BABYLON S M L XL

The missing Language of Cyberspace

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We first discuss the future role of the CITY as a main generator of cultural fiction and suggest a superimposition of the PHYSICAL city and the DIGITAL city. We then draw parallels between the original intentions behind the World Wide Web and Hyper Text Markup Language and its expected follow up CYBERSPACE and Virtual Reality Markup Language. The development of three-dimensional SEMANTIC CODES for interactive environments is identified as one main task of the future. Within this framework, Babylon S M L XL, a series of research experiments conducted at the Architectural Space Laboratory at the professorship is investigating concepts and methods. The images display some scenes from this work in chronological order, while the captions provide content descriptions and METACODE abstractions.

1. The Crisis of the City

Cities, as the main processor units of civilisation seem to be on the decline. After most of the flows of humans, information or goods have been focused into urban hot spots for centuries, some of these streams are now being diverted by other forces. One of the main reason for the urban concentration process, the simplification of complex system flows through short transmission distances is becoming increasingly less dominating.

This, of course, has to do with the accelerated separation of the communication body from the physical body in networked communities. The architect Toyo Ito describes the Japanese society as "a society permeated by information and penetrated by communications systems. A society in which each individual has two bodies: a 'real'
Babylon_S, “True Spaces and Beliefs”
September 1995
An early experiment, that investigated the combination of animated objects and static objects and consists of a hyperlinked web of scenes, which are to be read as personal signals of the author, forming a cinematic 3D story-space. The sequences use simple rooms (True Spaces) and juxtapose them with “translated” truisms (Beliefs) by the well known communication artist Jenny Holzer. i.e. “Action causes more trouble than thought”.

body consisting of its physical presence, and a 'fictional' body, shaped by the information directed at or received by it." While face-to-face communication as a basic emotional need remains untouched, a wired person can perform functional communication from anywhere to anyone. As a consequence, Ito sees the elimination of the very concept of the city: "A kind of de-socialisation will take place within the city which will then be perceived as a 'fictional' structure, its spaces no longer needed to serve the needs of a 'real' population. At this time the non-city will emerge as the 'real' answer." (1)

Really? What can be observed at present are major global shifts of economic resources in online workforce markets, that can transform cities in very short time spans. Public access to the Internet was opened in India on August 15, 1995. Only 18 months later, the city of Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka state, is known as the Silicon Valley of India, being the home of some of the biggest and most profitable software companies in India, with a highly educated networked workforce and an extremely attractive market base to potential foreign investors. As part of a global urban infrastructure, a metacity of connected markets, cities are apparently still in high demand.

A very different image of the city was on display at the exhibition “The Archaeology of the Future City” (Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan, 1996), which interpreted the city as a materialised memory map of cultural history: “The City is an accumulation of spaces cobbled together in time. The City in time reflects the powers, rules, and economic systems of each age, succeeding as an actual space linked to that particular age's technology and styles. Personal aspirations can be found swirling in every nook and cranny of this city space, leaving traces of their collisions with public systems. The