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**Informal discussion on
Second Life**

Medianthro mailing list
4 – 19 April 2007

Subject: **[Medianthro] Query: Work on "Second LIfe"**
From: **Angela Zito <angela.zito@nyu.edu>**
Date: Wed, 04 Apr 2007 21:13:46 −0500

Is anyone themselves, or does anyone know of someone, doing ethnography
in/on the virtual world of Second Life? Especially the pursuit of
spirituality or religion in the site? Or its integration into religious
practice off-line? Or the ethics of community, and how they are
developing? We are putting together a small workshop on Digital Religion
at the Center for Religion and Media in the fall, and are very interested.

You can reply off-line, if you'd like, to
angela.zito@nyu.edu

thanks very much

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Subject: **Re: [Medianthro] Query: Work on "Second LIfe"**
From: **Philipp Budka <ph.budka@philbu.net>**
Date: Thu, 05 Apr 2007 08:28:57 +0200

Dear Angela, dear List,

Tom Boellstorff (University of California, Irvine) is working on a
project about Second Life:

"My second current research project concerns cybersociality: the
construction of subjectivities and social relationalities in virtual
worlds. In my book manuscript, Virtually Human: An Anthropologist in
Second Life, I am interested in what happens if we take cybersociality
on its own terms rather than as a signifier for another mode of sociality."

More at: http://www.anthro.uci.edu/faculty_bios/boellstorff/boellstorff.php

Best,

Philipp

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Subject: **Re: [Medianthro] Query: Work on "Second LIfe"**
From: **Philipp Budka <ph.budka@philbu.net>**
Date: Thu, 05 Apr 2007 09:46:11 +0200

Dear List,

Here are some brief information on what "Second Life" actually is:

"Second Life is a 3-D virtual world entirely built and owned by its
residents. Since opening to the public in 2003, it has grown explosively
and today is inhabited by a total of 5,255,045 people from around the
globe." (http://secondlife.com/whatis/)

"Second Life (abbreviated to SL) is an Internet-based virtual world
which came to international attention via mainstream news media in late
2006 and early 2007. Developed by Linden Lab, a downloadable client
program enables its users, called "Residents", to interact with each
other through motional avatars, providing an advanced level of a social
network service combined with general aspects of a metaverse. Residents
can explore, meet other Residents, socialize, participate in individual
and group activities, create and trade items (virtual property) and
services from one another." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_life)

Links:
http://secondlife.com/
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_life
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/6112880.stm
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6310915.stm

Best,

Philipp

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Query: Work on "Second LIfe"
From: John Postill <jpostill@usa.net>
Date: Thu, 05 Apr 2007 09:52:18 +0100

I find that Second Life is still very little known among undergrads, at least
this side of the Atlantic. Perhaps most of its early settlers are older? The
other day I discussed it briefly with media studies undergraduates here in the
UK and no one had ever heard of it. Many are heavily involved with YouTube,
MySpace, etc, but not Second Life.

John

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Query: Work on "Second LIfe"
From: "Knorr, Alexander" <Alexander.Knorr@vka.fak12.uni−muenchen.de>
Date: Thu, 05 Apr 2007 11:12:15 +0200

Funny, I wanted to stay away from SL, although my research project deals
with contemporary computergames, but just some weeks ago a friend forced
me to use my "cyberanthropological skills" on SL for a short TV-feature,
and, guess what, I complied ;-) And now the issue pops up at this list.
Anyway, Boellstorff already has been mentioned, so I only can furnish
some "fieldnotes" of mine (in reverse chronological order):

http://xirdal.lmu.de/cgi-bin/blosxom.cgi/2007/04/05#being_true_to_life
http://xirdal.lmu.de/cgi-bin/blosxom.cgi/2007/03/18#avatar_customizing
http://xirdal.lmu.de/cgi-bin/blosxom.cgi/2007/03/13#second_life_first_encounter

--alex

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Subject: **[Medianthro] Query: Work on 'Second LIfe'**
From: **dddumitr@ucalgary.ca**
Date: Thu, 5 Apr 2007 10:39:58 –0600 (MDT)

I am teaching a course on information technology and society to
undergraduates in Calgary, Canada. We've talked about Second Life briefly,
some have heard about it, others not. Those that have heard about it were
wondering how come people get addicted with such things (particularly
since you get to buy things with 'real' money in SL). Most of my students
were Facebook fans. However, my empirical observation is that students
become Facebook vs. MySpace users/ fans in relation to whether their
social networks are Facebook or MySpace users.

Delia Dumitrica

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Subject: **[Medianthro] Second life and teaching**
From: **Daniel Taghioff <danieltaghioff@yahoo.com>**
Date: Thu, 5 Apr 2007 10:22:38 –0700 (PDT)

This is tangential to second life as religious, unless, like most embattled
western teachers, you rather like the idea (most often fantasy) of being a
respected 'guru'.

But educators are very active in developing the interaction, collaboration and
learning side of second life.

This is not yet a subject of ethnographic work that I know of, though it is
ripe for it, but it does give a glimpse of possible futures for second life.

The 'tribe' ;-) doing this work call themselves "sloodlers" and can be found at

www.sloodle.com.

This is an offshot of the open source learning environment recently adopted by
the open university "Moodle"

Worth a look, it is quite possible religious groups might look to these
educational approaches for their own forms of second life instruction.

Daniel

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Researcher

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Subject: **Re: [Medianthro] medianthro Digest, Vol 13, Issue 2**
From: **Kathy Mancuso <kmancuso@gmail.com>**
Date: Mon, 9 Apr 2007 17:42:56 –0400

Angela et al,

You might be interested in reposing this query over at the AoIR

(Association of Internet Researchers) listserv, where there are many
people working in SL who can probably direct you to a) the specific
listserv and hangout spot in-world for SL researchers and b) who is
doing religion. Tom Boellstorff is, however, an excellent contact and
a very friendly guy. There's also Sarah Robbins, who goes by the
in-world name of Intellagirl Tully, who seems to be very engaged in SL
research on education, although I'm not sure whether she's an
ethnographer. Google her for her blog.

--Kathy

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. . . connection in an isolating age . . .
Katherine Mancuso, graduate student, Emory University

Web 2.0 research, life, and meta:
http://museumfreak.livejournal.com
http://del.icio.us/museumfreak

"Whenever anyone says 'You are,' they mean 'I want you to be.'" --Anais Nin

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] medianthro Digest, Vol 13, Issue 2
From: Maurizio Teli <maurizio.teli@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, 9 Apr 2007 18:00:20 -0400

Dear All, Dear Angela,

you can try to contact Lonny J Brooks, he is a lovely person and he is
using SL to teach ethnography at California State. Certainly he knows
someone interested in religion in SL.

Regards

Maurizio

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Second life and social stratification
From: Guido Ipsen <guido.ipsen@uni–dortmund.de>
Date: Thu, 12 Apr 2007 12:47:33 +0200

About second life:
I had never heard about it until last month and now that it occurs on
the list I tried to log on.
However, without success.
The program crashes on a regular basis and tells me my graphics adapter
is outdated.

Well, my system is three years old, and kept up to the best standards.
Naturally, a virtual environment requires quite some resources. But
then, who is able to participate in such environments? The inhabitants
are obviously socially stratified according to economic power, i.e.
available funds for computer technology in real life.
Maybe this is a reason why many students don't know about it. Many
others will not be allowed beyond the technological checkpoints on the
borders to Second Life...

Best,
Guido

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Second life and social stratification
From: "Ken Banks, RDVP Fellow" <ken.banks@csli.stanford.edu>
Date: Thu, 12 Apr 2007 09:36:13 −0700

Hi Guido

I have a couple of colleagues here at Stanford working in the gaming space,
and you hit the nail on the head – many of these 'virtual reality' games
demand huge overheads from the systems they run on, and this limits who can
participate. One colleague is developing a social entrepreneurship game,
based on a virtual environment, but he has gone a different route and
developing his game to run on older Windows-based machines. The market is
clearly much bigger.

On that note, he recently tried to install the latest version of a Second
Life-style game on his laptop (the name escapes me), but it failed to run
due to overhead issues. His laptop is only one year old.

Ken

Ken Banks
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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Second life and social stratification
From: jkirk <jkirk@spro.net>
Date: Thu, 12 Apr 2007 17:32:55 −0600

What is the point of this "second life" deal anyway?
I could care less about this virtual reality stuff. It's just
more consumerist escapism. People should be thinking
about what a second life might really mean in terms of
real lives. The hellhole that this world is today demands
less escapism and more serious dealing with the realities.

Best wishes,
Joanna Kirkpatrick
Bennington College, ret.
_____

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Second life and social stratification
From: Daniel Taghioff <danieltaghioff@yahoo.com>
Date: Thu, 12 Apr 2007 22:49:09 −0700 (PDT)

Living colour have a nice song called 'In another life...' anyway

I think the point about social stratification is good, although this may be something that eases over time. Do we give up on technological progress because it is expensive, environmentally demanding and initially socially exclusive, and sometimes chronically so? That's a big development debate, and I get the sense the issues are social rather than technical, is very much the Viagra vs. TB vaccine issue.

Second life is not necessarily just consumer escapism. One interesting application is the possibility of creating virtual offices or meeting spaces. This might reduce the need for plane travel to do business, or to go to the World Social Forum for that matter.

This is clearly something worth thinking about in relation to climate change. A recent development is an application called 'qwaq' which is a virtual collaboration space (www.qwaq.com). This may be 'vapourware' (i.e. here today gone tommorrow) but the trend towards collaborative virtual working spaces is interesting, and one outcome might be for it to contribute to lessening the hell-hole factor somewhat.

But who knows? The fun bit is what people start doing with it in practice, [whilst anthropologists look on...]

Daniel

Daniel Taghioff
Researcher

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     Homepage: http://taghioff.info
     Blog: http://taghioff.info/dant/

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Second life and social stratification
From: "**Dr. Mark Peterson**" **<petersm2@muohio.edu>**
Date: Fri, 13 Apr 2007 08:48:33 -0400

Kirk may be right that this is mere escapism, but this begs the question. What people "ought to do" entails a prescriptivist approach to ethnoghy that I am uncomfortable with. The primary issue is to describe and understand any social phenomena that attracts millions of participants. The sum membership of these virtual communities numbers in the millions. Advertisers have begun product placement. Real dollars are being spent as people exchange actual money for virtual money at fluctuating exchange rates. These things suggest the emergence of a phenomenon of considerable importance in understanding human culture(s) (and this kind of thing, I'm told, is even bigger in South Korea than here). It opens up new forms of sociality. My daughter and her friend Andrew play together during the day but in the evening, instead of watching television, they get together in a children's virtual world (where everyone is a penguin) and play virtual games. Certainly virtual worlds are at least as important for analysis as examining film, news and other forms of media.

Besides, even if it IS mere escapism, as I have written before, escapism requires careful cultural analysis to discover what people are escaping FROM and what they are escaping TO.

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Second life and social stratification
From: Kathy Buddle–Crowe <buddlecr@cc.umanitoba.ca>
Date: Fri, 13 Apr 2007 11:19:41 -0500

I am new to the list, therefore please forgive me if this merely
stumbles along already over-trampled terrain.

I am sympathetic with M. Peterson's argument, but I'm not sure we ought to
necessarily dismiss participation in on-line gaming as a form of escapism. I
work with Aboriginal people in Canada (both media-savvy producers and consumers
and those with aversions to fax machines, who still prefer to confer over cup
of coffee and a piece of fry bread). Still, it is not uncommon for those who
compete in on-line games and romance e-paramours, who mine television programs
for answers to their existential questions, or who play radio bingo, to
interpret their successes or failures in these endeavours as any diviner might
-- in very practical ways.

When television was first introduced to northern Native communities in Manitoba
the early 1970's, Cree people responded much as they did to other elements of
Euro-Canadian culture, by selectively appropriating and indigenizing media
technologies in ways that built upon existing socio-cosmological beliefs,
narrative genres and information gathering and sharing practices. Northern
Crees related the transportational capacities of television, for example, to
dreaming and to storytelling. They initially referred to the television as
'koosobachigan,' the Cree term by which the shaking tent was known. The shaking
tent (a verb) refers to an actual ceremony, protocols for communicating with
non-present others, and a positioning process for locating oneself within a
social cosmos that includes both people and specific elements of the natural
and supernatural environment. Certainly, thinking about television and
computers has evolved considerably since the 1970's, however, the idea that
there is nothing inherently "fantastical" (imagined or virtual) about an online
experience (as Miller and Slater have argued elsewhere) continues to hold
purchase.

I think this is an idea that comes through in the "virtual reality" artwork of
the a Northwest Coast artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. The installation piece
he came up with requires gamers to physically walk to enter his world – in
their own bodies and supporting their own identities. This comment on an
Aboriginal experience of "virtual reality" shows a person examining know who
they are and where they stand in relationship to another's created world. I
suppose he is making a very general comment on stratification and enduring
power differentials concerning relative abilities to make and recognize others'
subjectivities, however there is a materialist (embodied) aesthetic at work as
well that we would do well not to overlook entirely. The above is derived from
a book chapter in press....

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**Subject: [Medianthro] Death in cyburbia: Our celebration of the virtual world must be balanced by
research into its psychological effects**
From: simone abram <s.abram@sheffield.ac.uk>
Date: Tue, 17 Apr 2007 08:50:35 +0100

Dear all,

Some of you may want to respond to the Guardian about James Harkin's
article suggesting that:

Our celebration of life in cyburbia needs to be balanced with serious
social investigation of what happens to people who spend so much time
there, and what it says about our society that they should want to.

Why has there not been one? The reason is that many of us have so
much invested in Web 2.0 that we have hurled our critical faculties
out the window.

Comment
Death in cyburbia: Our celebration of the virtual world must be
balanced by research into its psychological effects

James Harkin
Monday April 16, 2007
The Guardian

http://technology.guardian.co.uk/opinion/story/0,,2057975,00.html

Simone

Dr S Abram
Dept of Town and Regional Planning
University of Sheffield
Sheffield S10 2TN
_____

**Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Death in cyburbia: Our celebration of the virtual world must be balanced
by research into its psychological effects**
From: Guido Ipsen <guido.ipsen@uni−dortmund.de>
Date: Tue, 17 Apr 2007 13:45:15 +0200

Dear all,

Psychology and many other disciplines are necessary to investigate
virtual worlds' effects – and causes.

To me, Second Life and other installments give a new boost to the old
hype about the independence of media and vr – it reminds me the
discussion about hypertext and democracy – oh, how democratic has the
world become now that we have hypertext and the internet...

Well, there is also no such hype about VR and SL. Psychologically and
economically, the virtual worlds depend on the "real" one.*

We invest "real" time in constructing the VR life. This time can be
measured in work units which are worth money.
We get, in return, emotional rewards which play out in "real" life.
These mean quite real hormones, neuronally measurable results and by no
means some independent result in the VR world.

Moreover, there is no alternative world but just additive worlds. If you
pull the plug, the VR life ends, but you persist.
If you shoot me, my real life ends. Regrettably, I cannot cobntinue in
VR without my real self.
Too bad, in a way, but that's life.

Hence, the nature of the hierarchical relationship between VR and
"reality" should be investigated. The argument about "alternatiive
worlds" can be neglected.
Psychology and economy are two possible areas to prove my argument,
there are surely more.

best,
Guido

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* I put "real" in quotation marks not because I deny reality, but just
for the cognitive risks to speak about reality "as such".

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Subject: [Medianthro] Second Life
From: Mark Pedelty <pedeltmh@umn.edu>
Date: Tue, 17 Apr 2007 10:56:24 -0500

I agree with Kathy that Second Life should not be dismissed as mere
escapism.

I first heard about Second Life last year at the Virtual Ethnography
Workshop in Amsterdam. My first exploration, however, came last night during
a bout of insomnia. Frankly, for better and worse, this is a glimpse into
the future.

There is no inevitability to Second Life, but something like it will develop
and become increasingly important, if past patterns are any guide. Just as
the primitive "gopher" system gave an early glimpse of the sort of
communication that would be possible on the WWW, Second Life is providing a
sense of what more holistic web worlds might look, sound, and feel like
(there is a sensory dimension to walking, flying, and teleporting through
these evolving worlds).

The technological optimist see a great deal of potential, especially in
reference to progressive networking and sustainability. If instead of always
jumping in a plane, especially for work purposes, we meet in virtual arenas,
we'll use a lot less fossil fuel. The rich nature of these interactions is
allowing the virtual interaction to more fully approximate the offline
encounter. Full "accurate" corporeal representation is probably not terribly
far off, and one can imagine how the augmented virtual encounter might even
be superior in some ways given the tools at the avatar's disposal. Absurd as
it might sound now, there might be more communicational content in the
virtual encounter eventually than one can receive in the unmediated
encounter.

Of course, the term "mediation" reminds us that these are not merely
interpersonal experiences, but like all encounters, they are mediated by
technology and the people, institutions, and systems with the greatest power
to form contexts, defined meetings, and create worlds like Second Life. The
tech optimists will hail the inability of offline companies to penetrate
Second Life (see the brand map of Second Life, fascinating stuff), only to
eventually lament the devolution of the medium into someone else's private
domain for making sales, disciplining bodies, etc., etc... It already
appears that some of the richest domains in Second Life are commercial. The
natural settings I found were sad simulacra of the real forest or dessert.
Conversely, the malls were much better than the real thing.

As for the argument that Second Life is diverting us from the task of fixing
global systems of oppression, part of me says "right on", but another
worries that we happy few of the Left have too often ignored popular

aesthetics while adopting a paralyzing sense of "seriousness." While I am
not ready to turn the focus to cyberprotest, such things as Second Life
cannot be completely ignored.

Mark

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**Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Death in cyburbia: Our celebration of the virtualworld must be balanced
by research into its psychological effects**
From: jkirk <jkirk@spro.net>
Date: Tue, 17 Apr 2007 10:18:30 –0600

>*From the Guardian article:*

"In the course of the last decade, many of us have quit watching the box in
the corner of the room and turned to fiddling around with gadgets through
which we can watch each other instead. The web has morphed into a vast
virtual suburbia to which many of us have retired to stare idly at each
other's lives. To internet geeks this is known as "peer-to-peer"
communication or "Web 2.0"; the rest of us could just as easily call it
cyburbia. For millions, this online culture is the only culture that
matters," followed by the admission that "Websites such as YouTube and
MySpace have become pleasure parks...." Could one declare such a pleasure
park to be the final
goetterdaemerung of the theme park, another variety of (three-dimensional)
virtual world? an exhibitionist Disney World?

This article gets to precisely what I was on about in my last post, which
criticised the very idea of cyber-identity and by implication of any kind of
cyber-"life." I cannot imagine why anyone would "celebrate" a tech
development that provides even more trivial consumer experience than the
usual suspects. The actual world today needs people dedicated to making it
and its environments a better and safer place to live for all of us.
Pleasure with respect to cyber"life" is not of the essence, since getting it
in the actual world is not a desperately difficult issue unless the
pleasure-seeker is psychologically wasted.

A lot of the popularity of cyburbia can be chalked up to crowd behavior, a
fad.

The article does suggest that research on the exhibitionist impulses and
behaviors might yield a few more insights-- in my opinion about people who
tend to or have taken the easiest road to non-effort in their actual lives.

Thanks to Simone Abram for posting the Guardian article.

Joanna Kirkpatrick
Bennington College, ret.
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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Death in cyburbia
From: "Dr. Mark Peterson" <petersm2@muohio.edu>
Date: Tue, 17 Apr 2007 13:13:44 –0400

I'm not particularly interested in psychological effects myself, but
I think Guido's post raises some significant methodological
distinctions of importance.

One of the most interesting things about computer mediated
communication, as opposed to most forms of mass media we have
traditionally studied, is that when one owns the technology of
consumption one also owns the means of production. As a result, much
of what is most interesting about these "new media" is their capacity
to allow for the mutual construction of texts. Virtual worlds are

not really that different from wikis or many other new forms of media
in that they provide opportunities for social actors to mutually
construct open, contingent texts. In virtual worlds, the text so
constructed just takes a very different form and engages a different
kind of imagination

Virtual worlds thus challenge much of our traditional semiotic and
other approaches to textual analysis, because they involve
mutuality. Analysis of virtual worlds in themselves is going to
require performative linguistics and similar models that assume
contingency and co-narration to adequately describe them. But as
George Marcus has pointed out, we also have examples (such as the
Kahluli) in the ethnographic literature of people who believe in
parallel "virtual" worlds where ghost selves or ancestors dwell and
interact with us from which we can draw models.

An alternative methodological approach is to ask who comes together
in virtual worlds. This involves investigating the worlds of the
social actors who spend time on line in such worlds, and asking what
functions their virtual social worlds play in their physical worlds
and what meanings they have for these participants.

Finally, although participants co-produce their virtual worlds they
do so within parameters already established by producers. Many of
these virtual worlds are enormous money-making machines with very
real capacities for the conversion of virtual and real-world economic
capital. These corporations design and maintain these worlds, pay
employees, are responsible to shareholders and so forth. Thomas
Malaby at UWisconsin is studying this, I believe.

It seems to me each of these different levels offers us opportunities
to ask different questions about this phenomenon and requires
different methodologies.

Mark

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Death in cyburbia: Our celebration of the virtualworld must be balanced by research into its psychological effects
From: jkirk <jkirk@spro.net>
Date: Tue, 17 Apr 2007 22:33:16 −0600

>*From an essay by a friend and active citizen. Probably this listserv doesn't*
take attachments, so I will simply paste some of his remarks in the body of
this message.

"Anyone Can Hear The Water Speak"

a call to awakening the intuitive self

by Bill Chisholm

        "As we sat together in the sterile hallway of the Federal
Courthouse in Las Vegas, outside Judge Hang 'em High Lloyd George's
courtroom, Western Shoshone spiritual elder, Corbin Harney, said, 'The water
spoke to me.' We were sitting five feet apart on a bench, looking straight
ahead, waiting our turn to testify on behalf of our friend, anti-nuclear
weapons activist, Rick Springer. Corbin then said, 'The water told me, 'In
a short time you will see me, I will look like water and feel like water,
only I won't be the same.'' After a few moments, he concluded, 'Anyone can
hear the water speak if they will only listen.'

...I have spent a good deal of time alone in Nature contemplating the deeper
meaning of life. Though I have a degree in business and could have found a
niche in the modern consumer-oriented world, I found I experienced myself

at a far higher level when I was down to a minimum of comforts in the wilds. Free of comforts I found an edge I hadn't experienced anywhere else. Though I hadn't heard it articulated in such a way, I sensed what Corbin was talking about: alone in the wild, if you quiet your noisy mind, open your eyes, and your ears, the wild has much to say. The wind, the trees, the clouds, the wildlife, and yes, the water all have a voice. I observed that even more during my years doing damage assessment for the, now inept, Federal Emergency Management Agency. If we'd learn to listen to the water we might not suffer so much flood damage.

The sad truth is: people don't listen. They have insulated themselves from Nature and from each other with technology, stuff, and information shuffling jobs. They like to think technology has advanced them as individuals and as a culture, but in truth, it has deafened them, made them weak, more dependent. After the powerful tsunami hit southern Asia wiping out large areas, destroying homes and communities, and killing thousands of people, it was expected there would be a large loss of wildlife. As the reports started coming in there was not the wildlife loss expected. There were in fact stories of animals of many species who sensed something was going to happen and headed to the safety of higher ground. That same thing was true of some indigenous folks, people who lived simply and more attuned to their surroundings; they sensed something was going to happen and got themselves out of harms way. 'Anyone can hear the water speak if they will only listen.'

Modern man has lost touch; ... Much of it has to do with technology, the speed of life, the noise, the disconnectedness. Very few inputs come from Nature. More and more and at an earlier and earlier age, inputs come from TV, iPods, cell phones computers, DVDs, and video games. A great deal of time is spent insulated from the world in cars, homes, factories,or offices.... People are going faster and faster and in the process see less and less of the world around them.. Very often when they are outside, they stay hooked to somewhere else via cell phones or satellite TVs. Too often they aren't where they are and not with the people they are physically with....Folks are missing the cues, the clues. Something happens and they aren't prepared because they aren't paying attention. You can't last long in the wilds or anywhere else if you don't pay attention to the world around you.

'Anyone can hear the water speak if they will only sit and listen.' We can't even hear the people we are with. Just look around; if you see three people together, particularly people under 30, often two of them are talking on their cell phones. They are oblivious to their companions and to the world around them. When not on cell phones, people are listening to iPods, playing video games or watching TV: all inputs coming from outside. There are so many senseless noises and flashing images going on most folks never have a quiet moment to ponder, to use their minds, to listen to what Nature is trying to say.

How then does Nature compete for attention. She has to speak louder and louder. You'd think people might pay attention when they can no longer see the mountains or the stars, when the air stinks so bad they can hardly breathe.   The sad truth: most folks don't even look towards the mountains unless they want to recreate. They really don't experience the mountain because they have too much with them: cell phones, iPods, snowmobiles, four wheelers. They are going too fast; they are too focused on their fun. Caught in the noise and the speed they miss the world around them, its smells, its sounds. They are so caught up in the world of man they miss the warnings, fail to see much less read the signs, sense the stillness for its tension. Then boom they are surprised by an avalanche, a flood, a fire, an earthquake, a tsunami................"

and, I might add, a massacre.

Best wishes, ave atque vale,

Joanna Kirkpatrick

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Second Life
From: Guido Ipsen <guido.ipsen@uni−dortmund.de>
Date: Wed, 18 Apr 2007 11:09:22 +0200

Mark mentions the semiotic implications.
Some time ago, I devised a model called "extended semiospheres".

I argue that whatever medial/mediated experience we are subjected to, we
expand the semiosphere (Term by I. Lotman, you might rephrase it as
cultural sphere of communication and experience for disciplines other
than semiotics) of direct experience.

I.e., SEEING something is a quasi-nonvirtual experience, as is TOUCHING etc.
Being TOLD about a touch or a vista is already a medial extension of our
own semiotic experience. This extension is something we are quite used to.
Now, the interesting aspect about media is that they are able to expand
our semiospheres into the realm of the realistically IMPOSSIBLE.
Such as, dead people brought back to life in stories, time travel in
science fiction, impossible movements in movies such as "Matrix" etc. etc.

The next step is to be brought into a sphere of mutual interaction with
such an environment of impossible experience, not just experience it as
an observer/reader/listener.

Hence, the mere existence of "cyburbia" is just another aspect of medial
extension of "real" life; the effects in "reality" and the hierarchical
structures involved I sketched in my last posting.
However, just as Mark mentions, the technology that makes possible the
impossible in a virtual life DOES have effects ON reality, as
ultimatively, human experience is networked through and through – I
throw in good old James here again. Hence, how do we separate virtual
experience from real experience? We simply cannot do that; maybe on a
conscious metadiscourse level, but otherwise no (hence the pathological
cases where students use guns to continue the fight in their high
schools that they started on the screen. These are the extreme results,
but others may be more subtle).

The virtual semiosphere is a vast extension of the real one, and this is
also to emphasize that it is no alternative to reality but is
intertwined and interwoven with it. The experience production of Second
Life and its effects can only be guessed upon.

Best,
Guido

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Subject: **Re: [Medianthro] Death in cyburbia**
From: **Elisenda Ardèvol <eardevol@gmail.com>**
Date: Thu, 19 Apr 2007 00:44:01 +0200

The article of The Guardian Simone posted us is intriguing, annoying and misleading and the fact it is reporting is astonishing. But, in fact, the newspaper article bring us nothing new, no insight or explanation, but panic and confusion, and it is not very well informed about current Internet research. Also, it fails at the very beginning because it establishes a non clear cause-effect relationship. What kind of psychological effects is the author talking about?? That this man was committing suicide because he has been exposed too much to the Internet flat relationships? That the users may be psychological damaged for watching the scene? That our culture is going crazy because of Internet? All of that? (nonsense) Internet is not the cause. On the other hand, and for the shame of the human race, death has been an spectacle for centuries, and the casual watchers of this suicide cannot blame their selves, as I could not when a few months ago, an actor died in the theater, during the play, and we didn't believe that, until the personnel told us that "it was real".

But, going further, I found very interesting Guido comments and Mark remarks that "when one owns the technology of consumption one also owns the means of production" and that mutuality is one of the key concepts to understand Internet practices, much of them including mutual text production, others, watching and being watched. We cannot dismiss that Internet is not only text and that the software and platforms you can interact with seem never ending. It is becoming more and more difficult to generalize and a lot of "new" practices are emerging.

What I found amusing is, going back to mutuality and to the article, is the answers it has received. Online newspapers have this add: you can read what other readers think about it, and I liked this answer of Dante:

Dante
April 17, 2007 3:04 PM

It is interesting the individualised basis of this article: Why the psychological effects, rather than the social effects?

All the criticisms here have been leveled at every form of media that has ever arisen, and was also leveled at democracy: It is banal, populistic, and it is unhealthy for the weak minded "subs" who become "cybs" in this burbia, to fraternise with one another. It should be stopped at once for their own health and improvement!

There is plenty of research out their onto the SOCIAL aspects of the web. Some of them point out dangers some benefits. There are whole sub-disciplines, new media studies, anthropology of media etc...

Yes there is a lot of hype around web 2.0, just like around web 1.0, TV, the printing press. Yes these things do have a darker side, but at the same time, they have their most profound social effects when they become normalised.
There is also a considerable academic literature on "Moral Panics." I am sure the psychologists, and the social psychologists have a lot to say on that too.

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