

Part I: Why Deviance is Disco Solaris' Greatest Asset

Author: 3ntr0py | 2430

Editors: Mr. Dot, Calvin 0141, Grancho, El Papo

My involvement in the Disco Solaris community occurred entirely by happenstance. I was new to non-fungible tokens (NFTs) and the Cardano ecosystem as a whole, and like many newcomers, my initial perceptions of NFTs were divorced from the potential and utility they possessed, a perspective limited by traditional frameworks of standardized economic value and investment strategy. What I didn't expect, was that once becoming an active participant within the DS community, that these perceptions would become irrevocably altered. Instead, I found myself among the 5777 citizens of Neo Miami, a retrotopian synthwave story-driven metaverse, where the NFT I held became my passport and validation of citizenship to the off-world colony on Moebius-9—a society where creativity has been afforded new opportunity.

This is the first in a series of ethnographic articles that aim to provide a critical analysis of the inner workings and emerging events in and around the DS space. In this introductory article, I explore how deviance and deviation as acts of defiance and subordination towards organizational structures such as the frameworks and methodologies employed during project management can aid in the emergence of unexpected potential and project sustainability. I do not intend to explain the ideas of or speak for any of the 5777 Neo Miami citizens or Disco Solaris' developers, but what I do hope is to be able to produce something imprinted upon and affected by the emerging DS community and what is currently transpiring in and around this project.

Disco Solaris describes itself as a story-driven retrotopia on the Cardano blockchain consisting of 5777 algorithmically generated non-fungible tokens that double as the holder's ticket to the first off-world city of Neo Miami located on Moebius-9. The sci-fi dystopian art style of DS has been discussed as being heavily influenced by the art of Jean Giraud (aka Moebius) best known for Dune's initial character design. The team is comprised of experienced game developers, marketers, artists and special effects professionals. Most notable is Mr. Dot who has the largest community presence and is responsible for the vision, design, writing, marketing and community engagement of DS. Next is Mr. Dim who is responsible for the design, programming and business aspects of DS. Deadpaint is the lead artist responsible for creating the visual aesthetics that have become synonymous with DS and of whom little is still known. Lastly and of important note is Amber VHS (Julia Marcell), a professional Polish musician who has been responsible for producing the soundscape of Neo-Miami. Collectively, this talented team has fabricated an immersive story-driven environment that harnesses its community's creativity and imagination.

During my first few weeks of active involvement within the DS community, it quickly became apparent that the project was deviating away from many of the traditional practices I had witnessed in other communities. Talks of floor price were discouraged, rankings and trait value, although not entirely irrelevant, did not amount to the entirety of an NFT's overall value. This was in stark contrast to previous experiences where some community's inherent concern for floor price, resale value and potential gains, all of which were derived from traditional economic practices, were all consuming. Community members were instead encouraged to follow their intuition and choose a citizen that was felt to best represent themselves, or one that ignited a connection on a more incorporeal and emotional level. Community involvement and story progression are what would reap the most reward. Through their active participation, community members have been given a sense of agency and afforded the opportunity to harness their creative capital and collaboratively contribute to the larger narrative. Opposed to demarcating community boundaries where control rests solely in the hands of developers, Disco Solaris is facilitating a mutually inclusive environment for its community to flourish.

Although the story-driven aspect is not an element entirely unique to the Disco Solaris NFT project, its adoption and deployment illustrate a novel approach. This is not to displace or disparage the amount of work that goes into the production and maintenance of any other NFT project, but it requires an inordinate

amount of foresight and vision to be able to develop a stable yet impermanent scaffolding capable of facilitating the growth, longevity and constant recalibration that a project like DS requires. Nor is this an attempt to rule out any financial motivators, as any system requires an input of energy or resources to sustain itself, a similar argument Hoskinson purported regarding his decision to monetize the Cardano blockchain during one of his discussions about leaving Ethereum (Stokes 2021, Prignogine & Stengers 2017[1984]). What is unique, is how the story-driven element has been harnessed by DS.

My initial assumptions were that a base storyline would co-exist with a narrative mimicking something akin to a *choose your own adventure*. A process where the storyline would be directed by community votes, but from choices that would ultimately be dictated by the governing body of developers. Although hints of this process were evident in the beginning, what ensued was entirely unexpected. Over the course of the last two months, the DS community has witnessed the emergence of several community-driven projects that instead of being stifled and suppressed by a governing body, have instead been nurtured, supported and become integral to DS' overall wellbeing. At the time of writing, there currently exist ten community-driven projects with more underway.

The most notable of these projects are Discoin, Mayor Granchos weekly Twitter spaces and The Brew Club. The Discoin project emerged as a community initiative spearheaded by the Jael Cartel, a formation of community members funded by El Papo, who acquired the Charles Hoskinson one of a kind DS tribute NFT for 125000 ADA. It has been stated that the NFT will be tokenized through a process of fractionalization, referred to as “Charles’ Sacrifice”, whereby DS NFT holders will receive a percentage of the fractionalized tokens (Discoin 2022). As stated in the Discoin white paper, the Charles NFT “will be divided up into 5,777,777,777 pieces, [each piece] creating [a] Discoin, [and that all] 5777 Neo Miami Citizens will receive 57777 Discoin” via airdrop and will become the official currency of Neo Miami (Discoin 2022). The Discoin white paper further explains how “Discoin is intended to holistically ensure the well-being of each and every Neo Miami Citizen and to empower creators” (Discoin 2022). Essentially, a community-driven effort that was allowed to flourish has resulted in a form of feedback that is not only empowering Disco Solaris NFT holders to further support their creative efforts, but is additionally adding value to both the overall project and the NFTs themselves.

Granchos, the honorary mayoral candidate of the DS community, has also begun hosting weekly live Twitter spaces that have provided the community with an environment that facilitates a sense of belonging, the dissemination of news and events, and a space that allows for the free flow of ideas via communal discourse where the project can be critically analyzed (Bakhtin 1984[1965]:7-10). Providing each community member with a platform to voice their ideas, and participate in multidirectional discourse is an integral component for the creation of a common middle ground and for dispelling project hierarchy and stratification. The most recent topic of discussion has been the creation of a constitution, a document that will be written by the community for the community with the hopes of further empowering DS community members.

Lastly, Calvin, one of the co-founders of the Ada Handle project has recently discussed his decision to make a sizeable investment in the DS project (Calvin 2022). Calvin has begun publishing The Brew Club, an extension to DS’ story-driven metaverse that is centred around the NFT character 0141 named Milo, and Calvin’s Brew, a platform to facilitate Calvin's critical analysis, insights and predictions about the Cardano ecosystem. Calvin has stated that he will be legally integrating his Brew Club project into the DS storyline and has been bestowed the role of a DS advisor (Mr. Dot 2022, Calvin 2022). Calvin’s arrival into the project illustrates how providing a conduit for creative input can spur unexpected and unintentional growth. As a result of this new partnership, the DS project has been afforded a new level of legitimacy within the larger Cardano ecosystem by signalling to others through his willingness to accept risk, that he believes DS has unbounded potential for future growth.

These are only three of the ten projects currently in production at the time of writing with many more currently unnamed or unknown projects on the horizon. Yet, all these projects share a commonality. Each project arose because DS provided a permeable framework that facilitated external creative input through

deviation. The standardized and conditioned response to encourage growth in any system of production has typically been the continued and iterative reinforcement or compression of an initial condition through some form of ordered containment. For example, corporations have a fiduciary responsibility to their shareholders to make decisions deemed to be in the best financial interest of said shareholders. These interests generally result in the form of consistently increasing quarterly earnings (Riegger 2016). The question becomes how long can production or services be increased or amplified, budgets cut, or research ventures funded? Each of these areas of growth requires a rubric or ordering body of structures that govern how they scale. As projects exponentially increase over time, more and more resources and energy are required to sustain their growth and operation. Some succeed, but many more fail. The issue with utilizing this type of governing logic, is that much like a mold spore, compounding order acts like a compressor that inevitably leads to the catalytic pressures required for abstraction (the buildup of pressures resulting in spore proliferation), and thus the dissipation of said system (Grant 2021). Essentially, ordered systems eventually collapse under their own weight when trying to prevent or contain change. Marx emphasizes:

how continuity in the conditions of production cannot be achieved without the necessary conditions for reproduction, thereby underscoring how change stands as a constant threat to reproducing surplus value. ... To minimize change, to respond to shifting situations rapidly, to prevent workers from controlling their own destinies are some of the social conditions that must be attended to so that change can be incorporated into the reproduction of the relations of production. (Weiner 1992:9)

In the above excerpt, Marx is critiquing production's need to suppress the threat of change in order to sustain the capitalistic imperative, and it is the deviation from this very governing body of logic that has aided DS in its current rate of growth and success. In mathematics, a *random walk* consists of "a sequence of steps (such as movements or changes in gene frequency) each of whose characteristics (such as magnitude and direction) is determined by chance" (Merriam-Webster 2022). By not demarcating or limiting the extent of community participation, members are essentially allowed to paint outside the lines with the potential of the fruits of their labours feeding back in the project's overall success and thus their own. Through the incorporation of random creativity from its community, DS has effectively strayed from traditional models of organization and through their prioritization of deviance, deviation and disorder found limitless potential.

The point being put forth in this article is that confinement and rigidity stifles creativity in any setting and ultimately leads to unsustainable conditions. By devising an open-ended project that incorporates the random creative input of its members (Raymond 2001[1999]), DS has enabled growth beyond the initial visions of its developers through the inclusion of randomness and uncertainty in the form of community-driven projects. At the time of writing, this project achieved the rank of 15 on the [openCNFT.io](https://opencnft.io) chart for total overall volume, which now grosses well over 2 million ADA. This is extremely impressive for a project that is only two months old. What Disco Solaris has done is essentially found a way to tap a limitless resource that doubles as a feedback loop benefiting both developers and community. By promoting the creative input of their community, and allowing for the incorporation of uncertainty, DS has found a stable foothold in the cNFT space and created a mutually inclusive community. I suspect a bright future for Disco Solaris, and I'm excited to see what lies ahead!

Next Article:

How Disco Solaris is Creating Inalienable Wealth

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