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Virtually sustainable: Deleuze and desiring differenciation in Second Life

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Introduction

> 'The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual'. (Deleuze 1994, 208)

As this quote reminds us, virtual possibilities and worlds are real. As a limited actual articulation of the virtual, experiences in online virtual worlds constitute substantive components of the assemblage of subjectivity for the people about whom we write. Virtual worlds also provide possibilities for the actualization of ranges of experiences that are not possible outside forums such as Second Life.[1] In exploring the 'realness' of virtual worlds, we advance a particular theoretical inquiry into processes of achieving social sustainability in Second Life. We give a summary of sustainable practice for web design and note the implications of the lack of discussion of sustainable practice in relation to 3D virtual worlds. We then move into virtual worlds and undertake three case studies of cultures working towards being sustainable in Second Life. We take up a Deleuzian ontology as a means of thinking about sustaining cultures and valuing differenciation. After Deleuze (1994), we take differenciation to mean the material process by which something becomes different from itself. Deleuze draws a distinction between this material change and the virtual process of an 'Idea' changing or becoming different from itself, which he calls 'differentiation'. Specifically, he states:

> We call the determination of the virtual content of an Idea differen*t*iation; we call the actualisation of that virtuality into species and distinguished parts differen*c*iation. It is always in relation to a differen*t*iated problem or to the differen*t*iated conditions of a problem that a differen*c*iation of species and parts is carried out, as though it corresponded to the cases of solution of the problem. (Deleuze 1994, 207)

Differenciation is the realization of virtual possibilities. It is also a fundamental aspect of Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari's productive concept of desire, which is ontological. Matter is the expression(s) of desire. Through this generative notion of desire, Deleuze and Guattari (1983), mount a challenge to Freudian psychoanalysis and its tendency to 'overcode' desire. They argue that by channelling desire back into the family and limiting revolutionary desire, psychoanalysis operates in the service of capitalism. As an alternative, Deleuze and Guattari developed the concept of schizoanalysis,[2] which enables an understanding of assemblages and an associated focus on context. Developing strategies to counter, or question, the impact of capitalism on social relations is an ongoing challenge. We explore such challenges through our case studies. These three communities operate in productive tension with capitalism. They rely

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on the capitalist corporation Linden Labs for their existence, yet they are not economically sustainable in capitalist terms. They survive through an assortment of changing entrepreneurial practices, which celebrate, and some of which commodify, difference. In enquiring into the sustainable nature of such cultures, we begin with a contextual overview of sustainable practice for web design and note the lack of such discussion in relation to 3D virtual worlds.

Terms of sustainable practice

In exploring the role that Second Life plays in processes of differenciation and inquiring into the sustainability of such cultural forms, this paper asks: what is necessary to sustain 3D cultures that appreciate difference and allow diversity to flourish? In offering an answer, we begin with a consideration of what sustainable practices in Second Life might look like and investigate what is required in order to achieve such an outcome. Sustainable web development and online user communities (as currently manifest) are the product of a concerted amount of group labour, yet need to be regarded as works in progress. Filho (2000) asserts that sustainable development has become one of the most widely used terms in the field of environmental sciences. Yet, of course, concerns about sustainable development should not rest solely with environmental or 'hard' scientists. Such a move out of environmental science is made by Eisermann (2004), who defines sustainability more broadly as a convergence of various design disciplines along three intersecting axes that address economic, social and environmental goals. In terms of our argument in this paper, we are interested in that which Eisermann defines as socially sustainable development: practices which create products and services that are appropriate, inclusive, intuitive and desirable for their users. Developments such as virtual guide dogs and relays that allow blind people to talk to those in Second Life are examples of socially sustainable development.

McKenzie (2004), drawing on the models developed by the Western Australian Council of Social Service, suggests two views of the relationship between the economic, social and environmental factors impacting on sustainable development. The first model, 'concentric circles', suggests that environmental factors have greatest influence; the inner circles representing social and economic factors being seen as dependent on the environmental factors. The second model, which McKenzie asserts is a more recent interpretation of the relationship between the factors, depicts sustainability as three overlapping circles; each of the factors being regarded as equally important. Even though the significance of the social factors on sustainable development has become more accepted in recent years, McKenzie (2004) asserts that many organizations have failed to acknowledge that social sustainability is a concern of equal importance to those of environmental and economic sustainability. Moreover, the role that designers play in promoting social sustainability is not clearly understood and often not discussed. Despite the potential impact designers can have in promoting efficient design, eco-design, disability-inclusive and universal design, Eisermann (2004) remarks jocularly that sustainability is the 'cod liver oil of the design world'. Eisermann is referring to the unpalatable taste associated with a commitment to what designers know is good for them (and for society) because of the challenges they face in meeting the demands of consumers who are reluctant to prioritize global concerns over their individual desires (Lilley, Lofthouse, and Bhamra 2005). Here, we see a clear example of the fact that capitalism's success results from its ability to master flows of destratification, which involve the breaking open of social and moral practices of regulation. Users and consumers ask: why spend time establishing what sustainable web development is, if it means slowing down the development of new 3D user technologies? But we ask: can we fold capitalism back upon itself and have both speed and sustainability? Fletcher and Dewberry (2002) suggest that achieving such an outcome would require a shift in the

professional subjectivity of web designers, whom, they argue, are as much part of the problem as they are of the solution to the sustainability crisis. Meyer (n.d.) cautions that designers will continue to contribute to the problem unless they revise their approach to problem solving in response to perceived consumer demands. Such an apparent lack of commitment to sustainability might, in part, be explained by the lack of a clear definition of the term.[3] Compounding this problem is the focus given by many designers and companies to economic goals at the expense of social goals.[4] Such attitudes are evident in Second Life, where 'disability-friendly' technologies are taken up at times as a form of cultural inclusion or sub-cultural expression – they are not standard practice for most Second Life users.

This lack of sustainable cultural development is hardly surprising, considering that Filho's (2000) research demonstrates the general lack of understanding of how the concept of sustainability can be applied. The concept is more abstract in the area of Web 2.0 design, and the design of 3D worlds such as Second Life, which are concerned primarily with promoting the sustainability of virtual communities. As Teo et al. (2003) point out, while virtual communities are increasingly pervasive, little is understood about the ways in which designers can contribute to their sustainability. Even those designers who are committed to 'sustainable development' find difficulty in relating principles of sustainability to interaction design. Stanford, Tauber, and Klein (2005, 63) also allude to these problems, explaining: 'While we are as concerned with the environment as the next design firm, it was originally unclear how any of this could possibly relate to interaction design. After all, our products are digital. They can't end up in a landfill.' Such a limited concept of sustainability needs to be moved beyond, and in order to achieve such movement we consider sustainability in terms of the cultural dynamics of virtual community. We are interested in how communities that foster embodied diversity and celebrate difference might be sustained in Second Life.

Community in Second Life needs to be understood as assembled in close relation to community outside Second Life. A young man's behaviour at a local footy club meeting and on Second Life in an interest group meeting might demonstrate very different facets of his personality, in accordance with diverse cultural mores. Yet the assemblage of subjectivity formed through the 'actual life' on the football field and the virtual experiences in Second Life is bound together in identity. The importance of understanding cultural differences on and offline is explored at length by Linda Carroli (1997) in 'Virtual Encounters: Community or Collaboration on the Internet?' Carroli distinguishes between dominant Western notions of 'community', in which communities are regarded as homogeneous and stable, and Internet (virtual) communities, which are 'diverse' and 'ephemeral'. We question the utility of such a division, as our research has found that Second Life communities are heavily coded and particular cultural mores are firmly embedded in people's online relations. However, we are interested in the way Carroli argues that communities online need to be considered in particular ways. She states that, online:

> Collaborations are multiplied – as diverse as cyber-sex, MUDs, and chat – operating in an ever-expanding field of connectivity and rendered not only active, but interactive. Collaboration is process oriented, disordered, never a beginning nor an end. Encounters are inherently collaborative. The encounter is generative, heralding the possibility of any number of 'becomings'. (Carroli 1997, 361)

In some respects, Second Life, as Carroli argues, is dynamic, diverse and ephemeral in contrast to more stable notions of individual and community. For example, in Second Life, your gender isn't fixed. Indeed, one's species isn't fixed. One might, therefore, argue that identity and community are not 'sustainable' in Second Life. However, our research has found quite the contrary. Rather than encountering amorphous clusters of avatars that do not relate to each other, we have found that some communities tightly police their boundaries. Second Life is a space that

facilitates varied kinds of engagement for people who identify as disabled, yet remains less accessible to some users, such as those who identify as having a disability, than it is for those without. Bodies who see themselves as physically, intellectually or psychologically 'disabled' outside virtual environments log on to Second Life and encounter the technology and identity politics of this online community in different ways. Within Second Life, a new trajectory of disablement is established. Some users' experience of the Second Life technology is disabling. Other users, many of whom identify as being disabled outside Second Life, navigate this virtual world successfully.[5] In so doing, they might reconstruct their virtual identity to align with the real world, by purchasing a wheelchair for their avatar, joining a disability rights group or attending disability-specific gatherings.[6] In gesturing towards these broad fields of experience we make two points. Firstly: the terrain of disability and Second Life extends well beyond the discussion we advance in this paper. The field of people with a disability using Second Life as a recreational place and site for community building is a cultural location of significance, which requires further study. Secondly, the construction of disability in Second Life (both the experience of disability for the embodied user and also the virtual identity of the disabled avatar) is an area of importance in need of further investigation. We endeavour to offer a culturally sustainable theoretical perspective through which studies in both these areas might be advanced. We also enquire into how the cultural groups in our research foster processes of differenciation that might offer a sustainable way of appreciating embodied difference online.

Sustainable cultures and relations

The following case studies are based on ethnographic research conducted in Second Life, involving a series of interviews with the founders/coordinators and members of three virtual communities: Wheelies, Virtual Ability and GimpGirl. Like Boellstorff (2008), we take the activities and words of the residents of Second Life as 'legitimate data' about embodied difference, disability and culture in a virtual world. Boellstorff defends this research methodology through arguing that the requirement to also meet interviewees in actual life would presume that virtual worlds are not in themselves real contexts. We have not met interviewees in 'actual life'; however, our ethnography has not been conducted entirely within Second Life. We chose to allow the interviewees to define the context within which they are most comfortable meeting. Some participants in the study chose to meet via Skype. For example, Simon Stevens, a regular in Second Life and a noted identity in this virtual world, preferred to meet using text chat via Skype. Others sent instant messages from within Second Life, in preference to responding to emails. Some participants chose to use voice in Skype and others expressed a preference for text in Skype – even though their speech was intelligible. Such flexibility in modes of aural and/or visual communication is specific to the Internet as a medium and allows research participants to determine the mode of contact. As noted above, we explore these case studies as partial examples of the ways in which capitalism's success results from its ability to master flows of destratification. Such processes of destratification involve the breaking open of social and moral codes and practices of state regulation and stratification. The case studies exemplify the interplay of coding and decoding; territorialization and deterritorialization. The communities we write about exist because of capitalism: Second Life SIMs and islands cost money and are capitalist enterprises that produce revenue for Linden Labs. Yet each of the communities we examine deterritorializes capitalist flows in some way. Wheelies operates partially through an exchange economy in which residents of the SIM who work for Wheelies are offered free accommodation on the Island. Virtual Ability Island runs free education programmes that introduce people who identify as having a disability on the skills required to function effectively in Second Life. GimpGirl provides an Internet Relay Chat service at no charge that allows blind people

to converse with sighted people in Second Life. Each of these strategies for community support and engagement performs an alternative to the capitalist economy on which Second Life primarily depends.

In the first of our interviews, Simon Stevens (aka Simon Walsh in Second Life) describes Wheelies, the club he founded in Second Life, as a community for 'everyone'. When asked whether many of the members of Wheelies are mobility impaired, Simon asserts 'this is a myth, we all have impairments'. The attraction to Wheelies, explains Simon, is the music, live artists, dance and contests. He goes on to explain that part of the attraction is also because Wheelies is a safe place to have fun with no pressure to disclose anything about one's abilities or disabilities in actual life. Polgara Paine, who has taken over the responsibility as Director of Wheelies and relocated the club to a new SIM owned by Polgara and her partner, shares Simon's philosophy, emphasizing that they don't want a 'disabled community' but rather, an inclusive community that celebrates difference. Polgara explains: 'We want a community where everyone is welcome.' The new SIM housing Wheelies is called Taupo, and it provides a virtual community for people associated with Wheelies with houses, apartments, shops, a hot tub, pool house/art gallery, workshop, garden, visitors' centre and planned facilities including an educational centre, plaza with games, beach area for swimming and floating. Wheelies also employs people with disabilities to run the club – positions include a manager, DJs and a landscape gardener. Employees at Wheelies are guaranteed a minimum income and some choose to live 'rent free' in the Taupo community in exchange for their services to Wheelies. Wheelies is a community that is not exclusive, yet performs a preference for supporting the work of members who live with embodied differences and identify as being 'disabled' in actual life. By bringing together people who do and do not identify as having a disability in actual life, Wheelies offers a space in which cultures of relation are not formed around disability identity or politics but, rather, around shared pleasures. People who do not have an actual disability might share experiences of being led by a guide dog or dancing in a wheelchair with the avatars of users who configure their virtual identity to reflect an actual impairment or disability. Alternatively, other users with actual disabilities can choose to leave visual signifiers of these embodied states behind. Both demographics become different from their actual selves through their virtual involvement in Wheelies.

Although Virtual Ability Island was launched only in August this year, the community has a longer history dating back to the establishment of 'Heron's Sanctuary' by Sodapop Heron, Superquiet Heron, and Gentle Heron on a plot of land on the EduIsland 4 SIM in 2007. The three founders came to Second Life initially to find a community of support as individuals who faced barriers to participation in the physical community in which they lived. After meeting with other Second Life residents who identified as having disabilities, the group determined the need for a community that would provide companionship and friendship among those who understand the limitations of the physical world. The name Heron's Sanctuary was chosen to reflect the founders and to create an identity for the community that did not label members of the group as 'disabled'. The mission of the group to date has been to assist people with disabilities to come into Second Life and sustain them in the virtual world through the provision of support services. However, they adopt an inclusive philosophy and do not distinguish between those who are disabled and those who are not. As Gentle Heron explains:

> There are groups in *Second Life* that are for people with a very specific disability, there's a Crohn's and Colitis support group, very small group, it's a small segment of the population but it's very targeted. Then you've got places like *Wheelies* and that's in a way targeted because Simon's iconic within the disability community. You're not forbidden to go there if you're nondisabled as some of the groups do forbid you, like *GimpGirl* when they first started in here was very female and that was an issue actually. Now they accept anyone who identifies as female; they have some male transgenders who are members of *GimpGirl*. And *GimpGirl* now because of *Second Life* has created

> a new role in the organization called ally, and so they now have male allies. But our group was purposely made differently, we do not distinguish between those who are currently disabled and those who are nondisabled, and we have members in both categories, we don't require them to reveal which category you belong to. We have found that tolerance and understanding is a big outcome for us.

At the beginning of 2008, the group became incorporated as Virtual Ability Inc. They received 501(c)3 non-profit status and planned their relocation from the plot of land on EduIsland 4 to a new SIM, Virtual Ability Island, as a cooperative undertaking with the Alliance Library System with funding provided by the ALS National Library of Medicine. According to the Virtual Ability Inc website, the vision of the community is to be the 'leading provider of services for and information about the disabled in electronic virtual worlds' (http://www.virtualability.org 2008). An important role of the community is to provide newcomers to Second Life who identify as having a disability, with the initial training and ongoing support required to enable them to function in the virtual world. Virtual Ability is also a collaborative partner in another virtual community, the Health Support Coalition, enabling the 70 + health and disability-related virtual communities in Second Life to communicate through their group leaders. Their latest project is the Ability Commons, which aims to provide a place for these virtual communities to meet together, network and provide mutual support, while also nurturing smaller and evolving support groups. In a different way from the work of Wheelies, Virtual Ability Island is developing modes of sustaining cultures that support actual embodied differences. Through providing training and support programmes, Virtual Ability Island facilitates processes in which users become different from their actual selves. Virtual Ability Island states that its goal as an organization is not how many members it has, but rather whether or not its members change and develop through membership in the group: 'Virtual Ability, Inc.'s success will be measured not by how many people stay in our group, but by how many use our services to grow into virtual worlds' (http://www.virtualability.org 2008).

Unlike Wheelies and Virtual Ability, the GimpGirl virtual community was established outside Second Life in 1998 by Jen Cole (aka JennyLin Arashi) and a group of young women with disabilities who were seeking a community that understood their needs and provided a safe place for women and girls with disabilities. The community was initially established via a website that provides a range of services including email lists dedicated to particular areas of interest, a printed newsletter and an IRC chatroom. The virtual community was established in Second Life in February 2008 and provides regular meetings and seminars. In contrast to Wheelies and Virtual Ability, GimpGirl places restrictions on those who can attend its group meetings; members must identify as being a woman with a disability (though the term 'woman' encompasses a broad range of gendered identities including those who identify as intersexed or transgendered). Members who have an interest in supporting the women with disabilities community and partners are welcome to attend public events. The GimpGirl community expressly states that people who are interested in women with disabilities for sexual reasons or who are seeking a romantic relationship are not welcome. As the following discussion with Aleja illustrates, GimpGirl is not open to people whose interest in the community is about fetishism:

> [23:39] Aleja Asturias: One of our first group members in *Second Life* came to us because she felt people in other groups did make fun of her, particularly for presenting as an amputee. But she was also concerned that we were not legitimate, that we were just another group for people pretending to have disabilities. Or for fetishists.
> [23:39] Aleja Asturias: Which comes up more than I would like.
> [23:39] Denise: so her avatar appearance was someone with amputation?
> [23:39] Namav Abramovic: sigh

[23:39] Denise: oh dear that is awful
[23:40] Aleja Asturias: Yes. Her avatar (if I remember correctly) was a bilateral leg amputee.
[23:40] Denise: but a reflection on some of the odd groups you can find in SL I suppose?
[23:40] Aleja Asturias: Virtual reality does give people with unusual inclinations room to play, or room to be abusive
[23:40] Denise: as all being into fetishism?
[23:40] Aleja Asturias nods.
[23:41] Denise: yes – diversity is an advantage of SL but can be abused too I suppose
[23:41] Aleja Asturias: in our group, we aim to include people of many self identities, but they do have to really be who they claim to be for us to be comfortable.
[23:41] Aleja Asturias: We are not open to fetishists here.
[23:41] Denise: so authenticity is important?
[23:42] Aleja Asturias: It is to me, and those who work with this group.

In addition to the Second Life community, GimpGirl has established several virtual social networking communities through sites such as Live Journal, Twitter, FaceBook, MySpace, Flickr and the CafePress store. According to Gentle Heron from Virtual Ability, GimpGirl is interesting technologically because of its utilization of social networking tools to extend its community. Members who are unable to access the Second Life community are able to 'attend' meetings through the community's Internet Relay Channel service that can be accessed from the GimpGirl website.[7] The number of Second Life communities providing assistive technologies for people who are blind is fairly small. It is tremendous to see GimpGirl enabling conversation and community between blind and non-blind users. While GimpGirl has some somewhat striated ideas about membership, these are coupled with an ethical engagement with difference and diversity, in which 'woman' is constituted in a range of differing ways, and technological platforms are provided to facilitate communication between a range of users with actual impairments.

There are, of course, many intersections with other virtual communities in Second Life. Some members of Wheelies are also active members of other communities. Louise Later, for example, who has a home on the Taupo SIM and works in Wheelies as a DJ, is also a member of Virtual Ability and, together with her sister, KC Garfunkel, has been collaborating with Charles Mountain, a Virtual Ability mentor on the design and development of assistive devices in Second Life for members with significant visual impairments. Their latest projects include a virtual guide dog and white cane that guide avatars with visual disabilities through Second Life by following another avatar on command, or locating objects by name. They inform actual subjectivities and communities outside Second Life. This point is also made by Turkle (1995), who points out that we need to understand virtual communities as part of the larger cultural context; there has been an erosion of the boundaries between the real and virtual. The recent fundraising event held in Second Life for Nick Dupree (aka Namav Abramav) illustrates this. In the physical world, Nick is a 26-year-old health care activist and writer whose physical disability necessitates reliance on an electric wheelchair and ventilator. In the virtual world, Nick is an active member of various disability-related virtual communities in Second Life and has conducted successful campaigns within this virtual environment advocating for improved health care services in his home town, Alabama. Despite the success of his activism in 'real life' and in Second Life, Nick's physical needs could no longer be met adequately in Alabama and so he decided to relocate to New York where the required services are more readily available. The virtual communities in Second Life rallied to this cause, and a fundraising event – 'New Worlds for Namav' – organized by GimpGirl coordinator Aleja Asturias, was hosted on 24 August 2008 in Second Life.

There are many other communities in Second Life that provide support for people who identify as disabled. The three case studies presented here, however, illustrate the ways in which

people with disabilities have 'stepped through the screen into virtual communities' and reconstructed their 'identities on the other side of the looking glass' (Turkle 1995, 177). As Turkle explains, such reconstruction is a 'cultural work in progress' and we argue that sustaining these communities is also a work in progress, as members form and re-form new and transient communities to address the barriers they experience in physical and virtual worlds.

Nourishing difference

Adopting a Deleuzian approach to thinking through desire and differenciation will nourish communities of difference and in so doing advocate for disability accessibility in Second Life. Deleuzian ethics involves opening up the potential for the unknown. For example, discussions about hearing-impaired users in Second Life show some ways in which affirming difference increases the capacity to act of not only the hearing-impaired uses but also the Second Life users without hearing impairment who advocate the use of assistive technologies. Currently, hearing-impaired users have also encountered profoundly unethical – if not damaging – situations in which:

> People described their own experiences of being excluded, or else sought to marginalise others, in ways such as:
>
> - Declaring exclusion (e.g. talking about the 'ongoing problem' of being ignored, that the deafness will require non-use of voice to be explained over and over again, claiming that Linden Labs [the corporation that owns *Second Life*] should have consulted with hearing impaired users but did not, talking about 'your kind' or 'your friends', by claiming that people who only speak 'obscure' languages are unable to participate in many discussions)
> - Expressing discomfort (e.g. someone who had identified themselves as hearing impaired declaring that deaf mute status was 'embarrassing and humiliating', by suggesting that alternative reasons such as technical problems should be given for opting out of voice instead of admitting a hearing impairment). (Oliver 2007, 'Ways of Excluding' section, paras. 1–3)

Deleuze offers us useful tools through which to understand the social and political implications of such acts of discrimination, and with which to nourish cultural appreciations of difference. In explaining the core principles of Spinoza's philosophy of ethics, Deleuze (1988, 28) argues that ethics cannot be separated from Spinoza's conception of consciousness, values and sad passions. These 'three practical theses concerning consciousness, values and the sad passions' (28) constitute building blocks for Spinoza's philosophy. The first of these concepts, the illusion of consciousness, is the idea that our lived awareness of consciousness is a fiction. Rather than being the 'origin' of one's thoughts and actions, human beings *are* the affects that our thoughts and actions have on us. Through acting, people create themselves. Individuals are produced by their interactions with the world. While we can think 'person' and 'context', for Spinoza, the ways in which a person acts and thinks are not separable from their context. Deleuze takes up this first principle of Spinozan thought – the belief that we *are* the affects that our thoughts and actions have upon us. He employs this idea to replace the Cartesian notion that our consciousness is the location *from* which our thoughts and actions arise. For Deleuze, then, subjectivity is produced, not given. For Second Life users, their virtual experience is part of their subjectivity both on- and offline – and the nature of these experiences has impacts that inform their future actions. They are part of processes of subjectivation.

The second aspect of Deleuze's thought in which he draws significantly on Spinoza, as well as Nietzsche (1978, 1990), is his critique of morality as opposed to ethics; his assessment of the cultural production of values. For Spinoza (2001) and Nietzsche (1978, 1990), Good and Evil are

fictions created by a worldview grounded in transcendent beliefs, rather than in the practical world. Deleuze argues that 'transcendent' thought is expressed via Kant's philosophy,[8] orthodox religion, and psychoanalysis (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 1987, 1996). These three forums respectively create a 'transcendent moralism' that reduces people's power to act – or engage with practical specificities as cause for action. We contend that negative representations of people with disabilities as being unworthy of 'inclusion', or as 'holding back' the mainstream, can act as transcendent knowledges of disability, in which disability is produced as 'other', as 'scary', extra-ordinary and in need of control or repair. The pleasure and independence experienced by people with a disability who use and enjoy Second Life radically displaces transcendent ideas of disability as a signifier of need. Second Life users who advocate that virtual spaces can 'free' people from disability, suggesting that disability is something one would categorically wish to be without, reduce their own capacity to act.

The third aspect of Spinoza's thought that Deleuze adopts in his fashioning of an ethics is the call to reject the 'sad passions'. 'Sad passions' are affects that erode life. Deleuze explains them through saying:

> Sadness will be any passion whatsoever which involves a diminution of my power of acting, and joy will be any passion involving an increase in my power of acting … Here you understand well that he [Spinoza] does not take sadness in a vague sense, he takes sadness in the rigorous sense he knew to give it: *sadness is the affect insofar as it involves the diminution of my power of acting*. (Deleuze 1978; emphasis added)

An everyday example of a sad affect in Second Life can be found in the relationship between people who think there is nothing to be gained from inclusive technology and culture. More than any other group in Second Life today, people with profound cognitive, motor, sensory, auditory or visual disabilities experience disadvantage to the point of exclusion. Attempts at disability-inclusive technological development seem little able to alter this situation because of the lack of attention given to developing and implementing accessible ethical web use policy. Interwoven with this is a neo-liberal, rights-based discourse in which people with disabilities who are experiencing access problems are either silenced by their physical exclusion or are criticized for holding back other users. For example, hearing-impaired users, when lobbying for assistive technology, faced the suggestion that:

> the hearing impaired get by fine at movies and in the rest of their life so should just get on with things here, that deaf people probably didn't like it when sound was added to movies. (Oliver 2007, bullet point 4 in 'Ways of Excluding' section)

Deleuze (1997, 243) describes the interpersonal dynamics of such sad affects with insight. He states: 'affections rooted in sadness are linked to one another … and this in such a way that our power of action is further and further diminished, tending towards its lowest degree'. Sorrow and fear of difference are self-perpetuating. They arise from acts prompted by the feeling that one's actions will have no positive impact, whatever they are, so one may as well act for apparently self-serving purposes. In such methods of thought, individuals are positioned in competition with one another. This should be replaced with an understanding of individuals as unique: as dividual expressions of a milieu of difference.

Conclusion: Dark precursors for diversity in Second Life

In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze states:

> The coexistent levels of a psychic totality may be considered to be actualized in differenciated series, according to the singularities which characterize them. These series are liable to resonate under the influence of a fragment or 'dark precursor' which stands for this totality in which all the levels coexist. (1994, 291)

The three Second Life cultural formations we have examined can be read as coexistent levels of a psychic totality in which 'disability' is moved beyond, in a sustainable, caring way that holds at its core inclusive practices and technologies. People who are actually disabled are part of this movement beyond 'disability' through differenciation into dividuality and diversity. The technological barriers limiting the accessibility of 3D virtual worlds, though challenging, can be overcome. Much more complex are the attitudes of both the developers and the participants of these virtual communities, which help to sustain these barriers. Wheelies, Virtual Ability Island and GimpGirl each offer different examples of how disability can be appreciated as an articulation of difference: the life-force of which all human beings are an expression. These groups also offer examples of economies of relation that decode the capitalist models through which Second Life operates. They constitute flows of desire that are bound in communities formed outside nuclear families and which are grounded in assemblages of subjectivity produced through experiences in both actual and virtual worlds. The focus on context afforded by the concept of assemblage is critical in terms of acknowledging sustenance. Social assemblages produced by special interest groups such as Wheelies, Virtual Ability Island and GimpGirl inform the subjective assemblages of dividuals who participate in and sustain these communities. Subjectivization is a process of differenciation in which a person becomes different from themselves in relation to the contexts of their experiences. Dividual assemblages of consciousness, action and context inform online communities that are themselves part of broader social assemblages that bring together dividuals, virtual contexts, economies of relation and in so doing facilitate larger social processes of differenciation. Each of the cultures we have examined is sustained through dedication and genuine investment. Cultural sustenance is only achieved through such commitment, which is effected when a context becomes part of a dividual's process of subjectivization, an aspect of their assemblage of subjectivity. In order to nourish this commitment to context and foster economies of relation that differ from capitalist modes of production, Virtual Ability Island offers free housing for new residents and provides volunteer mentors. Wheelies and GimpGirl are similarly reliant on commitment, sharing of time and on building experiential communities in which members become different from themselves through becoming embedded in a virtual context. Each of our case studies offers different ways of actualizing possibility – from establishing new social networks online, to learning skills required for navigating 3D virtual worlds, to performing gender differently. We have begun to explore what the world of Second Life might look like through a Deleuzian lens. In thinking about virtual sustainability, Deleuze has much to offer. For Deleuze, 'the virtual' is possibility; it is all that the actual can become (1994, 211). 3D virtual worlds such as Second Life need to be embraced as sites in which possibilities for articulating difference and fostering inclusion are actualized in sustainable ways.

Notes

1. Second Life is a 3D virtual world. It enables participants to create identities in the form of 'avatars' that are visual and auditory bodies created within the computer world. These bodies interact with others in an immersive environment.
2. Via the concept of schizoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the radical surplus of products under capitalism, and the cultural significance attached to these products, is both dangerous for the ecology of consumers' mental health and the ecology of the planet. The planet is deployed to produce goods that have meaning only in terms of fabricated market value – in an abstract economic market that feeds capitalism. This process is schizophrenic because of the break between flows of matter which have ecological economies that operate independently of capitalism and 'the productive essence of capitalism' which 'functions or "speaks" only in the language of signs imposed on it by merchant capital or the axiomatic of the market' (1983, 241). There is no end point to this process other than a cessation of production following a complete erasure of resources.

3. Frankental (2001, 20) refers to this problem in his discussion of corporate social responsibility (CSR), arguing: 'CSR is a vague and intangible term, which can mean anything to anybody'. This marked lack of connection resonates with the findings of Filho (2000) whose informal study conducted in European tertiary institutions revealed that, for many people, the term 'sustainability' is too abstract, too broad, and too theoretical to be another fashion.
4. Margolin and Margolin (2002) assert that such prevailing attitudes have their origins in the Industrial Revolution, during which the dominant design paradigm was one of designing for the market, with alternatives, such as attention to social development, receiving little attention.
5. For some participants or residents, 3D virtual worlds such as Second Life have allowed them to interact socially, shop, run businesses, and access information in ways not possible in their 'real life'. For example, Cassidy (2007) argues that Second Life has provided residents David Wallace and student Niels Schuddeboom, both of whom are wheelchair users, with 'an outlet for creative expression' (Cassidy 2007). For many, Second Life has proved to be a viable alternative to 'real-life' employment, enabling residents like Nanci Schenkein to operate their businesses through a virtual medium (Is this a real life, is this just fantasy? 2007).
6. For example, Simon Stevens is the founder of Wheelies, a social network of almost 600 residents and a nightclub where people who use wheelchairs 'hang out' each week in Second Life. While Stevens chooses to remain in a wheelchair in virtual life (Is this a real life, is this just fantasy? 2007, para. 5), others, like Susan Brown, prefer to leave their wheelchairs behind to experience Second Life as walking avatars (Stein 2007, para. 31); others experiment with different identities, alternating the gender of their avatar and sometimes the species (from human form to animal) between visits. Changing the appearance of Wilde Cunningham, a well-known Second Life avatar identity, has, for example, been enjoyable for the nine adults with severe disabilities who control Wilde. Lilone Sandgrain is a 'real-life' day care worker and the hands and voice for the group (Live2Give: Mascot's Musings 2005). Sandgrain organizes Wilde, the avatar, to perform the wishes of the nine adults whom he/she embodies in Second Life. Other users who identify as being disabled outside Second Life choose to construct their virtual identity as being without disability.
7. As Aleja explains:

> … this relay allows blind people to talk to those in SL … we found out about it through a community for people with autism … doesn't seem that many groups using the relays specifically for accessibility purposes but it seems like a natural accommodation. It would be great to see all disability related groups have relay as an option.

8. See Deleuze (1984) on Kant's philosophy.

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