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Creativity in Second Life: the virtual world as a site of experimentation for fashion start-ups

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**Creativity in Second Life:
The virtual world as a site of experimentation for fashion start-ups**

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Abstract

In this paper we propose that Second Life (SL) might be an ideal plateau for novice fashion designers to experiment in their milieu and gains skills in design and a variety of other fashion related activities such as marketing and customer identification. First, we address issues of demographics, social interaction and emotional involvement in SL. Second, we compare and contrast the fashion industry with the SL fashion industry in an effort to inform future research about the particularities of the SL market. Our analysis suggests that SL demographics and identity of residents may not be indicative of SL consumption and that SL fashion departs significantly from real life fashion in terms of fashion cycles, products and the characteristics of a fashion designer's occupation.

Key words: Second Life; fashion; design; consumption; virtual world; MMORPGs

*Fashion is made to become
unfashionable.
Coco Chanel*

Introduction

In the 1994 film *Prêt-à-Porter* (dir. Robert Altman), a respected haute couture designer in financial difficulties has to present her models in cow-boy boots during her fashion show, a commercial trade-off that conflicts with her artistic vision. This telling scene reveals the fact that most haute – couture firms’ main source of profit comes from licensing instead from their ‘main occupation’, clothing (Crane, 1997:399-400). A luxury design firm will now produce “avant-garde and postmodernist clothes to attract attention to the brand name and its licensed products” (Crane, 1999:20). While haute couture designers cannot survive from their main oeuvre, new designers who want to start their own label find that the exercise requires high level of investment and the start-up costs are almost prohibitive (Crane, 1999:19 & Crane, 1997:405). Even for working as a designer in a firm, the US Bureau of Labour Statistics notes that due to low turnover and a small number of openings every year, relatively few job openings arise. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008-2009).

At a time when breaking into the world of fashion is difficult and luxury designer firms prosper financially from licensing through ‘novelty’ or ‘notoriety’ that they strive to associate with their brand, there is a new market that is flourishing – and it could offer opportunities for many designers to try their hand at designing garments and accessories, having and running a shop, marketing their products, participating in fashion shows and

building relationships with their customers. But, there is a twist: The designer will never have to touch actual fabric. They can still produce and sell garments – albeit of a digital nature. The market in question exists in Second Life (SL), an online persistent 3-D virtual world, created by its residents.

This paper explores the demographics and social interactions of SL residents as well as SL fashion in comparison to real world fashion with a view to gain some indication as to the production and consumption of fashion in SL. The exploration of these issues is in effect a preparation for a qualitative research project, which aims to address these issues with SL fashion designers themselves. As part of this preparation we explored some theoretical issues and also held pilot interviews with some SL designers to gain an indication of their views and experiences prior to finalising a research design. Our theoretical analysis was informed by existing literature, SL official statistics, press and blog articles and observation. Our pilot interviews ranged from a questionnaire to e-mails and Instant Messaging with avatars within SL. We approached fashion designers whom we identified from press and blog presentations and from random fashion related searches within SL. Subsequently we enquired as to some of their experiences with SL fashion, their own creativity and their business practices. Even though the content of these communications is not presented in the current paper, it informed our observations on SL fashion and will assist with subsequent research.

Second Life: Description, Demographics and Social Interaction

SL is an online, persistent 3D virtual environment. By ‘persistent’ we mean that the world continues to exist even if the user is not logged in to it; the programming behind

the platform means that the world will continue to operate. Linden Labs – who started creating SL – constantly creates new land and SL residents purchase that and create houses, shops, landmarks etc. SL has sometimes in academic papers been called a Massively-Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPGs) like Lineage and World of Warcraft (for example in Yee et.al. 2007). However, there are two important differences between MMORPGs and SL.

Firstly, in MMORPGs players participate in a game and they cooperate with other players to succeed in various tasks or ‘quests’. The players climb ‘levels’ of proficiency as they complete quests. Yee notes that “ultimately, each user decides which form of achievement they will pursue, and the richness and complexity of the environment eliminate the need for super-ordinate goals or storylines” (Yee, 2006:6). However we would note that a player who logs in for the first time will have little opportunity to actually play the game, learn about the world or meet a lot of other players if they just leave their avatar standing where it materialized. Hence, via playing, some storyline is created and some goals achieved. SL is different in this sense as the residents do not have to do anything specific. If they choose they can just ‘be’. There are no foes to battle, no skills to learn, no professions to master, no puzzles to solve. Therefore we elect not to use the term MMORPG for SL in this paper and we are instead using the more generic term *metaverse* (also used by Geser, 2007) as conceived by Neal Stephenson (1992) in his novel “Snow Crash”. Stephenson’s literary vision, describes a truly biological immersive environment which is not possible in SL but in terms of scalability (rich individual details), usability (facial expression and body language) and economics (since SL has its own economy) the terms will suffice. SL is however a more freely developed metaverse

than the dystopic vision of Stephenson and that brings us to its second fundamental difference which is the building of elements in the world and the retention of copyright.

In MMORPGs the basic business model requires players to sign over their intellectual property rights in order to enter the game (Herman, Coombe, Kaye:2006). The radical new approach of Linden Labs, when creating SL, was to recognise that the creative contributions of players belonged to them. In SL any creation – be it an item of clothing, a body, a piece of furniture or a whole house – belongs to the player that has constructed it both in SL and in FL – First Life. Avatars – a user’s digital representation – are highly customisable and can be literally anything that the user envisages, even if that is not anthropomorphic – there are for example “furrries” i.e. anthropomorphic animal characters. In contrast, users have to make a specific choice in MMORPGs from a list of characters, for example in World of Warcraft a user can choose between factions (Alliance and Horde) and the races within these factions¹. There has been some research focusing on the motivation behind race choice in MMORPGs (e.g. Yee, 2008) which indicates that different personalities and motivations are drawn to different character types. The worlds of MMORPGs are also mapped out by the creators as are the professions that characters can learn, the various trades, the quests or missions. There is also an economy that functions more or less in a pre-determined way, i.e. the players amass wealth by completing quests and selling items. Arguably there have been instances of exchanging items for ‘real world’ currency but the products themselves are limited, created by the companies that design the games and the copyright belongs to them, hence selling them to other users is arguably illegal (e.g. Musgrove, 2005). SL has a completely

¹ The Alliance currently consists of Humans, Night Elves, Dwarfs, Gnomes and Draenai. The Horde currently consists of Orcs, Tauren, Undead, Trolls and Blood Elves. Each race has further subdivisions in nine classes which are Druid, Hunter, Mage, Paladin, Priest, Rogue, Shaman, Warlock, and Warrior.

different economy that functions in general terms independent of Linden Labs since users own the copyright of the creators. Even though we consider SL to be different than MMORPGs extensive research in demographics and social activities of players in the latter also exhibits some similarities which we will explore subsequently.

It is worth noting that most research in MMORPGs and SL also subscribes to a dichotomy of lives when examining online gaming, opting for online experience and real-life or offline experience. In SL we found indications that the two 'lives' concept is debatable. In most articles, websites and discussions the term First Life is mostly used interchangeably with the term Real Life, however, during our contact with SL residents some disagreed strongly with our use of the term 'Real Life' even though some others used the terms themselves. The dichotomy of Second Life and First Life or Real Life is naturally rife with complexities about 'place', the sense of self, the nature of mediated communication, how participants perceive their exploits in the metaverse.

Before we explore some of these issues a brief introduction into the mechanics of SL will be given. As a result of the Linden Labs policy for users to effectively create the metaverse, today SL has over 65,000 acres (Second Life official website, 2008) starting from just 64 acres created by Linden Labs in 2003. New residents join by subscribing on a website and downloading the necessary software. They use a first name and choose a last name from a list. Upon creating their character they have a choice of a 'ready-made' avatar, which they can customise later. The user can login to SL, optionally go through an 'orientation' that will show them how to make their avatar walk, talk, touch objects and generally 'live' in SL. After that, the possibilities are numerous. A resident can meet

people, travel through the land, build houses, purchase virtual life or even start a new business.



Figure 1 – Welcome to SL – orientation for new residents. Since the choice of Avatars during sign-up and prior to customisation is limited there are a lot of identical Avatars in this first visit to Second Life. (captured Feb. 08)]

Total residents in Second Life currently stand at 12,765,680 (Second Life Virtual Economy Key Metrics, Jan. 08) but one should also note that not all residents are equally active and that one resident does not necessarily equal one user. A user may have multiple avatars. SL also has its own currency, Linden Dollars which can be bought and sold on LindeX – the official Linden Dollar exchange or other unaffiliated third party sites. The Linden Dollar exchange rate is approximately US\$1 to L\$270 and the Linden resident balance in Jan. 08 was 4,428,871,969 (approximately US\$16,403,230).

The Linden Dollar and the possibility for residents to create, rent and sell their own creations had as a result a relatively big number of SL entrepreneurs dealing in such

diverse professions as land, architecture, design, fashion, dance etc. A variety of articles and profiles made their appearance in the press describing some instances of businessmen and women who made their fortune in Second Life. As early as May 2006, Anshe Chung was featured on the cover of Business Week (01/05/2006) as the “first online personality to achieve a net worth exceeding one million US dollars from profits entirely earned inside a virtual world.” (Anshe Chung Studios Press Release, 26/11/2006).



Figure 2 – Business Week cover (01/05/2006)

Anshe Chung, the avatar of Chinese-born language teacher Ailin Graef who lives in Germany, developed her fortune over two and a half years starting with an initial investment of US\$9.95. She initially bought small plots of virtual real estate which she then subdivided into plots and developed with landscaping and virtual buildings and subsequently rented or sold.

Real estate is only one of the occupations that SL residents take up. The SL official website (2008) lists some examples of in-world occupations like party and wedding planner, fashion designer, custom avatar designer, private detective, hug maker etc. To use the services of any professional in SL the resident will have to pay in Linden Dollars. However only a very small percentage of residents actually have Premium Accounts – that is, they have a registered credit or debit card and use Linden Dollars – 92,096 of a total of 12,240,161 (Second Life Virtual Economy Key Metrics, Jan. 08) Nevertheless as we noted earlier, the fact that not all users are equally active and the possibility that one user may have multiple avatars has to be taken into account when contemplating these numbers.

Even though we do not consider SL an MMORPG in this essay we are compelled to note that some of the findings from MMORPG demographics research coincide with some of the statistics that Linden Labs offers on SL. Moreover the existing research into MMORPGs is vital for giving indications on demographics, the process of social interaction and the idea of transferring in-world acquired skills to real life. It should be noted however that the findings of MMORPG literature are not necessarily transferable to a metaverse which has crucial differences from an MMORPG environment – even though it should be recognised that the two ‘modes’ of being in an online world also have crucial similarities, such as the virtual environment, the avatars, the social interaction etc. Hence we note some similar trends here as a guide even though we would propose that more SL – specific research is necessary in order to take into account the idiosyncrasies of the environment.

Most research into MMORPG demographics (Yee, 2001 and 2006; Griffiths, Davis & Chappell, 2003; Cole & Griffiths, 2007) serves as a reminder that the popular image of the gamer as a male teenager is largely not accurate. Most MMORPG players are in their 20s (for example the mean age is 23.6 in Cole & Griffiths, 2007 and 26.7 in Yee, 2006). In SL the majority of residents belong to the 25-34 age group (35.43%, Second Life Virtual Economy Key Metrics, Jan. 08). In terms of gender there is a significant presence of female players. Yee (2001) reported 84% of EverQuest players were male while Cole & Griffiths (2007) found that 71% of MMORPG participants were male and 29% were female. SL has much greater female participation – with males accounting for 59.02% and females for 40.98% in January 2008 (Second Life Virtual Economy Key Metrics, Jan. 08). We have seen no explanations as to why the percentage of female residents is significantly higher in SL – even though with the stereotype of the male teenage player and with SL being marketed as a world rather than a game might offer an indication. However, further research in this area might yield interesting results and give some insight into the differences between the SL metaverse and MMORPGs. It has also been indicated that in most MMORPGs a wide variety of occupations is present, from students and professionals to homemakers (Yee, 2006) and it would be interesting to see in future research if that diversity persists in SL.

In both MMORPGs and SL, social interaction is a key feature of the environment. According to McKenna & Bargh (2000) positive social interactions are enabled online as people have greater anonymity, physical appearance is not equally important as during face to face contact, the online world transcends limitations of physical space and users themselves can control the timing of their interactions. Yee (2006) notes that these factors

– apart perhaps from the fourth - are present in MMORPGs and they “suggest why social interactions occur in these online environments” (Yee, 2006:13). The results of the Cole & Griffiths (2007) research indicate that players made “good friends” within MMORPGs and 39.3% indicated that they would discuss sensitive issues with online friends that they would not discuss with real life friends. Similarly Yee (2006) found that 22.9% of male players and 32% of female players had discussed personal issues with MMORPG friends that they had not disclosed to real-life friends. The trend for female players to be more likely to do so was also noted by Cole & Griffiths (2007). This norm of sharing intimate details, along with the return and time involvement of players to MMORPGs regardless of the positivity or negativity of their experiences, suggests an emotional investment on their side and illustrates “the ability of these virtual environments to elicit a large amount of emotional investment” (Yee, 2006:30). In terms of SL this emotional investment – if it also stands for SL – could explain why residents spend money on land, clothes and other digital products. Even the friends of a SL businesswoman who deals in real estate expressed the question: “People pay you money to rent land that doesn’t exist?” (Craig, 2006) Yet if we accept that residents have emotionally invested in SL the answer becomes easier.

The key question though for this paper, since we are concentrating on fashion design and the skills needed or cultivated in SL, is 1) whether SL can serve as a platform to study social interaction – and thus try to gain understanding of the consumption of fashion products and also 2) the type of skills that the designers can attain and whether they can be transferred in real life. Yee et al. (2007) asserted that nonverbal social norms like interpersonal distance, gaze, talking and location persist in SL. From this they feel

that “it is possible to study social interaction in virtual environments and generalize them to social interaction in the real world” (Yee et al., 2007:119). However, the limitations of the study which Yee et al. (2007) also note, such as the absence of context from the data and the research into only one virtual world, might also limit the assertion above. Nevertheless, since there are indications that some social norms persist in SL it is possible that business people in the world may exploit the circumstance.

In terms of skills and their transferability, Yee (2006) has already indicated that in MMORPGs a distinct portion of respondents who use leadership skills to organise emergent groups feel that this exercise has improved their real-life leadership skills. From this indication we have also asked our respondent, who are all fashion designers in SL, to self- access the skills they have gained or are gaining and whether they may be transferable in First Life. Even though are sample is small and our method is qualitative most of our respondents feels that they have gained a variety of skill from working in SL and they have a desire to transfer those skills in a FL setting. Even though this too can only serve as an indication it might open the path for a more robust assessment of skills acquired in SL and their transferability.

From the research so far and the statistics offered by Second Life itself a fashion designer – or business person in general – can have indications as to their potential customers. The wide variety of age groups might mean opportunities for a variety of fashion designs for example, to cater each age group. The majority of 25s to 34s might also indicate a spending power greater than that enjoyed by the stereotypical teenage gamer. Research into the occupations of SL residents might also provide useful insights for designers – even though it should be stressed that the age, occupation and perceived

preferences of a group might not be transferable to their online identities. Even though Yee (2008) has noted that players choose avatars that mirror their actual appearance, his assertion comes from MMORPGs, where a limited choice of avatars with set characteristics are available. The complication of creating an individual and unique character in SL will have to be taken into consideration as well as the fact that the online character might be similar but it might also diverge completely from the actual person and his/her preferences in terms of consumption in First Life.

Fashion in First Life & Second Life

Having presented the workings of SL as well as the findings on identity and social interactions of participants in MMORPGs and SL we will go on to examine briefly fashion design and fashion consumption as a further consideration for a fashion designer that might be undertaking work in SL. When we started looking into the Second Life fashion industry it became clear that it would be very difficult to pin down fashion as equivalent to the First Life fashion industry in terms of fashion life cycles, products and consumption. It also became clear that the term ‘fashion designer’ is an inaccurate description of the activities of an individual working in SL fashion with their own label and shop. These differences are briefly discussed below.

Fashion life cycle theories as presented by Sproles (1981) range from the Long Run Time Frame – whereby fashions cycle over 30 to 50 years – to the Short Run Perspective – which focuses on the life of a specific fashion lasting several years. Under the Long Run Time Frame “each new fashion is an outgrowth or elaboration of the previously existing fashion” (Sproles, 1981:117). Hence new fashions are just minor changes to the

previous ones and as long as the overall style holds it is not important what these changes are. Sproles asserts that if the model holds then “producers and marketers of new styles face little risk of rejection no matter what they design as long as they maintain long run direction consistent with the trend in historical continuity” (Sproles, 1981:117). Under the Short Run Perspective each fashion will last for some years and then be replaced by another. Both models present a situation that effectively means that a style dies at some point – even if it will be resurrected some years in the future. Ergo, an 1860s dress will not be sold in a retail store near you today nor will it be worn at work. However in SL, designer Laynie Link, of LaynieWear designed just such a dress (see figure 3) and is giving it away for free in her stores. This is just one example but a brief search in SL for ‘medieval dress’, ‘armour’ and ‘science fiction’ all produced results with shops and relevant products.



Figure 3 – 1860s Day Dress by Laynie Link of Laynie Wear (Linden Lifestyles blog, <http://lindenlifestyles.com/?p=923>, last accessed 17/04/08)

The story of the 1860s dress is interesting. Daisyblue Hefferman (SL avatar name) was involved in the creation of “Land of Lincoln”, an educational ‘place’ about Lincoln and his time in SL. She asked some designers to create something of the period. Arguably the fact that she writes her experiences in one of the most well known blogs about SL Fashion, Linden Lifestyles might have helped in persuading the designers. Laynie Link was inspired by the request and created the dress for free and also a parasol and underwear relevant to the period which are selling for L\$100 each. This brings us to the issue of propagators of new fashions and the importance of gatekeepers.

In FL fashion theory the industry or the consumers – be it in terms of class (Simmel, 1904), the mass market theory, the subculture theory or the theory of collective selection (see Sproles, 1981) – propagate new fashions. Certainly there has been research in the role of haute couture fashion designers as innovators (Crane, 1999) and also of fashion designers as trend spotters (Sinha, 2002), which also fits in with the view that consumers propagate fashions if we accept that fashion designers might be sent onto the field to collect data for use in their creations (Sinha, 2002). Yet in SL we have already indicated that fashions actually exist in the plural and in great diversity. Therefore the propagators of fashion may be completely different depending on the genre that we are examining – since in SL one may find what could be called ‘normal’ clothing and then all the shades in between that and ‘extreme’.

The role of gatekeepers though seems to be important in our anecdotal story of the 1860s dress. As Hirsch (1972 and 2000) has noted, cultural products are not consumed on merit but they have to struggle with a system of organizations that filter cultural products before they reach the consumer. Bourdieu (1983) has also contemplated the role of critics

in the production of symbolic goods, considering their increasing importance as the result of the artists' disassociation with patrons and their increasing indifference towards the bourgeois buying public – even though if we accept that fashion is defined by the buying public then Bourdieu would categorise it only as *l'art moyen*. The 1860s dress was created following the suggestion of a 'gatekeeper' or 'critic' and it is possible that its presentation – along with that of the accompanying products – might have maximised sales or at least footfall in the LaynieWear SL shops. Sadly at present such examination was beyond the scope of our study and footfall statistics are not available in such detail from Linden Labs. However there are currently several online publications and blogs on SL fashion as well as regular SL events like fashion shows. A whole industry of gatekeeper organizations – writers, models, catwalk organisers – revolves around the central figure of the fashion designer and it is possible that Hirsch's and Bourdieu's assertions might be or become significant.

Another point that requires attention is about the variety of products that might be considered 'fashion'. Fashion in FL is usually taken to mean clothing and accessories – even though the term has now transcended these boundaries. Goods have gone beyond their use value (Baudrillard, 1988) and are now signifiers of status, beliefs, affluence etc. (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979). For the purposes of this paper we initially limited our view of fashion to clothing and accessories but it soon became apparent that in SL we would have to be brader in our scope. There is a number of shops in SL who offer 'ready-made' packages of not only clothing but also complete bodies. Effectively the user can purchase a box which includes a body, skin tone, details such as eye colour, skin colour, length of arms etc – even going as far as genitalia. Most of the popular fashion shops in

SL (as the search facility itself calculates them) include clothing and complete body makeovers for the avatar. The fashion designer therefore does not have to limit creativity to clothing but can ‘branch out’ to all areas of the avatar’s appearance.

This complication was added to another from our observation of SL designers and our introductory discussions with them when designing our questionnaire. It seemed that ‘fashion designer’ was a term that had too many FL affiliations and quite different for each person we discussed this with. Additionally it became apparent that SL fashion designers don’t just design clothes. They also partake in a variety of other activities like creating their shop, doing the marketing, making display decisions, taking care of the publicity etc. Effectively only one of our respondents – even though are sample is definitely not representative – was working with someone else and so for the rest all aspects of their fashion business demanded their attention. This is a great departure from the FL fashion industry where most designers will work as innovators or trend spotters as we mentioned above.

The point about designers in FL working as innovators or trend spotters is that they need to resolve a *design problem* i.e. what to design (Sinha 2002). Without resolving the problem satisfactorily the company will face the problem of producing something that does not sell. Hence a lot of effort is being put into identifying the consumer and anticipating the choices they will be willing to make. There is a huge difference here in FL fashion from SL fashion. In SL the design problem may disappear altogether for several reasons such as; 1) One piece of clothing that is popular may be replicated ad infinitum at no cost and unpopular lines don’t have a prohibitive cost that they would in FL; 2) From our discussion above into the identity and demographics of SL it becomes

apparent that it would be extremely difficult to anticipate the preferences of a wide variety of consumers who may not necessarily be acting according to their FL demographics since they assume an alternative identity with their avatar; 3) Fashion shops and labels in SL do not partake – as of yet – in licensing and hence the role of the designer as innovator who solves the design problem of notoriety is not equally important. These are just some indicative reasons, however it is important to stress that since the design problem does not have to be solved it is very possible that the designer may just – in the words of one of our respondents – “*do what (they) feel like doing*”.

Still, arguably the SL fashion designer will need to know at some point that the time they have spent creating their products, creating their shop etc. will be rewarded in some sort of financial return. However, as we noted it seems to be extremely difficult to anticipate the preferences of consumers. Some designers might circumvent this problem by monitoring the gatekeepers and consulting with their customers. Already SL fashion labels have SL groups and designers themselves are contactable for custom work and/or ideas for future products. However for the industry as a whole it is very probable that the wide variety of products will be ultimately more profitable than turning to mainstream ideas about what products will sell. In fact the Long Tail model (Anderson, 2004) might be more effective in sustaining the SL fashion industry. Anderson’s idea is in basic terms that with a far-reaching distribution channel the obscure products will actually sell more than the popular or ‘blockbuster’ products. Keeping in mind that SL is a distribution channel with – currently – negligible storage and distribution costs it is very probable that the products that are obscure will collectively have a market share that is similar of exceeds that of the popular products. Consequently, the availability of products for a

wide variety of tastes may also mean that the popular products will decrease in popularity since customers will be able to find an 1860s dress – if that’s what they want and will not have to purchase a 2008 dress instead. Naturally a full exploration of this proposal with data on variety, obscurity and sales is necessary if it is to be discussed in any depth and the thoughts of SL designers themselves will have to be sought.

To conclude our consideration of fashion in FL and SL it has to be noted that numerous differences have been identified. SL is a market in which the identity of the consumer is not as straightforward as demographics would suggest due to the complication of the assumed identity of each resident. SL fashion is also extremely diverse in terms of fashion cycles – as fashions seem to coexist without one replacing the other as in FL fashion and products go over and beyond the strict clothes and accessories categories. Finally the role of the SL fashion designer is – in contrast to the FL fashion designer – much more diverse and much more demanding since he/she will also have to consider over and above the fashion design itself issues of retail space, marketing, pricing etc.

Conclusion

This paper stems from the apparent difficulties that new designers face with entering a market with high – entry costs and the divergence of haute-couture companies’ income from clothing to licensing. We hypothesise that SL might be an ideal plateau for fashion designers to experiment in their milieu and gains skills in design and a variety of other fashion related activities such as marketing, customer identification etc. In order to understand the fashion designer’s activity in SL it is imperative to explore the

demographics and social interactions of SL residents as well as the SL fashion market in comparison to FL.

In addressing these questions in the literature, within SL practice and from pilot interviews with some SL fashion designers, we found that online worlds and SL in particular have residents both male and female with a diverse age distribution. Nonverbal communication norms from real life seem to transfer in SL, yet there can be no definitive answer when questioning the identity of the avatars and whether their demographics can be representative of their SL behaviour and preferences – hence their consumption of fashion cannot be calculated similarly to the FL fashion consumption.

Additionally, we noted several departures in SL fashion from FL fashion practices; most notably in the theory of fashion cycles, according to which in FL, fashions seem to replace one another while in SL fashions seem to coexist. Moreover, in terms of products, SL fashion offers a wide variety which is not constrained by clothing and accessories but branches out to whole bodies and body parts. Finally the fashion designer – as we indicated above – does not only act as trend spotter or as innovator but rather takes on a more expanded role, potentially making decisions on design issues, the creation of a shop, marketing the products, maintaining relationships with customers etc.

The following areas of possible future research emerge from this study: 1) the problematic concept of ‘who’ is the person consuming in SL and how their FL demographics might not necessarily provide a clue into their SL character and consumption patterns; 2) the possible absence of fashion cycles in SL, since styles seem to coexist, and the negative or positive effects that this could create for the market in terms of production and consumption; 3) the wide variety of products – which expands

the work of the fashion designer from clothing and accessories to avatar body makeovers and the complexities this could have in terms of variety of products and consumption patterns, and 4) the necessity for an SL fashion designer to deal with other aspects of fashion apart from business and the possible skills that this process might offer – which could arguably also be transferable to FL. In conclusion, the SL fashion market offers an opportunity for researchers to address a wide variety of questions concerning fashion consumption and fashion production albeit in a new environment.

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