

Who is Life?

I am a media and communications professional in the real world. I specialize in analyzing media messages and crafting communications and public relations strategies for companies, the government and individuals. Until recently, I was engaged as a media analyst studying how issues involving terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are discussed in the mass media, and how these media trends impact public understanding and sentiment.

What is SL for you? How do you co-exist within those two characters?

I entered SecondLife a year ago, at a time when the platform is becoming less of a strictly entertainment venue and increasingly a tool to extend real-world efforts—in the workforce, public advocacy, philanthropy, in addition to being an incredible venue for purely creative efforts.

My first and second world personas are very close to one-another. I am interested in identifying opportunities which will allow my creative talents as well as my business skills to be fully utilized. Virtual reality platforms are the frontier of global communications; they offer unprecedented potential for those who can learn the skills and parlay them into real-world actions.

I have both an artistic and a professional interest in directing machinima: there are a number of ways the medium can be used to support companies and other interests through public relations and strategic communications initiatives. I have been developing these ideas over the last months and look forward to offering these services.

But I am also interested in strictly creative projects.

The world is volatile, and there are many challenges before us. I stand with those who seek to temper the chaos rather than add to it. And by telling stories through film, I believe I can help to cast light on deep human issues and social dynamics and offer visions of hope and progress that may inspire others. I would like to write and direct machinima that are films in their own rights, but also use machinima to create opportunities to write and direct traditional films. I am fairly certain I am in the world to be a film director, but have not yet had the opportunity to realize this “calling.”

Do you have any background in movie technique before coming to SL?

I have been interested in filmmaking since college and, following my bachelor's degree, pursued traditional film training. I began my career as an independent filmmaker shooting 16mm film and produced a short film while working as a project manager and writer on other independent projects. Financially, it was a very tough road to travel.

I left this field following the attacks on September 11, 2001 to work in Washington. However, my interest in filmmaking persists, and I would like to return to it professionally. Virtual filmmaking offers an opportunity for me to do so. The expense of traditional filmmaking is prohibitive, whereas V.R. filmmaking requires minimal financial investment and is within my means.

Do you change your modus operandi because of SL, how?

This is my first SL film, and I am learning and applying new skills, so the process I used to approach the film was technically very simple and relied heavily on my traditional film background.

For example, it did not occur to me while shooting that I could just take a shot and then, in the editing, change the frame to come up with the right composition. I was still shooting as if I was using real film with a camera on a tripod, and I had to get the shot right going into the camera! This made my production process longer than it probably needed to be. At the same time, I have a great reverence for the skills of the film masters, and a certain amount of “pride” in at least attempting to work in that tradition, even if in a new medium. The film has some technical flaws and is not as “polished” as it could be. But for a first work, I feel it does a fair job of establishing a character and telling a story, which I hope will resonate with an audience. I do believe that less is more and that it is hard to do simple well, and that all the nifty, high-tech effects in the world will not carry a film that lacks a compelling story. So, this is what received most of my attention.

How would you define your last movie?

“Life on Life” grew organically out of my experiences in SecondLife in every respect, and was not really a planned production. I did not have a script or storyboards. I call this film a “docu-narrative,” because the vignettes are based on events that actually happened, but which I recreated in order to film them. And I took some creative license during the recreation! But the story is an honest reflection of one avatar’s path through the metaverse.

The process of making the film was interesting for me because rather than come up with an idea and then find or make the things I needed for it, I instead used what I had and made a story out of those. For example, I went shopping for animations without any particular use for them in mind. And after I had about 30 or so, I looked at them and decided what I could “say” with those gestures. And the scene with Metamingo, was actually shot as part of the 48-hour film competition, which I could not complete, so I reworked that footage to fit into this story. The story grew out of this process, and then later I shot or bought or made things I needed to fill in the gaps. I did not write the script until after the film was edited!

Your movie plays on the "mingling" of the stage in the movie and the one where it is displayed, what lay behind this?

Using the theater set as a narrative structure was developed for a few reasons. First, I needed a way to knit together all of the disparate elements I was using. . .how to go from Virtual Africa to the story about the suicide bomber in a logical way, was critical. So, I chose this first-person narrator, who essentially takes us on a tour of her virtual experiences.

I also was focused on the interplay between the real and the virtual worlds, and was trying to convey the sense that SecondLife is very "real," and that the individuals within it are "real people"--even if some are role-playing.

I also liked using a stage, because my sense of SecondLife is that there is both pressure but also opportunity to “perform”—whether that be as a business owner, entertainer, builder, etc. And everyone is trying to reach and develop an audience. So, I started the story with the character alone in the theater, talking to herself about things that are important to her—and imagining an audience that was not yet there, but which slowly comes over the course of the story until, in the end, the seats are filled and she suddenly realizes: “Oh! I have an audience!!” I think this is exactly how things work in SecondLife and in the world, in general.

And because this story is rooted in real events and in real issues, which I think are of importance beyond my personal story: the strife around the terrorism issue, the dynamics of social spheres, the struggle to communicate, and the use of SecondLife itself, I wanted the audience to be complicit in

the scene by having them actually become the audience to which the character is speaking.

In the future, I will make films and venues that have more explicit interactivity.

Where is your movie available to watch ?

My film is streaming live on a “big screen” until the end of July at the humble theater set:

<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Claremorris/163/50/99>

And can also be seen on blip.tv at:

<http://thelifefactory.blip.tv/#1053306>.

I will soon be establishing a film room in the new Google VR platform Lively, in order to bring the film to a different audience.

What has SL made possible for your artistic expression?

Above all... Second Life is a medium I can AFFORD to work in. Making traditional films is prohibitively expensive, and although I shot a film, which even had a minor “star” in it, I never could afford to finish that film. And so my frustrations as an aspiring filmmaker have been thwarted for a long long while.

“Life on Life” is a very “realistic” film—a docu-narrative-- which I think was the appropriate style to use for a story that wanted to comment on those aspects of SecondLife that intersect with the first world in a very real way. But I am also looking forward to doing more with the fanciful potential of SecondLife in my next film—an allegory about transparency, privacy and fragility.

Which are your favorite machinima-related destinations or websites in SL?

There are some wonderful technical and community resources in SecondLife, which I have benefited greatly from. The Machinmatographers group has been a constant source of know-how, support and camaraderie, for which I am very grateful. I am very appreciative of the camera tools that Geuis Dasin has developed, and I owe especial thanks to AWM Mars, who shared invaluable experience with me on how to stream and optimize films for screenings in SL.

What initiative would you like to see in SL that hasn't been done yet concerning machinima and expression in general?

I have two interests in helping to develop machinima as a form. The first is to explore the possibilities of making films interactive within the virtual platform itself—sort of virtual realities within virtual realities. And I would also like to see machinima works become viable products in the traditional market. We have seen the first of these cross-over pieces with the Malatov Alva series that premiered on HBO.

Are there any SL artists you admire or who've had an influence on your work?

I am a huge fan of the film “The Dumb Man” by Sherwood Anderson and the film “Passage to Zhong Fu” directed by Verdi Millionsofus, and of the films of Robbie Dingo. All of these directors have wonderfully poetic and mystical sensibilities that touch the human experience in a very poignant and intimate way. Second Life allows one to render poetry visible, and these artists exemplify that.