



## Panel in Second Life | Storytelling in virtual environments

Date: May 17, 2008

Time: 10:00 AM PDT (Check [www.worldtimezone.com](http://www.worldtimezone.com) for local times)

Location: Second Life Campus of the Center for Digital Storytelling (@ "Teaching 2" - NMC Campus)

SLURL: <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Teaching%202/209/109/23>

Organization: Center for Digital Storytelling, with the support of the New Media Consortium

The Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) and the Museum of the Person are celebrating the International Day for Sharing Life Stories on May 16. The following day – May 17 – the CDS is proposing a reflection on storytelling in virtual environments in the form of a panel in Second Life. The approaches to this theme will be very different as a result of the panelists' distinct academic backgrounds. Please read abstracts and bios listed next.

### The topic

The pervasiveness of digital cameras made it possible to extend the idea of storytelling beyond the more customary *"everyone has a story to tell"* to *"everyone has a story to tell and the means to do it and share it"*.

Virtual environments (VEs) - with their various degrees of immersion – offer yet a new digital platform to tell stories. Games are becoming more interesting than the typical 'point and shoot' stories that initially thrived and still do, particularly in some age/gender circuits. These may be kinetically very engaging but fall short as far as 'plot elaboration'... More recently, the genre that has become known as 'serious games' is introducing civic participation and other societal aspects to gaming. At the same time, environments such as Second Life and Croquet are arguably reframing social interaction as a crucial part of the telling process – the teller inhabits the same space and time as her audience during the process - much as in ancient oral traditions. However core 'affordances' of the medium in oral traditions arguably lose ground in VE, such as the role of tellers as they pass the story along, the need for co-presence in space and time of both teller and audience, and the real-time feedback the teller receives regarding audience engagement. As for the latter, that involvement may be limited by such diverse factors such as degree of identification with the teller, with the audiences' own representations in the VE, or with a reduced ability to visually express that same engagement.

The level of engagement with a story may differ from the degree of immersion – as in level of sensory fidelity to the real world as far as visual, auditory, and other sensory cues are concerned. In phobia therapy, and when telling a story whose aim is to trigger the right brains; structure, realistic auditory, and haptic stimuli seem, in some cases, to be more important than realistic visuals. In environments used in medical and military training, the goal is to correctly map all sensory stimuli pertinent to the training situation, to the responses.

With games, however, the logic seems to be different. Layers other than realism seem to play an important role in engaging audiences who easily forgive low resolution, mono auditory worlds. In VEs the same tolerance to a sensory-limited world seems to be there, while aspects of ancient oral-tradition storytelling seem to be revisited: notably the 'passing on' of the story, the real time/ on site togetherness, and the temporal uniqueness of the telling process.

## The speakers

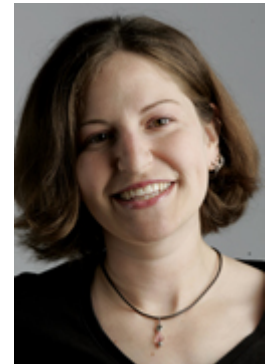
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### It's still all about great content

The goal of online storytelling is to keep the best of the physical realm – great images, great content and a good user experience – and translate it to the virtual world. Using scanned images of real things like crumpled paper, feathers and other objects that look like you could touch them can add a layer of interest to the flat-screen. Keeping navigation simple and intuitive lets users forget they are on a computer. The closer we can get to the feel of paging through a slick magazine or going through a scrap book and peeking into envelopes the more the computer can stop being a barrier and instead facilitate a wide distribution of interesting content.

We shouldn't aim to reinvent what we do – tell authentic stories well, rather we should adapt that and take advantage of all of the new tools we have to do it with.

Bio: After 7 years as a full-time staff photographer for newspapers, Jen Friedberg transitioned to the multimedia realm. She concentrates on bringing traditional storytelling and documentary photography and video to the digital realm. Friedberg graduated from the University of Florida in 1999 with a degree in Journalism and a specialization in photography. She is largely self-taught as far as multimedia goes and works primarily with Flash and Final Cut Pro. [www.jenfriedberg.com](http://www.jenfriedberg.com)



Jen Friedberg  
Multimedia Producer  
Fort Worth Star-Telegram

### Virtual Performance: storytelling and social exchange

Storytelling is a basic building block of human communication. In virtual and networked worlds, in which our essential condition is one of "performance" (either through character/avatar or simply through the layer of mediated presentation of self), storytelling merges with social exchange. I'm interested in the layering of these storytelling impulses onto real life, and committed to using the lens of storytelling as a way to provoke questions about the impact of the very technologies we inhabit.

Bio: Jenik's works, including 'Mauve Desert: A CD-Rom Translation', 'El Naftazteca' (w/Guillermo Gomez-Pena) 'Desktop Theater' (w/Lisa Brenneis and the DT Troupe) and 'SPECFLIC' combine "high" technology and human desire to propose new forms of literature, cinema, and performance. Recent projects and research instigate large-scale public art events over community-wide wireless networks. She is an affiliated researcher with the Center for Research in Computing and the Arts (CRCA) and the California Institute of Telecommunications and Information technology (calit2).



Adriene Jenik  
Telecommunications media  
artist & Assoc. Professor, UCSD

### Preserving the 'respond as if it is real' response

Taking advantage of the fact that within immersive virtual environments people tend to respond to virtual situations and events as if they were real, how can we use immersive technologies to develop interactive narratives?

Bio: For his dissertation work, Llobera is working with Starlab and Dr. Mel Slater's research group at UPC, in Barcelona, Spain. He holds an interdisciplinary MA in Cognitive Sciences from several institutions in France (Ecole Normale Supérieure, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, among others), and a double degree in electrical engineering by UPC and Telecom Paris. Llobera has also some background in creative writing, including writing a feature film script. An important part of his research is concerned with the question of how a script can be written, annotated and realized for an immersive context. If immersive narratives have to become a reality, a procedure that allows to intuitively script, stage and edit the content of the environment -in a similar way it is currently done in audiovisual industry- should be adapted to it. [www.starlab.com](http://www.starlab.com)



Joan Llobera  
PhD candidate  
Starlab  
Barcelona, Spain

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## Stories at Wheelies: A means to Personal Empowerment

For many individuals with disabilities, Second Life is their world because they are unable to leave their homes or, for some, leave their beds. Wheelies, which was founded by Simon Walsh as a club for dancing where everyone would be welcome, has grown beyond a mere dance club. Wheelies has become a social gathering place for people to meet and talk. Wheelies is trying story telling as a means to empower members through their personal stories.

Bio: Linda Higbee Mandlebaum, known in Second Life as Polgara Paine, has worked in the special education field for more than 35 years. She completed her formal education in Oklahoma with a Ph.D. at the University of Oklahoma. In 1981, she moved to Bowling Green, Ohio where she works as an associate professor in the School of Intervention Services at Bowling Green State University. While she went into Second Life to learn how to improve her teaching and to provide opportunities for her students to engage in learning activities they could not experience in real life, she has spent the past year learning more about individuals with disabilities than she would ever have anticipated. It is only now, after a year \_in world,\_ that she believes she is finally prepared to develop instructional activities that will be of value to her students.



Linda Mandlebaum  
Director, 'Wheelies'  
Associate Professor,  
BGSU

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## Using Digital Storytelling to break the Second Life Learning Curve

The initial student experience in Second Life can be frustrating and overwhelming. Digital storytelling within Second Life is an effective introductory learning activity for students, one that provides structure while also allowing creativity. The sharing of digital stories serves as a community building activity but also gives students a purpose and motivation to learn how to express themselves in a virtual world environment. Specifically, the digital storytelling activity is used to as a way for students to discover how to build with prims, how to upload pictures, how to present information in a 3D environment, how to search for and find objects, and most importantly, how to use the affordances of Second Life to tell a story. During the course of the one week assignment, student skill levels move from beginner to intermediate as they teach themselves and each other how to tell their stories.

Bio: Joe Sanchez is a doctoral student in the School of Information at The University of Texas at Austin. He has been teaching in Second Life since the Fall of 2006 and has written about Second Life in the areas of sociotechnical systems, the student experience and, building collaborative communities. Sanchez is co-founder of the Educators Coop, a residential community in Second Life for Real Life Educators.



Joe Sanchez  
PhD student  
School of Information  
UT Austin

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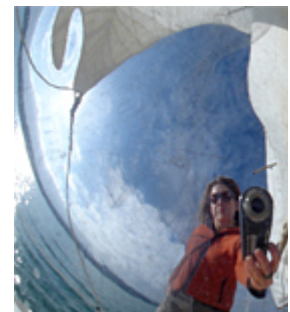
## Electric Comicbooks; StoryTelling and UpStage

Story Telling is a way of mapping ourselves in community. In virtual communities it's another form of avatar, the words we chose and how we use them paints the extra dimension which is the window back into our lives or the life we choose to present when we engage through the key board and screen.

Bio: Vicki has a background that includes working in arts environments, science technical roles, graphic and web environments, and 'second chance' education. She currently works with remote rural schools on the west coast of the south island, in their provision of professional development, access and delivery of distance education and in their social, cultural and educative collaboration using a variety of online tools.

A visual artist and a founding member of Avatar Body Collision, and collaborator on the creation and development of the cyberformance tool UpStage. Vicki's creative energies are presently involved with the devising and development of online performances works with Avatar Body Collision as well as training and support for others using of UpStage. Currently on a curatorial team working toward the second online festival of performance in UpStage - 080808.

<http://www.avatarbodycollision.org> | <http://upstage.org.nz/blog>



Vicki Smith  
Visual Artist, Aotearoa,  
New Zealand

## The moderators

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Joe founded CDS (formerly the San Francisco Digital Media Center) in 1994, with wife Nina Mullen and colleague Dana Atchley, as a community arts center for new media. Together they developed a unique computer training and arts program known as the Digital Storytelling Workshop. This process grew out of Joe's long running collaboration on Dana's solo theatrical multimedia work, *Next Exit*.

Since 1994, when the first Digital Storytelling Workshop was presented at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, Joe has been the lead in offering the process in 45 U.S. states and 20 countries, assisting in the completion of more than 10,000 video works. In addition to adapting Digital Storytelling for use in web sites, CD-ROMs, mural projects, and social issue campaigns, Joe has authored and produced curricula in many contexts, including the *Digital Storytelling Cookbook*, the principle manual for the workshop process, and the text entitled *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*. [www.storycenter.org](http://www.storycenter.org)

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Joe Lambert  
Founding Director,  
Center for Digital  
Storytelling

Ana is a Fulbright scholar from Portugal with research interests in social interaction in professional online communities. She has consulted on this topic for educational institutions and corporations in Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and the US. She started working in Interactive Narratives 15 years ago in Portugal. Since then she has conducted workshops on 'writing for new media' for film professionals and educators in Spain, Belgium, and Venezuela. When she came to the US she became keenly interested in the Digital Storytelling movement led by the CDS and has applied this methodology in courses taught in the US.

Ana was born in Second Life in 2005 and immediately mapped her real life to second life for a time (or was it the other way around?). Now, after a necessary period of detachment (she is easily addicted...), she is back in SL with two big picture questions - how does our cultural background affect the way we interact in SL and (more pertinent to this panel) how much of the wheel (if any) needs to be reinvented when telling stories in virtual - hence disembodied - environments. [www.boa-ventura.com](http://www.boa-ventura.com)



Ana Boa-Ventura  
PhD Candidate  
Col. of Communication  
UT Austin