Chapter 8

Moving Islands [Rafts]:
A Collective Art Conglomeration in Second Life

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will discuss the artistic processes and the related theoretical premises of a collaborative art undertaking that was displayed in Second Life® from Fall 2013 to Summer 2014. Despite the idiosyncratic, highly individualized nature of its components, the project nevertheless achieved a remarkable state of cohesion. What may have contributed to this unity will be one of the subjects under investigation at the core of this text. The text will commence with a survey of the creative mechanisms and strategies of the metaverse, after which a description of the project, its curatorial premises, including the usage of metaverse geography and climate as an agent of visual harmony will also be delivered. The chapter will then conclude with an examination of the collective art process within the context of the ‘unfinished artifact’ and John Dewey’s deliberations on the experiential nature of artwork/art process as a potential framework for metaverse artistic collaborations.

INTRODUCTION

This text takes a close look at a massively collaborative, evolving art project called ‘Moving Islands [Rafts]’ that came into being in the virtual world of Second Life in the Fall of 2013, and continued its in-world existence, with an ever increasing number of participants, until Summer 2014. The project brought together over thirty content creators who have markedly different approaches to building, differing artistic priorities, standpoints, outlooks and philosophies which they visualize in ways that are quite different from one other, indeed that are sometimes even at odds with one another. One of the questions that we will ask in this text will be how a successful collaboration...
between such an odd assembly of partners came about; and we shall attempt to address this query by examining the curatorial approach of the instigator of the project, the avatar Eupalinos Ugajin, who brought this diverse group of individuals together by selecting the project’s participants from amongst his own friends in Second Life. Accordingly, we shall try to understand his methodology by taking a closer look at the nature Second Life friendships between content creators, how such relationships oftentimes commence based upon a mutual interest in output and how this interest may lead to open-ended artistic collaborations as discussed here.

However, before we get to the quirky, idiosyncratic collaboration that brought the ‘Moving Islands [Rafts]’ project about, in order to set a framework which may help augment/clarify our inquiry, we shall conduct a condensed survey of Second Life building; the means of construction, and the inherently participatory nature of creative activity, given that most Second Life content is created in a chain-like, socially networked manner whereby output is often built upon pre-existent artifacts that were created by others. Indeed, very often our metaverse building activity remains as an ‘unfinished artifact’ (Eno, 1995) given that it is more than likely that others will continue to build upon what we have created.

A further topic that we shall devote some space to in this text, in order to understand the success of a collaboration that managed to generate a cohesive assembly out of over twenty installations that were placed in very close proximity to one another, indeed perpetually colliding with one another as they floated upon the virtual sea of the simulator, is the climate and the virtual ecosystem of Second Life. Beyond their proximity to one another, these large sized, indeed sometimes outsized artifacts ranged from the minimalistic to the highly ornate in terms of their appearance; and from the political activist to the frivolous, from the humorous to the somber, and from the dramatic to the absurd when it came to their subject matter and conceptualizations. How such an assortment of discrepancies has been unified into a holistic entity brings us to the usage of geography, climate and weather conditions, which are components that are increasingly utilized as part of the artistic palette of those Second Life builders who build art ecologies or art habitats that take into account and make usage of the entirety of the simulator upon which the content is placed. Consequently, we shall also examine the climate tools of Second Life as integral devices for creating an art habitat/ecology since the curator, Eupalinos Ugajin, made considerable usage of them in order to affiliate a body of content that could have ended up being highly discordant if such a strategy of unification through climate and geography had not been employed.

Our authoring approach is one that weaves together such queries, also by bringing in strands that cover various other topics, such as the ones mentioned at the onset of this introduction regarding Second Life building strategies and procedures in general, their socially networked aspects, avatar attire, and the relevance of collage to Second Life building. We have tried to maintain a stance in which each of these topics segues as effortlessly as possible from one to the other, orbiting around the central question of how the ‘Moving Islands [Rafts]’ collaboration came about and how it achieved a congruent display despite the variegated nature of its components. Amongst the many strands that revolve around these central questions one does stand out however – namely, the discussion of the ‘unfinished artifact,’ given that the very collaboration itself, as well as the output generated from it, manifests attributes that remain in a perpetually unfinished, evolving state. Therefore, this chapter will conclude with a return to Brian Eno’s words on this perpetually unfinished state of electronic artworks, examined in conjunction with John Dewey’s notions of ‘Art as Experience.’ (Dewey, 1934)