The meaning of (Second) Life

— A virtual community of practice —

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Abstract

This report is an attempt to identify what Cypris Chat in the virtual online world of Second Life (SL) means to two of its founding members. The social constructivist lens of Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger 1991) was used to examine the proceedings and participants. Participant observation was used to observe classes over a six-week period and then semi-structured extended interviews with the two founding members were done to triangulate with impressions from the observations.

Keywords: Second Life, virtual language learning, communities of practice, participant observation, semi-structured interviews

Introduction

1. Background to the study

Traditionally, young adults who have wished to learn to use English in Japan have been forced to attend "Eikaiwa" schools, incurring large non-refundable joining fees in addition to considerable lesson fees. The quality of the tuition is in many cases poor, with unqualified teachers following a textbook verbatim, or just chatting to fill the time. There is however another alternative available to learners, and providing that a person already has a reasonably capable computer, the costs are minimal. In fact the joining fee is only 4 cents, and there are no lesson fees. Added to this is the opportunity to learn and socialize with others from many other cultures who have many different first languages, with the benefits of having highly qualified educators teaching classes.

But what is the catch? The place where the lessons and social events happen is in virtual reality. It does not really exist. The other participants you see on your computer screen represented by very cool and fashionable looking *avatars* may in fact not be so cool and fashionable in real life. The technology is still developing, and at the moment the movements and gestures produced by the avatars are randomly generated, meaning that they mean nothing in communication terms. Your real life friends may also think you are a bit strange spending hours in a virtual world, when you could be going to karaoke with them. But if that is not an issue, then learning English in Second Life in a

small corner of the virtual world called Cypris Chat may be an effective way to improve English and intercultural communication skills.

This report is an attempt to identify what Cypris Chat means to two of its founding members using the social constructivist lens of Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger 1991) to view the proceedings and participants. CoP has been used to examine how people learn from other virtual environments (Oliver & Carr, 2009) but to my knowledge, it has not been used in conjunction with Second Life. Qualitative research in the form of participant observation was used to first observe classes over a six-week period and then semi-structured extended interviews with two expert participants were done to triangulate my own impressions of the observations.

2. Second Life and Communities of practice

Second Life is an online 3D virtual world, but it is not really a game in the traditional sense of the word. It has some parallels with massively multiplayer online role playing games (or MMORPGs as they often referred to), but differs in that the range of activities is much greater in Second Life (Oliver & Carr, 2009). This research is not looking at the whole of the Second Life virtual world, but only one English learning community — Cypris Chat. Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, (2007) used the concept of CoPs to examine barriers to learning online, but not in a 3D virtual world like Second Life.

In addition to CoPs the work of the New London Group (see Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) on Multi-literacies provides complementary ideas and thoughts that can be interpreted in relation to Second Life.

There is a growing body of research into Second Life and its applications, with now more than one hundred published papers that look at SL and its use in education. Using the CoP lens to examine SL must be done with caution as Cox (2005) suggests that CoP is an ambiguous term, with a number of different interpretations available in the literature. It seems therefore expedient to define CoP at this stage of the paper. "Communities of Practice are defined as 'a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice'" (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 98 in Guldberg & Mackness, 2009, p 528). Furthermore, Guldberg & Mackness (2009) stress that it is based on "participation in community life as a basis for learning and identity construction" (p. 528). Wenger (2006) further defines CoPs as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." (p. 1). Gherardi, Nicolini and Odela (1998), provide further clarification of the concept:

Referring to a community of practice is not a way to postulate the existence of a new informal

grouping or social system… but is a way to emphasize that every practice is dependent on social processes through which it is sustained and perpetuated, and that learning takes place through the engagement in that practice. (p. 279)

As the term originates with Lave & Wenger (1991) it seems appropriate to look at a more recent explanation of what Wenger says that CoP entails. Wenger (1998) states that CoP integrates the four components shown below while referring to a familiar experience.

1) *Meaning:* a way of talking about our (changing) ability — individually and collectively — to experience our life and the world as meaningful.
2) *Practice:* a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.
3) *Community:* a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence.
4) *Identity:* a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities. (p. 5)

Cypris Chat manifests the four components mentioned by Wenger (1998) in its own unique way, and it seems useful to illustrate this at this point. Within Cypris Chat and SL there are numerous terms and expressions that are not immediately understood by outsiders, such as "relog" and "res" to name but a few, and these can be seen as *Meaning*. *Practice* is also present in Cypris Chat, as an essential element of the group is social, with events ranging from excursions to other sites in SL, to virtual weddings within the group. Cypris Chat is a *community* with the stated goal of learning to speak English, and skills are necessary to function effectively in the group. The social events discussed above serve to construct the group and its members' *identity*. Cypris is situated in the larger community of SL, and some members spend most of their time in Cypris, whereas others choose to spend time in other areas of SL. This serves to situate the group within the larger community. Cypris is also a relatively new community and members are learning more about how to make the experiences they have better as they spend more time in the environment, and therefore it appears to be suitable for examination with CoP.

Herold (2009), with regard to teaching and learning in Second Life gives the following opinion about the environment for learning and teaching.

Teaching and learning in Second Life is not vastly different from teaching and learning in the

physical world, and should not be seen or presented as such. Neither lecturers nor students enter a new (virtual) world. Instead, they sit in front of a computer and manipulate an avatar within a 3D environment. This environment is not as closed as a traditional computer game that punishes deviation from expected behavior, but allows for more user input and creativity. (p. 797)

Herold's opinion that the difference between learning in Second Life and formal classrooms is not large has been confirmed by my observations as well as the amount of creativity that is displayed by group members, not only in their avatars' appearance, but also in the world in which their avatars live, which is constructed by the most active group members. I was struck when I first observed lessons how similar the classes were to classes I had once taught in English conversation schools in Japan. There were of course some differences, but the essential elements that define a lesson were still there. It was easy to understand the process and form of the lesson, and understand that students were present in the classroom to learn English in a less formal way than at a traditional school. New participants in the classroom soon understood the structure and form of lessons and the norms of behavior.

Bell (2009) talks about the differences between virtual and real lives, and how people differentiate the two. At the lessons I attended, there appeared to be an 'in group' of people who regularly attended lessons and were at ease in the environment, and this was contrasted with other one-time visitors, who were not as aware of behavioral norms and jargon used in the group, and in many cases they were not as competent with the technology. Bell makes some suggestions for researchers in Second Life:

[It is] important to explore and come to understand the ways in which virtual lives and real lives are blended, what kinds of 'bleed-through' between 'real life' and Second Life take place, how residents conceptualize and manage the toggling between worlds, and what the implications of this experience are for things like learning. (p. 524)

This "bleed-through" will be examined further in the paper with regard to one of the participants.

3. Overarching Questions

There were three main questions that guided this study. The first question was present from the beginning of the study, but the second two questions emerged from observing the group over a period of six weeks. The multimodal methods of communication in Second Life and the way this was

utilized in Cypris were of great interest, as was the way that some people portrayed themselves in terms of their avatar's appearance.

1. What does Cypris Chat mean to some of its members?
2. How is communication carried out in Cypris Chat?
3. What is the importance of visual image to members of Cypris Chat?

Method

1. Context

Observations and interviews for this study were all carried out on the Cypris Chat Island in the virtual world of Second Life. Second Life is a free-to-access 3D virtual world that anyone with a fast Internet connection and a capable computer can use. The software needed is also free to download. In Second Life, people are represented by avatars of various forms, some realistic and some surreal. People also assume a pseudonym in Second Life, the first name they choose freely and the family name is chosen from a list of options.

Communication can take place in two modes: text and voice. Communication can also be open or private. The usual form of communication on Cypris Chat is by local, open, voice chat. This can be heard by anyone whose avatar is close by, or whose camera is zooming in on the speaking participants. Local text chat can be seen by anyone in the local area. Communication can also be between only two people, either by voice or text. This cannot be heard or seen by others. There is another method of obtaining privacy, and that is that some areas have private chat. In these areas, two people or small groups of people can use voice chat, and cannot be overheard by people outside the area. There is also an option of sending an instant message (IM) to anyone in SL, which functions like an email or text on a mobile phone.

Cypris Chat is an English Learning community that has existed for nearly 2 years. The Cypris Chat community provides a free place to learn English and to socialize with people from all around the world. There are officially 350 members of the group, although not all are active, and no more than 20 can be on the island at any one time. Observations were on a Thursday evening from 10:00 to 12:00 for six consecutive weeks between 21st January and 26th February, 2010. The lessons took place at the Chat Circle, which has seats for 12 active participants, 7 non-active observers and the teacher.

2. Participants

Participants in each class varied from week to week, which made choosing participants to interview problematic. The classes were designed for intermediate to advanced students, but in reality the range was from near beginner to advanced. There were also many first languages represented. One participant that I observed on five times in the lessons interested me, a Japanese woman from the Tokyo area with the SL name Mystie Slade. Her real life name is unknown. She is one of the founders of Cypris Chat and appears to be part of the 'in group' on the island. She was chosen as an interviewee because she had enough English ability to provide detailed and coherent insight into what Cypris Chat means to its members and visitors, and to provide some information as to how communication is manifested.

The teacher of the class I observed has the Second Life name DukeVan Acker, and he was also interviewed for this paper. The purpose of the interview was to confirm findings from the interview with Mystie Slade and to supply a different perspective on the areas of interest. Duke is also a founder of Cypris Chat, and knowledgeable on many aspects of Second Life. He is a native speaker of American English from California, and therefore was able to provide comprehensive and detailed answers to my questions.

It seems prudent to talk a little about myself. I am British and a native speaker of English. Before the data gathering began, I knew what Second Life was, but had never visited Second Life or any other virtual world. I entered as a complete beginner, and therefore my viewpoint was initially from a completely *etic* perspective. I do however consider myself to be computer literate, and I became comfortable in the environment quite quickly. I did however miss an important orientation session provided for all *newbies* in Second Life, and therefore my control of my avatar's movements and my ability to dress my avatar were a little ungainly. My *newbie* appearance and actions may however have been an advantage in interviews, and made the interviewees explain answers in more detail. I used the pseudonym of Eton Afterthought in Second Life.

3. Data Collection

Data collection, as stated above consisted of 6 lesson observations of more than 2 hours duration each. Detailed field notes were taken in real time for the first three observations and the remaining observations were recorded using FRAPS software, with notes taken at a later stage. During the observations I sat on one of the observer seats, and therefore interaction was minimal, apart from explaining my presence, and asking if it was acceptable for me to record the class. Regular participants are used to having observers in the lessons. Many observers are people trying to muster the courage to participate, while some are researchers. There seemed to be very little attention paid to

observers during classes.

After the observations two virtual interviews were recorded, both of them in Duke's quarters on Cypris Chat. The first interview was with Mystie Slade on February 28th, 2010. It lasted 45 minutes, and was recorded, then transcribed immediately afterwards. The second interview with Duke was done three days after the first, on March 2nd, 2010. The interview lasted for more than two hours, and was recorded, then transcribed the following day. Due to problems experienced with the recording software overlapping speech caused a kind of feedback to occur, so turn taking was difficult and like using a walkie-talkie. This may have made the interviewees talk for longer as it was difficult for me to interrupt them.

4. Methods of Analysis

Interview data, once transcribed, was then coded thematically in an interpretive way. Having been the interviewer at the interviews and then having transcribed the data from the interviews, I was familiar with the content, but the categories for codification were not immediately obvious. I started to code the data with only three vague codes connected with visual image, finance, and communication, but after going through the data a few more times an additional 9 codes emerged. This is in accordance with Charmaz (2000), who advocates the researcher taking a central role in shaping and interpreting the data. The three codes identified in the data that are focused on in the following sections were ADDICT — an *in-vivo* code connected to addiction to Second Life and concepts of reality; SOCIAL — a code connected to social meaning of Second Life; and VISUAL — connected with anything to do with visual representation in Second Life.

Findings and Discussion

1. Mystie Slade

After the formalities at the beginning of the interview I asked Mystie about her real life. Her answer was interesting in terms of what was not said. Her answer to this question was very short compared to others that referenced her SL life. This could have been because it was the start of the interview and she was nervous, but it didn't seem to be for that reason. It felt more like she was not interested in real life, but may just have been that she was unwilling to talk about her real life. There was nothing that gave me any hint as to her age, and although guesses can be made, she didn't feel it important or she didn't want to tell me. She told me her job and that it had nothing to do with English. To tell me she worked in a shop seems to be a very natural thing to say, but to immediately say it has nothing to do with English, seemed a little strange. She may just be proud of her English ability, or

this may be as a result of being interviewed in SL before — history constructing the dialogue. She also said she had almost no opportunities to use English. Her answers seemed to be very Cypris-centric, although she knew that was what the interview was about. Her next comment was that she used computers at work, and again this seemed to reference Cypris and SL. This referencing of SL and Cypris, perhaps gives some insight into her worldview.

2. Addiction

The following excerpt is from the interview with Mystie, and it provides, in her own words an indication of how much Second Life is a part of her life:

> Eton: And Mystie, last question. We've been talking maybe too long, but how much time do you think you spend on average in Second Life?
>
> Mystie: Oh, quite a lot, ah, I log into Second Life even during the day from my work, secretly [laughs]. I don't use voice, but I often just visit places, just stay in touch with friends mostly. But I come to Second Life only in the evenings actively. So maybe three, ah, around this, this time to midnight, maybe more than three hours a day, maybe five hours or so in a night-time. [laughs] Four five hours almost everyday.
>
> E: Wow.
>
> M: Yeah, a long time. I'm addicted I think.
>
> E: Do you see it as something like Facebook? Is it kind of a social networking thing for you?
>
> M: Yes. Er, yeah I do have a Facebook account, and er most friends are from here. [laughs] I don't make connection with the real life actually with that. So I only use it for Second Life purpose.

Mystie seemed to have been calculating the amount of time she spends in Second Life for the first time. The reasons she may not have thought about this could be many, and perhaps she doesn't see it as anything that is a problem. I had seen her at most lessons and had gained a sense that although she sat in a student's seat, she was not a regular student. She often seemed to take a matronly role in classes, telling others how to do things, and supporting the teacher in the class. I had no idea that she spent so much time in Second Life. I wanted to follow up on this issue with Duke in his interview, and the next excerpt is my question and his response:

> Eton: I think it's probably very extreme cases, but some people spending all of their lives here. Is that an issue?

Duke: Yeah, you, um, Mystie is on her computer at work almost all day I think, …, she maybe has Second Life minimized in a window, but she's working in real life, while she's using Second life as I use Facebook, right, … and people who do it like that are not in any danger of slipping into Second Life addiction. Of course I think there are people who, may use Second Life as their main social avenue... I don't know, when I come online, there aren't people who are always online, [laughs] so I kind of think, that maybe it's not a serious, serious problem for people here. The reason overall that Second Life is not as addictive as online games, is because there's, games usually provide goals and objectives, that are easy to aspire to, but Second Life is so open ended… At least from what I've heard...It's like a community center, sort of, I sort of see Cypris as like a community center room where there's English classes in the evenings, and a bunch of old ladies run it.

Duke knew that I had interviewed Mystie, and he assumed (rightly) that I was referring to her indirectly. Having founded Cypris Chat with her and a few others, he may have some loyalty to her, but he stated that people like her are "not in any danger of slipping into Second Life addiction." This is in contrast to Mystie's assessment of her own situation.

Mystie Slade mentioned the topic of addiction to SL during her interview, and Boon & Sinclair (2009) allude to something very close in the following quote:

A proportion of people using Second Life or any MMPORG are doing so — wittingly or unwittingly — to avoid real life issues and situations. The same could be said of television, of going to a theatre, or reading a book, but the difference is the amount of time and engagement involved. Maintaining and progressing a virtual identity inside Second Life requires considerably more effort and time than does sitting in a movie theatre, watching a television screen, or reading a book. It is entirely possible to find every waking moment devoured by the thoughts and activities required in leading 'two' lives. (p. 107)

It seems that Mystie's level of involvement is indicative of Wenger's (1998) concepts of *Meaning* and *Identity*. Mystie's *identity* in her real life and also in the Cypris community has been strongly influenced by her perceived role in the community. The meaning of her life in both contexts is referenced to Cypris and Second Life, and spending so much of her time in Second Life, speaking more in Second Life than in real life, places Second Life at the centre of her social network and worldview. She commented at the end of the interview "this is everyday life for me now, and, er, this is a part of my, it's just an extension of my real life, it's not a game."

3. Communication

Communication in Second Life and especially in Cypris Chat relates strongly to Wenger's (1998) concept of *practice*. In class, I had seen a number of different uses of the local text chat function. I asked Mystie about how she felt about text chat being used alongside voice chat in lessons, and her response is shown in the following excerpt:

> Mystie: Well, I find it depends on what they are typing. If it is actually related to the lesson material, or what they are talking about, I think they just use local chat to ah, not to disturb the voice chat. But sometimes people start text chatting for something that is irrelevant to the lesson or something. Just joking around or whatever. So it depends, ah we, ah used to tell them not to use text chat too much, especially if it is not important, because even when you are talking, if there's anything coming up on your local, your attention just, you know, you have to read it right? You just have to read it, so your attention will go away, moves away from what you are supposed to be doing, and maybe you loose track. So I ah, I don't know, it depends on what you are doing, if it's important in the lesson, like if you're explaining the vocabulary, or like spellings or something, or if it's necessary to use text chat, I think it is really important to do so…

Mystie's use of personal pronouns in this excerpt is interesting, and seems to be indicative of her status as a founder of the group. Near the end of the interview she said "I don't feel like I'm a learner, just learning or studying, you're just living in English", and this is consistent with her pronoun use. She says "we, ah, used to tell them not to use text too much" and the use of *we* confirms her feeling as an inclusive part of the Cypris leadership. She also uses the inclusive you in the following sentence "like if you're explaining the vocabulary", and this gives the impression of her being the teacher not a student. Her role however is ambiguous to newcomers to the group, as she is not a native speaker, and her attitude could cause indignation to those who do not know her status in the group. Her English is very good, she has a slight accent which distinguishes her as a non-native speaker, and she self-corrects grammatical errors more than a native speaker would usually do, but it would be fair to categorize her as a near-native speaker.

4. Visual Image

Finally I was interested in visual image in Second Life, and in a sense this is related to communication. It is another means for participants to present their selves in the community. I created my avatar to look as close to my real life self as I could, but it is clear that most people prefer to give

themselves less realistic characteristics in SL. The following excerpt shows Mystie's ideas about presenting one's self in Second Life:

> Eton: Everyone seems to change their clothing quite often and their hairstyle, and sometimes they change into a duck, or someone from South Park. How important do you think the avatars are in Second Life?
>
> Mystie: Ah, well at the beginning, it ah, well you know in the old days we only had one or two types of avatars or skins, and you had to buy or create new ones for yourself. Ah, but these days you can choose from many from the beginning, but it still looks the same. Everybody knows that you are new. And then you start getting, sometimes freebies, something you can buy, and you get something you like. And I think it is quite fun to make changes in your styles, or looks that makes you more original, even in this virtual world. And, er clothing, I didn't really care much about clothing before, because I didn't really go buy anything, but ah, erm, but I think it's nice to look better [laughs] ah if you can because people do, just like in real life, people do seem to like you better even if you look cleaner or nicer, and erm, I don't know. I think it depends on how you see yourself or see others. And while it's enjoyable you can keep changing you clothes, hairstyle, dress up. And that's what we can do, not just ordinary everyday clothes, but in different occasions you can dress up differently, and something you can't really do so much in real life, especially you know like ah Japanese people don't go to you know balls, dance and you know gorgeous places and dress up like that. So [laughs] it's an interesting experience to be dressed up in a gorgeous dress.

She said a number of things about appearance, but something interesting was that SL is like real life in that people treat you better if you look "cleaner or nicer". Another thing she said was that she could wear "not just ordinary everyday clothes" but for different occasions it was possible to dress up differently. This was interesting in that later she told me how much time she spent in SL, and it is clear that she doesn't have time to go out much at all in real life, or perhaps she doesn't need to, or doesn't have much money to.

I mistakenly thought that you had to spend money on these clothes and without planning to I asked her about her spending in SL. She told me how to get free clothes in SL, and that they were good quality. I was a little unsure of the difference between poor and good quality virtual clothes, but I didn't probe any further. She also said that everything is so cheap in SL compared to real life. This sounded like someone who found real life to be expensive. I thought this was of interest because of

course things in SL don't actually exist. Duke, commenting on the same theme produced the following statement:

> Duke: What's the function of your avatar and what's your relationship to your avatar? How much does it represent you, or some alternate version of you? Um, the reason I wore the duck costume was rather pedestrian, Christine gave it to me for my birthday, my real life birthday, so I decided to wear it. End of story. But there are some people who often shape change, I change my appearance relatively regularly when I'm not teaching, when I am teaching it's usually this avatar, usually in a suit, or dressed relatively conservatively, um, but when I'm just a, observer or helping out, or casually doing something then I could be anything. I would say that the people who shape change though, are a minority, maybe 10% of people, like to, like to fool around with their appearance as they say. That would probably indicate that there is some sort of strong, relationship that you make with your appearance here. You are so used to seeing yourself, or for some people it's just the back of their head if they can't use their camera very well, but you get used to your own appearance, and people get used to seeing you as, as your avatar. And it is disconcerting to see you as someone else, you suddenly change into another avatar, it might take a while to get used to, so I think people like, like to look at themselves, well they like to build their own, well I don't know if I should go too far into the psychology of people and their avatars, because I think people have different reasons for choosing how they look. I mean you and I chose basically, we chose avatars that are basically similar to how we look in real life, but I'm not sure but that might be a minority. Usually people choose avatars that are more physically attractive or bigger or you know, or bigger curves, for women [laughs].

The final sentence of Duke's response is of interest, and may be one of the biggest attractions of Second Life for some people. People perhaps feel better about themselves in Second Life than they do in real life, and this is a reason, for some, that they spend more and more time in Second Life. This virtual ideal self is a product of the technology of Second life and relates to Luke's (2000) concept of technological determinism, as it is the technology of Second Life that determines the ability to take on an idealized or fantastic avatar. Luke goes on to comment about the social value of virtual communities as being "'safe' places to meet and socialize, where 'real' identities, looks, abilities, class, or professional status don't matter." (p. 88)

It appears that this knowledge of the value of visual image in Second Life is related to Lave's (1996) "changing participation in changing practices" (p. 161). As people become more practiced in

Second Life they become more aware of the identity they project. It also appears to relate strongly to Gee's (2000) "'portfolio' composed of the rearrangeable skills and identities" (p.51) that have been acquired from being in Cypris Chat since its conception, and this obviously connects with Wenger's (1998) concept of *identity*.

Limitations

I recognize the limitations of this research in that it is a short exploratory study, and only offers insight into what one small English learning community in the virtual world of Second Life means to two of its participants. They are founders of the community and not regular members of the group. This research is unlikely to apply to other participants in other contexts. The two interviewees were willing to be interviewed, perhaps because of their invested roles in the community, and were also the only two participants with sufficient English skills to be interviewed effectively in English.

Conclusions

The very brief sketch of what Cypris Chat means mainly to one of its members and founders using only a small part of the data gathered has been drawn above. In an ideal world, where there were no time or space constraints to writing, a much more detailed, convincing, and interesting image could have been created, providing much more detail and thick description to transfer to the readers' situations. This restriction seems to be one of the biggest faults in many of the write-ups of qualitative studies that I have read, and most seem to be telling only a very small part of an enormous story.

It is difficult to draw conclusions, but it seems that to Mystie, Cypris Chat mainly, and Second Life to some extent, have not only become part of her life, but have become most of it. I have little idea about her life before she discovered Second Life, but cannot imagine much of it remains apart from her job. The reasons for her interest in computers before she started Second life, and her total acceptance of a virtual life now are unknown, although her investment in terms of time in the community may be because of the opportunities to create and build that are available. There could be other reasons that may include a mundane job, or shyness meeting face to face, but it could also be the result of something she wants to forget, such as her appearance or a bad experience with physical people. Financial issues were also spoken about on many occasions, and this leads me to believe she may not be very affluent in real life. The only way to find out more would be to ask her, and perhaps she would not talk about it to an outsider.

Duke, as a researcher and educator, is not as immersed and involved in Cypris Chat and Second Life as Mystie, and it seems unlikely that he would ever become so. He appears to see Cypris as an

effective way to teach in a multi-cultural and multi-cultural setting, as well as a convenient location for research. His views about the amount of time Mystie spends in Second Life are perhaps influenced by his friendship with her, although he was unaware of quite how much Second Life has become part of her life as a whole.

It appears that the communication norms within Cypris Chat are clear to its long-term members, but perhaps are not so clear to newcomers. The use of the multiple modes of communication and the unwritten rules for their use, along with the significance of an avatar and the clothes it wears will only become salient after prolonged exposure and use. This means that for newcomers that first impressions may be bad, and they risk embarrassing themselves by committing social faux pas. The social risks of looking too 'real' are present, but with enough acquired skill, a beautiful virtual self can be created. The effects of having such a beautiful virtual self however require further investigation. It seems likely the greater the difference between the real self and the virtual self the more likely a person is to want to be that person all the time, and escape reality.

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セカンドライフの重要性

——バーチャルコミュニティオブプラクティス——

アンドリュー・アトキンス

要　旨

　本報告では，セカンドライフというバーチャルオンラインワールドのサイプラスチャットを創立した二人のメンバーが現在サイプラスチャットは自身にとってどのような重要性を持っているか，社会構築主義のコミュニティーオブプラクティス（Lave & Wenger, 1991）を用い調査した。

　まず，定性的研究の中の参与観察により6週間授業を観察し，得た印象を三角測量し，2人の創立者に半構造的深層面接を行なっている。

キーワード：セカンドライフ，仮想言語学習，コミュニティオブプラクティス，参与観察，
　　　　　　半構造的深層面接