ART IN SECOND LIFE

THE GRAND TOUR -

"What I have observed in entertainment forums...is that security is observed by each other on the Net, able to observe each other in Second Life and able to observe each other in the second order networks that created to communicate highly personalized interactive works.

- Chrisy Denna

"In digitized social networks there is no place for psychologically defined notions whole, Identity unfolds through profiles across various platforms, known as vernacular connections. The current公元s of communication are not the biologically inherited and fused consciousness communities.

- Networked MC

"Simulations only after a gluttonous feast of sensory overload of reality.

- Melinda Rackham

THE ARRIVAL

A wave rushes and folds neatly on origami shoals. A spotted sky spatters into indecisive clarity. Land pops. Land rises. Lines rush out like ribbons. Names, then faces, then bodies and clothes. Bit by bit, the elements drop into place. Our tour will begin in five minutes. Lives are spent in search of other lives, alternatives for our selves and the indiscreet other voices standing on the edge of the void. Here on the beach before the tour, beings pop out of the ether, arriving through their magical invitation. Hello, you. Hello, you. Is that so-and-so? Great tail, where did you get that frock?

Linden Labs’ desire to have a place for ‘everybody’ really touches the core of the organisation of SL, but the actuality is that not everybody is interested. However, the everybody of SL is the body of the every. Types and characters, personas and people iterate and shift unlike anywhere and anytime in virtual history. The identikit idea catalogue of SL’s personality and appearance matrices are as much about their mutability as their oddity.

As the guests arrive for the tour, appearances shift as characters pose like dolls being undressed by unseen children. Many are unsure, and yet to decide how they will appear, even after they redress, for this new event. Tonight’s tour is an experiment in critically engaging with the creative projects, performances and potentials of SL artistic practice, organised for The Good the Bad and the Ugly -empyre-discussion forum.

BEARING WITNESS

Those in our pony tour group who have visited before, help the newer, less experienced members to observe proper SL etiquette and to ride their ponies correctly. Some stragglers have reconstituted outside the Odyssey building and are battering walls with their fresh new avatar bodies, others are flying around the ceiling. Some have gone exploring and are now submerged underwater wondering why they can still breathe, and other are roaming through SL’s vast and vacant architectural spaces.

A certain self-consciousness rustles through our crowd and several disappear to redress what they feel are visual inadequacies or inappropriate choices for today’s activity. First life galleries don’t sell cosmetic surgery and punk haircuts, more’s the pity, but here everybody checks their dress code after the birth from the never-never land of their computer’s memory buffer. Avatars reappear in different genders and colour schemes; with wings, tails and some delightful new frocks. The sparks of friendships and intimacy are igniting as inventory buffers. Avatars reappear in different genders and colour schemes; with wings, tails and some delightful new frocks. The sparks of friendships and intimacy are igniting as inventory buffers. Avatars reappear in different genders and colour schemes; with wings, tails and some delightful new frocks. The sparks of friendships and intimacy are igniting as inventory buffers.

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Over the tour guide’s magical invitation. Hello, you. Hello, you. Is that so-and-so? Great tail, where did you get that frock?

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THE TOUR GUIDES EXPLAIN:

Seizing the opportunity to try one of Babeli’s works Marina Regina jumps onto the harmless...
looking red plastic chair which is mounted on the large orange painting Avatar on Canvas. Nothing seems to happen... then the cohesion of her body disintegrates. She is both stretched and squished, her limbs attached in oddly unfamiliar patterns, distorted, deformed, and scratching uncontrollably... Marina still walks and talks and she is clearly unconcerned about a return to normacy. In fact she seems to enjoy enforced shape shifting!

Our avatars, our new breed of golden code, our selves are held, gently cupped, by their networks, by memories, by fantasy, by potentialities. As the tightly knit pattern unravels, they do not disintegrate depleted, but form other associations. New threads and strings emerge, electronic mucous spans the gaps between, glittering in the orange intensity of an SL sunset.

A series of bodies gathers wherever they can; to merely meet people is its own artform in the endless vacant lot. All appearances are deviances in the truest sense; triggers and toggles from central values on a series of scales. As the tour progresses, eyes dart across the polygon mesh. Borders have melted between the group but remnants of collective anxiety are still telepathically cast between species.

PERSISTENCE

"Does morphic resonance happen in Second Life as the formless cohesive element? Can an avatar have DNA? Complexity looks at interacting elements and asks how they form patterns and how the patterns unfold, patterns that may never be finished [because they're open ended]."

– Jacquie Clarke

While Brian Eno was addressing the North American Premiere of 77 Million Paintings at San Francisco’s Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, four Second Life versions of 77 Million Paintings concurrently entertaining in-world fans. Built by SL artist Annabeth Robinson and placed across four art venues, each installation was unique, streaming generative sounds, and offering Eno “extras” Building versions of off-world installations is not Robinson’s usual operating mode, rather she addresses the complaint that SL is a lonely desolate experience. The majority of her art works require playful participation (whether known or unknown) of avatars to animate them. This interaction may be by touch, collision or chat, or more subtly by surveillance where the artwork scans for avatars in close proximity, pulls data from them, then generates a visual or sonic event.

An early work, Email Invaders requires that the audience send an email to either red or yellow space invaders, which will change size on a towering glass wall, dependant on the length of the email. This methodology of utilising elegantly simple work within the walls of SL scripting language overcomes its well documented narrow parameters. She refers to her working space – The Pencil Factory at the Port – as sketchbook, rather than a studio. Second life is a persistent medium, so rather than operating within a static technological or art-historical context, this work and other works are always functioning, always “on”. The gallery doors to not shut at 6pm. The projectors do not turn off.

Robinson’s visual metaphor for this constant consumption, for the fragility of self in a persistently present world, is ironically titled “You Demand Too Much of Me.” This sensor/time based sculpture decays in direct relationship to it’s audience numbers – to how much it
is on display, looked at, surveilled. More avatars present means the sculpture will disappear, block by block, and it is not non-existent. Then when there is nothing to look at any more and it is left alone, it slowly reappears one block at a time, like a deleted Terminator reconstituting itself until whole, only to disappear again.

Like Adam Nash, Robinson is pushing the parameters of live in-world generated music and visuals. Her Avata Harp sound installation creates tones when an avatar or other physical object moves within its physical space. Flying through the work, the tones raise in pitch closer to the centre.

While Robinson’s works resonate between walls, inside the gallery space, in clearly defined art arenas, Nash’s works are more al fresco, venturing into the vast often denuded open public spaces of SL. Embedding his poetic, reactive responsive works in SL ground gives them an element of accessibility. The park environment—a commons free of perverse advertising, and not adverse to instigating queer moments, returns art to the domain of people.

While buildable in SL, can possess an air of the possessed, the open land between buildings are not the facsimiles of landscape art, but enable the planting of flowers of doubt and surprise. Adam’s sonic poems free flow like the art of perpetual, uninterrupted movement, adapting motion to obstacles in the environment. The fluidity of the electro-plasmic body, the gaps and chasms between us, and between us and art are momentarily bridged in-world, in these temporal zones. We flock and swarms between spaces, around spaces, we are dynamic space.

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Technology and especially this monstrous phenomena called virtuality was Fuller’s bugbear, it was and still is powered not by metaphors but an existing history, going back to these first representational arts, by which we placed faith in exteriority to the self.

Never virtUal.

Environmental architect R. Buckminster Fuller, knowing full well the trappings of utopian fervour, foregrounded the practical manifestations of errors and coincidence as design allegories. The history of virtual space, going back to pre-linguistic uses of gypsums and chalks to demarcate boundaries, bears out the narrative. We build in dreams. We learn to build in dreams. We build dreams through learning. And so on.

Avata Harp sound installation creates tones when an avatar or other physical object moves within its physical space. Flying through the work, the tones raise in pitch closer to the centre. The avatars that question appearance, is completely adverse to instigating queer moments, returns art to the domain of people.

The avatars that question the technnotopian ideal of “always young, always beautiful” are my favorites...the usual

and pervasive appeal—like fellow Front member and mediated artist Scott Kildall. Second Life’s movements are non-existent. Then when there is nothing to look at any more and it is left alone, it slowly reappears one block at a time, like a deleted Terminator reconstituting itself until whole, only to disappear again.

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The tour is over.

“Sl need more vitriol and burning tyres to become justiciable.” — Ricardo Peach

Spaces and buildings become reinterpreted data; spikes of colour and light flux and shift. The real mutation is not in the process of material uses, but in the process of their deployment in art. It is the art process which is being ephemeralised, not virtual space, or even real space. The events to promote the residency were, in every sense, the purpose of the residency. Kligerman’s work transposes a concern for the uncertainty everyday into Second Life; into a world where uncanniness is in the soil and sea. Everyday objects for us literally take on new dimensions, or the rules of geometry shatter. The doubts and concerns about how to comprehend the role of art melted away into air.

REMEDICATION

On March the 16th, 1982, artist Joseph Beuys began his work at the Documenta 7 festival, planting the first of his 7000 Oaks in order to spread concern for the diminishing forestry on the once-green world. Each oak was paired with a freestanding basalt column, a ritual marker of importance that would be as legible to pre-lingual times as it would be in a wholly virtual sphere. Artists Eva and Franco Mattes took up the challenge to mirror the 7000 Oaks project by distributing 7000 trees and stones in Second Life on the 25th anniversary of Beuys’ original project.

What does it mean for environmental, or land art for that matter, to be replicated in virtual worlds? The environmental scenario for a multi-user computer simulation is on the surface very bleak: thousands of hours of computer use go into a single hour of normal traffic in Second Life. Yet the Mattes’ reworking of Beuys is never silent on the issue of the real, engaging with both the newly-r ritualised process of ‘planting’ and the 25 years since Beuys’ original concern, in which his type of work could only be more urgent than ever.

The Mattes rearticulate important elements of 20th Century art history by repositioning photography and collection at the centre of their virtual tourism. Their work on Thirteen Most Beautiful Avatars acknowledges the Warhol antecedent in process but in practice develops something altogether new. In a webcam-infested world, portraiture has an all-new reflexive action.

The remediation of Chris Burden’s Shoot at Odyssey was performed and watched in-world, documented in-world and now documentation is displayed in-world as photographs or video still on the Odyssey Gallery walls. The hilarity of this tripling and folding is not lost on an avatar audience, viewing a remediation of a remediation. Someone looks at something = Art.

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

If Coocteau’s famous dictum that film is a frozen fountain of time holds true, then our experiences of Second Life, bound by the aesthetic of the tour, with powers of flight and instant movement, could be the entire garden.

The life which is second produces meanings about the first even without drawing back the bleeping, erratic curtain. Those continually searching for a raison (or is that, ‘raison d’etre’ for Second Life, wondering what the hype is all about, arrive in search of meaning in zones inhabited mostly by people looking for the same intensities, victories and pleasures, as well as the strivings, failings and flaws of the seedling art practices which exist in-world.

There is no grand surprise coming; the art phenomena of Second Life are articulating and rearticulating the art world’s concerns at the same speed and register. It is not just being simulated, but the life of the artist. If art serves to abstract in a different sense than simulation, not to model situations but to remove them from their context for a moment, then where art and simulation meet we find a zone totally at odds with itself. Artists fold space and time to turn them into a newness which accelerates our experience. Simulations and games fold space and time to develop experiences which accelerate newness.

The experiment-engine of Second Life offers potential, in a sense, that is all it offers. The tour residents undertake on every visit is, a tourism utterly unlike the virtual worlds before it, or the game-worlds competing for the current clock cycles of our computers. A garden of errors, glitches and twitches offers the visitor, the dweller and the provocateur ample fruit for harvest.

This original tour was curated by SL Residents Sully Witty (Christy Dena), Angela Rhea Sheppard (Amantine Robinswood), Mark McDonough (Jeremy Leloup), Sharyn Broe (Napoleon Arrant), Ricardo Paravane (Ricardo Peach), Brian Ruckard (Eexy Canadia), Adam Richardson (Adam Nash), and Robert Secker (James Morgan).

The tour is over.

Thank you to David Cranswick for wrangling the d.Lux Pony Club ponies, http://www.dlux.org.au

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Eva and Franco Mattes Shoot performance documentation at Odyssey.

“Sl need more vitriol and burning tyres to become justiciable.” — Ana Valdes

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