Graphic Design: Gerardo Toledo, 2011.

Because I am not here
Second Life Based Artists, Four Selected Case Studies

by Francisco Gerardo Toledo Ramírez

PhD Candidate in Media Studies
Faculty of Information and Media Studies
The University of Western Ontario

Lacan Galicia my main Second Life avatar researching in Second Life

Abstract

Second Life (SL) is an on-line virtual world 'inhabited' by avatars that are designed by actual life users (SL residents). In SL identity, sociability and subjectivity are important and permanent aspects of the goal of having a second (virtual) existence.

My doctoral thesis (in progress) is centred on the work of 4 artists in SL and how they play with autoempathy, identity an subjectivity in the liminal shifting of aesthetic regimes (that rely upon temporalities rather than spatialities) present in their SL artwork. This is what Anna Munster calls the *distribute aesthetics*[1] of virtual worlds.

Lacan Galicia, my avatar in SL, works in four case studies concerning these subjects. The expected findings of my research can contribute to the discussion of the theories of digital aesthetics and interactive virtual worlds at large.

1   Munster, Anna. 2006. *Materializing New Media. Embodiment in Information Aesthetics*. Hanover, NH.: Dartmouth College Press, University Press of New England.

Purposes

• To demonstrate whether and how virtual artists envision and develop alternative and effective ways of understanding, performing and interrogating the meaning of virtual existence.

• To find out how virtual existence in SL is assumed, experimented and signified from their practice as avatars that perform as artists in a virtual space.

• To demonstrate how aesthetic and media studies perspectives on viral worlds research may be a valid, but as not yet fully developed analytical tools.

Objectives

1. To study 'SL-based art', and the avatars that, as artists, create it.

2. To study how these artists interpret their own contribution as virtual selves disseminating, concurrently, critical standings about SL *ethos*.

3. To analyse both aesthetic experience and art experimentation as currently important yet not fully recognised dimensions of SL's ontology.

4. To approach the examination of the aesthetic component of user-generated content, identifying patterns of contribution to the advancement of new epistemologies of SL and virtual worlds in general.

Expected Findings

This is a work in progress, three out of four interviews are done so far. The four case studies will be completed by January 2012. To date, the data recollected seems to ratify the importance that a research perspective anchored in virtual aesthetics and SL-based art has for the general theories of digital and virtual art, and virtual worlds.


Snapshot from "Immersiva" 2009-10 © Bryn Oh

I will record your face
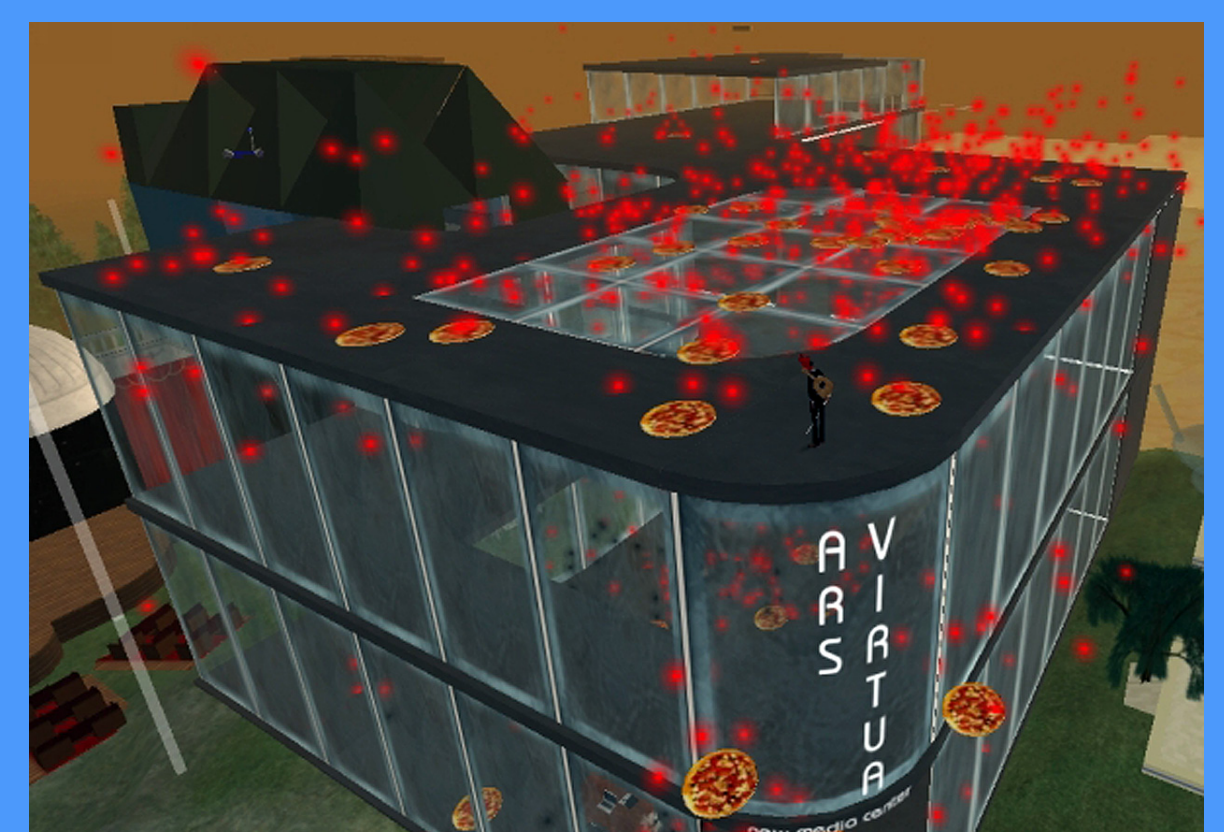
Gazira Babeli "Singing Pizza"
Unauthorized installation, Ars Virtua, 2006 © Gazira Babeli

Methodology

I am applying a relatively unprecedented **qualitative inquiry method**. This is a blend of analytical perspectives from aesthetics (distribute), media studies and visual semiotics.

The method designed for recollecting information on each case study, both in Actual Life (AL) and Second Life (SL) is quite logical:

• Collecting material about the artists in AL and SL.

• Expanding the theoretical foundations and theoretical framework upon which every finding may be contrasted and interrogated.

• Immersion in situ of my avatar as a 'privileged' yet critical observer/interviewer.

• Interview recollection of thoughts, narratives, images, sequences of motion, intervention, acting, fiction, etc., within SL.
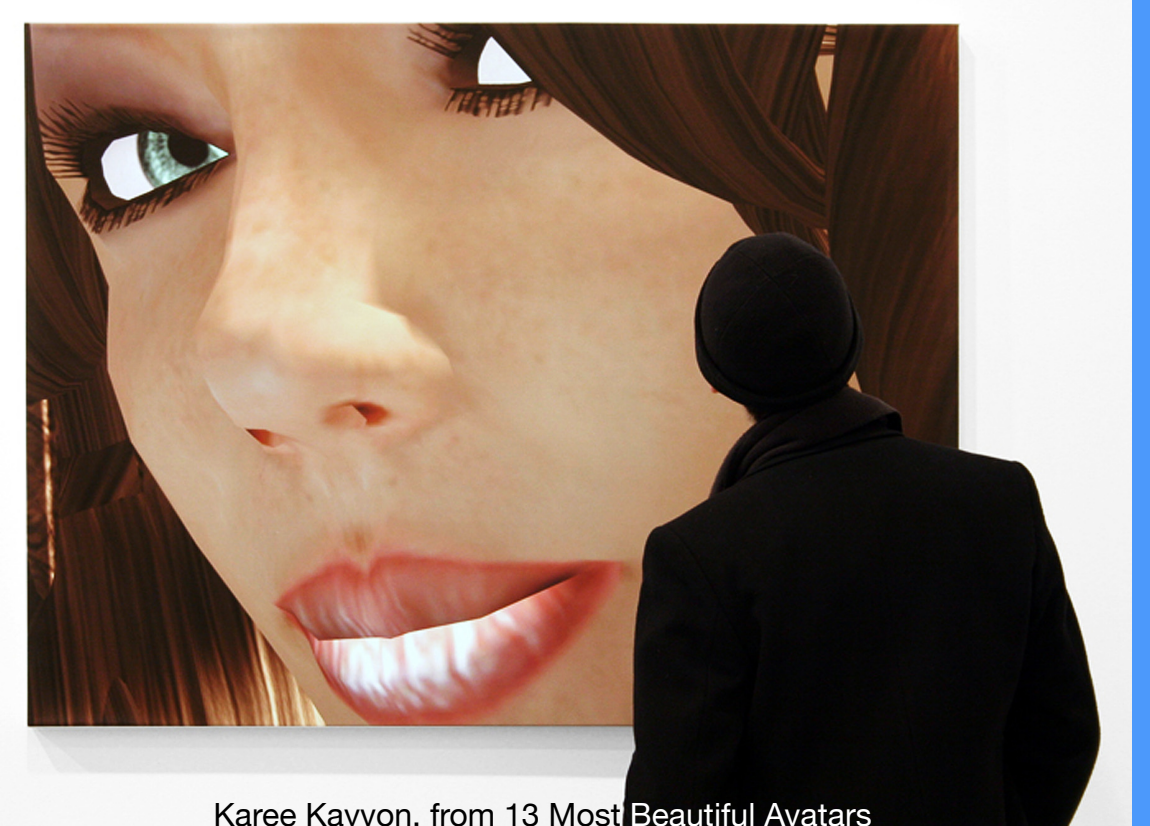
Karee Kayvon, from 13 Most Beautiful Avatars
2006-7 Eva and Franco Mattes aka 0100101110101101.ORG
digital print on canvas 36 x 48 inches © Postmasters Gallery