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Impacting the Real Future via the Virtual Present

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Every few months I have the pleasure of reviewing the outcomes of a long process that led to a production of a new JVWR issue. In this Editor In-Chief's Corner I want to reflect on the role of JVWR as I now understand it. Let me first review the topics covered in this issue and then reflect how the issue matches JVWR goals.

The Assembled 2014 issue includes six papers demonstrating the diversity and depth of topics we strive to cover:

1. **The future of massive collaborative events** – the paper explores the future of live events, where internet of things enables thousands of people to participate, vote, and enjoy live events. With this paper you can try to imagine the various challenges and opportunities of community creation, including ecumenical aspects.
2. **The future of anonymity (and antisocial behavior)** – one of the best values of virtual worlds is anonymity. Where people can explore their identity. But there is a danger in the form of antisocial behavior (in the form of griefers). With this paper you can try to imagine, and maybe design, new structures of 3D3C identity that will balance the value of anonymity and dangers of antisocial behavior.
3. **The future of 3D collaboration** – in a review of one mega case study (OpenVCE project) the authors touch upon some of the more advanced nuances of virtual meetings. The current (2014) state of the art of multiple people doing a video conference call (as in Microsoft Skype

of Google hangout) pales in light of the potential of Oculus Rift-like immersion. With this paper you can try to imagine the next level of on- and off-line collaboration in various settings.

4. **The future of friendships** – modern technology, and especially Facebook, has hijacked the term “friend.” A new meaning has evolved. This paper explores the meaning and especially the expectations of friendship within one virtual world: Second Life. I see here interplay: on one hand one could gain new friends fast, these are different kind of friend. On the other hand, one can understand friendship in a new way. With this paper you can explore the evolving nature of real and virtual friendship in the age of LinkedIn, Facebook, WeChat, and Ashley Madison.
5. **The future of health care via “Motivational Interviewing”** – the term “motivational interviewing” focuses on patients’ struggles to make changes for which they may not be ready, willing, and able. The paper explores the means to train doctors in that task. With this paper you can explore a future version of this work that may lead new cost-effective methods to treat people.
6. **The future of looking at the other** – in a paper that seems to build on some of the previous papers in *this issue*, and with eye grabbing title of “White Man’s Virtual World” this paper conducts a systematic content analysis of gender and race in massively multiplayer online games. This content analysis examined representations of gender and race among 417 unique characters appearing 1,356 times in 20 hours of recorded content from four popular commercial MMOs.

These six papers in this issue demonstrate some of JVWR goals. They are pushing our thinking about both the virtual and the real, they are presenting “new” academic science that go beyond the trivial, and they are taking a stand about the world. We encourage authors to follow the diverse models presented here.

In terms of process, these six papers were culled from about 100 proposals or full submissions we got during 2013. Last year we got many more papers than the year before because of our Lantern effort. “Lantern” was focused on getting summaries (in the form of literature review or other analytical reviews). We had part 1 of the Lantern issue in the beginning of 2014, and we expect part 2 to be published in the 3rd quarter. We will shift our energy towards the 3D3C book towards the end of the year. This led to many more papers we had to cover, compromising our usual speed of response (we usually publish the assembled in the beginning of the year).

We are thankful to the esteemed editors of the issue that were able to review the focused selection and work with authors on their papers. They include Samuel Cruz-Lara (LORIA - UMR 7503 CNRS – INRIA, Université de Lorraine, France) as the prime editor, and Sue Gregory (University of New England, Australia), Suely Frago (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil), Urs-Vito Albrecht (Braunschweig University & Hannover Medical School, Germany), and Christopher Lueg (university of Tasmania, Australia) as the co-editors.

Here are more detailed overviews of these papers:

1. Distributed Immersive Participation as Crowd-Sensing in Culture Events

Theo Kanter, Rahim Rahmani, Jamie Walters & Willmar Sauter / Department of Computer and Systems Sciences, (the latter is also from the Department of Musicology and Performance Studies), Stockholm University, Sweden.

This article investigates new forms for creating and enabling massive and scalable participatory immersive experiences in live cultural events, characterized by processes, involving pervasive objects, places and people. The multi-disciplinary research outlines a new paradigm for collaborative creation and participation towards technological and social innovation, tapping into crowd-sensing. The approach promotes user-driven content-creation and offsets economic models thereby rewarding creators and performers. In response to these challenges, the authors propose a framework for bringing about massive and real-time presence and awareness on the Internet through an Internet-of-Things infrastructure to connect artifacts, performers, participants and places. Equally importantly, we enable the in-situ creation of collaborative experiences building on relevant existing and stored content, based on decisions leveraging multi-criteria clustering and proximity of pervasive information, objects, people and places.

2. A Multi-faceted Approach to Anonymity Online: Examining the Relations between Anonymity and Antisocial Behavior

Rebecca Chui / University of Warwick (LLB Law); London School of Economics and Political Science

This article reviews the literature on the relations between anonymity in antisocial behavior: does online anonymity qualitatively alter online behavior, encouraging antisocial behavior online? Or does online anonymity have no effect on the exhibition of antisocial behavior? The author argues that this line of thought presents an unsatisfactory dichotomy as it does not sufficiently account for individual contexts. Anonymity alone is not adequate to induce antisocial behavior: it requires the motivation to act in that manner.

3. Virtual Collaboration Spaces: Bringing Presence to Distributed Collaboration

Austin Tate / Artificial Intelligence Applications Institute (AIAI) & School of Informatics, The University of Edinburgh, UK; Jeffrey T. Hansberger / Human Research and Engineering Directorate, US Army Research Laboratory, USA; Stephen Potter & Gerhard Wickler / Artificial Intelligence Applications Institute (AIAI) & School of Informatics, The University of Edinburgh, UK

This article concerns the use of virtual worlds alongside web technologies for on-line collaborative activities. The potential of this combination of technologies lies in the complementary notions of presence that these technologies offer their users. After discussing the nature of synchronous and asynchronous distributed collaboration, the authors describe – one case – a virtual collaborative environment that has been developed for task-focused communities and support to them through specific problem-solving episodes. This environment has been subject to experiments involving the development and provision of expert advice in the context of the response to a large-scale emergency crisis.

4. Virtually Friends: An Exploration of Friendship Claims and Expectations in Immersive Virtual Worlds

Brooke Foucault Welles / Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA; Tommy Rouse / Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA; Nick Merrill / University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA; Noshir Contractor / Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA.

Recent scholarship suggests that immersive virtual worlds may be especially well suited for friendship formation on the Internet. Through 65 semi-structured interviews with residents in highly populated portions of the virtual world *Second Life*, we explore the nature of friendship within the

immersive virtual world, examining friendship claims and expectations and the specific features of the virtual world that enable friendships to emerge.

5. Using 3D Virtual Standardized Patients to Teach Motivational Interviewing

Margaret Czart, DrPH / University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health, USA.

The term motivational interviewing focuses on patients' struggles to make changes for which they may not be ready, willing, and able. The foundation of this approach is the transtheoretical model, which posits that behavior change involves several stages and that not everyone is equally ready to change. To address the lack of training and self-confidence, medical schools have implemented motivational interviewing training courses within the curriculum, utilizing a problem-based learning approach. As computers have become more popular in education, motivational training has moved into the e-learning, computer-assisted, learning environment. A pilot study was designed and implemented at the University of Illinois at Chicago, College of Medicine, in an effort to explore the feasibility of using virtual standardized patients in the Second Life, one of the first virtual worlds available to teach motivational interviewing.

6. White Man's Virtual World: A Systematic Content Analysis of Gender and Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Games

T. Franklin Waddell / College of Communications, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, USA; James D. Ivory, Rommelyn Conde, Courtney Long, and Rachel McDonnell / Department of Communication, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, USA.

Based on previous research indicating that character portrayals in video games and other media can influence users' perceptions of social reality, systematic content analyses have examined demographic trends in the way video game characters are portrayed. Although these studies have extensively documented character portrayals in traditional console and computer video games, there is a lack of content analyses examining character portrayals in the very popular massively multiplayer online game (MMO) genre. Such studies are needed because many characters in MMOs are customized avatars created by users, which may lead to different trends in character demographics. This content analysis examined representations of gender and race among 417 unique characters appearing 1,356 times in 20 hours of recorded content from four popular commercial MMOs, which was generated by five recruited users. Characters tended to be disproportionately male and white, with females and racial minorities appearing much less often. Implications for potential effects on users' perceptions of social reality are discussed.