

The Positioning of Pooky: a semi-professional's utilization of a virtual world for experimenting with television

CarrieLynn D. Reinhard
Dominican University
United States of America
creinhard@dom.edu

Pooky Amsterdam
PookyMedia
info@pookymedia.com

Abstract

The emergence of the Web 2.0 paradigm has brought more attention on to the idea of Internet-based interactive television where the audience is allowed and even encouraged to participate in and interact with the stages of television production, distribution and exhibition. This paper focuses on virtual worlds as one Internet-based platform within which people are experimenting with how to produce such egalitarian television programming. For this paper, virtual worlds television is seen through the experiences of one virtual worlds entrepreneur. The analysis focuses on how this entrepreneur, Pooky Amsterdam, positions herself as a producer of virtual worlds television by positioning herself in relationship to the users or audiences of her shows. The analysis considers her comments on how she is trying to position herself against the traditional power dynamics of television broadcasting paradigms by positioning herself as an entrepreneur in a new(er) power dynamic. Thus, her positioning of herself relates to how she endorses the Web 2.0 paradigm as a user herself of virtual worlds technologies.

Keywords

virtual worlds; web 2.0; positioning theory

As the newer media subsumes the reception activities of the old media, many in the public and academia are questioning what happens when the content and activities of the old

media are subsumed, and even supplanted, by the new. In particular, the rise of streaming and mobile television programming has led some to wonder about this new paradigm of television and how it impacts production, distribution, exhibition and reception (Bruns 2008; Green 2008; Grindstaff & Turrow 2006; Meikle & Young, 2008; Tay & Turner 2008; Wood 2007). These questions include understanding how the interactive nature of digital technologies, such as the Internet, impacts the traditionally passive, audience-as-consumer conceptualization of television. How does television becoming Internet-based change how things have been, and would such changes be for better or worse?

The study discussed in this paper reflects these issues regarding 'Television 2.0', participatory television, interactive television, and Internet-based television. With the move to Internet-based television, there is a concurrent renewal of interest in interactive television. Television has dabbled with interactive experiences as far back as the 1960s (Howley, 2005; Kim, 1999; Kim & Sawhney, 2002; Stewart, 1999). Interactive television discussions and experiments focused on making the delivery platform technology, conventional television, interactive for delivering content, or with content offering limited interactive possibilities for consumers (Jensen & Toscan, 1999; Kim, 1999; Stewart, 1999). The rise of Web 2.0 has seen a rise in discussion and application of more audience-centered interactive television to deliver more content interaction (Reinhard, 2010). Such television strategies align with the overarching paradigm of Web 2.0 that celebrates the activity of the audience as requisite for content to be produced and distributed (Carpentier, 2009). Such influence from the Web 2.0 discourse should thus be seen in how producers (Bruns, 2008) approach this new era of television and the traditional television positions of producers and audience.

For this paper, I have been in dialogue with one such producer: a semi-professional producer of television programs and machinima films. Her name is Pooky Amsterdam. As part of this dialogue, we toured the ongoing productions she currently has, and I have participated in the live shows. We have discussed her views on the future of television, which she has described as "connected television", "intertainment", and "citizen shows": her use of this jargon reflects her goals of creating more participatory television experiences for her audiences. This paper focuses on how Pooky positions herself as a television producer, and how she performs this identity through her interactions with others. This paper addresses the research question of how she sees herself and her relationship with her audience. These positioning and relationships are used to address the overarching issue of how Pooky relates to the discourses of traditional television production and Web 2.0.

First, I discuss the issue of content interactivity, interactive television, and Internet-based interactive television in which I argue that for a particular type of content interactivity, virtual worlds television production may be better suited as a production technology. Following that discussion is background information on Pooky Amsterdam, the television programming we discussed, and the methods used to see how Pooky is positioning herself. Finally, the analysis of our discussions and her online descriptions focuses on the performance and positioning of Pooky as enacted through her description of herself, her programs and her audiences.

Virtual Worlds Television

Interactive television has been concerned with how the technology used for distributing and exhibiting the television content provides the consumer with more control in *accessing* the content (Kim, 1999). However, true content interactivity occurs when the structure of the delivery technology for television programming allows for users to have some influence over the *progression* of the content, either before or after its production (Cover, 2004; 2006; Mcmillan, 2002); how a player interacts with and controls the unveiling of the content of a digital game is an example of such interactivity. Interactive television providers working with conventional television have attempted to replicate existing content participation by replicating preexisting genres and audience activities such as weather, sports, talk shows, game shows, and polling (Baldwin, McVoy & Steinfeld, 1996; Kim, 1999; Kim & Sawhney, 2002). Since the rise of digital games, with their increasingly complicated narratives, and the Internet, with its requirements for content interactivity, there has been growing interest in how to learn from these interactive media for the production of interactive television content (Cover, 2004; Ekman & Lankoski, 2004; Owen, 1999; Ursu et al., 2008).

Researchers have conducted joint investigations into how Internet-based technologies could be used to create a broadcast model to enable content interactivity. Different European research teams have developed computational engines that utilized databases of pre-recorded, scripted video and audio files (Hales, Pellimen & Castrén, 2006; Ursu et al., 2008; Van den Bergh, 2007). The database selected which files to use to construct the broadcast content, editing the scripted program in real-time as if it was a live broadcast, essentially becoming “a personal TV postproduction team for each viewer” (Ursu et al, 2008, p. 28).

Other researchers have attempted to design systems that present more immediate content interactivity. In Japan, Saito and Murayama (2010) developed *AdlivTV* (*Audience-*

Driven LIVE TV system) as a prototype broadcasting system where the audience could impact the outcome of a live broadcast through their requests to a camera operator on what to record and transmit during the live broadcast. In Belgium, Van den Bergh et al (2007) discussed how to design technical systems to support ‘Staged Participatory Multimedia Events’ that would allow users to become their own television producers, creating interactive shows based on existing genres, such as quiz shows.

However, the content interactivity offered in these experiences is not a one-to-one ratio such as that found in playing more advanced digital games (Reinhard, 2010). This means that the progression of the television content, whether mediated in real-time by a computer or a human, was not reactive to every single user. Instead, the content responded to the aggregated audience; this is understandable given the broadcast models under which the producers and researchers were operating. Digital games, while mass produced, are largely consumed in a relatively individualized manner. For interactive television to achieve a type and amount of content interactivity akin to digital games, it would have to negotiate these two models, which have been constructed from traditions associated with two different technologies: broadcast television and computers.

Such a negotiation can be seen in amateur and semi-professional television programming that utilizes the Internet for distribution of webseries (Van den Bergh et al, 2007). For example, *YouTube* producers Chad, Matt and Rob (www.chadmattandrob.com) have been producing interactive short films that utilize the hyperlinking possibilities of *YouTube* videos to provide each audience member the chance to influence the outcome of the film. These producers have found a way to combine the broadcast model with the expectation of individualized reception with computers. However, such participation is a limited form of one-on-one content interactivity, impacting only its progression. This lack of participation during generation may be due to the structure of websites like *YouTube* where production happens offline and where there is no networking capability for users to join together for content creation (Bruns, 2008).

A different Internet-based platform may be better suited for producing more content interactivity via online production. Social virtual worlds may be well suited for this position given the user-generated requirements structured into these Internet-based platforms to provide the platform's content. From a common definition, virtual worlds are the reproduction of the appearance of the physical world in a digital environment into which people, via digital representations or avatars, can gather and engage in a variety of social and personal activities (Bell, 2008; Schroeder, 2008). Virtual worlds are spaces that require user activity in order for

them to become places in which things happen, whether those things are slaying dragons in game worlds or producing works of art in social worlds. Virtual worlds, when they are not strictly for gaming purposes, are social worlds that require, to varying degrees, user-generation for their content; that is, nothing happens if the users do not do something.

In these virtual spaces people have been creating places to produce television programs. Unlike websites like *Xtranormal* (www.xtranormal.com) or *TVML* (www.nhk.or.jp/strl/tvml) that offer single users the chance to create computer animated programs, virtual worlds can involve the activities of multiple users coordinating in real time to produce programming via processes that are similar to television production in the physical world. Within Linden Lab's virtual world *Second Life*, a number of amateur and semi-professional producers have been producing television programs for the past several years, with an entire segment of the world's inhabitants involved in some type of media production (<http://secondlife.com/destinations/media>). Many of these productions appear to follow a pattern of activities seen in research on television production in collaborative virtual environments a decade earlier.

In the United Kingdom, researchers experimented with how to use a three-dimensional virtual environment to produce *Inhabited Television* (Benford et al 1999; Craven et al 2000). The audience was invited into the virtual environment to participate in the content production, which was recorded and broadcast. In their virtual worlds television, the television producer defined a framework within which the audience interacted and participated to generate content; the interaction between performers and the audience was then recorded to broadcast to television viewers (Van den Bergh et al, 2007). This production paradigm can be seen in various virtual worlds for television production (Reinhard, 2010): it is the idea of "build it, and let them create" that is a foundational paradigm to virtual worlds and reflects the Web 2.0 paradigm of providing the structures in which people can behave more agenticly through user-generated content creation (Jarrett, 2008; Leung, 2009): that is, to "build it and let them create".

Two television series illustrate how *Second Life's* structure let producers create talk shows within which their audiences could creatively participate. The television series, *Metanomics*, has been produced, distributed and exhibited in the world as well as streamed to their website, www.metanomics.net, since the first show on September 17, 2007 (Reinhard, 2010). It is the work of a professor of economics, Dr. Robert Bloomfield of Cornell University, who, as part of his interest in the economics of virtual worlds, began producing his own inworld talk show. The National Public Radio series, *Science Friday*, owned and operated an island in

Second Life to which they streamed each episode. While on the island, people could watch the show, comment on it via the text chat feature of the virtual world, and even have their questions become part of the broadcast. The series started in 1991, but did not stream inworld until August 31, 2007, just before *Metanomics* began. Unlike *Metanomics*, the series stopped streaming inworld in May 2010, due to budget drawbacks. Structurally, these programs are very similar for how they incorporated the audience, and Dr. Bloomfield discussed having learned from this series during a presentation he made to my research project in September 2008.

The entrepreneur discussed in this paper utilizes a similar format to *Metanomics* and *Science Friday* in the two programs she produces inworld. As did the previous examples, she utilizes virtual worlds, and specifically *Second Life*, to produce her television programming, while also utilizing websites, including YouTube, to distribute and exhibit them. Thus, her television programs are completely online creations. As I will describe in the following sections, she structures her programs in the paradigm of “build it, and let them create” with herself being a user and endorser of that framework, as the analysis will illustrate. This paradigm’s connection with the overarching Web 2.0 discourse, and how it relates Pooky’s positioning of herself, is the focus of this paper’s analysis.

Positioning of Pooky

This paper’s goal is to analysis how Pooky Amsterdam discussed herself and her perspectives on virtual world based television production, distribution and exhibition. The analysis draws on two theoretical perspectives. First, positioning theory is drawn on for analyzing the rhetoric she uses to reflect upon herself, her beliefs, and her practices. Second, as the topic is virtual world television, issues of Web 2.0, and the discourses surrounding Web 2.0 are considered.

According to positioning theory, how people converse in any given situation can reveal the beliefs and practices they are acting upon; that is, the positions they are undertaking during the situation reflect their endorsement of certain “storylines” that frame how they make sense of the world or the topic on hand and act accordingly (Harre et al, 2009; Paulus, 2009; Tirado & Gálvez, 2007). What a person says during a conversation reflects the role(s) s/he is taking on in any given situation (Ligorio & Pugliese, 2004), and the positionings people take during a conversation are their maneuverings between storylines, or discourses (Linehan & McCarthy, 2000). Positionings can be reflexive, where in a conversation a person positions himself or herself (Davies & Harre, 1999, as cited in Linehan & McCarthy, 2000). Positions can only be

understood in relation to one another, and in the context of some discourse or storyline (Paulus, 2009). Positions can be generated from a discourse, and/or work towards shaping the context and thus the discourse within which one is positioned (Riva, 2002; Tirado & Gálvez, 2007).

Discourses involve the creation, avocation, and evocation of grand narratives on a sociocultural macrolevel that can become frames for making sense of everyday life on a microlevel (Tirado & Gálvez, 2007). According to Carpentier (2009), the discourses surrounding the emergence of the Web 2.0 paradigm has placed participatory and interactivity audience activities to the forefront of consideration of what is important in the reception of media technologies and contents involved in the paradigm (Cammaerts, 2008; Carpentier, 2009). To a degree, such participation is celebrated and not critically considered for political economies or actual instances of media reception (Carpentier, 2009). The emergence of new media technologies that promote and/or require audience participation has been heralded as creating a new communication paradigm. Such a new paradigm is then placed into opposition with older paradigms: in this instance, it is the difference between audience-as-consumer and audience-as-agent (Reinhard, 2011), with audience-as-agent representing the Web 2.0 discourse, and audience-as-consumer representing the traditional television production discourse.

Method

I have come to know Pooky solely through computer mediated channels. She emailed my research project at Roskilde University seeking participants for her inworld quiz show, *The 1st Question*. I emailed her my willingness to participate. Our next channel of communication was via the inworld text chat feature of *Second Life* to arrange my appearance on the show. We also communicated via the VoIP program Skype for the audio aspect of the show. Our subsequent communications have occurred via Skype, email and inworld text and voice chats. I have never meet this woman in the physical, and only knew her via her avatars from *Second Life* and her computer-mediated presence; in both, her primarily presence has been to call herself “Pooky Amsterdam”¹.

The methods of data collection/production utilized in this study have focused on these computer-mediated communication channels. In this paper, I analyzed two interviews I conducted with her via email and Skype. The first interview was intended to produce an overview of Pooky's relationship with virtual worlds. She was interviewed on her motivations

¹ Pooky Amsterdam is the pseudonym of the woman; it is her avatar's name. I asked her how she would prefer to be addressed, and she confirmed to refer to her only by this pseudonym.

for getting inworld, becoming a virtual worlds television producer, and what led to the start of her various projects. This interview occurred on January 28, 2011. The second interview occurred on March 2, 2011 during which two ‘walk abouts’ and ‘talk alouds’, akin to the fieldwork studies of Steele and Brown (1995), were conducted to visit two of her inworld *Second Life* productions, *The 1st Question* and *The Dating Casino*. She was interviewed on the design of each space and the reasons it was constructed as it was, how she sees the role of the audience for each show, and about what questions, learnings, helps and hinders she faced using the virtual world to meet her goals of ‘citizen shows’. As with the online descriptions, the interviews were analyzed for how Pooky positions herself in relationship to virtual world television.

This is a study and a paper about Pooky's thoughts as communicated through her voice. My positions as researcher are as a receiver first, a transmitter second, and an analyst third. In this paper I take on all three roles to varying degrees, with the receiver position backgrounded through data collection/production. As I want to ensure that I am an adequate transmitter of her thoughts and her voice, I invited Pooky into the writing phase as a member check against my transcription and analysis of her comments, to ensure I have not said something she asked me not to as it was said in strict confidence. Upon her request, the quotes given in the analysis section have been cleaned of idiomatic phrases such as the use of “like” and “you know” as conversational pauses. Additionally, to ensure that I am an ethical analyst, she was invited to check me for slander or misrepresentation: any time we conflicted with our interpretations of what she said, we discussed that matter in more depth, creating the space for clarification and further analysis. While it is my goal to seek understanding of Pooky's thoughts and actions through the theoretical lens of positioning theory and discourse theory, it is not my goal to be overtly negative or positive of her; having Pooky read my words and discuss them with me was a means to ensure more objectivity on my part.

Pooky's Television Programs

The 1st Question (<http://www.the1stquestion.com>) is a quiz show designed to test avatars on their knowledge of current events, science and technology. Three contestants compete in a series of rounds, answering questions and creating neologisms – all with the assistance of the studio audience, who can text their answers to the questions and who vote for the best neologism. The program is produced at the *StudioDome* on the *SpinDrift* island, located at <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Spindrift/70/241/701>. When I participated in the show as

FoxMarie Tennen on December 19, 2010, the episode was for their winter holiday season special. The set was designed to reflect non-religious aesthetic themes of the holiday, while maintaining the standard aesthetic orientation towards science and technology.

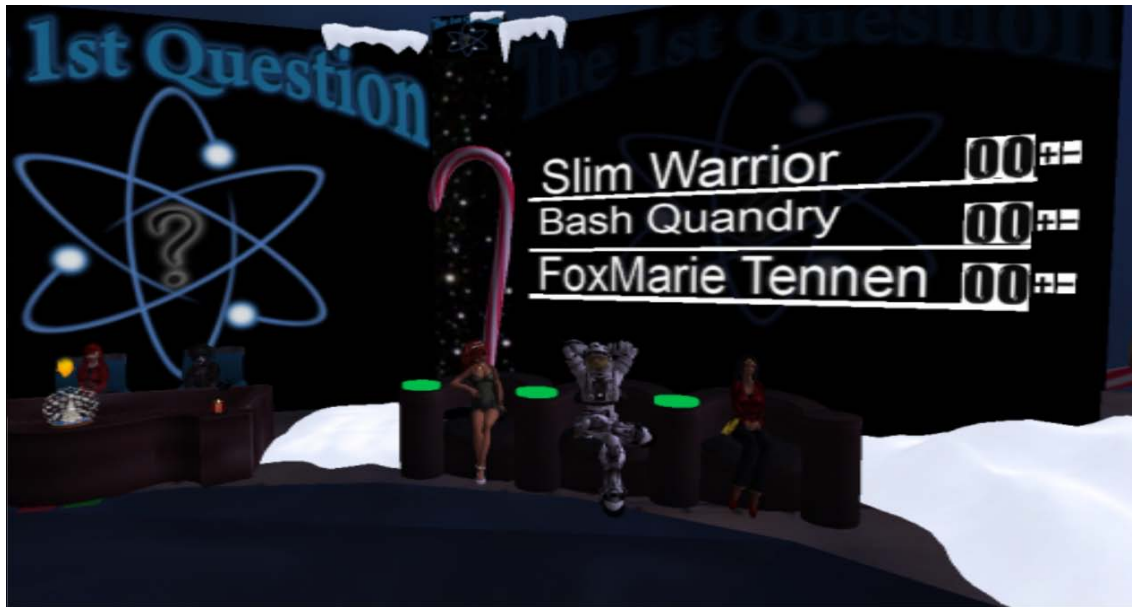


Figure 1. *The 1st Question*, December 19, 2010

The program continues to be produced regularly inworld, and is broadcast via Treet.tv, with archives of the show available www.the1stquestion.com.

The Dating Casino (<http://www.thedatingcasino.com/>) is a game show designed to help avatars meet avatars to form romantic encounters and even relationships. In the vein of *The Dating Game* (Chuck Barris, 1965), three male and three female contestants answer a series of questions, and their answers are used to determine which man would be best paired with which female. For this program, Pooky assumes a different avatar identity, Lovey Foxtrot, to be the show's host. The program has been produced at the *LoveDome* on *SpinDrift* island at <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Spindrift/68/223/752>. During my visit for a special Valentine's Day program (02/14/2011), the program was being produced from the *LoveDome* on *Northpoint* island. The set was designed to reflect the dual aesthetic themes of 'love' and 'casino'.

At the time of writing this paper, the program is only produced for specials. However, archives of the show can be found at the program's website.



Figure 2. *The Dating Casino*, February 14, 2011

Pooky's Positionings

This is a paper about how a woman is positioning herself in the terrain of a virtual world as an entrepreneur of television production, distribution and exhibition for a new media technology era. A focus on positioning is, to some extent, a focus on identity construction(ing) (Ligorio & Pugliese, 2004; Riva, 2002): how the person describe him or her self in relationship to aspects of the world around him or her can help us to understand how that person makes sense of not only the world but of his or her position within it. As the creator and individual primarily responsible for the operations of *The 1st Question* and *The Dating Casino*, Pooky positions herself as the producer of these two television programs. In addition, her tongue-in-cheek description of herself reveals how confident she feels in that role:

I'm the best producer there is online, virtually. ... I have an incredible eye for detail. I have an understanding of the medium. I know what has to get done. I have a will of iron. And I'm funny, which helps. (interview 1/28/11)

She positions herself as a unique individual, from which she derives her confidence as a producer: "I don't think there's anybody who has the experience I have in production." (interview 1/28/11). Perhaps some of that self-confidence also comes from a feeling of being driven. She repeatedly indicated that she felt compelled by a vision of the future of television to act upon it, positioning herself as a visionary by describing her drive as such:

So what really drove me, though, to Second Life and to do the show in Second Life was more of a vision that compelled me and that I had to manifest, because I already knew that people like to sort of log in and be active... (interview 1/28/11)

Thus, she sees herself as somewhat unique by positioning herself as a pioneer, an innovator, for having seen the future of television entertainment. In her own words, Pooky is not only positioning herself as a producer who performs the work necessary to create the television programming; she has also positioned herself as an entrepreneurial visionary and innovator of what she sees as the next step in television.

However, there is humility in any selling of her own abilities as she couches her discussion of her abilities in the ideology of crowdsourcing and social media: that she would not be the visionary, innovator and entrepreneur she is if it were not for the actions of the unseen but not unfelt masses -- the many hands that help her to create her productions:

I can think of a lot of things, CarrieLynn, and do. I'll never be able to implement everything that I think of in this lifetime. But I am only one person. And I can only think of what I can think of. With you, I can think of twice as much. With another person, three times, with another person, four times. And so the ability of this medium to call and draw upon other people's contributions is also huge. (interview 1/28/11)

She not only speaks of the general publics and audiences of the virtual worlds, but also mentions the specific people who help her create her programming, such as for *The 1st Question*:

I write this show top to bottom myself. And always have done, because I always will. Although I do have some audience members who send me articles of things that they think I would like, which I enjoy. ... And I also book the show as well. PetLove helps with the soundcheck. I give the script to Hydra, and he ... does a remarkable job. He's a wonderful, charismatic co-host. I'm very fortunate to have him. He's been with me since the first show. In fact the whole team has really been with me since the first show. Rob does the set managing and he brings the winner's names out at the end. He resets the buzzers, he puts the names up. ... It's a small crew, but we do put the show on every week and yes, I suppose do the lion's share of work in production. (interview 3/2/11)

She feels that she could not be where she is without the positive reinforcement she felt she received from others by going in and producing inworld, beginning in the virtual world *Habbo Hotel* and then in *Second Life*:

Well, it became, to some extent, a refuge. ... I was going through a [rough time in life]. And it became a place where I guess I could go and find some support.
(interview 1/28/11)

At first glance, there appears to be a tension between selling oneself as unique and then lauding the actions of others. However, given that her vision of participatory television, which requires the actions of the unseen but not unfelt masses, perhaps she positions herself as confident because she saw how to utilize this new paradigm to create an egalitarian ideal.

Thus, she couches her responses in the ideology of social media repeatedly when she positions herself as a producer in a somewhat humbled position to her audiences – as if it is her role to bring something to them, to serve them, through her entertainment:

Q:...what do you see as your relationship to the audience?

A: To bring them something valuable.

Q: And how do you find it valuable?

A: To bring them meaningful information. (interview 1/28/11)

I do love people. And I think that we do need each other. And being in a virtual world has allowed me the honor of, I think, serving a bigger slice of the human pie.
(interview 3/2/11)

Additionally, she sees her role as producer as being one where she is serving people by preparing them for the future and bringing them what they want in a format that they would consider to be entertaining.

I feel my responsibility is to inform my audience in a fun and entertaining way. ...when you give somebody a message, they've got to be ready to receive it. You could have the best message in the world. If your audience isn't ready to receive it, they're not going to hear it. So my job is to provide the format by which important information can get in. (interview 1/28/11)

Her idea is that she is creating these programs to empower others. With her programming, she sees herself as a mediator for empowerment and understanding. And to provide this service, she feels she has to be in dialogue with her audience.

Thus, for her, any power or influence she has comes from being in dialogue with her audience by providing something of value. She feels she needs to have the confidence to be the leader, but that she is always open to criticism to learn and improve.

... it's like I don't need to be powerful. I just need to be creative. I need to do it. I don't see myself as more or less powerful. I don't have a power relationship with my audience. I'm there to provide something that they want. ... I'm very open to advice. I'm always open to what other people have to say. You have to have an ego in this business; you have to have an ego to put yourself forward, to make a better product, right? (interview 1/28/11)

In her view, the role of a producer in virtual world television is to be less powerful than a traditional television producer, and to be more in service to the needs of the unseen but not unfelt masses. Again, she is both selling herself and her idea of such an egalitarian television production, distribution, exhibition and reception by positioning herself as someone who recognizes this relationship as the future of television, and who embodies it through her actions.

Pooky sees herself as both humbled by the opportunity to produce this more egalitarian, participatory virtual world television, and determined not to let the opportunity pass her by:

...the way I see myself in relation to technology is that I'm fortunate enough to have a vision and even more fortunate to be in a time where it can be implemented. (interview 1/28/11)

Her humility and determination is likewise linked to the sense of compulsion that she has. She is simultaneously positioning herself as self-determined and as driven by the uncontrollable force that is her own desire to partake in this egalitarian ideal.

The tension of positioning herself presiding over her audience versus serving them, both the top-down versus the bottom-up approach to television production, is a tension very familiar in the ideology of Web 2.0. In the light of her endorsement of that egalitarian ideology, her rhetoric can be seen as an attempt to position herself firmly within its discourse, as her conversation and production actions are attempts to legitimate the ideology, and thus herself. It is the tension of audience-as-consumer versus audience-as-agent (Reinhard, 2011) that underlines Web 2.0.

Pooky endorses the position of audience-as-agent by endorsing the discourse of empowering people:

...that concept alone is behind the movement in blogging and the movement in the social media. Where people now have the ability and also the vanity of seeing their name in press, of seeing their name on Twitter. Of feeling a bit that they've got the power back. And I think that that's also what viewer log-in entertainment is about. Where you give people power to be a part of the proceedings. And how important that is. (interview 3/2/11)

In her view, then, audience-as-agent is an enjoyable position for the person to be in with regards to television programming. She sees the power of the audience to participate and control as the future.

The way people would begin to take over is in their being able to express their opinion. ... So I guess I see this kind of entertainment as presaging what will be coming, undoubtedly this decade, with the growth of connected TV, and that is with people being able to form their own entertainment and to do it freely. I think this is tremendously freeing. It's just so empowering, I guess, to use the 70s term. (interview 1/28/11)

By positioning her audience as audience-as-agent, she then sees her role as being to empower people to reach this desired position.

To aid her in this role, she sees technology as empowering and changing how people engage with the media. In particular, virtual worlds technology enables this audience-as-agent position by having structured into it the requirement for some level of audience participation, as the minimum to engage with virtual worlds technology tends to be higher than the requirement for engaging with other new media technologies.

But I also know that, if you look at the content creators, for example on YouTube – and I think these numbers are actually born out in other areas – you've only got like 15% of the community that creates the content, and 85% that watches it. So not everybody is a content creator, and not everybody is comfortable coming up and talking and expounding. Maybe a lot more people are watchers, but one thing that being an avatar does give you is the ability to join in and be less judged and to do things easier. So maybe being an avatar does 'up' being part of the content quotient. That would be my guess. (interview 3/2/11)

Here she aligns with new media studies that celebrate the emancipatory participation required in engaging (Carpentier, 2009). She sees this technology enabling and empowering people to reach their full potential by endorsing the ideological position on the positive effects of computer-mediated communication:

And so the ability of this medium to call and draw upon other people's contributions is also huge. For example, shy people: there are people who probably would not make much of a contribution in open society because they're so shy. But in a place like *Second Life*, they can shine. They can find their true talents. It's remarkable to me how places like Second Life allow people to discover their inner abilities. (interview 1/28/11)

Throughout the interviews, she did not discuss virtual worlds technology as having structures that disempowered individuals from reaching their potential, from becoming audience-as-agent.

Virtual worlds technology was positioned as a positive factor in her role as producer and in her audience's role as participant-viewers. Any failure to achieve the audience-as-agent position was attributed more to failings of human nature. Technology may not enable any and all agentic behaviors because people are still limited by being people. "I think people will live up to their expectations, as well as down, and I see the virtual worlds providing a very positive pull up." (interview 1/28/11). Any failure to be more innovative was not the fault of the technology but the users.

I mean, once again, we're people, we can invent a lot, but we will generally react positively to things which are somewhat familiar. So I definitely see game shows being played out in virtual worlds. Game shows are enormously popular in traditional television. (interview 1/28/11)

In endorsing the positive ideology of computer-mediated communication technologies, she again reiterates her position as being aligned with Web 2.0 discourses that suggest the new Internet-based technologies, such as virtual worlds, promote the type of audience participation that disempowers producers by empowering consumers.

And therein lies tension. She speaks about her audience-as-agents, as being empowered, and that she is not more powerful than them. However, it was through her own agency with the virtual worlds technology's structures – designing her television programs – that the audience was given the space in which to become agentic. Indeed, in her own words, while she sees

technology having a role in empowering the audience, she as sees her actions and encouragement as being important in the development of audience-as-agent in relationship to her programs:

I've always encouraged my audience to be a part of the proceedings, because them typing stuff out in open chat is fantastic. ... That's part of the enjoyment. ... But I think it's the way that the audience is treated, in here, and welcomed, in here, that creates their participation. Encourages their participation. I don't think it's merely the way the set is designed. (interview 3/2/11)

In her own words, the ways to "treat" people to participate in virtual worlds television production indicates a tension that exists in the Web 2.0 paradigm: the issue of structure versus agency.

While virtual worlds technologies empower humans through requirements for how to engage with it, as she also mentioned, technology cannot overcome human nature. Such as the human nature associated with power, with someone having to be in control, if only moderately. She creates the space, she encourages participation. However, this power dynamic, as associated with traditional media, is lessened in Web 2.0 media because of the space created by the producer to encourage and even require participation. While a power dynamic is at play, due to the requirement for structure to exist, it is not as predominant as in other media related producer/audience relationships.

Conclusions

The emergence of Web 2.0 has seen online technologies and sites propagate on social media and user-generated principles: provide the space for people to create and communicate, and they will do just that. In virtual worlds, such as *Second Life*, there are amateur and semi-professional producers who are doing just that with their creation of inworld television production, distribution, and exhibition. Among these entrepreneurs and innovators is Pooky Amsterdam. Like other producers, she has been using a structure she has not created – the technology behind *Second Life* – to structure spaces within the virtual world that has allowed her to produce television programming that asks other inworld inhabitants to interact in order for content to be produced. As a user, she has utilized the space built by Linden Labs to build her own spaces as a producer within which her audience can create social connections via their chatting, engage with the content of the show through audience participation, and even become potential show contributors.

Pooky's activities, and her descriptions to me of these activities and the ideas that guide them, are indicators for how she endorses the Web 2.0 paradigm of "build it, and let them create". Pooky has positioned herself as a producer within the tension of the dual identity of "producer" and "user" that has come to be associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm (Bruns, 2008; Ross, 2008). On the one hand, she speaks of her skills, her drive and her confidence that would be associated with a producer who has taken the lead to create something for others to consume. On the other hand, she humbles herself to her audience, celebrating the ability of the multitudes to come together to create while also somewhat placing herself in a position of service to her audience.

This tension also speaks to how she sees the power relationship between herself and her audiences. In the physical world of traditional television production, one person or the few are in charge of production, of idea generation, and they utilize more people to produce the final product. In Pooky's view, her relationship with her audience can be more of her audience being an extended television crew, helping to finalize the production of the show. This positioning between herself and her audience can also be seen as reflecting the ideology of Web 2.0, especially the ideas of crowdsourcing and participatory design: here production is decentralized, allowing for an egalitarian rather than hierarchical power relationship.

However, some of the traditional power relationship between producer and audience remains, in that her programs are structured with narratives similar to established game show and talk show genres. During the shows, there is a clear demarcation between who is on stage, and who is not, and the audience participation in content creation is more akin to how the studio audience or television audience can be invited to join in through specified communication channels, such as asking questions when allowed by a talk show host or callers being given the chance to participate in a quiz show. As she herself admits, virtual world television can only innovate so far when the constraints of human nature exert themselves through audience expectations; the still very human audience members have had more experiences with traditional television practices than innovative practices. Virtual worlds are already innovative: to layer on more innovation without the audience being ready for it may dissuade participation at all. After all, had more people been prepared for the participation requirements of Web 1.0 for designing websites, there may not have been such a boom-and-bust in the late 1990s. Perhaps that is why she positions herself as a pioneer in this field, with her desire to prepare the audience for more user-generated television. Perhaps only more familiarity with their own

potential as producers will more firmly disrupt the traditional producer-audience power relationship.

In relation to the issues discussed in this paper, future research will need to examine the audience members' reception of her programs: the audiences of those inworld and those viewing in a more traditional manner. Such research can examine the positionings of Pooky, especially the aspects of power dynamics, from the audiences' perspective, and to understand how they interpret these programs in the discourse of Web 2.0. Carpentier (2009), in his critique of this discourse, produced a study to understand reception of Web 2.0. However, his study did not research reception as participation in content creation, of which Pooky's positioning are focused. Perhaps inworld audience members feel more empowered by the experience and this gratification, as identified by Leung (2009), which would help explain their interest in attending such user-generated television production.

Pooky is not alone. Her audiences are not alone. How she positions herself to her audiences, and views her audience's position in regards to her productions is not alone in online interactions. Her positioning reflects the celebratory approach to the technologies and practices of the Web 2.0 paradigm. Pooky has taken up the standard Web 2.0 discourse of being both empowered by the technology and more disempowered compared to traditional television producers in her relationship with her audiences by striving for the egalitarian potential idea of the Web 2.0 discourse. She is thus similar to so many other Internet entrepreneurs who seek to capitalize on the structure of Internet technologies to generate enough interest amongst consumers and to use them to propagate the enterprise. The power of crowdsourcing, participatory design and viral marketing are all predicated on achieving interest amongst users to participate and to provide the means by which they can without having to learn whole new skill sets. Future studies with other entrepreneurs and audiences will help us to understand to what extent the ideologies of Web 2.0 are fundamentally altering how people engage with television, with each other, and with media content in general. It will help us understand if these ideologies are more than a passing phase, and what that means for the fabric of our daily lives.

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