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# Virtual Reality Irvine, California

By David McKee

Universal Plastic Surgery: The Right of Man?

The trees here are all twenty paces apart. I know - I measured with my own feet. The city is owned wholly by the Irvine Company, leased to beautiful people and approved companies. Every morning at sunrise an army of dark-skinned people invade to prune the bushes, sweep the streets and sidewalks, trim the trees, and rearrange the flower beds with season-appropriate colours; most of these folks are gone by lunch time. I'm reminded of a little robot Isaac Asimov once envisioned: a quaint, bug-like, bot that would, unbeknownst to us, live in our hair - trimming it, keeping it presentable. virtual reality irvine, california

There don't seem to be any poor neighbourhoods in Irvine; it's a planned community, and I guess one just doesn't plan for that sort of thing. I suppose some of the graduate students at Irvine's version of the University of California would qualify as lower middle class (whatever the hell that is), but they're academics. There seems to be an allowance for 'entricity' among future scholars.

The roads are a sea of personalised license plates and very expensive cars. Along the roads and highways one can see billboards advertising cosmetic surgery - personalise your breasts, lips and stomach as well. If one follows the road to the beach, halogen-cured skin-suits the colour of leather shoes lie about sporting thread-thin thongs and tiny party-coloured bikini tops that hardly restrain the bulbous fruits of prosthetic aesthetics. Sleek-bodied, black-suited men of impressive proportions coax a thrill or two out of the Pacific's tidal crest.

Surfing isn't limited to the ocean, however, and Irvine's virtuality isn't limited to the material. A ubiquitous cable TV commercial advertises Orange County's new webpage: a place where you can plan your perfect meals, shop for whiter teeth and smaller noses, and see what styles are appropriate this week. The cable company that brings you this information will sell you a hard twenty-four hour cable Internet connection that rates "100 times faster than your old 28.8 modem". That way you can get all that handy information fast enough to keep up with the fads.

If your attention span is good enough you'll hear the webpage commercial declare, "Orange County is the centre of your universe". Ground zero, more like. Orange County, the geographic womb of Irvine, has been nuked by a five-hundred megaton consumer-culture/information technology fusion bomb; the citizens have been irradiated and mutated. Fallout rains down daily, carried through the smoggy haze that obliterates mountains resting mere miles away.

No one minds. The people here have long slept in the shadow of Hollywood, modernity's cultural Chernobyl. Hell, you can get a nice tan from that radiation shit. And that's what it's all about - deck yourself in a hundred reasons to be seen. If you are lucky you can sell yourself. Or an image of yourself.

Arthur Kroker, in *Data Trash: A Theory of the Virtual Class*, announced the evolution of the recombinant sign, the socially and technologically cyborged citizen in a total immersion environment of pan-capitalism and cultural commodification. Of the genus Recombinant Sign, one species has developed in Southern California. Always already reshaping its carapace to accommodate ephemeral fashion - its shifting nature a kind of chimera dominated by old prejudices - this species moves in an environment terraformed to please. Let's hope evolution is kinder in (and to) other places.

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