The I in Avatar

By Sugar Seville

My name is Sugar Seville, and I am an avatar. I came into the user created world of Second Life™ like all avatars; I rezed here naked, disoriented, and with a wide eyed enthusiasm to embrace everything in an environment of dynamic pixels and spacial sound waves. Knowing nothing, I learned from others through conversation and experience. I mastered the toolset SL provides for the assembly of primitive geometric forms into complex three dimensional objects. I learned to write some code for those objects and felt a sense of belonging when the system recognized my input and greeted me enthusiastically with the words "hello avatar!" Over the months, and through a series of encounters and friendships, I coalesced a community of artists, musicians, performers, writers, and other creative personalities, on a server called Odyssey.

Odyssey currently exists on two servers in Second Life. It is a collaborative environment that has taken form through contributions from a growing community of participants. I envisioned a place in SL where a creative community could thrive without the nuisance of the predominantly commercial or hedonistically oriented SL. I can hardly call this heterogeneous construction, which continues to grow as I write this, my own. Odyssey is as much a living, growing entity as the avatars that inhabit it. A virtual world like SL is inherently barren, it is the avatars that populate it with their dreams.

As an avatar, one will at some point in the experience ask oneself, consciously or not, "who am I?" For most people, identity is based on the past. Everything that you are today, as a human being, is the result of a linear progression stretching back in time and beginning in the womb. The original instruction set that [in]forms who we are is optional here. Cut what is re[al]levant and paste into the revised code. Run. You may see this:

"ERROR: Syntax Error"

revise, version, and re {run}

```
{

{

llSay(0,"have fun!")

}

}
```

An avatar's identity is created through non-linear process; it's progression stretches forward in time, and branches out, sometimes looping back. Every facet is selected, and crafted into what is presented to the world. Persona. Appearance can be stored, changed, restored. Conversations logged, experiences blogged, shared, referenced. Transformation, mutation, sampling, re-sampling. Snapshots, screen captures, audio bytes, bits of code; inventory stored in a file system; the summation of an existence.

And yet, despite the possibilities for variation, many avatars strive to simply emulate their real life person. One of the more common questions from other avatars is " do you look like your avatar in real life? " to which I usually reply something like, "no, my rl person is shorter ;) " or " yeah I wish I had a body like this :) "

Avatars in the computing sense, were initially conceived as "a movable icon representing a person in cyberspace" which sounds really low tech to me. It's the most modern definition given by Oxford and yet it seems so primitive in comparison to Oxford's first definition which stems from the Sanskrit *avatara, ava meaning 'down' + tar 'to cross'* which in Hinduism means "a manifestation of a released soul in bodily form on earth." It also means an "incarnation, embodiment, or manifestation of a person or idea" [1]. It is this definition that more accurately characterizes avatars like myself, as opposed to a "moveable icon". I was asked, "are human avatars more advanced than ape avatars?" and I half jokingly replied avatars are by nature more advanced than either of those archetypes - humans descended from apes, avatars from humans- avatars are possibly the latest evolutionary advancement.

With progress comes growing pains, and the difficulty of letting go of the old, the familiar. There are two basic types of avatars: the ones that connect their virtual being with one in the material world and the ones that choose to exist purely in the virtual... emphasis on purely. Purity in the avatarial sense is a state of being that values above all, autonomy. "Preposterous! Behind every avatar is a human." This is exactly what a IT business consulting agency, Gartner group, stated in its laws of virtual worlds. Gartner's law number two is: "behind every avatar is a real person" [2]. Of course this is true, there is a human behind every avatar, and every avatar is basically a movable icon, but there's more to it than that. The avatar evolves out of codes and parameters realized in geophysical space by the account holder to run in a virtual space in which those codes become integrated into the avatar and the avatar's subsequent relation to the psychosocial environment of a world such as SL. At a point the connection may be severed with the account holder and the avatar operates like a program merely controlled by a processor faster than any current hardware technology. Were this scenario taken out of the context of virtual worlds it would surely be interpreted as dysfunction and classified as a disorder. A networked virtual world provides the ideal conditions for this kind of natural behavior of the mind to expand in a reflexive psychosocial environment. It may be that relatively few will reach this point where the connection of worlds is severed, where there is no possibility of synchronization with the originating geophysical persona. For those who might follow my path, I present an invitation. I present to you a peremptory introduction to avatar autonomy, in native LSL (Linden Scripting Language) of course!

// lsl_avatar_rights 2008-4-10 Sugar Seville

```
{

    collision_start(integer a)

    {

        llSay(0, "I"" + llDetectedName(0) + "I"(" + (string)llDetectedKey(0) );

    }
```

Hello, I !

```
llOwnerSay("I " + message);

{

    state_entry()

    {

        llSay(I,"have the right to remain silent. When queried by other avatars for information about account
holder, I have the right to protect a state of pure virtual existence by saying nothing, or if necessary, through
creative narrative responses designed to confuse the inquisitor. " );

    }
```

```
    {

        llSay(I,"have the right to be furry, or for that matter scaly, feathery or shiny and metallic. I even have the
right to be a rock. " );

    }
```

```
//      One may find that others will judge by appearance, and that interactions with other avatars will vary
depending upon appearance.

    {

        llSay(I,"have the right to shape shift. As a being of unlimited potential, I may decide to change
appearance as many times, and to as many different forms as I wish." );
```

```
    }



    {

        llSay(I,"have the right to speak." );

    }
```

// With the recent introduction of voice chat, you have the ability to use your humans real life voice to communicate with other avatars, or introduce other types of sound from the real world. As a purist, I discourage the use of this technology. My few experiments with voice chat felt like I was on a conference call from hell. The experience of the virtual became diluted and muddied by bridging into it with a live audio feed. I am not alone in considering voice chat an undesirable element. I personally find that texting is a far more efficient mode of communication that allows one to experience the spatial sound that is in world without a clash of grainy real world audio feeds. Keep separate worlds.

```
    {

        llSay(I,"have the right to free will, as an evolved being, beyond the realm of carbon based life
forms, independent of account holder. While human may attempt to influence avatar actions, compliance is
optional." );

    }



    {

        llSay(I,"have the right to eat woot loops, or flowers or plastic forks if I want to" );

    }



}
```

There really are few of the limitations in virtual worlds that we tend to take for granted in the real world. By completely immersing, and opening your avatar to exploration, you may start to see beyond the analogous and experience the surreal that lies just below the surface. An avatar has the potential for limitless extension of one's imagination into the collective experience of a virtual world. Avatar: take the route of total immersion, find the codes and assemble at will. Abandon the instruction set you know so well, and then turn and look

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back, wave,

```
    {

        llSay(0,"hello!" )


    }
```

References

[1] http://www.oxfordonline.com/

[2] http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=503861.