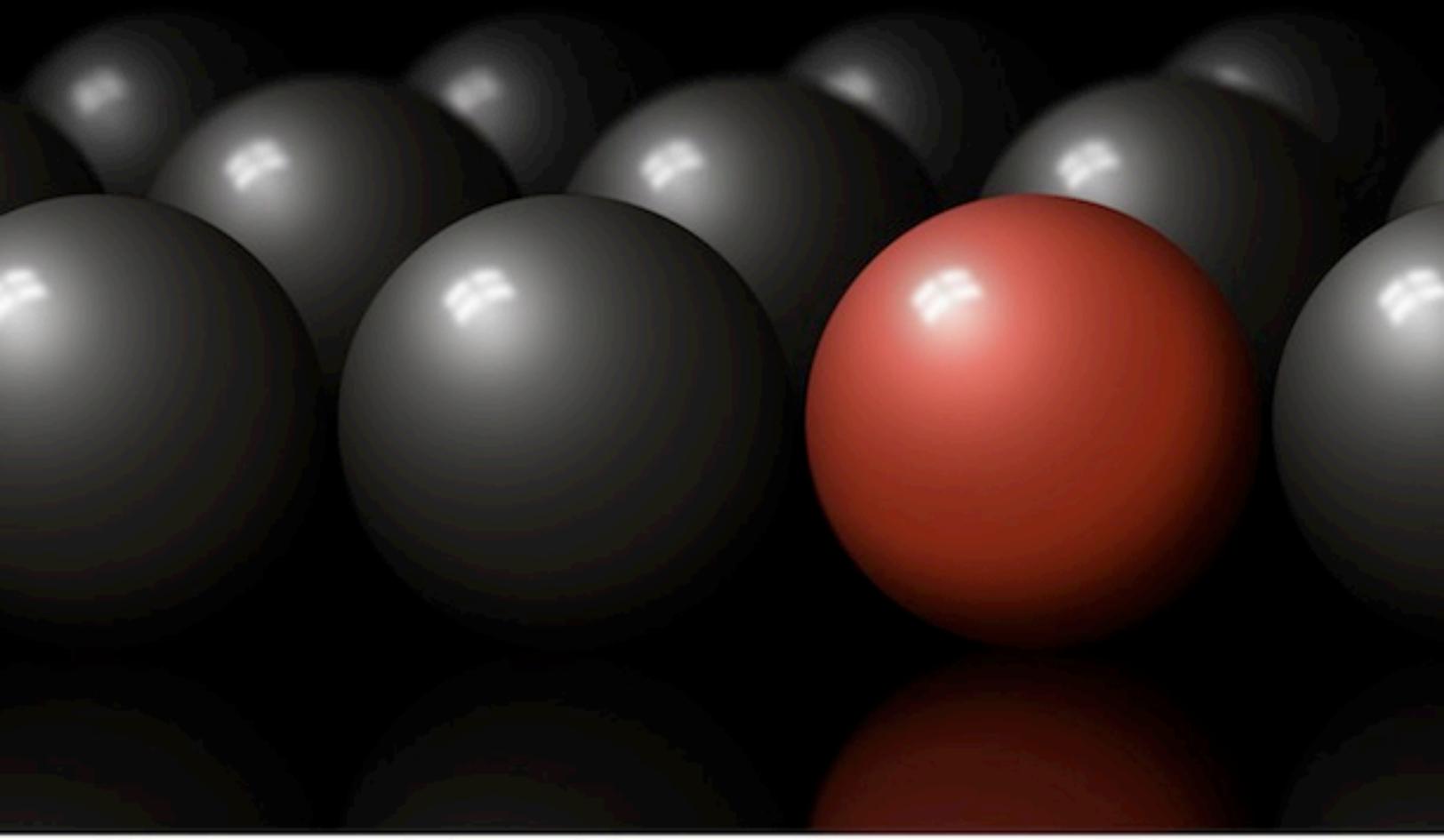


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This issue includes papers from the 2010 Federal Consortium for Virtual Worlds Conference organized by Paulette Robinson and her colleagues at the National Defense University.

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Metaverse Assembled 2.0

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Avatars as the first manifestation of geo-politically unconstrained global citizens

By Randy J. Hinrichs, 2b3d

Developing the appropriate behaviors and competencies to integrate into society is a crucial test for any concept of citizenship¹. Virtual society today is a connected community of global citizens thriving across multiple platforms and social networks. People are dispersed geographically, culturally and politically and are unconstrained by whom they interact with and why they interact. In virtual worlds, the borders are fluid and physically unconstrained. The personal surrogate encoded as an avatar can move about freely and participate in dynamic, multiple states at the same time. The avatar is valued more for his performance, skill and abilities in the context of the virtual world, rather than by his race, pay grade or political affiliation. The avatar is empowered with self prescribed roles and responsibilities and is emerging into a new kind of sovereign world, bursting out as the first manifestation of a geo-politically unconstrained global citizen.

Research finds significant correlation between virtual world behavior and physical behavior. Stanford's Bailenson (2005) found that avatars felt they needed more personal space when standing next to each other in virtual worlds.² Suggesting that people sense proximity to

¹ Leydet, Dominique. (2006). Citizenship. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/citizenship/>

² Bailenson, Jeremy. (2005). The Independent and Interactive Effects of Embodied-Agent Appearance and Behavior on Self-Report, Cognitive, and Behavioral Markers of Copresence in Immersive Virtual Environments. *Presence*. Volume 14, No. 4, pages 379-393. Boston, MA. MIT Press Journals.

one another irrespective of being physically present to one another has many correlates in the neuroscience literature. Sharer and colleagues at the University of Washington (2008) have seen a decrease in the pain and anxiety experienced among post-burn victims undergoing physical treatment while immersed in a snowy world of winter³ suggesting that the blending of environments produces a psycho-physiological effect. Castranova (2008) demonstrated the price of a single good in two separate virtual worlds with one being 50% less than the other drove demand down by 43.1 percent⁴ hinting that economics in virtual worlds work similarly as they do in the physical world. One thing remains clear, avatars are persons using virtual worlds to interact with each other. What is different is their ability to interact with each other across borders, unfettered by physical location, using 3D communication software to build trust relationships across boundaries .

Stephen Covey in his book entitled *The Speed of Trust*⁵ writes that we need to build a global sense of trust in our organizations so things progress fluidly without having to negotiate each transaction. The need to build trusted relationships in fluid communities is occurring in social networks. Virtual worlds add a 3D image, or a face to those relationships; and, software vendors have helped build that trust by creating avatars with expressions and gestures that help to convey human empathy. They provide first person views to help concentrate on the tasks at hand, and third person views to develop a sense of self, so avatars can see themselves in the scene that represents their place of work, their classroom, and their home. There is a heightened sense of participant and object value when that trust is built. We benefit from the combined efforts of "seeing" as we work in 3D spaces and we observe the quality of the contributions generated in the 3D space as we see others "doing".

Co-located environments bring people together around the common element of the fireside i.e., the circle of trust; and, avatars view each other's interactions in this powerful medium of community. Couple the camaraderie with the ability to bring in mentors or top experts in a field, to the worksite and you produce a healthy, distributed organization ready to take on a client with a distributed, qualified set of supporters on the spot. Reaction times are enhanced and users do business seamlessly without the constraints of physical location. Without

³ Sharar SR, Miller W, Teeley A, Soltani M, Hoffman HG, Jensen MP, Patterson DR. (2008). *Applications of virtual reality for pain management in burn-injured patients*. Expert Rev Neurother. 2008 Nov;8(11):1667-74.

⁴ Castranova, Edward, (2008) *A Test of the Law of Demand in a Virtual World: Exploring the Petri Dish Approach to Social Science*. CESifo Working Paper Series No. 2355. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1173642>

⁵ Covey, Stephen. (2006). *The Speed of Trust*. New York. Free Press.

the constraint of the physical, it seems that the political and legal constraints imposed by physical restrictions melt away. There are no building codes, no onsite worker safety rules, no parking permits, less energy consumption and more focus on accelerating effectiveness and efficiency, flexibility and communication. The savings to the environment is pronounced as real time business can occur from the home office without a single physical visit to a corporate building, a bank or a law firm.

To help out on the legal side, in some virtual worlds, digital rights management and the ability to transact real money enhances ownership, so when avatars co-create intellectual property they mutually define creator, subcontractor and owner IP--without lawyers! Another constraint is removed. These digital rights stay with the objects at the pleasure of the virtual world creator and can be deeded, transferred, copied or made free in order to suit the needs of the inhabitant. Avatars are free to start businesses and transact instantly as though they were large organizations, because they create the environment that simulates the acceptable standards of doing business and use the Internet to connect to the same services enjoyed by most companies. This is a significant change from the investment that they could not have afforded previously, especially since the labor force can be a combination of people from all over the world.

Original ownership of objects and real estate management add to the mix of the unconstrained worker's tools and motivates job creation in virtual worlds. Some virtual worlds are building virtual cities like Singapore and Tokyo to establish a sense of global positioning which benefits existing businesses setting up in virtual worlds. But, new citizens, are unbridled by current location and are motivated by ownership and originality.

Avatars buy or build and brand their own real estate, increasing motivation to participate independently. Avatars create property and make it available for trade to increase their value in working in-world. And here, they change it up instantly, retaining ownership rights and accommodating for any difference in doing business instantly. If something isn't working, they get rid of it at little cost, and put in a new one, after all they own it. If it's a parameter their customer doesn't like, they teleport to another location and bring together the elements of the world, the partners who are experts and the services which are abundant and they try a new location to keep their business moving forward. The possibilities seem boundless since the new citizen works for several people at the same time, not just one corporation for a long period of time.

Avatars do experience the reach of the government in virtual worlds, so they are not completely unbridled in their activities as citizens. The government does have regulatory control at a fundamental level. The United States government had to curtail virtual banking, gambling and pornography as it began to threaten citizen protection. However with regulation comes innovation. The Swedish Financial Supervisory Authority (Finansinspektionen) granted a license to Mind Ark so they could function as a central bank for all virtual worlds within the Entropia Universe and offer selected bank services to customers on the conventional market.⁶ Although some government precedents are being set and the law is acting upon citizens' virtual lives, the stage is not quite defined and citizenry in virtual worlds remains more or less self governed.

In the current state of virtual worlds, avatars create what they want, go where they want, and self-govern *in absentia* until the authorities show up. They are not bound by physical restrictions, and morph their appearance or teleport from place to place engaging in any kind of identity tourism. This model represents freedom to the public. Freedom to innovate, to set up business, to compete on the internet no matter the size of the organization, to engage in a world of creativity and individuality. It is unlikely that the first adopters are going to give up so much freedom. They will comply instead where needed and they will continue to innovate on the fringe until the fringe becomes the norm. This is why studying the appropriate behaviors of an avatar citizen and knowing their rights and responsibilities is becoming increasingly important.

Learning the rights of an avatar as a citizen might be guided by constitutional government. Most avatar citizens today believe they have the right to express themselves freely and create worlds that represent their needs. They believe they have the right to own and transfer their intellectual property no matter where they made it. They have the right to build their own property, assemble in groups and move between virtual borders to transact as they desire. They believe there should be limits to search and seizure of digital content in their virtual spaces and when rules are broken across intra-constitutional communities, avatars believe they must be assured of their right to due process. We are still the same people, interested in integrating ourselves and our technology into our society utilizing as much of our political structure as possible. As a global society we are connected by technology in ways that cross political boundaries. So, it must be clear that the norms for defining virtual worlds apply across all work

⁶ As reported in <http://www.virtualgoodsnews.com/2009/03/mindark-brings-real-banking-into-entropia-universe.html>

environments created by avatars, and all social environments visited by avatars. In doing so, we can hope to evolve the concept of citizenship for the coming generations of geopolitically, unconstrained global avatars. For their numbers are growing.