Syncretic Fields: Art, Mind, and the Many Realities

Roy Ascott

In the late 20th century, the formative issues in digital art were about connectivity and interaction. Now at the start of the 3rd millennium, our post-digital objectives will increasingly be technoetic and syncretic. During the previous two centuries, there was much ado about e pluribus unum: out of many, one: a unified culture, unified self, unified mind, unity of time and space. Now at the start of this century, the reverse applies. E unum pluribus, out of one, many: many selves, many presences, many locations, many levels of consciousness. The many realities we inhabit—material, virtual, and spiritual, for example—are accompanied by our sense of being present simultaneously in many worlds: physical presence in ecospace, apparitional presence in spiritual space, telepresence in cyberspace, and vibrational presence in nanospace. In this respect, Second Life is the rehearsal room for future scenarios in which we will endlessly re-invent our many selves. As artists, we deal with the complexities of media that are at once immaterial and moist, numinous and grounded; and the complexity of the technoetic mind that both inhabits the body and is distributed across time and space. Where all these differences could be at odds with each other, we are in fact developing a capacity, mostly unconsciously, to syncretise. That is, to analogue and reconcile contradictions, while melding differences, such that art and reality are becoming syncretic. What today we build in the immateriality of cyberspace will tomorrow be realised concretely with nano technology. Our syncretic reality will emerge partly through the cultural coherence that intensive interconnectivity elicits, partly through the nano and quantum coherence at the base of our world-building, and through the spiritual coherence that informs the field of our multi-layered consciousness.

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