

Chapter 11

Synthetic Worlds, Synthetic Strategies: Attaining Creativity in the Metaverse

Elif Ayiter
Sabanci University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

This text will attempt to delineate the underlying theoretical premises and the definition of the output of an immersive learning approach pertaining to the visual arts to be implemented in online, three dimensional synthetic worlds. Deviating from the prevalent practice of the replication of physical art studio teaching strategies within a virtual environment, the author proposes instead to apply the fundamental tenets of Roy Ascott's "Groundcourse", in combination with recent educational approaches such as "Transformative Learning" and "Constructionism". In an amalgamation of these educational approaches with findings drawn from the fields of Metanomics, Ludology, Cyberpsychology and Presence Studies, as well as an examination of creative practices manifest in the metaverse today, the formulation of a learning strategy for creative enablement unique to online, three dimensional synthetic worlds; one which will focus upon "Play" as well as Role Play, virtual Assemblage and the visual identity of the avatar within the pursuits, is being proposed in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

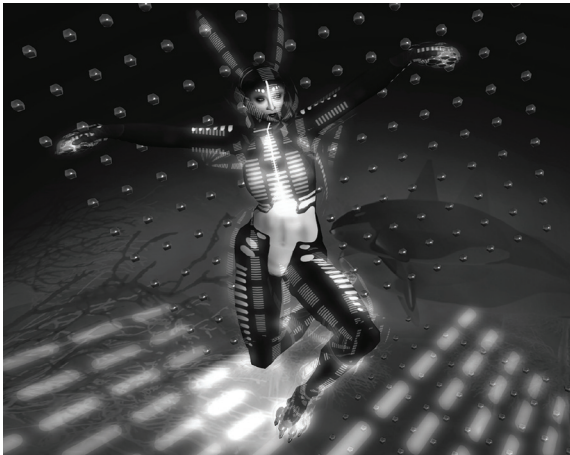
In his book "Exodus to the Virtual World" economist Edward Castranova predicts that a migration of considerable proportions from the physical realm to three dimensional, online synthetic worlds is to be expected within the next few decades. The anticipated outcome would be a demographic

landslide of significant enough socio-economic impact to constitute a need for compelling changes in political, social, cultural and economic strategies not only in the virtual but also the physical realm (Castranova, 2007).

As opposed to a discrete, one way migration, as would be the case in population shifts in the physical world, the anticipated migration would be of a continuous nature, with migrants switching back and forth between the physical and the

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Figure 1. The Avatar “OrKa”, by Alphi Fullstop, aka. Elif Ayiter, Second Life®, 2009



synthetic world. If, during this ebb and flow of time allocation more and more hours of activity become appropriated by the virtual world the physical world would suffer the consequences primarily through the loss of revenue generated by the consumption of (physical) goods. However, equally impactful would be the loss of interest and attention towards (physical) socio-cultural occurrences, events and policy. By looking at the current health indicators of virtual economies, the earnings of which can readily be translated into physical currencies such as the US Dollar, Castranova predicts that if a sufficiently large number of players migrate to virtual pastures the consequences upon physical economies, and by extension socio-political structures, will be powerful enough to instigate fundamental changes in (physical) public policies as well as a re-examination/re-definition of (physical) socio-cultural mechanisms globe-wide. Furthermore, Castranova sees this as a more than likely occurrence when viewed within the economic theory of human time use, the allocation of attention and the attractiveness of virtual worlds within its context, as well as the growth in the gaming industry coupled with the emergence of ubiquitous technologies.

Since creative practices are inextricably intertwined with the socio-cultural milieu within which they flourish, it would follow that vast change, not only in terms of the actual creative output itself, but especially and more importantly in terms of the contextual premises within which this creative output is generated should also be expected. Malcolm McCullough approaches the process of virtual creativity through an examination of the virtual medium itself and the ensuing requirements of craftsmanship which this medium brings to bear upon the creative processes involved in the realization of virtual artifacts. According to McCullough, individuated human craftsmanship, a term largely overlooked by modernist art and design movements, is being, once again, brought very much to the fore by the practitioners of digital creativity: While the assembly line of mechanized industry predicates that the developer/conceiver of the design object is inevitably removed from the actual phase of its production; artists, by and large, seem to have embraced the distinction of labor between concept and realization as well, where pre-eminence would appear to have been allotted to the conceptual phase of the work. Today, the affordances of the digital

Figure 2. Virtual Assemblage: Skin created by Pandora Wrigglesworth and limb attachments created by Lucia Cyr are combined into a novel avatar by the author. Second Life®, 2008



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