The virtual world of *Second Life* offers an opportunity to question the idea of ground and its value. Its lightweight present of different restraints yields a ground that can support us in a new way.

Connecting to the (virtual) ground: between groundedness and groundlessness in *Second Life*

Aikaterini Antonopoulou

The ground as the solid surface of the earth, as the land that lies under our feet and as the foundation on which anything built rests, has always served as a condition of a possibility of place. It is through the transformation and the manipulation of the earth that places of all kinds can emerge. Heaviness and gravity on the one hand, and the attempts to overcome them through high-rise constructions on the other, define physical space and create different sorts of spatial relationships. Although the concept of a sense of place often appears subjective and ephemeral, grounding life in places is inevitable. Since, traditionally, the notion of place is conceived as a static entity and is associated with rootedness, the sense of belonging, and the desire for fixity and security, the quest for placeness and homeliness refers both literally and metaphorically to the attachment to the ground.

On the other hand, the desire to defeat the connection to the ground, and with it an attachment to place, is not new. In the past, air travel and then space travel have nurtured the imagination of many generations, who anticipated their liberation from earthly burdens. In recent times, new technologies, telecommunication and transport systems have effectively transformed the world in this direction, so that we can no longer say we are rooted to a place and restricted by it. The emergence of a telecommunication civilisation that is by default 'ungrounded' has enabled people to interact in real-time through interfaces rather than face-to-face, and thus has drastically changed the concept of 'groundedness'. The body that used to be well-anchored in places within the city is now networked, tied into countless electronic connections, yet absolutely free within physical space. Such attempts to escape the 'tyranny of place'[1] have introduced a freer and lighter existence in the world, even if these, at the same time, provoke a sense of not belonging and homelessness. In his book *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, Karsten Harries asks:

> *If the loss of place can be mourned, must it not also be welcomed as an essential part of the increasing emancipation of the individual from the rule of the accident of place? Place no longer need be destiny.*[2]

Then the 'accident of place' is no longer enough to determine people's lives and interactions, and cannot tie us to the ground any more. Within this context we are clearly less rooted in the ground, but the question is, do we need to be rooted at all? John Rajchman suggests that 'once we give up the belief that our life-world is rooted in the ground, we may thus come to the point where ungroundedness is no longer experienced as existential anxiety and despair but as a freedom and a lightness that finally allow us to move'[3].

By extension, in *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari describe the earth as 'pure deterritorialisation', in other words as pure uncoded material, as a grand reserve beyond any regime of signification, and as an entity that does not await any re-territorialisation, but instead exists as a plane of pure immanence.[4] In Deleuze and Guattari's thinking, the earth is not one element among others, but the condition that brings together all the elements in one, 'using one or another of them to deterritorialise territory', while it is itself detached from territory, so that geography is not restricted in providing places for things, but may be equally physical or mental.[5] A world of dematerialisation and deterritorialisation raises questions about whether we still need places and grounds to anchor us. If we still do, how do we reconstruct them within the multiplicity and the flexibility of our times? And, if we don't, are we ready to confront homelessness or – alternatively – to redefine homeliness within mobility and through connectivity?

Now that mobility and connectivity have introduced a new dynamism and flexibility, and the attention increasingly shifts from the one and only 'native' ground to multiple material and immaterial conditions that shape our existence, the question is whether the attachment to the ground refers to the materiality of the ground itself or to some sort of phantasmatic background context. In a world that is less about place and more about places, less about origins and more about connections between the different sites of our lives, the notion of 'groundedness' mediates between

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materiality and symbolism. Similarly to physical space, cyberspace is also capable of creating a 'there' and a place, establishing new geographies and different sorts of attachment. Are we then moving from a conscious attachment to a native ground and a single home, to a multiplicity of places, grounds, and, if possible, 'homes'?

This attachment to the ground is the focus of this essay. It mediates between groundedness and groundlessness: from the Heideggerian 'being in the world' as 'being on the earth' and the understanding of the 'native ground' as a repository of meanings and memories, to flying in the physical world and studying an avatar's weightless existence in virtual worlds. By using examples taken from the virtual world of *Second Life*, it aims to question the symbolisation of the ground, and through this, to explore the forms that placeness takes within digitisation.

Being on the earth

For Martin Heidegger, the very idea of being in the world, and consequently dwelling in the world, has to do with belonging to the earth, and thus having a strong connection to the ground:

> *Upon earth and in it, historical man grounds his dwelling in the world. In setting up a world, the work sets forth the earth. This setting forth must be thought here in the strict sense of the world.*[6]

He conceptualises the earth not as a mass of matter, but instead as the 'native ground' on which human dwelling is based. It is upon the earth that the work of art is grounded in the world. If 'in setting up a world, the work sets forth the earth', then 'setting up' here is not a mere process of placement. The earth and the world appear reciprocally together through the work of art. The work makes space on the earth, it liberates the space of an open region in order to establish its structure, and by this structure it sets up a world. Through this work the world becomes grounded on the earth and, as a consequence, the earth is projected through the world. Thus the ground on which our dwelling, and through this our being, are founded does not work as a simple platform, but is instead 'site-specific' and fixed, inseparable from us.[7] We carry this native ground with us at any time and it constitutes a part of who we really are.

The tension between the earth and the world is very important in this discourse. Being in the world as mortals on earth means for Heidegger staying within what he calls 'the fourfold' (in German, *Geviert*)[8] that is between earth and sky, divinities and mortals. The four elements constitute a simple oneness: being 'on the earth' means being 'under the sky' and together these also mean belonging among humans and staying before the divinities.[9] Being within the fourfold practically has to do with staying among the things actively, remaining in peace within them and also 'sparing and preserving' them. Human beings dwell in the world by safeguarding the fourfold, and accordingly, this sort of dwelling keeps the fourfold within the things.

The oneness of the fourfold and the definition of the human existence within it suggest that the human being may be bound to the ground both literally and symbolically, yet not imprisoned in it. Heidegger juxtaposes the openness of the sky with the solidity of the ground and places man between the two, and this placement defines his existence. Altogether, human existence is thus placed between materiality and spirituality, between reality and expectation, well-grounded on the earth and nonetheless open to unearthly dimensions. Earth, sky, mortals and divinities constitute the basic preconditions and a framework for human existence, and therefore ground human beings in the world. Karsten Harries sees the Heideggerian 'earth' as 'material transcendence':

> *[...] even if constituted by our language or concepts and as such appearance, what thus appears is not created by our understanding but given. Inseparable by our experience of things is a sense of this gift, an awareness that our understanding is finite; and that means also that the reach of our words, of all our determinations and calculations, is limited. The rift between thing and word, earth and world, where 'world' means not the totality of facts, but a space of intelligibility, cannot be closed.*[10]

This 'material transcendence' suggests that the fourfold ensures that the earth-world system exists as a fixed entity, beyond our limited understanding and the way we construe space and perform in it, interestingly, an idea that may not be so different from Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of the earth as 'pure immanence' mentioned above.

As long as the earth is not simply a stage where life happens, but an active component of the human being, then the 'native ground' is charged with meanings and memories, and at the same time it provides the essential material for its extension: building. In his book *The Dominion of the Dead*, Robert Pogue Harrison identifies the significance of the human being in the connection to the dead through the regional ground.[11] Thus the burial is seen as the preservation rather than a separation from the dead. Instead of being discarded from human life, the dead 'humanise' the ground to form the basis on which worlds and histories are founded. The earth, by absorbing the dead, constitutes simultaneously the receptacle and the content of humanity, the beginning and the end of human life.[12] A grave does not simply mark the place where the dead lie, but stands equally for the mortality of the living, symbolising the temporality and the finitude of human being. Following Heidegger's thinking, Harrison here suggests that we inhabit this world through building homes and cities on the ground, because this ground is already preinhabited by its predecessors. This enables us to inhabit the earth historically rather than merely 'naturally'.[13] Therefore architecture 'transforms geological time into human time, which is another way of saying it turns matter into meaning'.[14] And, in exchange, ruins express the decomposition of meaning into matter, reminding us simultaneously of the

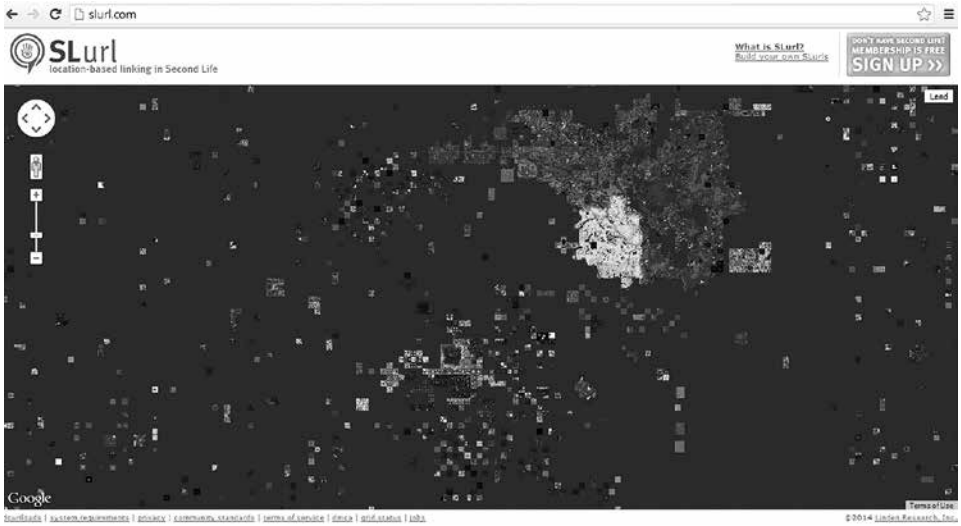
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beginning and the end of human life and the fact that the earthly ground in its heaviness always prevails.

If this is the role of the ground in the human being, then its extension, building, also constitutes a continuation of past and memory, and an important feature of being in the world. In effect, building stands between past and future, memory and experience, both conceptually and materially. Given the metaphorical and literal analogy between ground and foundation, architecture comes to negotiate between gravity and lightness, tradition and innovation. From graves and monuments well rooted in the earth signifying the confrontation with death, to modern architecture that transforms the heaviness into lightweight constructions that smoothly sit on the ground,[15] and to skyscrapers that represent the desire to defy gravity, building becomes an expression of man's complex connection to the ground. From modernity and onwards, different utopian and futuristic visions have called for new spatialities that would oppose the solidity of the earth. An architecture of non-static, infinitely expandable spaces, and spaces that follow movement and action, has been a recurrent dream. Furthermore, new technologies and virtual space spur architecture towards the dematerialisation and the open-endedness of physical space. Building attempts either to overcome groundedness or reconstruct the ground in a lighter sense, driven by the desire for material transcendence and freedom.

On the other hand, a ground reduced into a thin surface would not be able to bury past worlds and their dead within it. It would provide a space emptied of memories and meanings and any building on it would constitute a new beginning that takes place. This is the world of *Second Life*, a digitally constructed and thus artificial world that draws references – but not restrictions – from the physical environment. *Second Life* is a free online virtual world, where everybody is invited to build an avatar – a digital representative – through which they can participate in it. All sorts of real-world-like activities take place there: people design and build, they create businesses, they hold meetings, they throw parties, they interact and they communicate with other people through their avatars. The *Second Life* world is made of combinations of pixel-like islands that float in a digital ocean *[1]*. Due to this structure, the world is infinitely expandable so that when more land is needed, new islands are created, while regions that are no longer in use disappear from the map. Memories and meanings are only contained within computer codes rather than within the ground. Unlike the Heideggerian earth, the world of *Second Life* is not 'site-specific': islands appear and disappear due to demand and any sort of construction can be placed on them, as long as the user-resident has the skills to design or the money to purchase it. Furthermore, an avatar does not poetically exist between the earth and the sky. If the earth is flattened into a surface, then the sky is also simplified into a background. The sun, the moon, the day, the night, and the changing atmosphere are only background selections in the *Second Life* viewer. But more importantly, thinning the ground into an abstraction is a movement away from death too.

If for Heidegger the fourfold represents human mortality, temporality and finitude, avatars do not need that. Since the digital representations do not die and their constructions are not ruined or demolished but deleted, there is no need for them to stand on a ground that has a thickness, as there is nothing to be contained in it. Clearly the construction of virtual worlds symbolises the desire to live a freer and lighter existence, and escape from the 'tyranny of place' mentioned above, but as mortals, are we truly ready to disengage from the earthly ground and inhabit these spaces? The selection of *Second Life* here is significant because it enables us to examine what we select to recreate – and in what form – when we have the option to reconstruct the world anew, and without the material restrictions of the physical world. *Second Life* is worth studying, not as a visually perfect representation of a world, but rather, as an environment that, despite its imperfections, has the ability to trigger the imagination of its users



1 *Second Life* Map

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to supplement and complete their experience. By revealing the users' fears and desires, it works as a 'testing ground', a place where we may study the reconstruction of our body and ground from zero, and also question whether this 'reconstruction from zero' is ever possible when everybody brings his/her 'real-world baggage' with him/her.

Defying gravity

As Nietzsche writes:

> *Whoever one day teaches humans to fly, will have shifted all boundary stones; for him all boundary stones themselves will fly into the air, he will christen the earth anew – as 'the light one'.*[16]

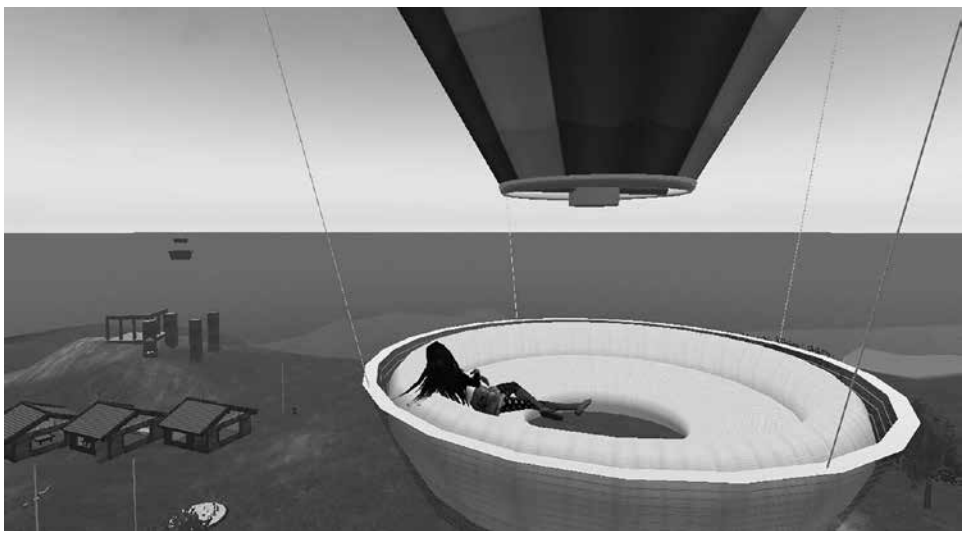
To Zarathustra, the human being is a 'heavy burden to himself' as long as the earth anchors him. Earth and life seem so heavy to him because he cannot fly. Only when he learns to fly he will be able to rename the earth as 'the light one'. Until then everything, truth and meanings, the 'ground and background of all things', remain hidden and buried.[17] In Nietzsche's symbolism, gravity suppresses things and becomes a burden that needs to be overcome. Flying does not merely defeat gravity, but it renders the earth and one's own existence weightless. The desire to detach from the ground and become weightless signifies the need to reject the earth-sky and up-down divisions and re-invent a freer space. The earth that Zarathustra describes is not the place of dwelling that Heidegger conceptualised. If all the 'boundary stones' are removed so that the earth can become 'the light one', then dwelling cannot be anchored in it. In this freer sort of space, living should be considered within the context of mobility and rootlessness, even if this, at the same time, means a certain homelessness.

Flying signifies the liberation from all earthly matters both literally and metaphorically. To be lifted up is to be set at a distance from any involvement with the things and everyday burdens. One is transformed into a spectator put in a god-like position. From above, the world becomes visible and comprehensible in its complexity. Man has always been trying to build high structures and create flying machines to be lifted off the ground. The desire to defy gravity and navigate freely in the air stands as a metaphor for the dissociation from things and the ground as home, as past and as memory. Up in the air one is free to start anew, to construct one's own grounds and to build one's own connections.

The electronic age may have not (yet) managed to set man free in the sky, but it has created immaterialities and transparent connections to set



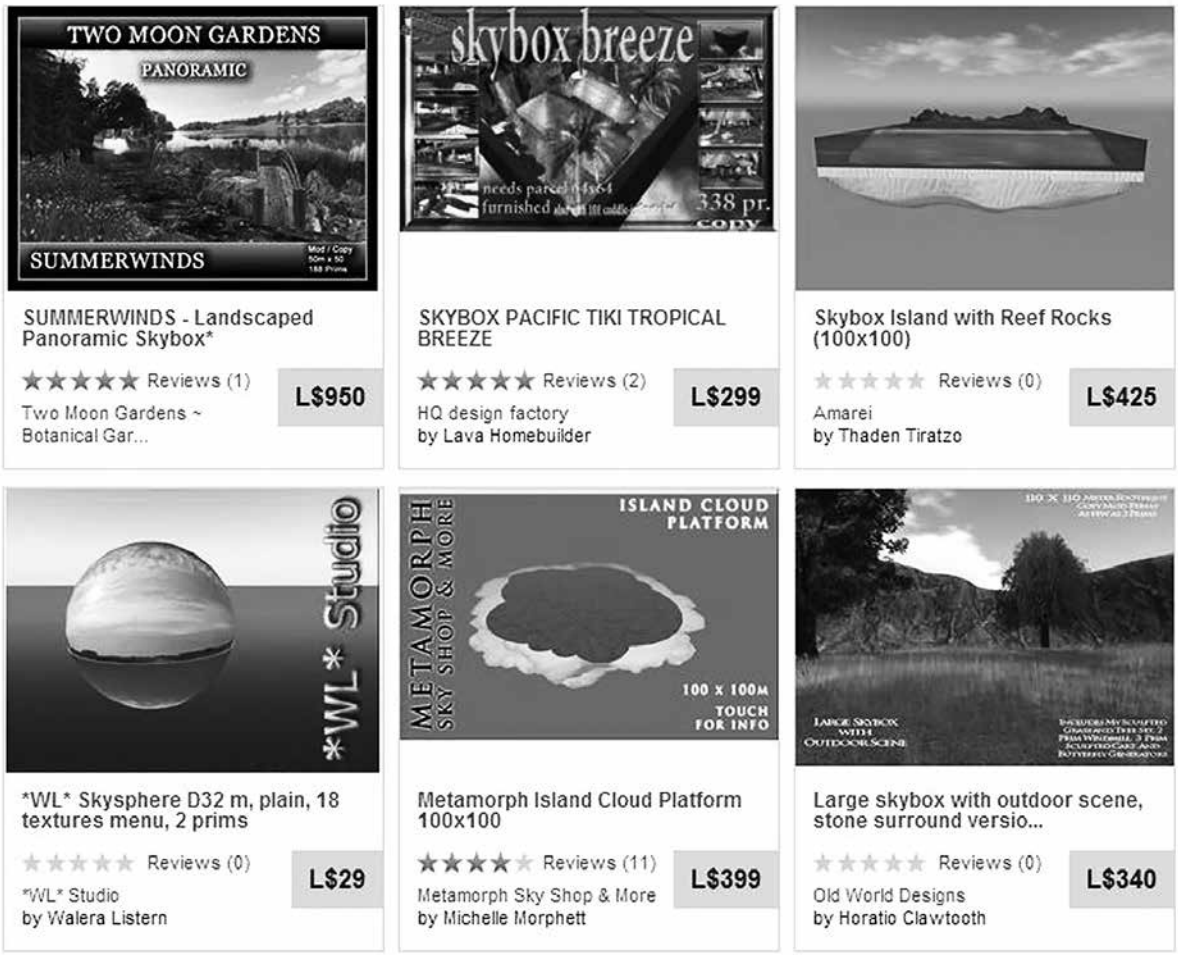
2 Flying in *Second Life*, image by the author



3 Hot-air balloon in *Second Life*, image by the author

4 Skyboxes, image from the *Second Life* Marketplace [accessed 18 October 2012]

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4

him free on the earth. Electronic interconnections and virtual places have reduced our dependence on bodily presence and materiality. Physical spaces function in collaboration with virtual spaces and action-at-a-distance supplements face-to-face contact, so that space becomes more flexible and fluid whereas our connection to the ground becomes weaker. If we 'live more lightly on the earth'[18] due to new technologies, lightness is here achieved by the superimposition of – weightless – communication layers into existing social and material patterns and their interaction. But if cyberspace, as a platform where everything and everybody is floating, renders our existence in the world lighter, opening up fields of dematerialisation and deterritorialisation, it can also indicate how we conceive the earthly ground and attach to it.

In *Second Life*, similarly to the real world, up and down have a meaning and objects fall under gravity. However, residents are also allowed to ignore these constraints and explore new freedoms. Apart from teleportation, which constitutes the basic form of transport between regions in *Second Life*, avatars can also walk, run and fly *[2]*. Flying is a very popular and enjoyable practice that enables avatars to navigate within regions and between neighbouring locations. To explore further their flying experience, residents have also developed wings and flying vehicles and have organised events such as hot-air balloon races, aerobatic performances and skydiving *[3]*. By flying, an avatar has the opportunity to get the general view of an area, to explore it differently and to orientate in it. When in 'flight mode', it is beautifully animated to float freely in the air, to swirl according to the user's directions, and to smoothly rise higher without effort. Users often create their personal animations through programming to augment this experience. When escaping flight mode, the avatar falls naturally on the ground, with an acceleration of gravity set at 9.81 m/sec^2 (the same as the conventional standard value for the earth), to give out a real-world-like impression of fall.

Flying in *Second Life* does not simply liberate avatars from their weighty existence in the virtual world. Instead this function aims at indulging the user behind the avatar in a purportedly liberative immersive experience. The aesthetics of exhilaration here intensifies bodily experience and grants absolute freedom. Flying fulfils the desire of an existence despite gravity throughout which we may see things from afar – even if in this case 'things' are the digital representations that stand for the real ones. And most importantly, a fall here can cause no damage. An avatar can perform a free fall and land on any kind of surface without fear of getting hurt or dying.

In *Second Life*, not only avatars can defy gravity, but buildings can, too. The digital sky gives space to very popular constructions, called skyboxes. A skybox is a construction in *Second Life* that floats in the air, set in specific coordinates. Skyboxes range

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5a



5b

5 *a* 'Sky Land', image from the *Second Life* Marketplace [accessed 18 October 2012]

b 'Sky Land Castle', image from the *Second Life* Marketplace [accessed 18 October 2012]

from simple floating platforms and cubic enclosed spaces to extensive housing structures or even large retail centres. The digital marketplace offers a great variety of structures for different needs and desires. Simple box-like or spherical structures that simulate heavenly landscapes in the interior and grass-covered 'sky platforms', modern designed 'mansions' and spacecraft-like constructions, offer all kinds of alternatives *[4]*.

A special category of skyboxes are the 'floating islands' which resemble pieces of land floating in the digital atmosphere. 'Sky Land' featured here *[5a]*, suggests a piece of roughly excavated ground, though flattened on top and covered with grass, ready to use/build. The potential buyer can also purchase a castle of suitable size by the same designer to place on top *[5b]*, or may design another building of his liking, or even use the land as it is. Certainly an elevated platform is of different significance to a floating piece of land. A sky platform functions as a lightweight stage that may give space to isolation up in the open sky. Similarly a floating house may stand for the futuristic desire to inhabit space and build houses completely detached from the earth. Both examples suggest experimentation in terms of lightness, and an attempt to disconnect from the ground and resort to finer means of support. But if flying in the sky fulfils our desire for freedom from the earthly matters, then should we carry a piece of land with us? Do we really want to and, most importantly, are we able to disengage from the ground? And is it the ground in its materiality or in its conceptualisation that we cannot let go?

The real in virtual land

Buying and selling virtual land has always been an attraction and a popular practice in the *Second Life* world. Individuals and companies have invested real-world money to acquire virtual land and be able to use it as they want. The digital environment offers the platform in which they are able to express themselves and establish connections not only with each other, but also, interestingly, with the environment itself. This environment clearly exists only within the imagination of its creators and its users, but the question raised here is, how strong the bonds with it may become? The following example enables us to study how bonds and attachments are built in an entirely digital and user-created context, regardless of its immateriality.

On 15 April 2010, four *Second Life* residents and property owners filed a class-action suit against Linden Lab, the company operating *Second Life*. They claimed that the company was misleading players into thinking they actually owned their virtual lands. Although acknowledging the fact that in virtual worlds there are no courts, halls of Congress or visible mechanisms for civic governance, the plaintiffs argued that since there is a large flow of real money by real people, real world legal consequences should follow as well. In other words, they suggested applying real world laws into a virtual world.

When *Second Life* was first launched, following the norms of its contemporary virtual worlds, the participant's intellectual property rights to their creations or possessions in the world were not recognised. Linden Lab soon decided to differentiate by preserving and recognising the residents' ownership rights to all virtual items, land and goods. The idea was not only to maximise the company's profits by selling property, but also to create a world that would function similarly to the real world and would establish strong economic and legal connections to it as well.[19] The company aimed at improving and increasing the user-created content in *Second Life*, along with the users' engagement in it. The revised 'Terms of

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Use'[20] for the *Second Life* world allowed subscribers to retain full intellectual property protection.[21] The representations of land were thus declared as identical to the land in order to set the basis for the construction of a real economy in the world: 'we said the same thing about land: Land is yours to own and resell [...] Let's just make this a real world, let's let it have a real economy and let's make property have real value'.[22]

This decision enabled the development of a variety of businesses within *Second Life*, with clothing and avatar stores being among the first. The transition to the land model gave entrepreneurs the opportunity to create large retail centres that would simulate the real world shopping experience. Franchising, shopping malls at different locations, advertising and branding were also developed. Skilled designers were also encouraged by this system to invest time and ideas in virtual creations. The possibility of generating an income, especially by doing something enjoyable, transformed *Second Life* from a playful social network to a real – albeit representational – world.

In the meantime, the *Second Life* world had also established its own currency, the Linden™ Dollar. Linden Dollars can be exchanged for U.S. dollars or other foreign currencies through a number of different websites. They are the virtual tokens that allow all economic transactions. *Second Life* residents use them to purchase goods, land and services either from each other or directly from Linden Lab. The cost of land itself is also based on demand and can fluctuate with the market. Land may be purchased directly from Linden Lab, or from private owners, or even by 'virtual real estate' agents.[23] Alternatively, land may also be rented. Overall, Linden Lab has established an economy based on real-world economy and has managed to attract companies and individuals to invest money in virtual land, each one for their own purposes. Interestingly, illegal financial activities, such as credit card fraud, identity theft and PayPal chargeback, also take place in *Second Life* to prove the actuality of this financial system.

The *Second Life* world was thus shaped, mostly by its users, according to such terms and conditions. Linden Lab clearly stated that 'Second Life is an online, 3D virtual world, imagined, created and owned by its residents' where 'everything is owned, controlled and built by the people who are there'.[24] However, at an unknown date according to the plaintiffs, Linden Lab decided to change the 'Terms of Use' at the expense of its residents. Without any notice, Linden Lab removed any reference to ownership from its website. 'Why would I want to own land?' became 'Why would I want to have land?' and no compensation to the residents was considered on behalf of the company. As clearly stated in the new 'Terms of Use', Linden Labs own every bit and byte of electronic data that is stored on its servers.[25] Therefore:

> *Virtual Land is the graphical representation of three-dimensional virtual world space. When you acquire Virtual Land, you obtain a limited license to access and use certain features of the Service associated with Virtual Land stored on our Servers*.[26]

As a limited licence right, Virtual Land does no longer constitute a real property right or actual real estate,[27] and it is not redeemable for any sum of money from Linden Lab.

Based on these changes, the plaintiffs accused Linden Lab of preventing access to all of their belongings in *Second Life* – items, land and goods – to which they had (representational) rights, titles and interests, without any intention of compensating them. They argued that, even after the revised Terms of Use for the virtual world, Linden Lab kept deceiving users into thinking that they would own the land they purchased. They described *Second Life* as an environment modelled after a 'real world dictatorship that causes investors to build an infrastructure in the country claiming there are "ownership" rights where the true but secret intent is actually to nationalise the assets and infrastructure built by the "investors" or in actuality unsuspecting consumers'.[28] Having invested time and money in their – until recently – virtual possessions, they suggested that, since their property was purchased and designed as equivalent to real-world property, it should be treated and protected as such. And so they would take Linden Lab to court and demand five million dollars in compensation.

Most video games and virtual-reality games based on imaginary worlds have to do with conquering land and fighting over territories. In *Second Life*, there are no winners or losers. However, as in physical land, virtual land may become a repository of value and power. *Second Life* residents were promised a land of absolute freedom – freedom according to conventional, or maybe American, standards – but, instead, they felt deceived, oppressed and censored. From this utopian-virtual environment they resorted to real-world legislation to claim their rights. Virtual land, initially presented by Linden Lab as a 'real' thing belonging to those who purchased it, is here regarded as a product of the imagination and a fictional value, the three-dimensional representation of which we may see and 'experience' only online. Although a participant may invest – real-world – money in digital property, invite people to this land, hold meetings in it, exchange information and communicate with others, this only exists in the Linden Lab's code. Everybody's accounts and 'valuables' constitute electromagnetic records stored in the company's servers. And, of course, these 'bits and bytes' constitute property of the company. But, apart from questioning whether virtual worlds – and *Second Life* in particular – belong to the sphere of reality or to that of the imagination, most importantly, we need to ask why the *Second Life* economy is 'built off the ground', and what makes 'ground' a major form of investment there. Most generally, what is it that makes this attachment so valuable that it is worth recreating in virtual worlds? And since this digital, and as such immaterial, reconstruction is so important then is it the physicality and the materiality of the

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ground or its phantasmatic frame and its reference to the utopian discourse that makes it significant to people?

Epilogue

In Gilles Deleuze's essay 'Desert Islands', the island constitutes a dream object for two reasons: first, it represents the separation from the rest of the world, and second, it suggests a new start, a beginning anew.

> *But everything that geography has told us about the two kinds of islands, the imagination knew already on its own and in another way. The élan that draws humans toward islands extends the double movement that produces islands in themselves. Dreaming of islands – whether with joy or in fear, it doesn't matter – is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone – or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew. Some islands drifted away from the continent, but the island is also that toward which one drifts; other islands originated in the ocean, but the island is also the origin, radical and absolute.*[29]

As with the world of *Second Life*, desert islands offer the opportunity to erase the past, with all its memories and attachments, and to construct a 'lightweight' present of fewer restraints. In Deleuze's thinking, were the people who resort to a desert island only driven for this passion for movement, then 'the island would be only the dream of humans, and humans, the pure consciousness of the island'.[30] However, this is not possible. Since humans cannot be reduced to plain movement, carrying in them the world they have left behind and its civilisation, they will only be outsiders to this island, forming a fictional unity with it. For in the desert island:

> *[...] it is not creation but re-creation, not the beginning but a re-beginning that takes place. The deserted island is the origin, but a second origin.*[31]

Then the inhabitation of a desert island – and of any piece of land that the island represents – is a matter of re-birth and re-production. All the elements that have survived from the first origin will constitute the essential material for the construction of the new world. Beginning anew means that there always exists a precedent for this new beginning, something that could not be left behind, something substantial to trigger the re-construction. This explains how – and why – one resorts to *Second Life* to build a ground and a home. As strong as the attachment to this – physical – world may be, there will always be the desire to separate from it and start again, if possible from zero. As long as cyberspace is a space of a second origin, the material of the first origin will always shape it. Following Deleuze's thinking, inhabiting virtual worlds does not necessarily express the negation of any ground and place, but instead the desire to start anew, and the potential to mediate between groundedness and groundlessness in pursuit of a ground that supports us in a new way.

Notes

1. Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 168.
2. Ibid., p. 169.
3. John Rajchman, *Constructions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 88.
4. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
5. Ibid., p. 85.
6. Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1934) in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 15–86 (p. 45).
7. Rajchman, *Constructions*, p. 44.
8. The fourfold was first developed in 'The Thing', a lecture given by Heidegger in 1950, and was revisited in 1951 in his conference paper 'Building Dwelling Thinking'.
9. Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (1951) *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 141–60 (p. 148).
10. Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, p. 159.
11. R. P. Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. x–xi.
12. Ibid., p. 2.
13. Ibid., p. 3.
14. Ibid., p. 3.
15. John Rajchman discusses the dismissal of the natural ground in Le Corbusier's Maison Dom-ino: 'the house is thus freed from the earth of historical tradition to move in an extendable boundless space, acquiring a Mondrian-like autonomy, where a ground is only a vestige [...] In this revolution, houses will be put in pilotis barely touching the ground, roofs flattened, and everything turned into intersecting horizontal and vertical planes and monochromatic stucco surfaces'. Rajchman, *Constructions*, p. 79.
16. F. W. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 154.
17. Ibid., p. 154.
18. Langdon Winner, 'Whatever Happened to the Electronic Cottage?' *Tech Knowledge Review* (23:3) 2001. Available online from: http://www.praxagora.com/~stevet/netfuture/2001/Jul2701_121.html [accessed 1 September 2011], p. 3.
19. C. R. Ondrejka, 'Aviators, Moguls, Fashionistas and Barons: Economics and Ownership in Second Life', *SSRN eLibrary* (2004), p. 1. Available online from: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=614663&high=%20second%20life [accessed 10 October 2010].
20. M. Haughey, 'Second Life Residents To Own Digital Creations', *Creative Commons*, 14 November 2003. Available online from: http://creativecommons.org/press-releases/entry/3906 [accessed 17 June 2010].
21. According to the class action suit, at that point, Philip Rosendale, one of the creators of *Second Life* had stated: 'what you have in Second Life is real and it is yours, it doesn't belong to us. We have no claim to it. Whatever you do in Second Life is your own intellectual property. You can claim copyright on it. You can make money.' C. Carter, C. Evans, D. Spencer and V. Spencer, *Complaint: Class Action for Damages and Injunctive Relief*, 15 April 2010, par. 83. Available online from:

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http://www.virtuallanddispute.com/pleadings/evan_spencer_carter_v_linden_labs_virtual_land_property_rights_class_action_lawsuit.pdf [accessed 17 June 2010].
22. Ibid., par. 48.
23. Any resident can become a landowner as long as he is a Premium Member (by paying US$9.95/month). Apart from the cost of land, landowners that possess parcels that are larger than 512 square metres are required to pay a sort of 'tax' as a monthly charge, called the Land Use Fee (also known as a Tier Fee).
24. Carter et al., *Complaint*, par. 87.
25. *Second Life*, 'Terms of Service', par. 4.5.
26. Ibid., par. 6.
27. To avoid misunderstandings, the company also defines the terms 'buy' and 'sell' in the *Second Life* world, in order to dissociate them from their real world definitions. Thus 'buy' and 'sell' here refer to the transfer of the Virtual Land License and the same applies to the exchange of Linden Dollar Licenses as well: 'Second Life offers a Linden dollar exchange, called the LindeX exchange, for the trading of Linden Dollars, which uses the terms 'Buy' and 'Sell' to indicate the transfer of Linden Dollar Licenses'. Ibid., par. 6. Also: 'Regardless of terminology used, you acknowledge that as used in this Agreement and throughout the Service in the context of Linden Dollar transfers: (a) the term 'Sell' means 'to transfer for consideration to another user their Linden Dollars in accordance with the Terms of Service', (b) the term 'Buy' or 'Purchase' means 'to receive for consideration from another user their Linden Dollars in accordance with the Terms of Service', (c) the terms 'Buyer', 'Seller', 'Sale' and 'Purchaser' and similar terms have corresponding meanings to their root terms, (d) 'Sell Order' and similar terms mean a request from a user to Linden Lab to list Linden Dollars for Sale on the LindeX exchange at a requested Sale price, and (e) 'Buy Order' and similar terms mean a request from a user for Linden Lab to match open Sale listings with a requested Purchase price and facilitate completion of the Sale of Linden Dollars.' Ibid., par. 5.2.
28. Ibid., par. 148.
29. Gilles Deleuze, 'Desert Islands' in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 9–14 (p. 10).
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p. 13.

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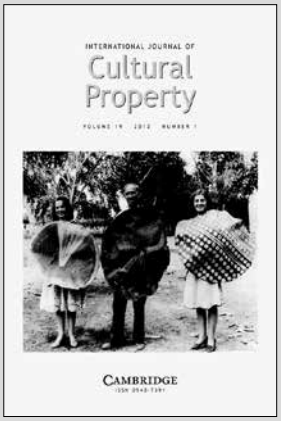
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