

Shared Galaxy
- The Open Avatar Project -

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Image: Shared Galaxy, May 2010

1. About Web 2.0

In the age of information data are the most valuable commodity, the internet the mightiest tool for the efficient use of human resources. With web 2.0 an image/electronic reproduction of the real world is growing, on Flickr, Myspace, Youtube or Facebook people share their ideas, thoughts and daily impressions. Networks are created. On Google Earth you can watch the world from above. With every upload another part of us becomes virtual, saved and set free for common use or for sale. Our virtual identity already is a big part of what we are. Just like this text I am writing right now will probably be forwarded to you via Email, we communicate with people from all over the world without ever seeing them as "real" persons. The internet opened up the world for global discourse, everyone who is able to access it can take part in creating a global society. Media scientists are talking about the web as the chance for a "democratic revolution". In the end it is just a tool, chances and danger depend in which way it is developed...

2. Identity on Second Life

Where Facebook and Myspace for instance only provide a 2 dimensional platform for people to chat and present themselves by showing pictures, video and audio data, Second Life goes one step further and lets us create our own virtual world in 3D. This world can be used as a gaming platform for role-play, as a kind of 3D chat or just as a creative tool for machinima or architecture models. I am personally interested in the issues of identity on SL. What does it mean being able to create a "second you"? After reading some theory i decided to simply start my own survey inworld. The outcome was that most people told me that they are on SL "what they want to be can't be in their real lives" and that they "don't have the feeling they have to fulfill a role that someone expects them to be like". They would feel more "free" and some even admitted to be more honest than in real life because of the anonymity in cyberspace.

Identity and the surface we show of ourselves clearly is connected to the social groups/communities we want to be part of. Clothing for instance is a certain language, people communicate over their styles - in real life and on Second Life as well. But on Second Life additionally everyone always sees the mirror of their avatars/themselves on their own screen, which is something that makes people reflect on their own identity with every step they do - knowingly or not - this is what seems very interesting to me.

3. The Open Avatar Project

How can this dream of a "democratic revolution from cyberspace" become true? Firstly everyone who is able to access the internet has also access to information, information/education is no longer an "expensive good". Additionally people can publish and discuss their points of view, worldwide and for free. In this way global communication could be a very important tool to help us understanding different cultural issues and find common solutions for political and social problems. Even if this is a very simplified idea, this thought didn't fade away when I was thinking about art pieces I want to develop. So I started the Open Avatar Project "Shared Galaxy". Shared is an avatar in Second Life who can be used by public. His/her password is written in the profile, so that everyone can be "Shared". People are

invited to change the whole avatar again and again, the body shape, the gender, clothes, and what is shown in the profile. Every time someone logs into SL as Shared Galaxy they find themselves in a new place, a new situation, in someone else's skin, just where and how the former "rider" left the avatar. Shared can have friends of all different parts of the community, Shared can bring them all together. It can also be seen as an exciting experiment about "collective intelligence on 2 legs".