conditions; the Loner Gnosiz the Gnome from EverQuest that exemplifies how the choice of avatars is dealt with; and the Literary project, which exemplify the building of relationships in a virtual public project.

Analytical inscriptions: actants of theory

Before I present the case example of user-driven content creation, some of the actants of theory are now introduced.

The notion of "inscription" refers to the marks that we inscribe into a field of study as soon as we start researching it. In the present study, the inscription in figure 8

inscribes the empirical fields of co-construction, choice of avatars, and the building of relationships:

Fig. 8

Figure 8. The diagram that organises the empirical study.

It is denoted “the diagram,” and it organises the field of empirical study. The inscription visualises the notions of programs, anti-programs, and tensions; these tensions form trajectories of connections between what is seen as programs and counteracting anti-programs.

In the Wonder DK case, the program is to start a virtual business to make a living. The anti-program is the inability to realise this very idea and vision.

Grounded in this inscription, the analytical interest is to identify the gap-bridging steps taken by the participating actors to make a reality of the vision when confronted with gaps and tensions.

Steps that are taken to realise a program push forward or backward the connections of the program, thus continuously forming new connections.

Fig. 9

Figure 9. The diagram of programs and anti-programs.

The concept of gap-bridging links the analytical inscription of programs and anti-programs to the ideas of sense-making as dealt with by Brenda Dervin. Her metaphoric depiction of the triad of relationships between situations, gap-bridging sense-making and mediating or innovating outcomes is illustrated by in the shape of a triangle, and it is brought to the analysis to supplement the inscription.

Fig. 10

Figure 10. The triangle of gap-bridging sense-makings.

The gap-bridging sense-makings of actors, when confronted by gaps and tensions, are visualised by the video frames denoted keyframe, as earlier mentioned. The keyframes thus visualise the relationship between the diagrammatic actor-network inscription and the sense-making triangle.

The two metaphors of a triangle and a diagram visualise and organise the theoretical references and the actants of analysis.

FOCUS (1): THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF CONTENT AND CONDITIONS

To study the co-construction, the following questions guide the analyses:

What makes actors choose their world? How do they make sense of the co-construction of content and conditions for their engagement?

Example 1: virtual business case Wonder DK

The Wonder DK is a business case and it is the first case example and inscription to be presented. For each of the 19 case inscriptions only 4 video keyframes have been chosen.

Fig. 11

Figure 11. This inscription organises 4 keyframes from the Wonder DK case. It exemplifies the focus of analysis concerned with co-creation and conditions.

1) The first keyframe of the Wonder DK case refers to a Danish provincial town with a cosy and homely atmosphere (1: Reshaping town). It is a deliberate choice to target Danish rather than global audiences, thus, signifying that Wonder DK is not an American place and design. The idea of co-creation and co-design clearly appeals to one of the initiators of the project and so does the opportunity of making a living by running a VW real estate agency renting out shops. This is the program for the Wonder DK business. Obviously, the anti-program is a situation where no customers will rent the shops to establish their own businesses on the Wonder DK island.

2) One of the initial ideas is to not only refer to the design of a provincial town but also to fiction, the fictitious town of Korsbæk (2: Remediating TV-series). In remediating Korsbæk, one of the most important steps taken is to attract the attention of potential visitors to the town and with that also tenants. This second step allows Thomas to combine the recognisable with the fictitious.

3) The design of a real estate office and shop at the corner of the town square makes the program of running a business visible; it is made tangible and located (3: Locating office). However, attracting the attention of present and potential residents of the world proves to be very difficult.

4) As attention is crucial to running the business, Thomas includes a cosy town square with a village pond, birds, and benches in his design (4: Reshaping square). With the square, the virtual environment stages a meeting place; it is a step that proves important to furthering the business.

With these steps taken, the business manager with his avatar DC Aspen, engages with world-making to help him run an in-world business as opposed to the risk of attracting no attention and customers.

Gapinesses of the market strategy

To realise the vision of running a Second Life business, the design strategy of Wonder DK and the business model target the Danish market, and possibly also a Nordic. Therefore, to attract tenants that are willing to pay the rent for one of the virtual shops of the town, the business manager relies on a limited market with a design that clearly targets Danish audiences and customers. The business model and the design strategy point to the tensions generated between, on the one hand, a design that clearly attracts attention due to a consistent design strategy with national references and, on the other hand, the self-same strategy that limits the number of tenants on the global scene.

Navigating daily life

When the process of writing this dissertation was completed, the Wonder DK business was still running, even if the lease of shops and land no longer was the main agency of the business. Knowledge consultancy on in-world design was about to become the service that provided the income. In 2011, however, the Wonder DK business was closed. It had proven too difficult to make a living this way. Many issues and problems caused the closing, among others: market and pricing issues, Linden Lab's business model and customer service, and the problems of transfer of virtual objects to other virtual environments and digital systems and tools.

FOCUS (2): THE CHOICE OF AVATAR(S)

The question that guides the analyses of the choice of avatars is:

What makes actors choose particular avatars? What is it that makes sense for actors to engage with these particular avatars?

Example 2: the loner Gnosiz the Gnome

Fig. 12

Figure 12. This inscription organises 4 keyframes from the Gnosiz the Gnome case. It exemplifies the focus of analysis concerned with the choice of avatars.

1) Jan travels around the world with Gnosiz, and he is not a member of a regular guild. Gnosiz is a loner even if he sometimes goes fighting together with virtual friends in loosely coupled groups organised *ad hoc* (1: Going solo). While processing the video interviews, this is the striking metaphorical picture that stands out.

2) Going solo with a small avatar that faces severe dangers defines his choice of avatar (2: Being small); he did not choose one of the strong races and classes, such as a warrior. It makes sense to Jan to be with his small gnome because it allows him to show that it is his characters' skilfulness that helps him survive even if he is small and not very forceful.

3) The keyframe that visualises Gnosiz moving around EverQuest on his flying carpet signifies the persistent work that Jan has put into solving the quests necessary to acquire the carpet as well as the many obstacles that he has overcome in doing so. This struggle is part of his mediating program and vision, as it portrays Gnosiz as a survivor against the odds. His survival is only made possible because of his shrewdness (3: Acting clever).

4) In his many fights, Gnosiz' shrewdness also allows Jan to face severe dangers and to make Gnosiz appear even more courageous (4: Daring). In playing Gnosiz, he circumvents the limitations that have been set by the designers of EverQuest and manages to fight the dangers that will help him increase his experience and knowledge. Fighting back the tensions of defeat, he survives due to the knowledge and intelligence he has acquired.

By these steps, Jan, in company with his avatar Gnosiz the Gnome, engages with world-making to let him strive for survival and cleverness as opposed to being left behind in a situation with no more gains to achieve.

Gapinesses of a loner

During the video interviews with Jan, his main concern is how to follow some of his casual virtual friends to new zones of the game. Despite the fact that he emphasises that his avatar Gnosiz the gnome is a loner, the sense of being left alone in EverQuest while some of the other gamers move on to new extensions, is a recurring theme. There is not much left for Jan and Gnosiz to do, and no more gains to achieve, without moving on to the new zones in the game extensions, which he cannot afford. This means that world-making no longer makes sense to Jan.

Navigating daily life

In follow up talks, it appears that Jan has left EverQuest to move on to the game of Vanguard and later he migrated to Rift. At the time of the follow up talks, in Vanguard, he stills plays the little gnome. He left EverQuest to follow some of his friends when they decided to try out something new.

FOCUS (3): THE BUILDING OF RELATIONSHIPS

The question asked is:

How do actors engage with other actors and avatars? What is it that makes sense for actors to engage the way they do?

Example 3: the Literary project

The initial program of the Literary project is to initiate a public debate about public services in and about virtual worlds. The program of their project is to introduce and discuss the new media with the users of their institutional services.

Fig. 13

Figure 13. This inscription organises 4 keyframes from the Literary case. It exemplifies the focus of analysis concerned with the building of relationships.

1) The project team opens up the possibility for the institutions end-users to learn how to build and design in Second Life, and to do so at the project's place (1: Co-designing). Facing the problems that come with messy and pointless design, this idea is abandoned.

2) The next step taken is to initiate recurring weekly meetings at the project's place during which interested parties can join in to discuss and debate questions concerning Second Life and the Literary project (2: Meetings). Gradually, a group of colleagues joins the meetings to take part in the discussions, often with very critical contributions. Thus, discussions are initiated, but not with the public audiences who are the end users of the project's services.

3) To explore the potential of their in-world agency the project team organises cultural events such as inviting guest speakers, launching audio books, and holding discussions with authors. All of these steps are taken by the project team to make their vision a reality (3: Event making).

4) The discussions, debates, and events are open to blogging, which proves to be an important means of initiating and continuing many of the discussions of the weekly meetings (4: Blogging).

By these steps taken, the initiators strive to facilitate and initiate serious, yet, fun discussions and debates about new media. This is as opposed to a traditional profession that runs the risk of becoming out-dated.

Gapinesses of the Literary project

From the outset of the project, the idea and vision is to address the public institution's end-users. It proves very difficult. Building and designing in a world like Second Life are no different to other worlds, in the sense, that it always depends on design ideas and know-how. In other words, the approach presupposes a willingness to invest considerable time and commitment. User-driven content creation could not bridge the gap of public interest, time, motivation, learning, and know-how necessary to engage with design in such a world. Early in the project, it therefore leads to discussions with colleagues in the profession rather than engaging with end-users of the public services as was initially intended.

Navigating daily life

The Literary project faced problems when cutbacks and a scarcity of resources forced the management to prioritise and reduce expenses. The project did not reach out to end-users as was first intended. Rather, a relatively closed circle of colleagues although on a national scale debated the form and purpose of the project. Furthermore the workplace colleagues did not engage with the project but

retained an observational stance. Thus the conditions for the project were hard, and it could not withstand the cutbacks.

FOCUS (4): EXPRESSIONS OF SELF

The questions asked are:

How do actors express their in-world presence as accompanied by their avatars and in relation to other actors and avatars? In what ways do these expressions transform the actors?

Triadic sign-relations

In 2004, the virtual world designer and computer scientist Richard Bartle published the now classic work *Designing Virtual Worlds*. He summarised his experience from decades of system development in one sentence: "It's all about identity." This understanding has profoundly influenced our research on the phenomenon of avatars. We tend to see the avatar as the virtual proxy of the actor sitting behind or in front of the screen; a relationship between a signifier, the avatar, and the actor, the signified.

I will, however, make the argument that if we analyse and understand avatars as triadic sign-relations, and not merely as representations of the human actor, then we see clearer the sense of the actors' engagement and with that their expressions of self. I will argue that, in this way, we can integrate into the analysis, the *potentiality* of the engagement with the avatars of the virtual worlds.

The analysis of avatar semiosis is therefore grounded in the classic semiotic triangle of sign-vehicle (representamen), referent (object) and sense (interpretant). These are the three correlates of the sign, the *relata*. Important is it to mention that the sign is not the sign-vehicle, neither is it a class of semiotic objects, but the sign is the correlates of this triad of *relata*, the *semiosis*.

Fig. 14

Figure 14. The classical model of semiosis.

In the triadic model of sign-relations, the sign is something that stands for something for someone in some respect. This understanding of what is a sign is derived from the Peircean semiotics, and, broadly speaking, from the triadic models of the *relata*, whereas in the dyadic sign models the representative function of the dyadic model 'aliquid pro aliquo' is something that stands for something. The distinction between sense and reference, as shown in the semiotic triangle, distinguishes the dyadic from the triadic sign model.

The semioses of avatar design

If we turn to the virtual worlds to examine and analyse some examples of sign-relations and semiosis, then the worldliness stands out as an interpreter or sense that grounds the many different activities of the cases. To analyse for instance Second Life as a sign, we will have to address and identify the *relata* of the sign-relations. A semiotic analysis of Second Life phenomena therefore will seek to identify the three *relata* of sign-vehicle, referent, and sense.

1) The Linden Lab's *imaginaire* – the vision and the idea of a virtual world that frames the residents second life, a world created by its users – may then be seen as a sign-vehicle and the referent is the potentiality of the online presence in avirtual

world second life. The relation between sign-vehicle and referent, the secondness, is a process of mediation, that is, a realisation in effort and resistance. The particularity of this dyadic relation, however, is the thirdness, the sense. In the present example, the sense of the imaginaire is the worldliness referred to by the inscribed corners of the world, and the geo-positioning of online presence, as shown in figure 15.

Fig. 15

Figure 15. The translation of Second Life to the worldliness of the virtual world.

The semiotic process is 'ad infinitum'. The potentiality of the sense of the worldliness example is a translation into another sign-vehicle of new sign-relations. Meaning, Peirce says, is "the translation of a sign into another system of signs."

2) Therefore, in the next example, worldliness is translated into the sign-vehicle of the pioneering spirit, which is a potentiality of online presence in the Wonder DK case. The sense of this, the thirdness, is the design of a virtual business, Wonder DK.

Fig. 16

Figure 16. The translation of the Second Life worldliness to the Wonder DK virtual business.

3) The real estate agent, the businessman avatar DC Aspen, is the sense of the mediation between the sign-vehicle of the business Wonder DK and the idea and vision of making a living out of the potentiality of online presence.

Fig. 17

Figure 17. The translation of the Wonder DK virtual business to the real estate agent DC Aspen.

4) Acting business-like, convincing customers in sales speeches, pricing, and renting out shops is the sense of the mediation of the real estate agent and the potentiality of online presence in running a business.

Fig. 18

Figure 18. The translation of the real estate agent to the many acts of running a business.

5) The dress, the design, the appearance, and behaviour of the avatar is the sense of the learning potentials of running a business, preparing sales speeches, deciding the pricing of shops, billing, attracting attention, and creating trust.

Fig. 19

Figure 19. The translation of the potentiality of running a virtual business to the design of an avatar.

Many translations have been made from one sign to another in the above analysis. The most important of these are the transformative dialogues.

Transformative dialogues

In the Wonder DK case, the transformative dialogues and translations lead to profound changes; the initiator of the Wonder DK business changes from working as a programmer in an IT company to become a businessman of an entrepreneurial virtual start-up.

Fig. 20

Figure 20. The translation of the avatar DC Aspen to the learning processes of becoming a business manager.

In the analyses of transformative dialogues, the avatar DC Aspen is seen as a companion and a personal mediator; rather than seeing the avatar as a representation of the actor, it is seen as the potentiality of online presence; a potentiality, which acts back on the actor, thus initiating a chain of changes.

In each case study such transformative dialogues occur and the semiotic analysis serves to make “visible” the many changes that we find when we follow the actors, human and nonhuman, in chains of connections, translations, and semioses. When we follow how one sign is translated and transformed into another system of signs.

- With his range of avatars as personal mediators, a high school student sees himself transformed to become a systematic researcher and expert when he joins and explores many different advanced online games.
- A benefit claimant, sees himself transformed to become an empowered, cunning, and knowledgeable actor of the world when he enters EverQuest with his metaphorical avatar Gnoosiz the gnome as a personal mediator.
- A student teacher, sees himself as transforming to become an organiser and ideologist when he enters the world of EverQuest with his avatar Krongh the troll as his personal mediator.
- A disability pensioner, sees herself as transforming to become a highly regarded and high-level leader when she plays with the shaman Gelinu as her personal mediator.
- A programmer, sees himself as transforming to become a real estate agent, business entrepreneur, salesman, and design consultant when DC Aspen is his personal mediator in Second Life.
- A human-resource employee, transforms into a business manager, experimental entrepreneur, and a networking manager and designer when she is present with her avatar Helle as her personal mediator in Second Life.
- An academic, sees himself as transforming to become an in-world designer and a debater who challenges the traditions of his actual profession when he is present with his avatar Rob as his personal mediator in Second Life.
- When Alice is her personal mediator, a public service employee, sees herself as transforming to become a joyful experience designer, a debater, and explorer who challenges the traditions of her actual profession.

I hope that this presentation has shown how I have studied the many ways of virtual world-making to look for the driving visions, ideas and imaginaires; to identify the many hindrances and tensions; to focus on the uniquenesses, and, not least, to follow the many transformative dialogues that occur when human actors engage with virtual worlds in situations of engagement be it running a business or fighting giants.