

# Virtual Worlds and Interpretive Communities: Opportunities for Global Dialogue

February 16-17, 2009

University of Nevada Las Vegas

Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies

*with*

Sammy Ofer School of Communications: The Interdisciplinary Center (IDC)

Herzliya, Israel

## February 16

9:15-9:45 UNLV-IDC research teams meeting 1204 GH

9:00 Registration in Greenspun Hall Foyer

9:45 Opening Remarks

**Brian Greenspun**, president, Greenspun Corporation, editor & president, *Las Vegas Sun*

**Lee Bernick**, interim dean, Greenspun College of Urban Affairs

**Ardyth Sohn**, director, Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies

10:00 -11:00 **KEYNOTE ADDRESS:** GH Auditorium

### **Offline Implications of Online Religious Community**

This presentation will highlight conditions within our information society that have given rise to the growth of online religious communities and the challenges this poses to offline religious groups and institutions. Questions of how the experience of community online may alter individual's expectations of community and how authority structures are negotiated will be addressed through several case studies of different religious online communities facilitated via email, the web and Second Life.

Introduction by Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies Professor **Dan Stout**, editor of the *Journal of Media and Religion* and author of several books on religion and popular culture.

Speaker **Dr. Heidi Campbell** (Ph.D. University of Edinburgh), an assistant professor at Texas A&M University, is the author of *Exploring Religious Community Online: We Are One in the Network* and a forthcoming book *When Religion Meets New Media*, as well as several articles and book chapters exploring how technology and religion intersect on the Internet as well as through cell phones and other emerging media.

11:00 – 11:15 Break

11:15 – 12:15 **VIRTUAL KEYNOTE:** GH Auditorium

## **The Power of Immersive Experiences: Using Serious Games and Virtual Worlds to Enrich Social Interactions and Create New Spaces**

Moderator: Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies Professor **Larry Mullen** has written extensively about the formation of communities (both traditional and virtual) and is a visual studies expert, particularly in multi-player online games.

Panelists include:

**David Wortley**, director of the Serious Games Institute (SGI) at Coventry University, UK. He is responsible for the development of the Institute as a new self-financing initiative to establish a center of excellence for the emerging games application area. Working with academics, regional development agencies, and leading computer games companies, Wortley aims to make the SGI a thought leader and focal point for games-based learning, simulation, and immersive 3D virtual environments.

**Dr. Sara De Freitas**, (Ph.D. University of Sussex), director of research at the Serious Games Institute, an international initiative concerned with the collaboration of games, virtual worlds, and interactive digital media for education, health, and business applications at the University of Coventry, UK. It was founded at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, D.C., and focuses on public policy/management issues and applications as well as social, ethical, and legal issues related to game-based tools.

**Paul Turner**, co-founder of The Walk In Web Company as a virtual business resource center in Second Life, focuses on creating business presences in virtual worlds. His showpiece virtual version of his own town serves as a model for other global businesses attempting to expand their names, brands, and products in virtual marketplaces.

12:15 – 1:30                      Lunch

1:30 – 2:30 **PRESENTATION:**                                              GH Auditorium  
**Social Bots as a Research Paradigm for Virtual Worlds**

**Professor Doron Friedman** (Ph.D. Tel Aviv University), lecturer and head of the Advanced Virtuality Lab at IDC Herzliya, completed a post-doctoral fellowship at University College London in virtual environments and computer graphics and is an honorary lecturer at UCL. He is co-founder of Earthnoise, Inc., and has inventions and patents for several start-up companies. He has collaborated with a number of artists on digital media works shown in leading galleries in London.

2:30 – 3:00                      Break

3:00 – 4:00    **PANEL:**                                                              GH Auditorium  
**Avatar Mediated Cinema**

Moderator: Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies Professor **Tony Ferri** heads the national entertainment media interest group for the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and has published two books, including *Willing Suspension of Disbelief: Poetic Faith in Film*.

Panelists include:

**Peggy Weil** (Bachelors Degree Harvard/Masters MIT) is a visiting professor at the USC-SCA Interactive Media Division. She is a digital media artist and designer focusing on interactive and immersive design. As a member of the Architecture Machine Group (now the MIT Media Lab) from 1980-1982, she worked on pioneering interactive projects in design and telepresence, going on to create titles for the Voyager Company, Broderbund, Electronic Arts, Von Holtzbrinck, and Ravensberger Interactive. She was awarded the MILIA D'OR in Cannes for the CD-ROM series *Moving Puzzle*. She designed the original Roden Crater website and is currently working on a comprehensive redesign for Skystone and James Turrell. She was creative producer/designer for USC's Institute for Creative Technology E.L.E.C.T. project, a role-playing game to increase cultural awareness in Army officers, and the Redistricting Game, a USC Annenberg Center-sponsored project to increase voter awareness about redistricting. Current projects include *Gone Gitmo*, a virtual installation of Guantanamo prison, and *Mauerkrankheit/Wallsickness*, a virtual installation of the world's border fences.

**Nonny de la Peña** (Bachelors Degree Harvard/ Masters USC) is a transmedia producer studying at the USC Annenberg Program on Online Communities. She works across documentary, machinima filmmaking, and virtual world design, including the *Second Life* installations *Gone Gitmo*, prototyped at BAVC with MacArthur Foundation funding, and *Mauerkrankheit/Wallsickness*, an Annenberg Public Good Merit Award winner. She has written for *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, and *Time*, and her award-winning documentary films have been shown around the world. De la Peña is currently exploring how real-world social issues are informed by virtual worlds, including the way that nonfiction storytelling and journalism can be produced using first-person experiences in 3D environments.

### February 17

9:00 – 9:30                      Coffee

9:30 – 10:30    **PANEL: Law and Order in Cyberspace**                      GH Auditorium

Moderator: Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies professor **Stephen Bates**, former literary editor of *Wilson Quarterly*, has published four books as well as a monograph on the Hutchins Commission. His interests include legal considerations in emerging media, such as copyright in virtual worlds.

Panelists include:

**Peter Ludlow** (Ph.D. Columbia) is a professor of philosophy at Northwestern University and founder and contributing editor to *Second Life Herald*. His books include *Crypto-*



policy, law, and ethics at the Sammy Ofer School of Communications. He is also a member of the Israel Broadcasting Authority's board and chair of the ethics committee. He was general counsel of Israel's commercial television and radio authority.

**Amit Lavie-dinur** (Ph.D. Hebrew University) is director of the television studies program at the Sammy Ofer School of Communications and served as the dean of student affairs at the Media School of the College of Management in Tel Aviv. She also served as a selector for the new Israeli Foundation for Cinema and TV.

2:00 – 2:15                      Break

2:15 – 4:15                      **Research Breakouts**                                              **TBA**  
This time will be spent with participants discussing in small groups ways to further international collaborations about topics of shared interest. Topics will be selected by the attendees.

4:30 – 5:00                      **Reflections and Future Thoughts**                                              GH Auditorium  
UNLV-IDC teams

This conference is supported by a seed grant provided by the Greenspun Family Foundation to support collaboration between UNLV and IDC in the development of new and emerging global media projects. The UNLV-IDC research teams thank Brian Greenspun for providing leadership in important new directions for our field.