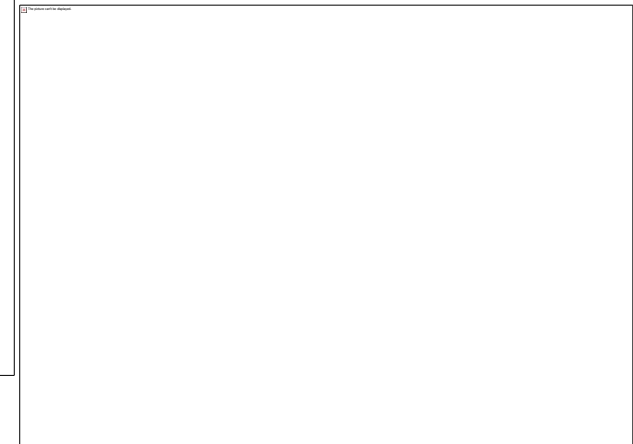


# Virtual Worlds in Context

Stephen Downes

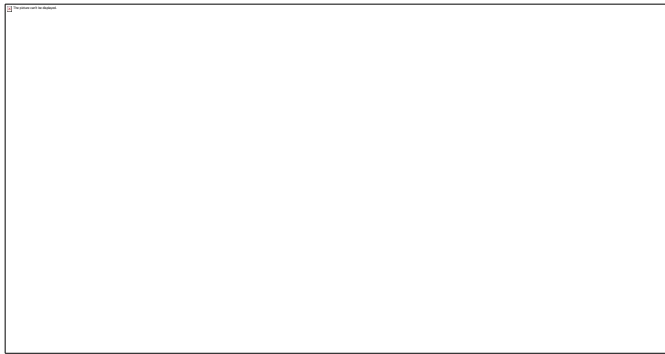
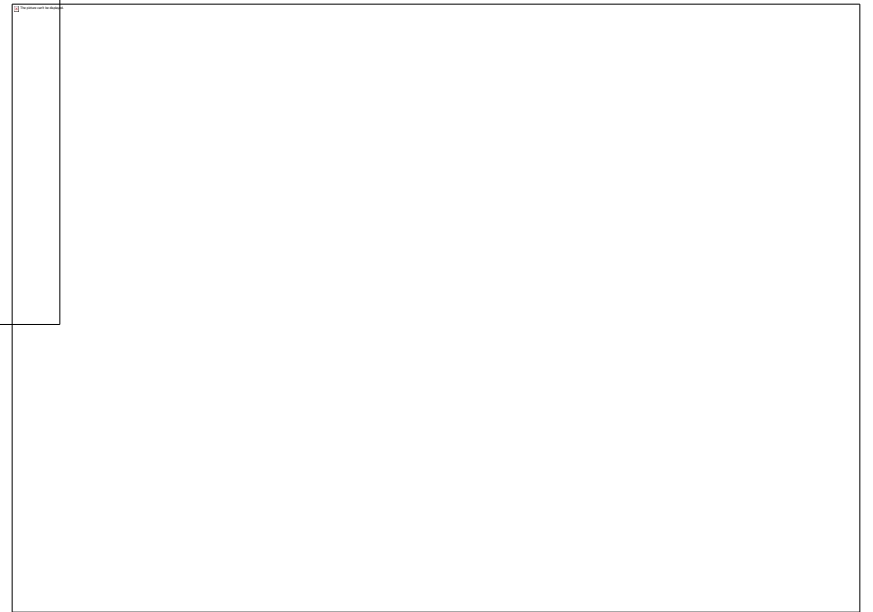
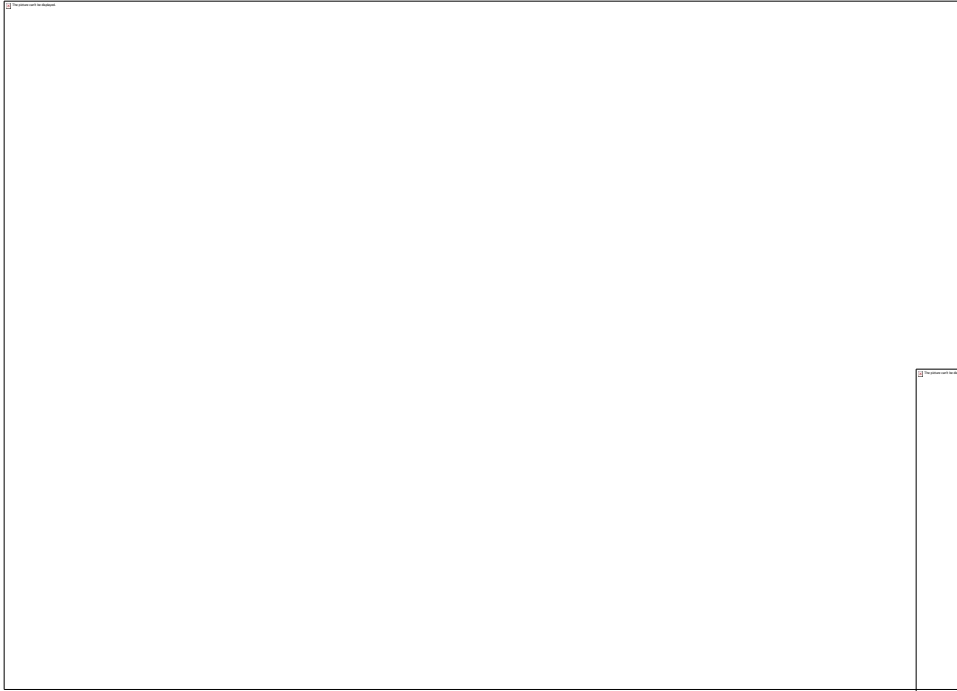
May 10, 2007



## The Second Life Phenomenon

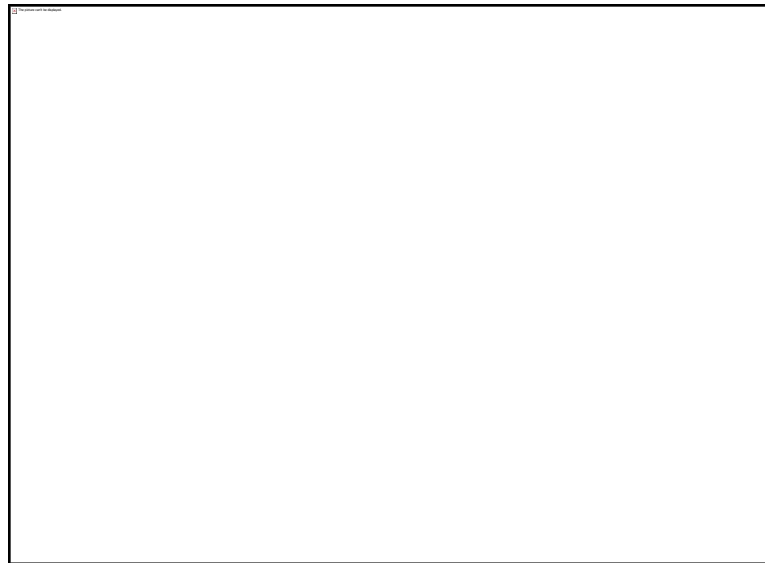
<http://secondlife.com/whatis/economy-graphs.php>

# A (mostly) economic phenomenon



80 percent of active internet users will have a 'second life' by 2011???

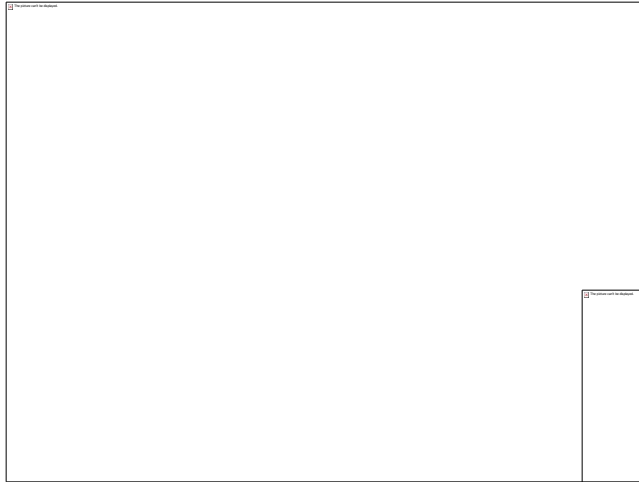
That's what Gartner says...



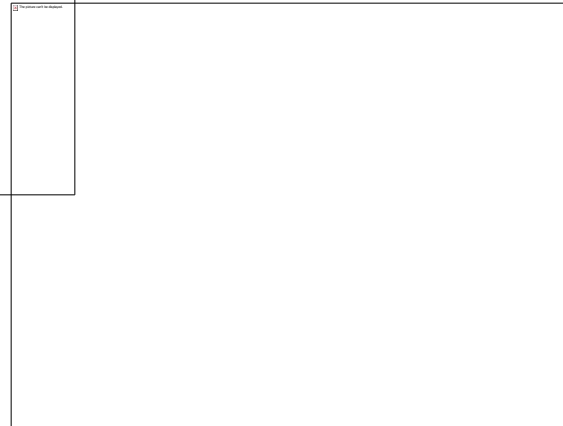
Of course they are sponsoring a symposium on this...

[http://home.businesswire.com/portal/site/google/index.jsp?ndmViewId=news\\_view&newsId=20070424006287&newsLang=en](http://home.businesswire.com/portal/site/google/index.jsp?ndmViewId=news_view&newsId=20070424006287&newsLang=en)

## Some Edu Initiatives...



“Schome will NOT be another ‘virtual learning space’, it will involve physical spaces for learners”

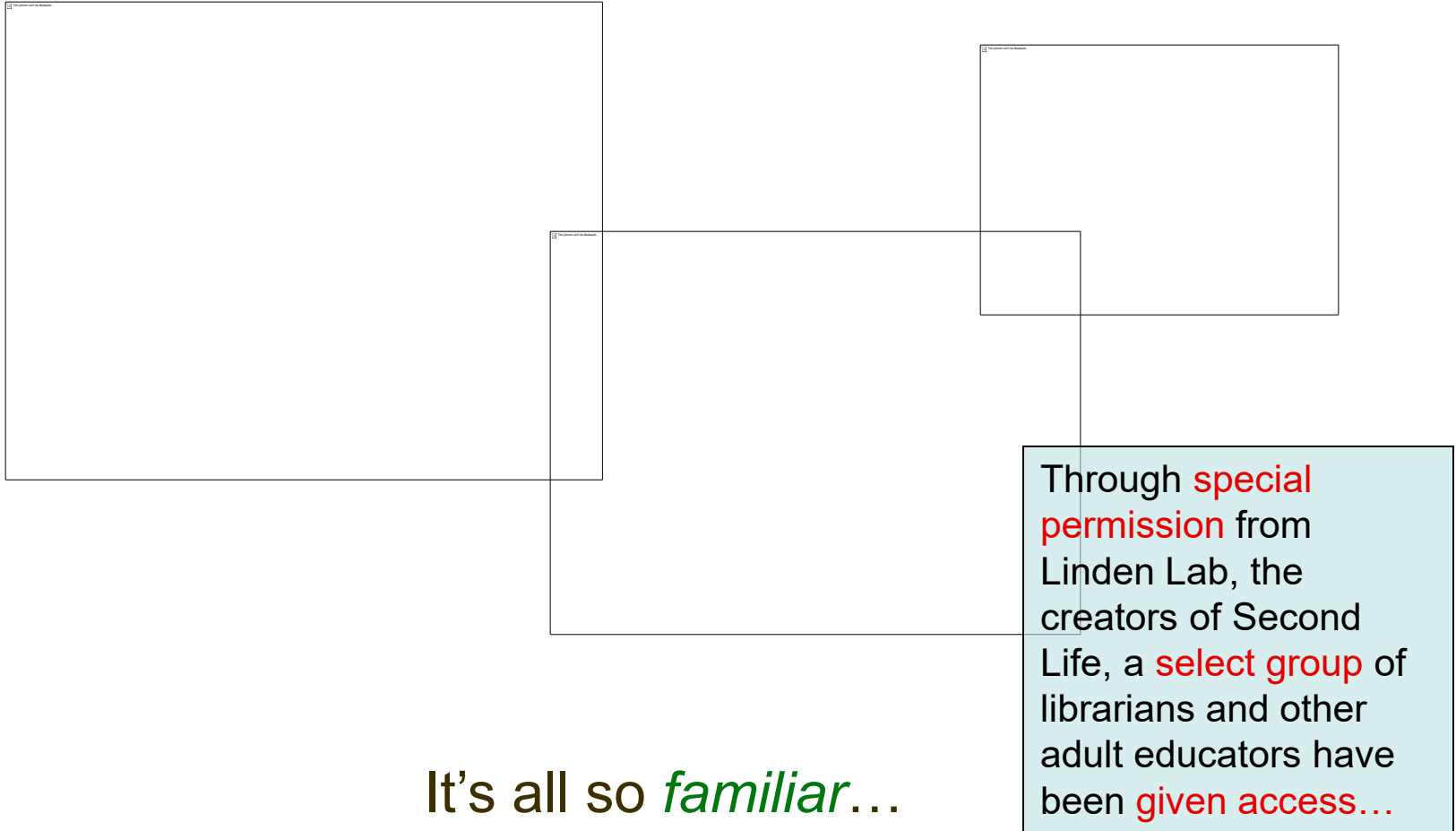


## Schome

(Not school, not home...)

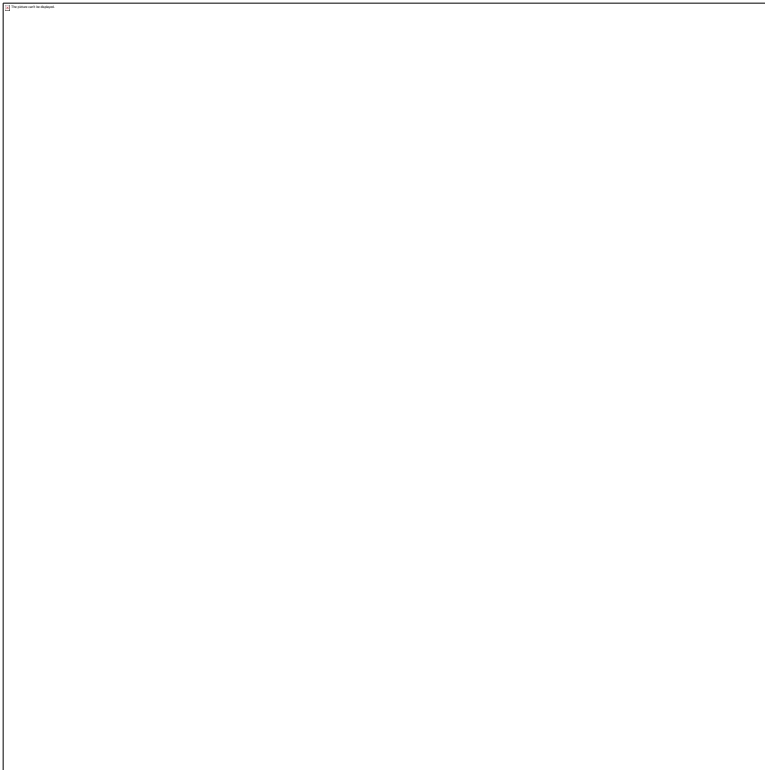
<http://www.schome.ac.uk/>

# Teen Library in Second Life



It's all so *familiar*...  
<http://plcmc.org/teens/secondlife.asp>

Through **special permission** from Linden Lab, the creators of Second Life, a **select group** of librarians and other adult educators have been **given access**...



- Research
  - grad students
  - accessibility
  - LMS-2L mash-ups
  - cool tools
  - 2L in healthcare
- Etc...

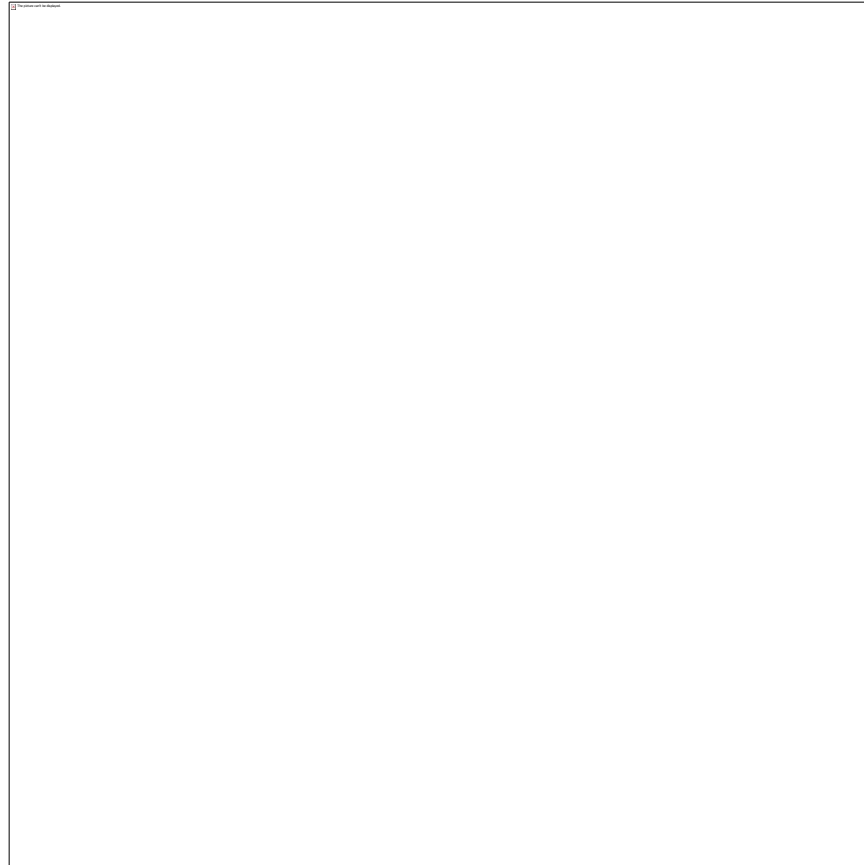
## [SLED] Second Life Educators

<http://www.simteach.com/forum/index.php>

<http://www.storyofmysecondlife.com/?p=116>

# CAVE

Center for  
Advanced Virtual  
Education



But...

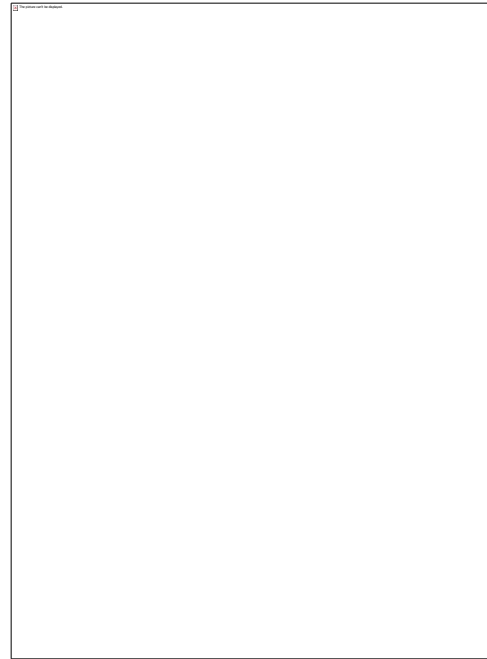
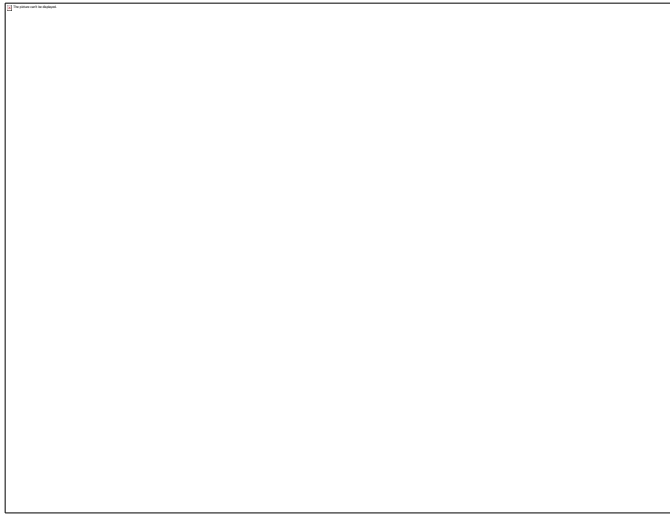
But...

It's all so *derivative*, isn't it?

Now! The ridiculousness of this does not escape me. I'm in my presentation, pointing my audience to the online wiki handouts, via a presentation slide. It points to a web URL that will link SL users to teleport to my office. There you can click the drawer for the current presentation, which links you back out to your browser. **Dave Warlick** <http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/2007/05/09/what-im-doing-in-the-cave>



# Discovery Educator Network...



If you have a  
*brand*, you're in  
Second Life...

<http://discoveryeducatornetwork.com>

# Encountering Second Life...



**It's like a scene from Star Trek**  
(You know, where the flying heechees have eliminated all life...)  
**until you hit the casinos**

# Questioning the numbers...

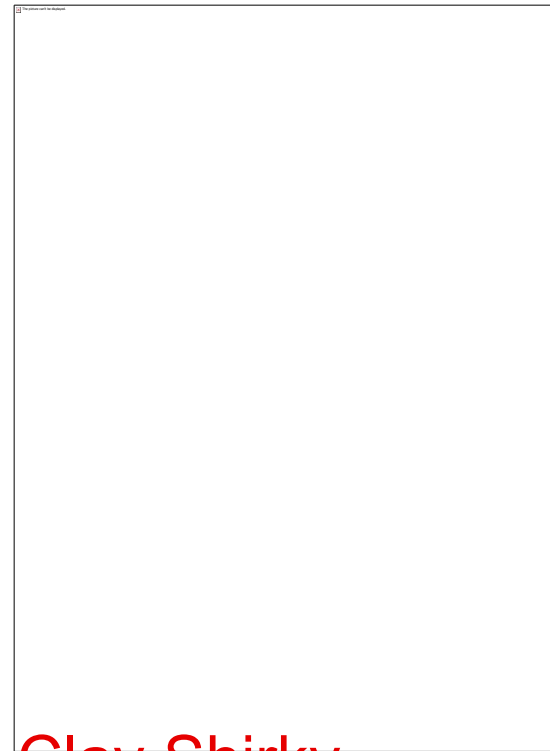
‘A story too good to check...’



‘Second Life is largely a "Try Me" virus...’

‘a service that appeals to tens of thousands of people, but in a billion-person internet, that population is also a rounding error.’

<http://valleywag.com/tech/second-life/a-story-too-good-to-check-221252.php>



Clay Shirky

# Why the big story?

## Shirky:

- people don't remember the history of VR
- a 3D reality is conceptually simple
- the media loves the 'content is king' story
- the current mania is largely push-driven

I ask....

Where are the bottom-up user-driven initiatives?

Where is 2L wikipedia? 2L OSS?  
Why was copybot killed?

Some history...

## Two sides of cyberspace:

1. The 'gamer' side
2. The 'text' side



# What is Second Life, really...?

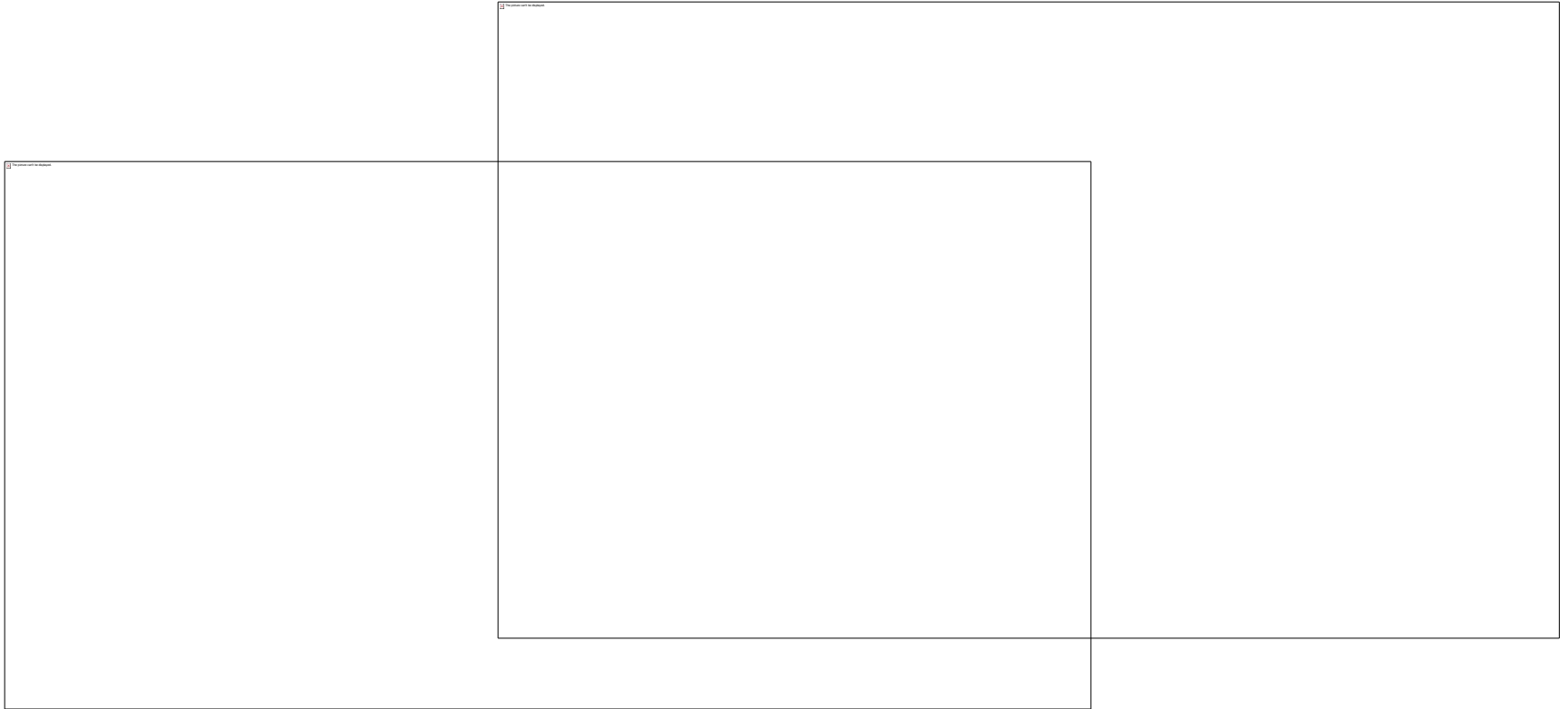


Despite being 'not a game' (which appeals a *lot* to the text people) it is the latest inheritor of a long line of online games.

the 'hero' in the gaming environment is the same as the 'student' in the learning environment and the 'individual' in the real environment.

<http://www.downes.ca/post/40010>

# Virtual Worlds Online...



MUDs, MOOs, MUSEs, DIKUs

# The Multi-Academic User Domain (MAUD)



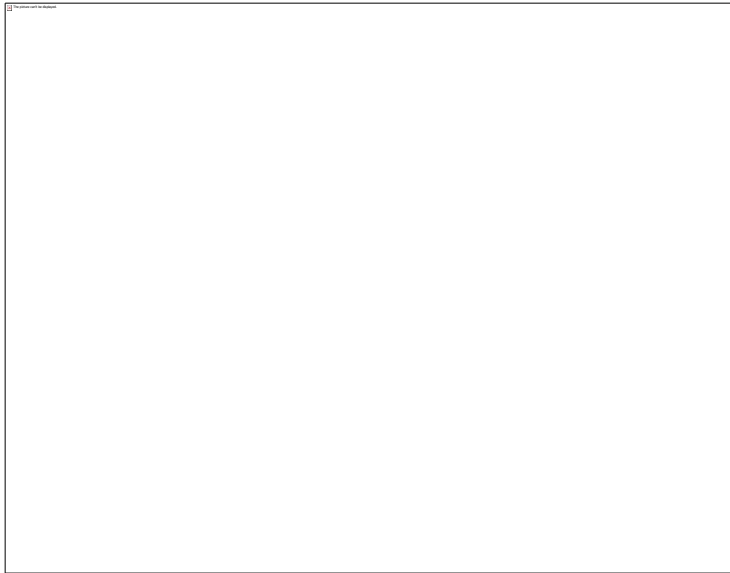
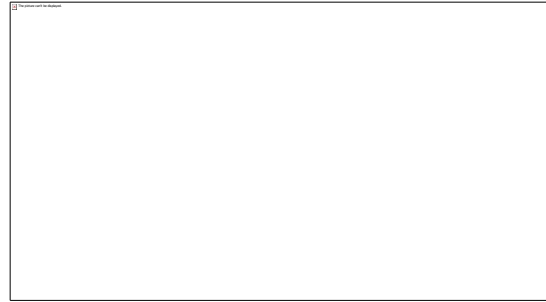
The inheritors...

Diversity University.... Walden University

Terry Anderson at Athabasca University



# More VR....

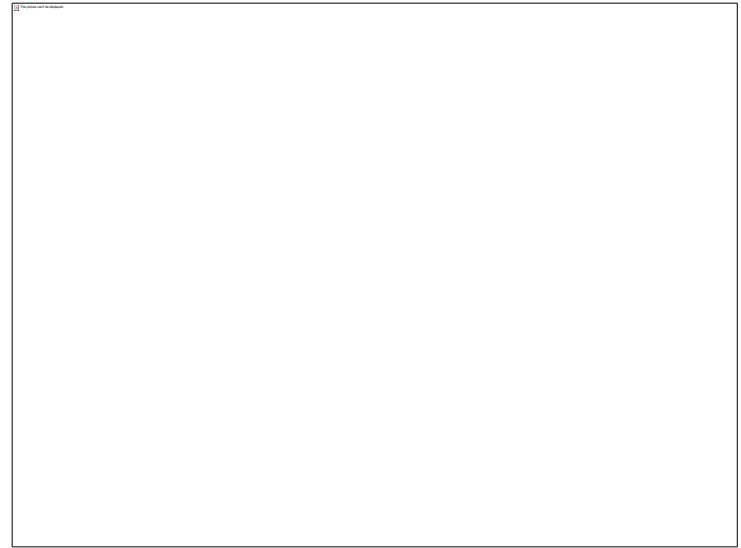


Active Worlds

The Palace



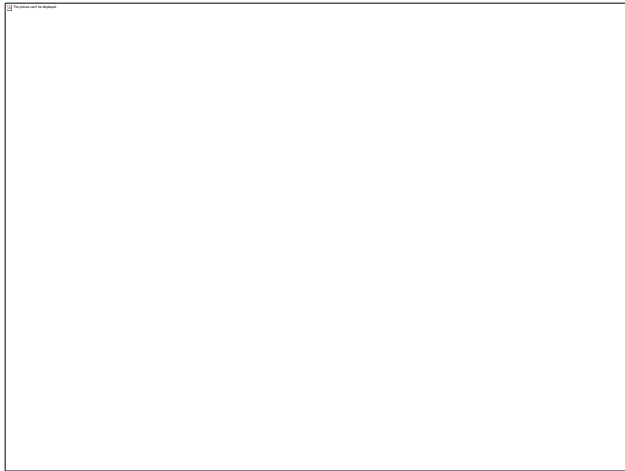
# And more VR....



Everquest



World of  
Warcraft



Furcadia

# Five 'laws' of virtual reality...?

Gartner

- \* First Law: Virtual worlds are not games  
**Fashion!**
- \* Second Law: Every avatar is a real person.  
**Bots**
- \* Third Law: Be relevant and add value.  
**Casinos**
- \* Fourth Law: Contain the downside.  
**Porn**
- \* Fifth Law: This is a long haul.  
**Crash**

# Let's look at the *real* issues of Second Life

It's helpful to recall a guy  
named David Noble...

Yes, *that* David Noble...

"universities are not only  
undergoing a technological  
transformation. Beneath  
that change, and  
camouflaged by it, lies  
another: the  
commercialization of higher  
education".

Digital Diploma Mills

[www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue3\\_1/noble/](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue3_1/noble/)

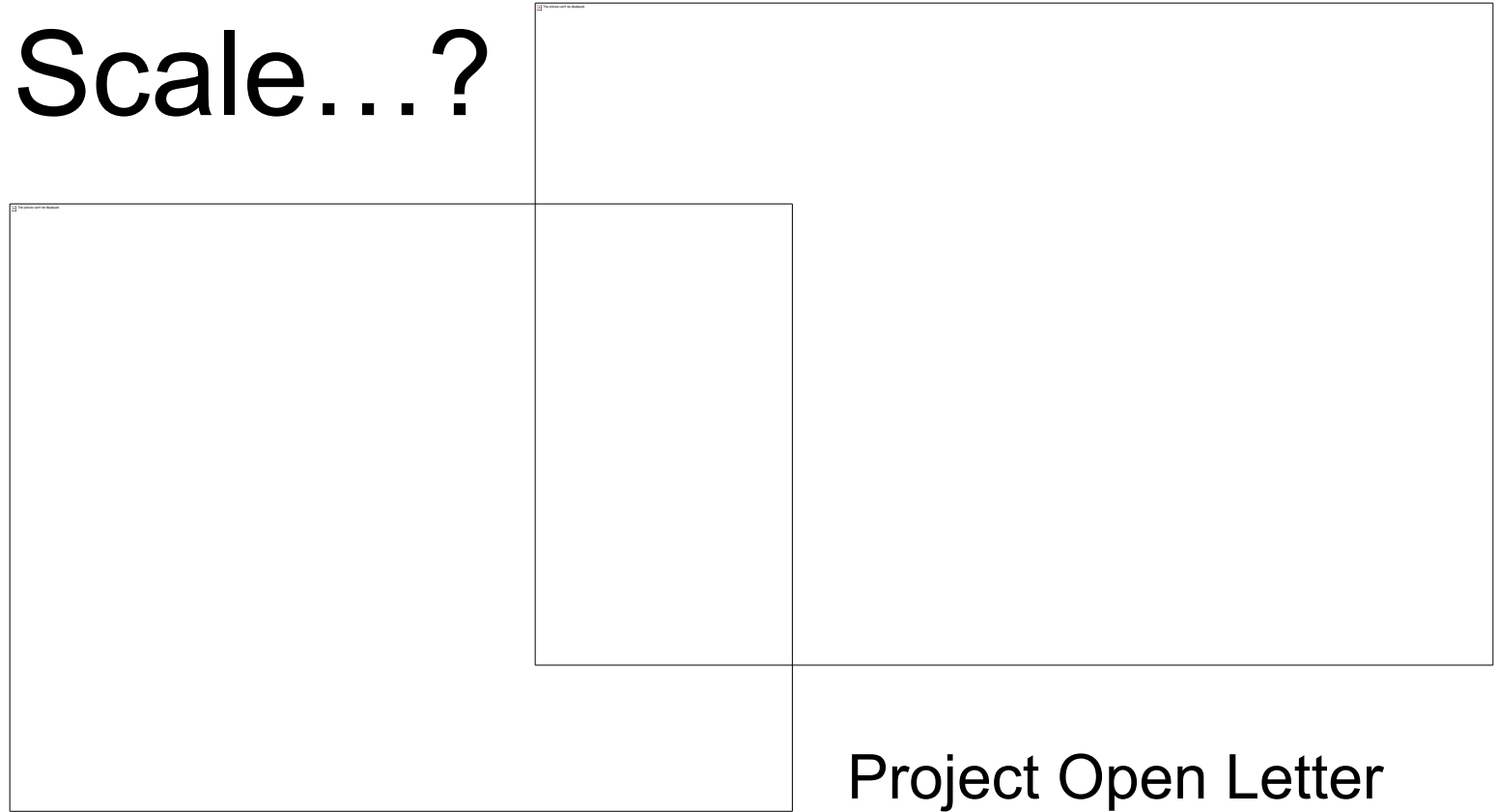
# Who owns Second Life?

'Babbage Linden' tells  
us people "own" their  
content...

... as long as you keep  
paying your rent

... and paying for your  
identity

# Can Second Life Scale...?



Project Open Letter

<http://www.projectopenletter.com/>

<http://www.dmwmedia.com/news/2007/05/04/analysis-reality-is-hitting-second-life-hard>

# What About Interoperability...?

Open Source Server?

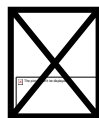
IBM call for a 'Virtual Planet'

<http://www.pcworld.com/article/id,131511-pg,1/article.html>

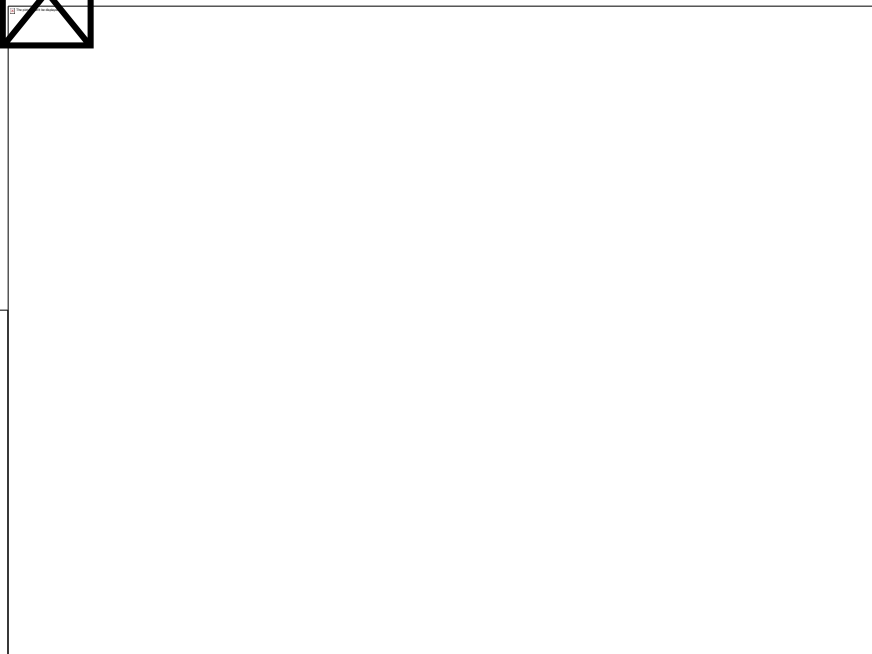
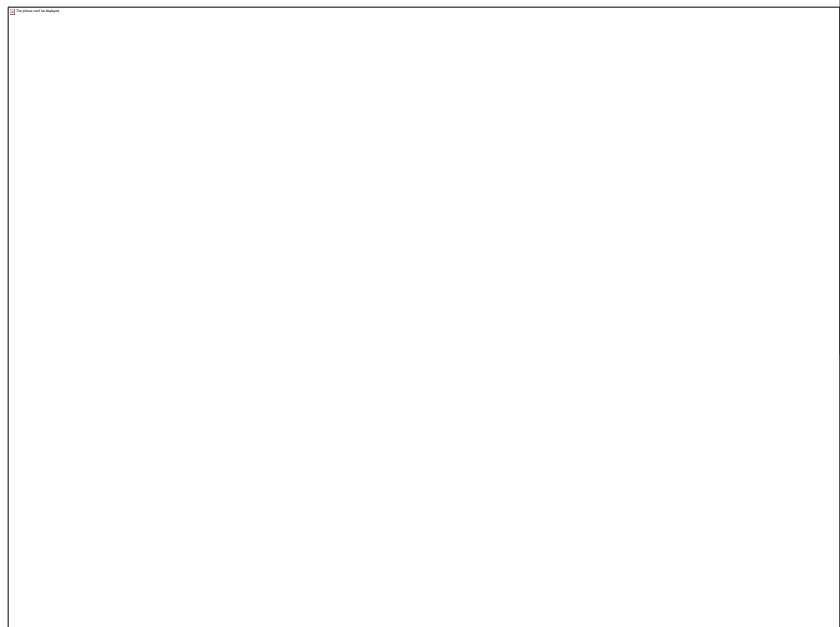


<http://www.intermud.org/>

# What's *really* happening?



This...



Looks like this



Second Life taps into a latent conservatism that serves their interests and helps people feel comfortable in familiar surroundings...



## It's so *not* Web 2.0

*Contra Ian Davis*

- pedagogy doesn't change
- power structures don't change
- the elite remains the elite

Where is data portability?

Where are open standards?

<http://www.rojo.com/mojo/4110>

# Where's the 'there' there?

Streaming of  
videos?

Standing in front  
of a class?

Avatars?

Rehearsal?



## Virtual Worlds vs Simulations

Hamish MacLeod

## Why Second Life?

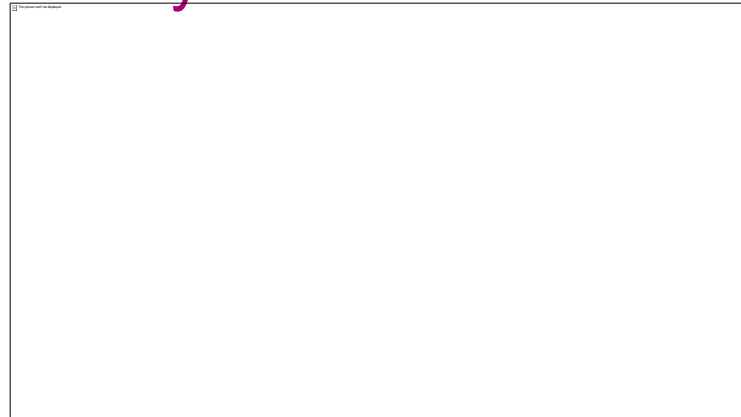
‘Cross-Platform’

‘Openness and Neutrality’

‘Manifest involvement with education’

Are these unique to Second Life?

To virtual reality?



Enhanced visualization

Why

Rapid development potential

Second

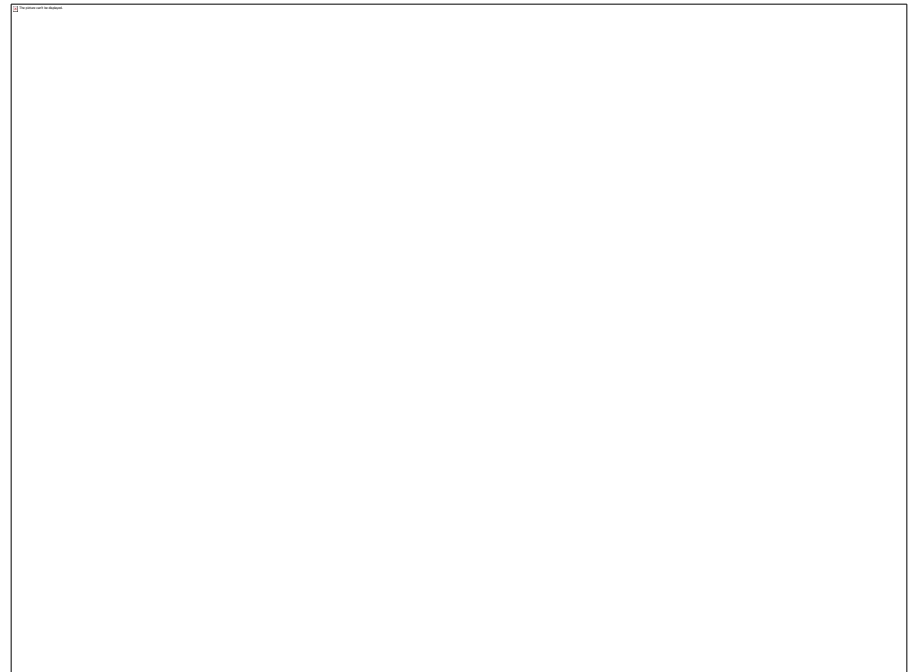
International communication

Life?

Sense of presence

Joanna Scott

Nature Publishing Group



None of these is unique to Second Life

2L isn't even  
particularly good  
at some of them...

Compare, for example, with  
phenomena like Instant Messaging,  
MySpace, YouTube, Skype, Wii...

“We would *never* consider placing our articles in  
Second Life... it's just pointless.” - Joanna Scott

So what's the real point of 2L?

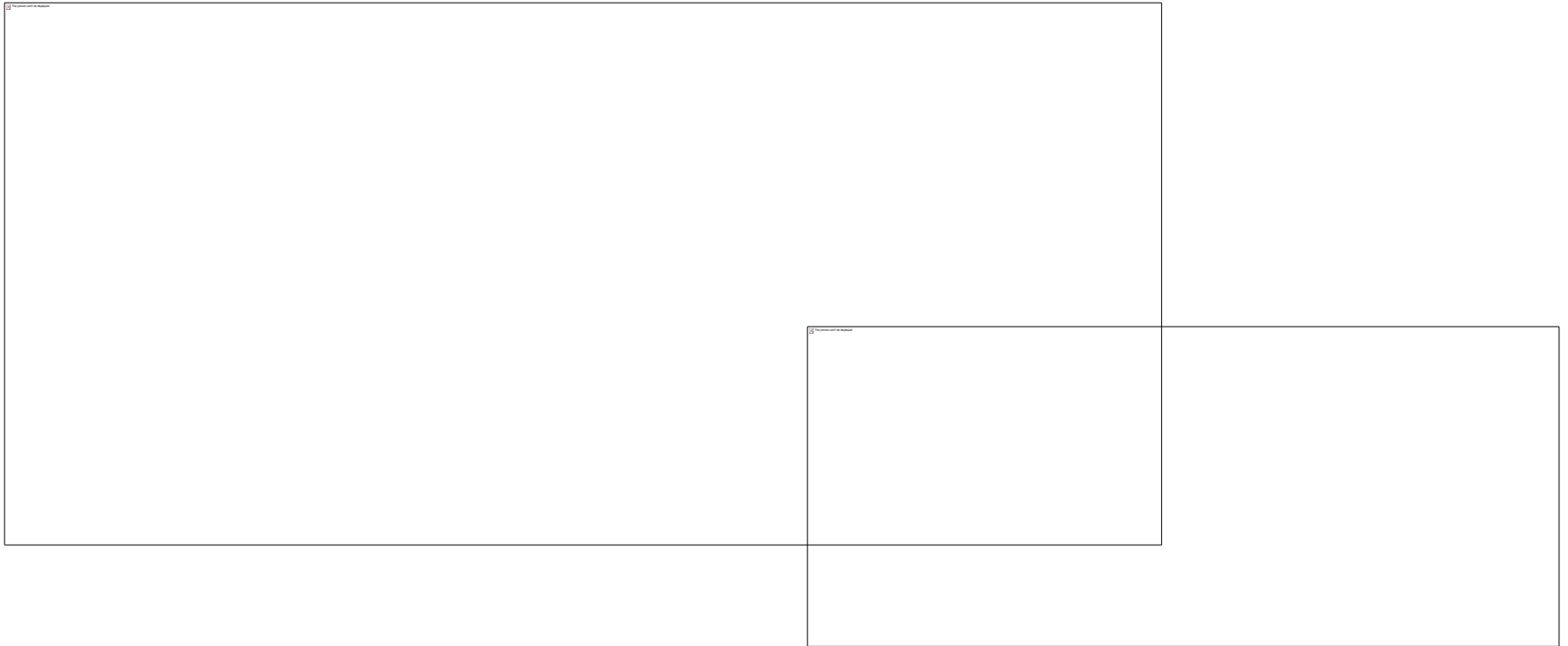




## Onder Skall

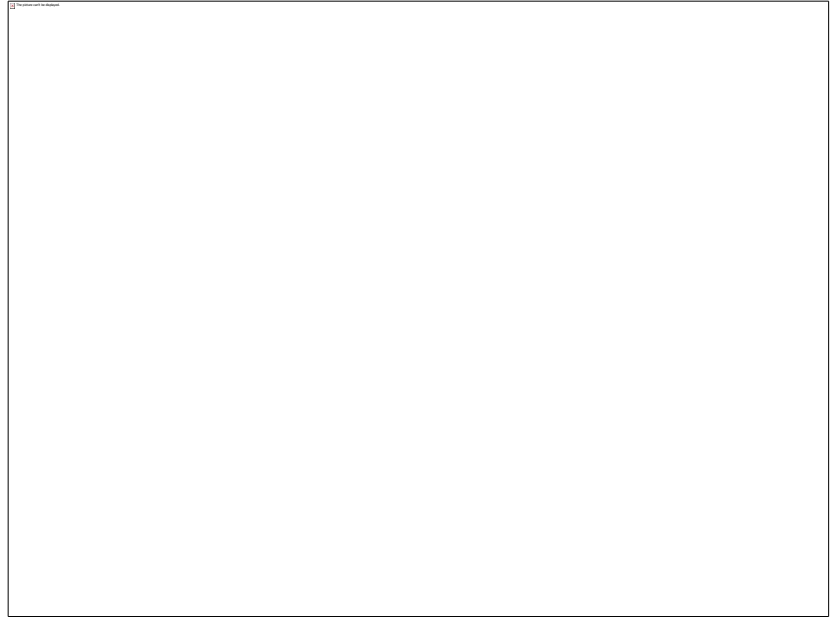
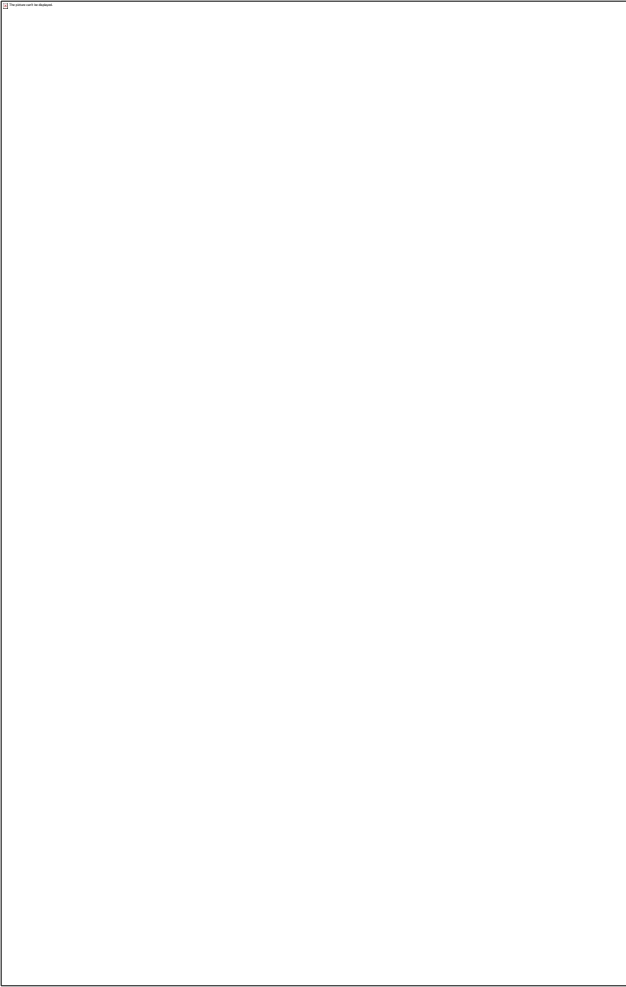
- \* 1. Real money must move in and out of the “virtual” economy freely.
- \* 2. Users must be able to create unique content and retain ownership over it.
- \* 3. The world must be persistent, and the users able to change it.

# Is this what online learning has been waiting for?



Commercial transactions?





**Private ownership?**

# Silos and walled gardens?

Built by companies and institutes that can afford 'islands'





**Branding?**

# Proprietary technology?



# An identity fee?



I submit....

That the future for virtual reality is (must be?) exactly what Second Life isn't...

- distributed hardware, distributed ownership
- open source - not proprietary technology
- noncommercial (or at least, for public education, a noncommercial alternative)
- diverse and democratic

A virtual world more like the web...

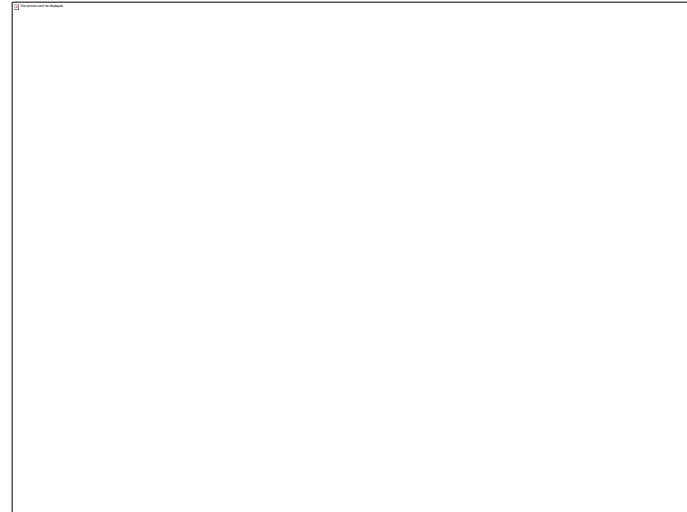
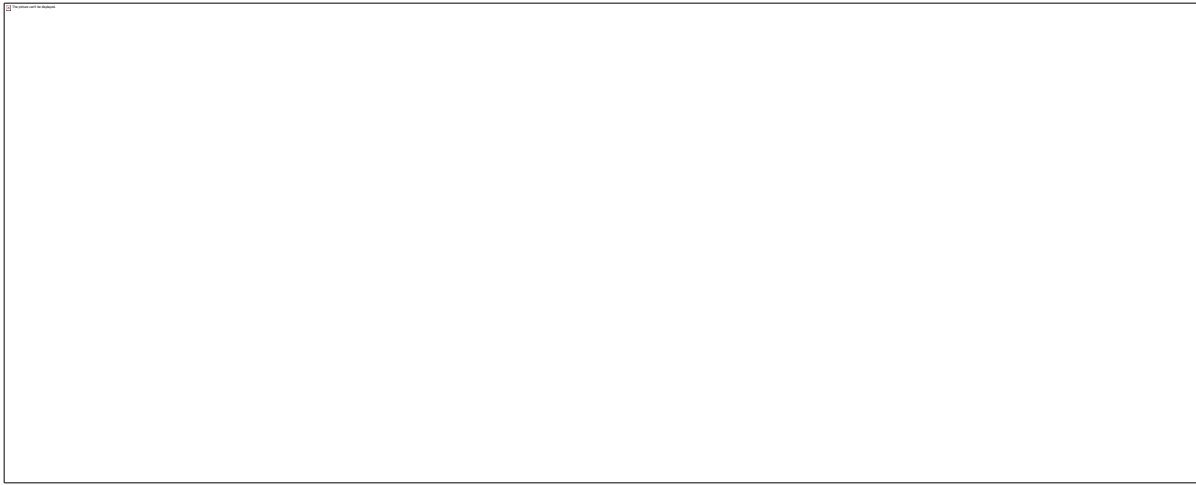
where we create our *own* worlds

where we can visit from place to place

anonymously

or as an avatar

where we can create a learning commons



<http://www.downes.ca>