

Journeys to locales outside time and place: why the Internet Café is the new executive lounge.

The End of Tourism?
MOBILITY
AND
LOCAL-GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

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Why a paper on backpackers and Internet Cafes?

We have little understanding of how travelers organize their time or how they use technology. Previous tourism studies have noted that insufficient attention has been paid to the experiences and practices of the traveler in explaining the nature of modern tourism. Internationally, the developing trend in world tourism is the growth of the fully independent traveler (FIT) and *Backpackers are the ultimate F.I.T travelers*. Therefore research into the "backpacker" market could provide useful insights into the future more traditional "mass market".

Internet Cafes like business lounges are regular fixtures in both travel areas and travel lives, often serving as magnets for travelers looking for places to pass time and connect with home. There is increasing interest in understanding how the mobility of communications and information technologies is impacting upon contemporary, connected society, especially in terms of how it may be influencing the way people conceptualize the public and private sectors of their lives and how social relationships, even those conducted offline, are mediated by internet technology in a networked technospace.

The purpose of this conference paper is to explore how networked technology is made ordinary at an internet café and how backpackers use the internet as "non-places" in the form of Internet cafes, and how this use

may be impacting the experience of being a Independent traveller.

Transient Places Airports, Internet Cafes, Business Lounges



Transient Global Work and Travel Spaces

The Global Workplace and Travel Space is driven by Technology and Mobility. Offices, Airport Lounges, Business Centres and Internet Cafes are becoming similar impersonal (non-space) spaces where weary transient travelers connect and express themselves. Separated from family and friends, at times bored and isolated, working and traveling longer hours and socializing with work colleagues and other backpackers become the norm. Travelers naturally seek out those non-places and people whom they share similar frames of reference such as in a Internet Café.

Internet cafés are businesses that provide Internet access to the public on a fee for service basis. They offer services like web browsing, e-mail, Internet telephony, and multiplayer games, in addition to basic computing services like word processing and printing.

A June 2005 Survey by the Oxford Internet Institute claims that 6 out of 10 UK adults actively use the internet and the average user spends 1 hour per day online. The Internet Café is currently a fixed place much frequented by travelers to go online. 69 per cent of British travelers claim they use email regularly to touch base with people back home and 42 per cent set up a new internet email account before leaving.

The Internet is becoming increasingly central to experience of long-term travel. By means of new information and communication technology, an exploding number of relations and connections in business and private life have made people in Western countries into citizens of a global world.

The Beach by Alex Garland

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

The Beach

The Beach (200) was directed by Danny Boyle based on British novelist Alex Garland's 1997 bestseller of the same name and a Mike Hodges screenplay.

Leonardo DiCaprio takes the role of Richard, a young American seeking to "suck in the experience" of freestyle travel in Thailand. He's a chronic liar, a pot-smoking hedonist, an amoral lover, and ultimately just a backpacker.

The Internet Café as a Non-Place



Non-Place Theory

Leo enters the café which has Glazed glass windows. Nobody can see in but nobody can see out. There are no indicators of place. The room is dominated by Computers. People are busy typing / looking at their screens. Nobody is seen holding conversations. Abstract art dominates the walls. Note that there seems to just Caucasians like himself at the Internet Café.

Many backpackers utilize the services and facilities of backpacker enclaves during visits to towns and cities along the backpacker routes using Internet Cafes geared to their needs along the way.

A space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical or concerned with identity will be a non-place. Examples of non-places are shopping malls, entertainment parks, airport lounges, highways, hotels and holiday clubs.

Internet cafés allow travelers to detach from the *a country they do not know*.

The use of Symbols in Non-places



Logos

Leo enters the techno space. A large map of the World dominates the room.

The familiarity of the globe as seen from global news channels, global brands like Macintosh Computers and applications (Internet Explorer) as well as the physical aspects of access (the keyboard, Monitor) are uniform throughout the world just as Exit and Emergency signs are in hotels, railways and airports.

Identity & Gestures



Identity and Gestures

He is gestured towards his seat, his temporary place. He has no choice of where he sits.

This is what occurs in Internet Cafes around the world as backpackers try to comprehend the rules of entry (prices, services, passwords) or trying to engage the gatekeeper's directions on where to sit and how access the World-Wide Web. Like other non-places like airports and their staff you go where you are told. Gestures are signs are important.

He's given a password to log in which he needs to use the Computer.

Non-places assign shared identities to its participants, which are determined only on entering and leaving in security checkpoints. Individuals entering the space of non-place are relieved of their usual determinants. Individuals become no more than what they do or experience in the role of customer or passenger.

Civil Inattention



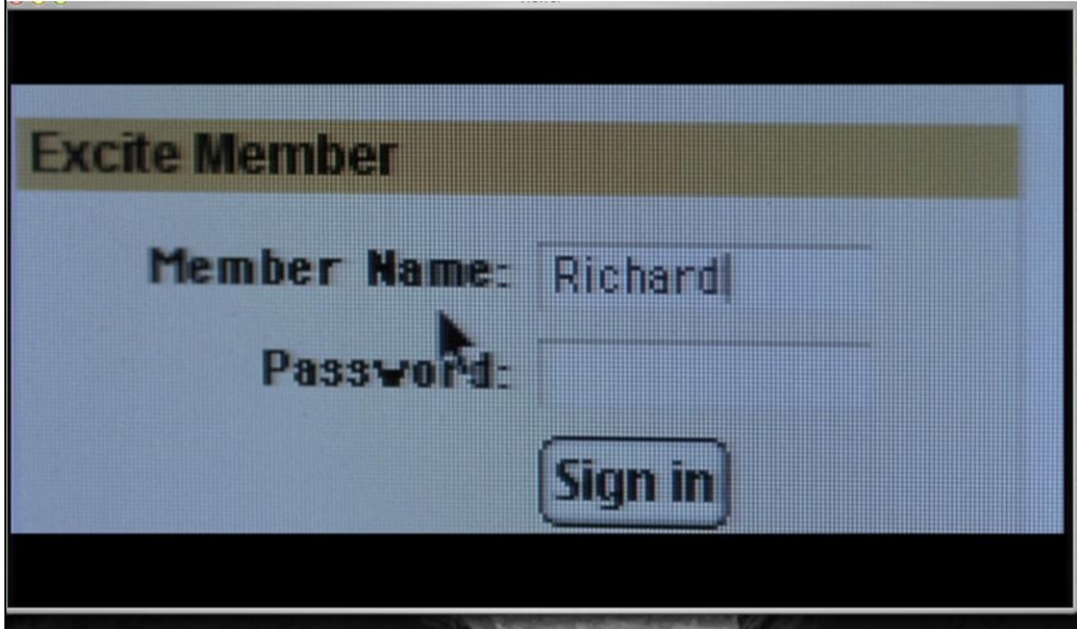
Civil Inattention

Leo's behavior as he walks in, as he carefully ignores everybody else. Nobody is seen speaking to anyone else.

Leo's behavior is an example of what Goffman calls "civil inattention" (Goffman 1971) which provides the illusion of anonymity and is key to maintaining individual distance in public social situations. For example the very fact of glancing at other people's screens was perceived by other people in the café as indicative of an intrusion.

What is important is not the actual privacy that civil inattention provides, but the act of performing civil inattention, and the illusion of privacy that the performance allows.

Is online a non-Place?



Is online a place or Non-place

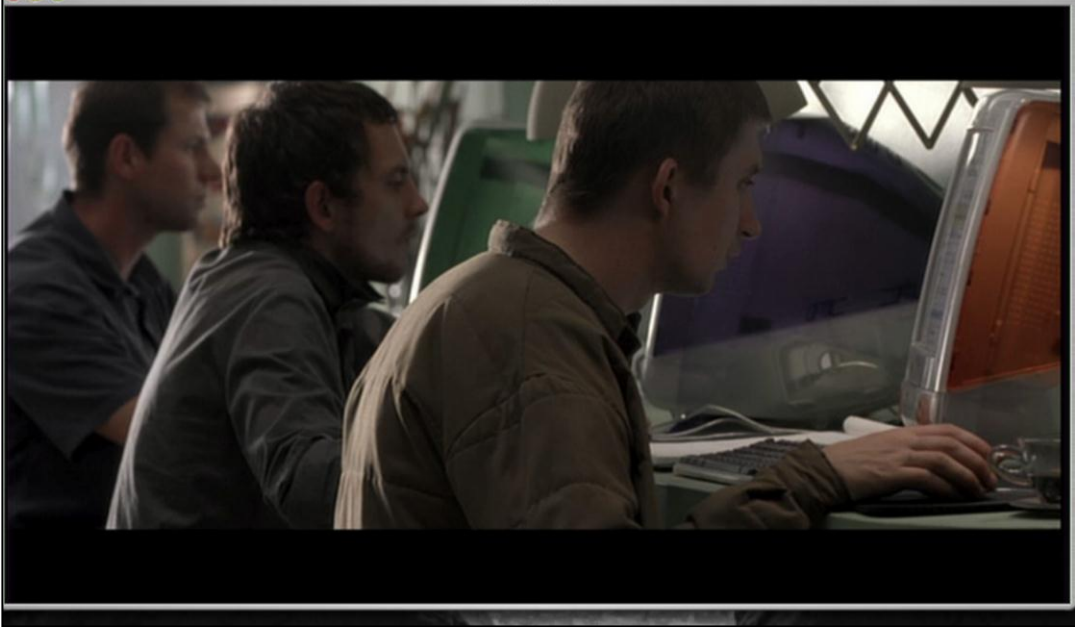
Leo first signs in to unlock the computer. It's unclear whether the Webmail Service "Excite" is the pre-determined homepage, a homepage tens of thousands of other backpackers may be simultaneously utilizing. He types in his Member name and Password.

While this paper will not discuss whether the Internet and being online is a non-place, Auge believes so. Taken in the context of the film, he proves his identity on request through a password **both a password to enter the realm of cyberspace and to enter his email account.**

There are emails from his parents (Mom + Dad) asking him "Where are you?". Another from Keaty (a character from the film/book) shouting "HOWZAT". Another from Jake asking "What's up Richard?".

The emails are all demanding responses.

Privacy and fear in a Non-Place



Privacy and fear

Leo looks to his left. Three males stare into their computers - the so called "Zombie Effect".

Under the avalanche of threats against Internet café use both materially and online, many users are demanding the shred of physical privacy further isolating them while online.

I would agree with Augé when he asserts that only fleeting glimpses of locality might be experienced in non-places. Even in Internet Cafes, the local might impinge in similar ways, smoking may be allowed, and downloading may be banned at one café but not the next etc. Still, I would argue that the local would impinge at cafes less than in most other non-places. Cafes have physical divisions (unlike let's say an airport, even in executive lounges) and you may not even see the local impinge or understand it in context. All of your focus is on the screen and in many ways, it like a modern office without the telephone interruptions, call for lunch or friendly and familiar faces.

Isolation



Isolation

Leo looks to his right. The same effect but one user has earphones on and a mobile phone on the ready. She is further isolating herself from the café noise and the people around her. It shouts, do not disturb me.

People at Internet cafes may isolate themselves further and create their own private experience of viewing through the use of such devices as mobile phones, iPods, Digital Cameras, headphones which serve to isolate even further individuals in this public space.

According to a June 2005 Survey by Direct Line Travel Insurance the 10 most popular travel gadgets were: Mobile phone (85%), Digital camera (74%), Camera (43%), Camcorder (28%), CD player (27%), iPod/MP3 player (17%), Laptop (10%), Palm pilots (PDA)/portable speaker (6%), Minidisk player/portable DVD player (5%) and GPS/currency converter (4%).

Other Indicators

- Do Regulations cause Place?**
- Are Non-Places tourist Attractions?**
- Do external events cause place?**
- Does over-regulation cause place?**

The Future

-Is the future wireless?

-Mobile Internet

Conclusions



Conclusion

Leo gets a message from girlfriend from the time on the Island. No message or update, just a message from “fs” entitled “Beach Life”. It’s a picture from his time on the Island. He looks around and there is no one to share his joy with.

Internet cafes like Business lounges are not aimed at encouraging digital inclusion and at enhancing social contacts between locals and travelers or any sense of community. I argue in the paper Internet Cafes have three identities.

They can be Social and contribute to the making of a place in local neighborhoods but only to locals, staff and long-term residents.

Secondly, and as this presentation describes, Travelers may treat them as an Office in backpacker enclaves. Thirdly, they may be hybrids where backpackers (using the space as an office) and locals (using the space socially) use the same space for different purposes.

I believe the message of this paper, presentation, the film and book is that

technology has the ability to disconnect travelers from their true natures and the travel experience. Travelers are becoming dependent on gadgets and been connected. Cutting the work/home umbilical cord is nearly impossible.