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Second Life Sweatshop

Adam Elenbaas



"Invisible Threads," a collaboration between Jeff Crouse and Stephanie Rothenberg, explores the growing intersection

between labor, emerging virtual economies, and real life commodities through the creation of a designer jeans sweatshop in the online, 3-dimensional virtual world of Second Life.

Replicating a real life manufacturing facility that includes hiring Second Life "workers," the project leverages the simulation capabilities of Second Life's virtual space in conjunction with its social networking tools to provide an insider's view into the future of global production - telematic manufacturing. This new model of production uses the labor of computer users who are working remotely on keyboards around the world.

The process begins in the real world. Real life customers at the **Double Happiness Jeans** store place their custom designed jean orders with a live factory overseer who manages the virtual factory workers from a terminal in the physical space. As the jean

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order enters the virtual factory, Second Life "workers" who are actually humans controlling onscreen avatars stationed at specialized machines begin the "telematic" production process.

Ten virtual machines, each correlating to a specification of the custom jean order, are operated by a SL worker in an assembly line manner. For example, machine number 2 which simulates a laser cutter creates the pattern whereas machine number 3, a dye vat, creates the "rinse" effect. Customers in the store can watch their jeans being created via a projection of the factory into the physical space.

At the end of the production cycle, the finished jeans are sent to a large format printer in the physical space, where they are printed on Tyvek material, quickly assembled, and worn out by the buyer. The entire process takes about 20 minutes. Styles include boot cut, skinny leg and flare. Profits from customer jean purchases are used to maintain the virtual factory and consumables (material, inks) and pay workers' wages.

The creators of the project hope to shed light on the current politics of outsourced labor as well as the role of "play" and digital games in cultural production. Just as in a real life factory, workers are monitored by a department supervisor and held accountable for their speed and efficiency and any production errors. The erratic flow of supply and demand and extenuating circumstances such as equipment failures and irrational dispositions may result in docked pay, layoffs and overtime.

The project debuts at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2008. A Double Happiness Jeans store will be located inside the New Frontier Theater on Main St.. If you would like to experience telematic production in Second Life, the factory is currently hiring workers. Double Happiness Manufacturing offers a competitive salary, virtual land bonuses and a safe and friendly work environment.

Please contact jobs@doublehappinessjeans.com or visit the

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website

<http://www.doublehappinessjeans.com/>.

(Text copied courtesy of Jeff Crouse and Stephanie Rothenberg).

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