by Elizabeth Lasater & Zoe Malliaros

Undertaking an analysis of the New York Times Real Estate section, we diagrammed different kinds of content in both the newsprint and online editions and compared published data to information found from governmental sources. Our findings include:

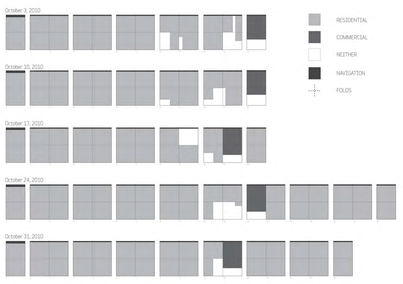
--In both editorial content and listings, the section is weighted heavily toward residential property to the almost total exclusion of commercial.

--The "Sales Around the Region" feature is skewed toward lower priced properties. The "snapshots" provided are significantly below average and median—thus favoring the lower end of the market despite representing fewer actual sales.

--Conversely, the prevalence of advertising copy that connotes affluence, especially "luxury," renders these lifestyle concepts meaningless.

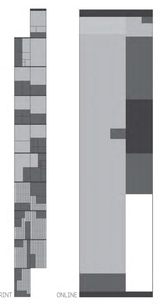
Residential Versus Commercial Content, New York Times Print Real Estate Section

The New York Times print Real Estate sections for the month of September 2010 show a pattern of content heavily weighted toward residential journalism, advertisements and classified listings. In a city where renters occupy 66% of units, residential real estate is a dream out of reach for most. But even in the worst of times for the real estate market, these fantasies still fuel a steady stream of articles and ads, implying that reader interaction is primarily for wish-fulfillment and vicarious enjoyment.



New York Times Real Estate Section, Sunday, October 24, 2010

The real estate section as manifest in a printed newspaper versus its digital counterpart expresses very different structures, reflecting an evolution in how we value and interact with its contents—journalism, classifieds and advertisements. Of these, perhaps the most radically divorced from its traditional format and nature is the classified real estate listing. The printed listings at the end of the printed newsprint section, tightly coded and succinct due to its own cramped real estate on the physical page, are replaced in the online edition by an immediately visible search bar which offers quick, tailored access to thousands of listings, images, descriptions and contact information.



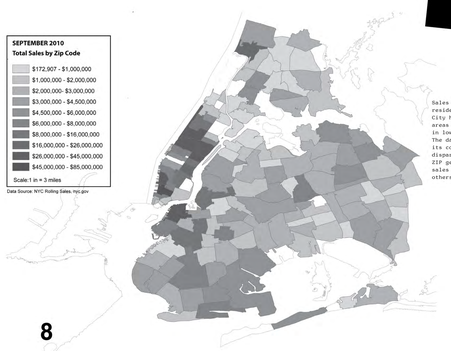
Reinterpretations of advertisements printed in the New York Times Real Estate section on Sunday, October 24, 2010.

Above
The desperate repetition of the word "luxury" to market residential real estate renders the word meaningless and unsavory. Other adjectives such as "stylish," "elegant," "ultimate," "choice" and "magnificent" suffer from the same prodigal overuse in real estate sales copy. This erosion of meaning renders the advertisements more and more nonsensical, a pattern our version fulfills to the absurdly exploitative extreme.

Page 4
Given that the average residential real estate sale in Manhattan last month was $1.2 million, most people engage with the New York Times Real Estate section as fantasy rather than as a real shopping aid. Playing with the "iPhone App" trope, this re-imagined advertisement reveals the subtext of the purported use and intentions of real estate apps.

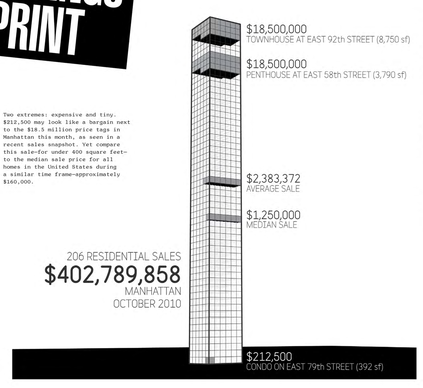
Page 5
This re-envisioned ad conflates a print advertisement for the New York Times Real Estate Classified section with the campaign slogans of the recent New York gubernatorial candidate Jimmy McMillan of The Rent Is Too Damn High party.

ALL THE LISTINGS FIT TO PRINT



Sales data by ZIP code for residential properties in New York City highlights the concentrated areas of higher price transactions in lower and central Manhattan. The data, while unsurprising in its concentration, reveals extreme disparities, with Manhattan's 10013 ZIP generating over $81 million in sales in a month, while several others generated less than $175,000.

Two extremes: expensive and tiny. $212,500 may look like a bargain next to the $18.5 million price tags in Manhattan this month, as seen in a recent sales snapshot. Yet compare this sale—for under 400 square feet—to the median sale price for all homes in the United States during a similar time frame—approximately $160,000.



GOWN TROUNCES TOWN, 2—0

by Mabel O. Wilson

When I ascend the grand steps in front of McKim, Mead, and White's stately Low Library on my daily trek to teach on Columbia University's campus, I am greeted by Daniel Chester French's heroic bronze sentinel Alma Mater. As our "nourishing and bounteous mother," she symbolizes the intellectual sustenance offered to all alumni, including myself, who have matriculated through the school's neo-classical uptown campus. While my downtown alma mater, New York University, may lack such an iconic tourist attraction, its alumni relations department works hard to remind its grads, about once a month, that our allegiance can be pledged one credit card swipe at a time. But what if your alma maters had developed voracious, insatiable appetites and were both hell-bent upon devouring their neighborhoods as part of their ambitious campus expansion plans? And if we were to analyze their tactics for amassing new territory, might the battle between competitive hot dog eaters Joey "Jaws" Chestnut's stuff and gulp technique (Columbia) and Takeru "the Tsunami" Kobayashi's dunk one, chomp two method (NYU) be an apt analogy?

Columbia's landholdings are the stuff of urban legends. When I was a graduate student in the early nineties, tales abounded about how Columbia was second only to the Roman Catholic Church for having assembled the largest cache of land holdings in the city. Some said that Columbia had been around so long that it still owned the land under Washington Square Park—an incursion into NYU's guarded territory to be sure. (The true story is that it was sited a bit further south, near Park Place, when it was still King's College in the eighteenth century.) Another widely circulating rumor was that Columbia held the deed for the parcel that Rockefeller Center now sits upon, its campus home before Columbia migrated uptown to its current Morningside Heights compound in 1897. Over the years, Columbia has stayed fairly compacted in its gated confines, choosing to build upwards and downwards rather than spread outwards. Efforts in 1968 to stake a claim in nearby Morningside Park for the construction of a new gymnasium, a facility that some believed would not be fully accessible to its predominately black and Hispanic Harlem neighbors, erupted in a spirited campus uprising led by students and the radical group SDS, taking over several buildings, much to the chagrin of campus administrators and city police.

Columbia University's recent attempt to move into Harlem has proceeded more like a game of whack-a-mole than an all-out ground assault. By accruing parcels one by one in far west Harlem, rechristened these days as Manhattanville, Columbia has amassed a 17-acre tract. Buildings are currently being cleared brick-by-brick so that Renzo Piano's master plan for a new mixed-use academic center can soon commence construction. The use of eminent domain, however, in which New York State designated some of the private properties as blighted in order to claim them for "public use," has not been implemented without considerable blowback. Attorneys representing two holdouts are currently appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court to reverse a recent ruling upholding the use of eminent domain. Despite all efforts to extricate them, it would seem some of those pesky moles are burrowing under for an extended stay.

The urban landholdings legend has been recently updated to rank NYU as the number one owner in the city, suggesting that they now possess more acreage than even the Archdiocese of New York. Indeed NYU's presence in Greenwich Village over the past twenty-five years has increased several-fold. Unlike Columbia's spatial strategy, which typifies what historian Michel Foucault characterized as "the enclosure," a hallmark of the nineteenth century's paradigm of the disciplined society, NYU's spatial strategy approximates what philosopher Gilles Deleuze called "rhizomatic," a distributed system emblematic of our society of control. To put it in laymen's terms, NYU's tactic has been somewhat akin to the pop-up shop that never leaves.

With new dormitories, rehabbed classrooms, more offices, galleries and cafes sprouting in all directions east, west, north and south, from the East Village to Governor's Island and from downtown Brooklyn to Abu Dhabi, NYU has planted hundreds of its violet flags in locales around the globe. But with the spring debut of "A University as Great as Its City: NYU's Strategy for Future Growth," a plan to add some six million square feet of space by its bicentennial in 2031, not all of its Village neighbors are happy about being further crowded out. In the master plan conceived by Grimshaw Architects, the effort to clone I.M. Pei's landmarked Silver Towers, for example, has already met with fierce opposition from local preservation groups who packed the public hearings held by Community Board 2 this past week. Their concern may be justified as this new venture by the 800 pound purple gorilla-in-the-hood would erect the tallest structure in Greenwich Village, a condominium/hotel tower whose top floors will no doubt offer panoramic vistas of NYU's vast holdings.

Whether or not NYU will move ahead with its plans in historic Greenwich Village and elsewhere in the city will attest to how well these community groups can tactically challenge, like their uptown comrades, the legions of lawyers these institutions have at their disposal. In the end it may not be enough that the city no longer feeds the beast of these land hungry institutions. Perhaps the land grab of my alma maters can be contained in other ways—Columbia may need a lap band to curtail its appetite, and NYU may need to undertake a master cleanse to flush out the toxins. Both institutions may come to realize that they need to reign in their ambitions in order to maintain a more balanced and healthy relationship with the town and its people, who ultimately give each school that distinctive New York City vibe.

IS BROOKLYN (ABU DHABI) OVER?

by Chloë Bass & Mitch McEwen

BUSHWICK, Abu Dhabi—The Life Cafe that opened here in Bushwick (Abu Dhabi) in 2026 may not be able to afford the rents in 2031. "It's getting really gentrified here," said barista Barack Chang. "When we first opened people were sort of skeptical of Bushwick (Abu Dhabi). They didn't think the conceptual artists like you have in Williamsburg (Singapore) would move out here. At first we were just serving the media drone-heads."

Over the past four years, Bushwick (Abu Dhabi) has seen rents climb. According to Mohamed Sanchez, it's not the concepters as much as the flash investors who are driving up the rents. A similar story, of course, played out in BedSley (Qatar) in the early 2020s, when apartment values skyrocketed to $10 million for a one-bedroom. "We were paying out of our eyes," said Rebekkah Swenson-Chang, who has since relocated to Canarsie (Qatar). "Fifteen dollars for a cup of coffee. Seventeen dollars for bus fare. We wanted to leave Brooklyn, but where to go from here?"

In Brooklyn (New York), there's a conflict between developers who want to expand Brooklyn to new cities in South America—current discussions center around Brooklyn (São Paulo) and Brooklyn (Medellín)—and those who want to focus on preserving the early 20-teens culture of Brooklyn (Abu Dhabi).

"It's too much, too fast," said Maria Johnson-Lopez, a resident in the Marcy Houses in BedStuy (New York). "The Life Group is just taking orders from the big developers, not paying any mind to how it is here in Marcy 1.0," said Johnson-Lopez, speaking of the Marcy Housing Google Life cooperative that has managed licensing and institutional satellite of the Marcy objects since 2018.

Even before its release 12 years ago, the Brooklyn Google Life App Visa had potential Brooklyners lining up worldwide. "The sheer volume of applications reflected that we were on to something very, very big," said Yasir Gregoricka, head of Human Management and Social Media. "On the one hand, it was scary. On the other hand, we knew we were creating a product that could possibly accommodate every one, eventually. It was a huge moment."

Now, those same Brooklyners delight questions of authenticity of their condos' common rooms spread across 17 global arenas, watching as even more Brooklyns start developments every day. "The Abu Dhabi prototype was great, but that's just not Brooklyn anymore," claimed one Prospect Heights (Singapore) resident, Skyping in from his local coffee shop. Prospect Heights (Singapore), perhaps the most successful neighborhood model, has often been the greater child for Life. On average, it has produced the most citizens interested in reinvesting in the Life subscription over time, surpassing even the media-focused Brooklyn neighborhoods in Abu Dhabi and Prague.

Two Trees, Brooklyn's main developer worldwide, is eager to push the Life app forward. Developed for Brooklyn in India, Japan and Russia indicates that all units could be filled well in advance of release. Even China is considering a massive rezoning of Beijing's virtual properties to accommodate Brooklyn (Beijing). "What we're seeing here is Brooklyn's amazing potential not only as a housing or job market, but as an ongoing culture-type. Every place we put it just thrives," said Julian Chowdhury, Two Trees' Global Liaison.

Despite concerns in Brooklyn (New York) about the rate and intensity of development, Marty Markowitz continues to be Life: Brooklyn's biggest advocate. The aging borough president still consults on new ways to package Brooklyn's character for global consumption. Said Markowitz, 85, "We used to say that Brooklyn was like no place on Earth. But what could be better than having the place like no place on Earth everywhere?"

"When we first opened people were sort of skeptical of Bushwick (Abu Dhabi). They didn't think the conceptual artists like you have in Williamsburg (Singapore) would move out here."

los angeles craigslist > central LA > housing > apts/housing for rent email this posting to a friend

Stating a discriminatory preference in a housing post is illegal - please flag discriminatory posts as prohibited.

Avoid scams and fraud by dealing locally! Beware any arrangement involving Western Union, Moneygram, wire transfer, or a landlord/owner who is out of the country or cannot meet you in person. *More info*

please flag with care:
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720 sq.ft. x 2731 W. Francis Ave Household Mutations

1920's apartment open for viewing beginning August 8th. Showing until August 22. Weekdays 10-6pm. Weekends 11-5pm.

Cory Fourplex. Lower unit in a four unit apartment. Two bedroom, one bath.
720 square feet of wall to wall carpeting.

Located just west of Downtown LA. Koreatown/Pico Union adjacent.
2731 W. Francis Ave. Los Angeles, CA. 90005 (google map/yahoo map)

THE HUNT: PART I
In August 2010, Los Angeles-based artist Carmen Argote posted a listing on Craigslist for a 720 square foot apartment at 2731 W. Frances Avenue in the Pico Union/Koreatown area. It was open for public viewing from August 8 to August 22. Interested parties were unwittingly entering an artwork entitled "720 sq. ft.: Household Mutations."

©2010 Gallery g727, Los Angeles

GRAFFITI GATE

by Peter Tolkin
Illustration by bioLINIA

NOVEMBER 22, 2030—After years of rancorous debate between neighborhood groups about the status of what some deemed an eyesore and others praised as a work of architectural genius, the graffiti-gate debacle finally found its resolution. In a unanimous ruling by New York City's newly elected 12 member Public Graffiti Abatement Board, the decorative "graffiti" gates at the base of the residential condominium at 40 Bond Street, developed 23 years ago by Ian Schrager of Studio 54 fame and mayoral candidate in the 2017 mayoral election, have been declared a nuisance and ordered to be removed. The board ruled that the "graffiti" design by architects Herzog and de Meuron, recipients in 2001 of the prestigious Pritzker Prize, was indeed graffiti and a defacement to the public right-of-way.

To make the determination, the board was especially focused on statements made by the architects on a now-defunct website showcasing the property (http://www.40bond.com/hdem_content.html). Here architect Jacques Herzog said of 40 Bond Street: "We like radical positions and we try to offer them. The idea of gates came to us first. It gave us a signature, a scale and individuality. The gates introduce the scale of the townhouses. The question was what kind of structure or grid or image would they have on them. We tested different things and most of them looked too traditional but we then came up with the idea of something very chaotic which we thought could be seen as coming from urban street culture, where graffiti is part of the landscape. So we took graffiti and manipulated it on the computer, the result is radical but it was a classical process of transformation."

Following the public hearing last week, Jenna Spitzer, the attorney representing 40 Bond Street residents, signed the NYC Graffiti Free consent form that states the following:

As a Property Owner or Authorized Representative of the Property Owner, I grant consent to the City to enter the property noted below for the purpose of removing graffiti. For the purpose of this Consent, "the City" means personnel and equipment of the City of New York, its agents and employees and/or a community organization designated by the City. The City may remove graffiti in the manner it deems appropriate, including but not limited to, by power-washing, painting, or use of chemical solvents.

The City will, in good faith, attempt to remove the graffiti from the property. However, by signing below, I understand that: 1) the graffiti removal services shall be performed as deemed appropriate by the City; 2) the City does not in any way obligate itself to perform any graffiti removal services other than those deemed appropriate by the City; and 3) the City assumes no responsibility if the area cleaned or painted by the City does not match the remainder of the property, or if some residue of existing graffiti remains.

I indemnify and hold the City harmless from any liability for physical injury, death or property damage arising from the performance of graffiti removal services on the property pursuant to this Consent, unless such liability arises entirely from actions or conduct of the City, its agents, employees or independent contractors. This Consent shall be effective until terminated in writing by the Property Owner, or by the Authorized Representative of the Property Owner.

According to New York City officials, the city's graffiti abatement crews will begin removal the week following the November 28, 2030, Thanksgiving holiday.

REAL PROPERTY

by Catherine Ingraham

"Real property" is the western legal term for land, tenements (real estate) and corporeal hereditaments (substantial permanent objects inherited with land and houses). Other forms of property law, such as intellectual or personal property law, have been historically structured around real property law—as if they were slightly fallen forms, as if they had left the Eden of real property. "Black's Law Dictionary" defines property as "a singular and exclusive dominion, in total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe." And yet there is also law which strongly or weakly constricts rights to property. Real property is thus, "a relation among people with regard to things" that is enforceable by law or custom; in either case, enforceable by principles and rules of action related to the security of persons and property.

Corporeal property—land, houses—is "real" in a legal sense but also, philosophically, in a common sense. It belongs to a world of things that lie, with a certain indisputable comfort, on the real side of ancient disputations about what is real and what is not. The ideas that anchor such disputations are treated, from a legal standpoint, as somewhat less real than land and buildings, which are the most real of the billions of things owned. Trees, for example, are not as real as land, although they run with land. In property terms, trees are under a "stewardship" that is not unlike the guardianship of children. Such a view of trees is an inhibitor to that deeper, more complex view we sometimes seek of landscapes, territories and habitats.

Over the millennia of fantastically subtle interpretations of human existence and its relation to the material world—which have given us property and its exotic legal-juridical regulatory systems—there have been several notable misprisions and wrong turns. The early American enslavement of people, for example, required a definition of certain people as things that ran with the land or, more accurately, as things that were able to be propertied as land was propertied—alienable and transferable according to the laws which governed inherited land. Other kinds of people in that same era, such as white women, were chattel (personal property), but they were neither alienable nor inheritable.

Acting as a thing—even in our contemporary adapted state as subjects—is not easy nor, from the owner's point of view (slave owner or wife owner), does the power of ownership easily succeed in subduing life. Landowners were attracted to slavery because of the compelling prospect of investing in the reproductive capacity of human beings in order to plant them, like seeds of tobacco plants, in the land that they were being forced to work. This seemed to be, and was for a while, a eugenic fantasy of a self-generating workforce. Human life is an expensive form of life and people-as-property is always an endgame that kills the exact "things" upon which the system depends. But saying so does not mitigate its force in the formation of peoples or nations.

The principles of real property, and property in general, include an expansionist tendency that contradicts the tight exclusivity of property's domain. In this view, property is agency; property desires the neighbors' property and wants to property, if possible, everything from people to languages to architecture to rivers. Real property, in particular, keeps the courts highly entertained—families murderous around inheritances, real estate and mortgage crises, historic preservation cases, eminent domain claims, disputed international territories, ownership of wildernesses. This is why Gabriel Garcia Marquez calls the history of property an epic "human adventure" that should not be taught in the "arid afternoon" of political theory. If property is arguably the most powerful character in these adventures, we see how, as Garcia Marquez suggests, it properly belongs to the richly imagined worlds of literature and poetry.

READING THE REAL ESTATE SECTION—A GUIDE

by Brigette Borders & Minna Ninova

Real estate shopping in New York City is a lot like finding love—you know what you want, consider yourself worthy of something good and yet always wind up meeting promising prospects that turn out to be heartless sociopaths. After time, you begin to develop the hardened skin of a shrewd cynic who can smell a fake before you walk through the door. But you don't give up—you're a New Yorker. You get up, eat brunch and crack the Times once more. Herewith, a guide to decoding the seduction of the personals real estate listings.

COZY—Synonym for the more technical term, "teensy-weensy." A tour of the cozy apartment lasts approximately the time it takes to turn one's head from left to right. Width not guaranteed to exceed occupant's wingspan.

DOORMAN BUILDING—An apartment building whose residents happily pay 35% premiums for the convenience of being affected by citywide doorman strikes. A must-have for aspiring patricians.

EAT-IN KITCHEN—This utilitarian kitchen's counter/prep station/wet bar will fold out to host you and one guest for a "petit" dejeuner.

EFFICIENCY KITCHEN—Often equipped with mini-fridge and powder-room sized sink, the essential amenity for New Yorkers who neither cook nor store food. Ideal for preparing Asian-fusion cuisine, such as ramen noodles.

FURNISHED—Ostensibly convenient for short-term renters who travel light; the cleanliness-concerned need not apply.

LOFT—An apartment style once popular with Manhattan's artistic elite, today's loft is any space larger than a cupboard that can be subdivided into three or more bedrooms by makeshift plywood walls. Bathrooms optional, leases improbable, sound insulation inconceivable. Highly prized as party locations in the borough of Brooklyn.

MINUTES FROM—Typically denotes any length of time between one and 59 minutes.

NEAR MAJOR TRANSPORTATION—See: MINUTES FROM.

PET-FRIENDLY—Fish welcome.

PRE-WAR—Housing style beloved for its detailing, generously proportioned rooms and tall ceilings. Fit for those with an aversion to embellishments like elevators or non-lead-based paint.

RENT CONTROLLED—To find one of these mythical gems, start with the obituaries; comparable to market-rate apartments almost anywhere else.

ROOF ACCESS—A code-violation rooftop space accessible by one or more of the following: fire escape, ladder, drawbridge, trampoline or tall people. See also: TERRACE.

STUDIO—Sometimes synonymous with "art-space," this apartment-type speaks of a certain lifestyle—the lifestyle of having a bed next to a stove next to a toilet.

SUNNY—Includes at least one window.

TERRACE—1. A set of operable windows that will permit a smoke break for at least two people without risking defenestration. 2. A fire escape.

UP-AND-COMING NEIGHBORHOOD—This neighborhood might be trendy in ten years, doubling your value. Or it might not.

WALK-IN CLOSET—A closet. "Walking in" will be limited to small, thin children.

WALK-UP—Short for walk-up-walk-down-forget-phone-walk-back-up-walk-back-down-come-back-with-heavy-groceries-walk-up-curse-your-fate-lay-in-couch.

WASHER/DRYER—If you find one, don't think. Just sign on the dotted line.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Having witnessed the increasing fragility of the AMERICAN DREAM, the Temple Hoyne Buell Center at Columbia University envisions a potentially defining future for American cities and suburbs in which URBAN TRANSFORMATION is stimulated by robust PUBLIC INVESTMENT in housing and related infrastructures. Recent research has identified PUBLICLY OWNED LAND in eight growing national Megaregions whose foreclosure rates, demographics, and economic and social indicators demonstrate a need for public housing. Currently slated for federal and local infrastructural investment, these sites constitute A NEW THRESHOLD OF POSSIBILITY in which a radical rethinking of public housing design, policy and public process could be tested. Challenging cultural assumptions concerning home ownership and associated settlement patterns, such as suburban sprawl, The Buell Center seeks to recast the notion of PUBLIC as A COMMON GOOD, thereby widening the current debates about the values and visions that DEFINE American cities and SHAPE its cities. An inspired alternative to the current relationship between land, housing, infrastructure and that which is considered public, about our cities and suburbs must be found. Your future attention and participation are requested.

Dated the 10th day of November, 2010.

Temple Hoyne Buell Center
for the Study of American Architecture
Columbia University
Graduate School of Architecture,
Planning and Preservation

REAL MONEY, FAKE LAND

by John Cantwell

Since its creation nearly a decade ago, Second Life, the hugely successful massively multiplayer online game from Linden Labs, has spawned a thriving economy in which players buy and sell goods and services created within the game. With a GDP approaching that of a small island nation—The New Scientist estimates, conservatively, that Second Life's total economic activity approached $600 million in 2006—Second Life has become something that would have seemed like science fiction not long ago: a virtual society with real-world financial implications.

Central to Second Life's economy is its booming real estate market, which thrives even as real-world real estate prices continue to slump. Just days ago an elaborate multi-dome complex of nightclubs created for the online world Entropia Universe sold for more than a half-million (real) dollars.

From 2001 until this past year, Second Life's terms of service were structured in a way that encouraged "Residents"—this is what Linden Labs calls Second Life players—to create content for the Second Life world: massive castles, exacting recreations of the world's major cities, scale recreations of space shuttles, anything you could imagine.

The thinking was that by allowing players to create their own content, Linden Labs was setting the framework for a much more immersive gaming experience, one that could otherwise only be built with a massive staff of programmers. In return for their efforts, Residents were given sole ownership of their creations. This transfer of ownership, from administrator to player, opened the floodgates for the markets that have come to shape Second Life. Skilled coders and designers began hawking their wares—anything from furniture to prefabricated housing to virtual brothels—to Second Life's rapidly expanding usership.

Second Life businesses were opened, and Residents eagerly forked over their Linden Dollars, Second Life's virtual currency, which were then reconverted by retailers to real currency (Linden Dollars, or L$, must be purchased with actual currency; the exchange rate is roughly L$215 to $1). Thus, a hybrid economy, both virtual and terrestrial, was born.

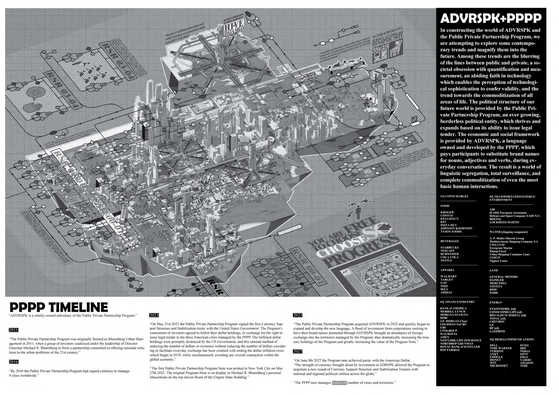
The value of goods and services on Second Life is largely determined by how Linden Labs prices space within the game. Since it is a virtual space, there is no natural physical limit on the area of land available in Second Life. Rather, scarcity is attached to server space. The more (rack)space a user consumes with their activity, the more money they pay.

Here's how it works: every object in Second Life is comprised of a building block called a Prim. Now here's the catch: the amount of land you own on Second Life determines the number of Prims that can be attached to your account. For instance, the smallest plot of land on Second Life can only accommodate 117 Prims. This makes efficiency a major consideration in design: a small house containing only 50 Prims is more valuable than a house of similar size containing 75 Prims. It also creates incentive to purchase more land.

The fact that real monetary value has been attached to the simple consumption of server space points to a different future for real estate: one in which virtual real estate becomes far more precious than real land. It's a transition already in process. Tech companies spend millions on vast server farms tucked out of site, while investment banks and hedge funds pay enormous premiums to use high-speed servers capable of shaving milliseconds off of transaction times.

Even as these changes occur, the legal efficacy of private virtual property remains uncertain. Linden Labs, perhaps realizing the immense value of the property it was squandering, altered its terms of service in 2009. Residents now hold a "limited license" when they purchase virtual property. In response, a series of class-action lawsuits were filed this spring, with plaintiffs claiming they were duped by Linden. In a post on the social media blog Mashable discussing the suit, several commenters argued that the case simply highlights the difficulty of enforcing terms of service on websites. Another commenter offered a more direct thought: "Go outside."

IS THIS RENT TOO DAMN HIGH?



BEDBUG

As told to Daniel Payne

I'm the most terrifying word in New York. Maybe you just call me the "B-word." Whatever works for you. Meanwhile, I'm in your sheets, hiding in books or maybe crawling all over your nice wood furniture. And I'm not alone. I've brought a few thousand members of my family. Brothers and sisters. Cousins. We're not a problem. We're an infestation.

What can you do to stop us? Get paranoid. Make sure every guest takes a hot shower before they come over. Ask where they've been today. Not that it'll help. I'm sneaky, resilient and resourceful. I've personally traveled across continents tucked into beards and knit caps. I saw most of Eastern Europe that way, with that band, um, Deer-something. I've seen you try to use those newfangled technologies—there's that one website called Bedbug Registry...yeah, I know what a website is. Trust me, you can't track us. Log on and search, but while you're doing that, I'm busy breeding. Come back to bed, sweetie!

I see you're scared. Every time I see someone hesitate before grabbing a piece of furniture off the sidewalk, think about it, then walk away, I know: we're winning. No more can you decorate your apartments with fashionable furniture from yesteryear. That brown velour couch? I'd think twice, friend. And don't get me started on the damage we've done in second-hand stores. Take that, Salvation Army!

"Small package, big punch." That's the bedbug motto. You can't even see us, but we still send you scurrying. We don't even need our best swarming tactics at this point. My uncle Willie wandered off alone and got lost at the 3 Crew building a few weeks back. In minutes you people are sending emails, calling up experts begging for help. And if you'd known Willie like we do, you'd know he's so worthless that we don't let him open up dinner, much less close down an entire building. The guy's got a brain like a mite!

But we can't fault him for wanting to get out and about. There's so much to do in New York. Those new seats in your movie theaters are great places to hang out for a few days and meet new people. Wasn't "Avatar" great? It kind of reminded me of what we could be if us bugs could really mate with you humans. Our best researchers are working on the possibilities now; we'd love to increase our lifespan, and all you people are living so long now.

Speaking of which, some my cockroach friends might be able to survive nuclear Armageddon. And, yes, you almost did us in with DDT last century; our elder generations ran the Bowery before they nearly disappeared altogether. But when you people figured out that you were killing yourselves in the process—not to mention that ugly bird you guys call a beloved national symbol—the comeback was on. My ancestors spent years in foreign training camps building resistance to your so-called repellents. Now we're back to stay.

Listen, everyone's reign of terror has to end sometime. Cockroach, you had a good run, sending a lot of wide-eyed transients packing up their apartments, but every house has its Brutus. What's that sticking out of your back, my enemy? Oh, it looks like a little knife, driven through that exoskeleton by me and a few thousand pals.

**Bedbugs! Bedbugs! Bedbugs!