Cyberprovincialism
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Collapsing Locality – Ludic Locations
Place and space are notions that have to be renegotiated once territory is claimed in virtual environments. A discourse on locative aspects of virtual environments will have to find new forms of transport and of non-travelling to rediscover place and location in e-space.

It is a common assumption of cyber-anthropologists, that an increase in virtuality leeds to an increased level of internationalism, cosmopolitan lifestyle, and a global, borderless image space. [Rath, 1987] [Fassler, 1999] [Ascott, 2000] The national territories supposedly dissolve, borders become meaningless and cultural differences melt into a ubiquitous image space, sound-pool and hypertext archive. The pilot projects of telematic art, connected the teepees of First Nation chiefs with European media centres [Ascott, 1989] or Wien with Vancouver - creating a virtual supermerger city called "Wiencouver". [Grundmann, 1984]. Contemporary social networking environments attempt to look cosmopolitan as well. SecondLife promotes an open and free toy society of semi-anonymous avatars from all around the globe, who peacefully share islands, clubs and shopping malls. The potentially cross-cultural 3D agora turns out to be as Philistine as can be, a petty bourgeois low-cost paradise with garden gnomes, ducks on ponds and ornamental trees in pink and white.

The islands and meeting spaces attract groups of similarly styled visitors who quickly agree to fall back into their regional jargon, dress code and political

conventions. Go to France Pitoresque, to Japan Resort, or to any of the SecondLife art places to find out how locally restricted and narrow-minded the World Wide Web can be. These locations are characterised by an extreme homogenisation of appearance and talk. Foreign languages are not strictly forbidden - they are often cherished as exotic and cool -, but the practice is less then monolingual, it is controlled by a totalitarism of jargon below the level of language or even dialect. SecondLife is a conglomerate of cyberprovincialism rather than an international community. I would like to suggest that there is a counter-trend to expanding locality in Virtual Worlds, a user-generated trend of imploding locality. Locality collapses into a digital Mega-suburb of gym-trained, cyber-solarium tanned bores who have set their daylight zone to eternal noon.

There is however hope in virtual geography. When Erik Champion stated that "Being Not-there May be More Achievable" [Champion, 2006] he suggested that en route from real tourism via augmented reality and augmented virtuality to full immersive virtual reality, we might stop by at a locative state of being not-there. Unlike tele-presence this form of negative presence has a distant closeness to an idealised travel destination. It "creates a sensation of place (as a cultural site) in a virtual environment in contradistinction to a sensation of a virtual environment as a collection of objects and spaces."

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