ME, MYSELF, AND MY AVATAR – A SEMIOTIC STUDY INTO DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION VIA AVATARS[1]

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Abstract

The Chinese musical idol show, *Dimension Nova*, (produced by entertainment company IQIYI) follows the same formula as other shows where a panel of judges choose from a pool of hopefuls to find the best singer. However, the contestants for *Dimension Nova* are virtual beings. The way these characters are presented, and the way the show is edited, intends for the creations to be the focus of the audience, not the creators behind them. Thus, augmented reality cameras render dances, conversations, performances, and rehearsals for broadcast with the models – or avatars – simulating a mixed reality environment. The audience fantasy is a collaboratively constructed reality – a feat made possible by virtue of the ubiquity of the digital avatar within the zeitgeist of society. The transformation of the avatar from a representation of the user to an individualised entity, interactive and reactive, as we progress from Web 2.0 era to the new Web 3.0 society

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of omnipresent computing is the focus of this article and is introduced by what I term the "hypervirtual" environment of the future.

Keywords: Virtual identity, space, digital self, avatars, hyperreality

Introduction

This article investigates the transformation of self against a shift from Web 2.0, the current collaborative web, to the future Web 3.0 – an internet powered by predictive machine learning algorithms. This is the move to the more artificially intelligent (AI), predictive, and omnipresent digital space, which suggests a near ubiquitous digitisation of society via Web 3.0 – or The Spatial Web as some call it (Cook *et al.* 2020; see Figure 1).

Understanding the Spatial Web

### Spatial interaction layer

Through next-generation interfaces (e.g., smart glasses or voice), we will be able to interact with contextual, real-time information that has been called up by intuitive and sensory triggers such as geolocation, computer vision, and voice, gesture, or biometric commands. In effect, this merges the digital and physical layers for the user.

Digital information layer

Through sensorization and digital mapping of the physical world, we will eventually create a digital twin of every object in every place. Today, this type of digital information is primarily accessed via screens and dashboards. In the future, it will be retrieved primarily via the spatial interaction layer.

Physical layer

The world as we currently know and experience it through the five senses.
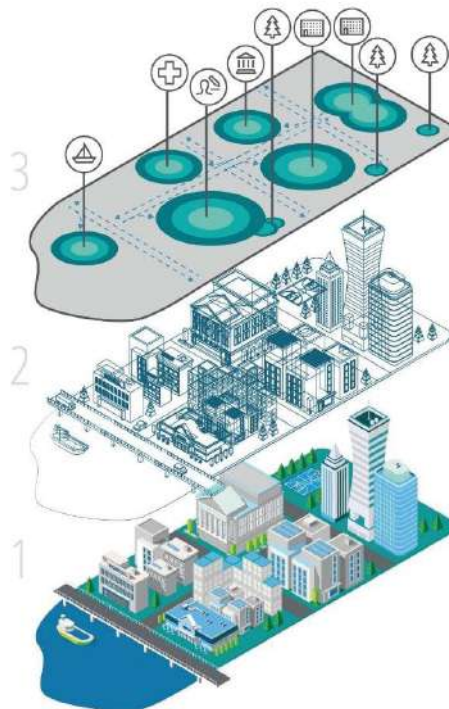
Source: Deloitte analysis.

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Fig. 1: The diagram of how the Spatial Web fits within the physical space of the city space (Cook *et al.* 2020: 3).

To this author, it will create a situation wherein reality becomes super-seded by the virtualisation of a communication process within our hyper-real society, transforming the individual via avatars and blurring the phys-ical and virtual space. The contemporary update to the hyperreality of Jean Baudrillard (1996) or Umberto Eco (1986) sees the hyperreal virtualised again, overlayed by another layer of non-physical reality. Such a process seems to have been somewhat predicted by Shangyang Zhao's definition of hypervirtuality. Since there is no concrete term to describe such an erosion of hyperreality as the grounding of the social construction of meaning, I will use hypervirtuality. Indeed, the process of travelling through the Spa-tial Web of the future mirrors Umberto Eco's tour of America (1986) but represented again via a digital ubiquity. The façades and illusions transcend the limitations of pure fiction to become its own non-fictional truth. The narrative of the ubiquitous virtual space completely consumes the physical. In "Toward A Taxonomy of Copresence" (2001) Zhao introduces the term hypervirtuality in the context of online communication thusly:

> when both Person X and Person Y are present through physical simula-tion in each other's physical proximity, we have a situation of hypervirtual copresence; and when both Person X and Person Y are present through digital simulation in each other's electronic proximity, we have a situation of hypervirtual telecopresence. In the first instance, human interaction is replaced by complete physical automation; and in the second instance, hu-man interaction is replaced by complete digital automation. Finally, there are hybrid or mixed types of human copresence, which combine two or more basic forms of copresence. (Zhao 2001: 6)

Given the prefix, "hyper" as an additional element, and the virtuality of the society that exists within the ubiquity of digitised hyperreality, using the term hypervirtuality seems appropriate. I have modelled the process visually for clarity (see Figure 2).

The first image (1) shows two individuals – as umwelten – communicat-ing within the physical space. The role of analogue data (experiences within the physical space for example) outweigh the digital influence in the con-struction of meaning and social reality. As the digital space becomes more intrusive however – via marketing, movies, tv, and other entertainment media (image 2) – then we encounter the hyperreal space as a potential occlusion between the physical space and the umwelt. The final diagram (3) demonstrates the impact of Web 3.0 and the mixed reality, ubiquitous digital layer that seemingly obscures the umwelt from the physical space. The umwelt behind the digital avatar, within the hypervirtual space, be-comes the hypervirtual umwelt permanently separated and mediated by the digital self (most overtly presented via the avatar).
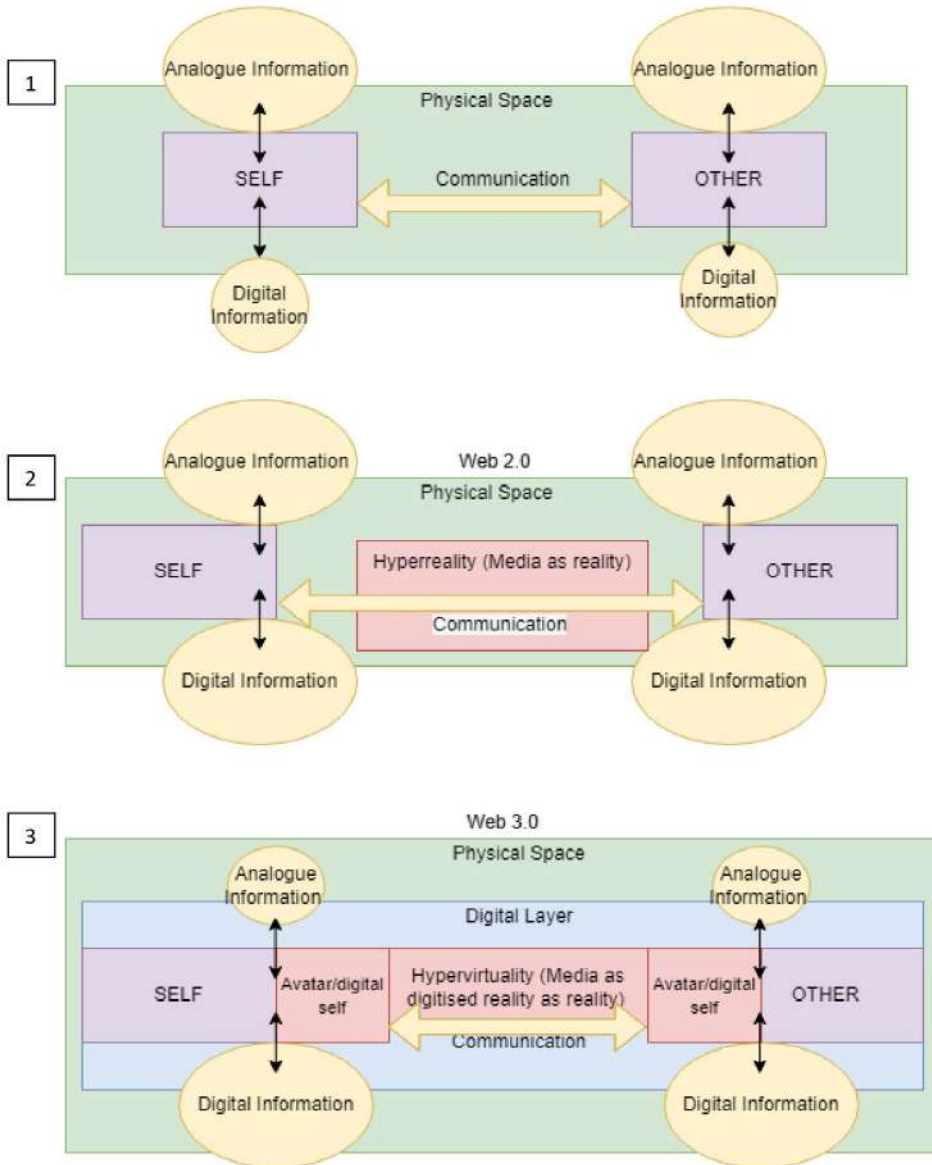
Fig. 2: This diagram visualises the model of communication within the physical space, minimally influenced by digital information (1), through to the hyperreality of Web 2.0 (2), to the hypervirtual of Web 3.0 (3). The physical self is increasingly separated from the communication process and the physical space via the digital layer of the ubiquitous Spatial Web. This diagram also demonstrates the shortfall in hyperreality as a model for communication in the near future.

Such a shift in the relationship between virtuality and (physical) reality also changes the freedom one can have in their identity, a positive impact of the new of this seemingly utopian virtual fantasy world. However, the utopia is, by definition, unobtainable, and instead describes more about current society – that is the ongoing discourse on the flexibility and freedom of self-expression. This hypervirtual society of Web 3.0 promises a complete acceptance of any induvial portrayal of oneself via the avatar, but to what extent these transformations are possible or healthy within the development of interpersonal communication is what I explore below.

The semiotic process behind this hypervirtuality can be described via the umwelt and the effect of the virtual upon the senses: "The optimist would say VR embraces the senses; the pessimist would say it kidnaps them" (Biocca, Levy 1995: 17). The virtual self is an extension of the original identity, not a separate identity (as would be the case with traditional acting for example). However, the caveat is that this is in the creative process rather than receptive aspect of online data. When a user interacts with an avatar, they are not talking to the real person but the virtual entity. The problem of hypervirtuality is whether the recipient is conscious of their virtual partner, and what such ignorance or knowledge thereof does to the formation of their own umwelt. The creation of one's umwelt from entirely hypervirtual signs (as a "more" digital hyperreal society) is the probable consequence of Web 3.0, and hypervirtuality models this transformation of self-identity.

Hyperreal Media/Hypervirtual Life

Interacting with a virtual avatar as a constructive and necessary component of a discourse leads to the questioning of objectivity and the truth of the information. Semiotically, the interpretation of the sign is the meaning, but the receiver will absorb context to append their interpretation – for example the hyperreal/hypervirtual avatar as the interactive agent. Hyperreal information is not new of course and offers a preparatory study for the potential hypervirtual interaction, exemplified by the shift from TV to social media as the source of news and focus of social interaction. The Gulf War was – to Baudrillard – fought on CNN as he wrote in his text *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1995). Information and performance are the new objective reality. The media have been constructing and re-constructing the reality of society through a controlled presentation of hyperreal media. The social reality of the TV advert has become the reality of the wannabe traveller, which then becomes the Instagram story – where so-called "influencers" travel to "Instagrammable places" and take edited, staged, photos

with the pretence of the lifestyle being natural, candid, or authentic, since it was shared so casually on a site like Instagram, which anyone can access. At least, anyone with resources, skills, time, and the appropriate marketable aesthetic for Instagram.

Social media created the phantasmagorical, mediatised, narrative of (hyperreal) information that led to President Trump – an evolution of the television media that created the movie star President in the form of President Reagan. Twitter and Facebook seemingly sought – and became – the replacement for TV. 30-minute shows gave way to the social media post.

As a generation evolved within the TV narrative, so a generation has grown-up with the narrative of social media. The mistrust of the hyperreal has been consecrated in the era of President Trump and legitimised by the social media companies themselves. However, the consumption of the physical reality by technology has not ended, it has changed to be more pervasive, less overt. Reality via modernism ended arguably in the post-World War Two era of the Cold War with mass communication, media, computers, and TV. During that time, sociologist Erving Goffman began his work into the interactions and presentations of everyday situations, significantly in the field of media, ritual (or hyper-ritualisation), identity, and the modern consumer society (1979). In his text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman suggests that within society we perform as the audience, creating mystification using information and ritualising performances (1956: 44–46). The social construction of reality and society present in Goffman, highlights the roles of the individual as a performer, the role of society as audience, and the reciprocal institutionalisation of the signs by the society. Mass media, of course, exaggerates such institutionalisation. Fernanda Carrera updates Goffman's research with cyber-advertising, stating:

> The understanding of cyber-advertising as part of a transformation of contemporary sociocultural practices, then, presupposes its engagement in what is understood as cyberculture (Lévy 1999). Understood as "a new relationship between technique and social life" (Lemos 2008: 15), contemporary culture establishes new forms of sociability by allying itself to the suggestions and developments of digital technologies. By allowing the interweaving of these technologies to the minutiae of life in society, revealed in the daily life of social relations, culture is seen in transformation, whose evidence is also translated into advertising constructions impregnated with stimuli to participation and technological interaction. (Carrera 2019: 5–6)

Carrera continues with an analysis of the advertising in the digital age, gender, and identity, with reference to Goffman, demonstrating a meaningful continuation of such research and the requirement for continued updates – especially with the authenticity of the message. While discussing brand marketing, this notion can easily be applied to the authenticity of the presentation of the self within the society and – reciprocally – the authenticity of the cultural space.

In contrast to the nihilistic Baudrillardian perspective of consumerism, Black Hawk Hancock and Roberta Garner write: "Goffman provides us with the dialectic between the protean, media-scripted, dis-integrated, hyper-ritualized self of contemporary societies and the grounded, embodied, territorially-coherent self that exists in some form in all societies" (2014: 164). However, they state, the hyper-ritualisation of performance somewhat aligns with the hyperreality of Baudrillard. Goffman initialises the theory of a dialectic formation of society – and individual reality. Within the semiotics of the umwelt, this grounding of the society (institutionalisation) and the self-as-performance, is bound within the society itself – be that contemporary society or the future hypervirtual society and the transformations that brings for identity, via the avatar, as a product of hyper ritualization.

The messages of information, identity, education, play, religion, are all elements of society that have proceeded to become (trans)mediated and appended by the virtual sphere to such a degree that significant tracts of the human experience could not function without the virtual. Those that refuse the online space have become delegitimised by the institutions of society – the individual is delegitimised by this process of deindividualization by the relationships formed (or not) between self and meaning.

The future of digital signs as a foundational element of social reality, means a lack of physical substance. The Spatial Web – with AI predicting its user's needs and wants, and virtual beings increasingly taking over from the physical interactions that cannot be experienced in a digitised future – is poised to be the new reality. Identity will be formed and constructed online – as it was offline – but without the constraints of the physical reality. The musician, the entertainer, the media (journalists and marketing agents alike) exaggerate the signs of the virtual, not of the real. The reproduction of the hyperreal theme park in the virtual meeting space and playground, *VRChat*, is the new hyper exaggerated sign. The shift from entertainment that is contained within the computer screen to virtual reality, and beyond, is an overt expression of the hypervirtualization of society.

Virtual Society/Virtual Self

Virtual reality (VR), far from being a liberating utopia, restricts and confines the user to a mapped physical boundary, tethered by scanners and hardware. While the Augmented Reality (AR) app on the mobile phone enables the dullness of reality to be overlayed with something more interesting, it exists only as a content layer that maintains attention and provides information additionally to a physical space. Mixed Reality (MR) merges the two, offering a blend of the virtual content, seemingly grounded by physical reality and is thus the digitisation of the hypervirtual society this article predicts. However, this reality ceases to be relevant as increasing numbers of overlays, more data, and more information, are delivered to the consumer. This reality is the figurative, substance-less simulation, where communication occurs between one or more avatars created to represent an ideal self to such an extreme that facial expressions and body language cues are reduced to standardised poses and emotes. This transformative process of hyperreality into the fully virtual world (hypervirtuality) denies the grounding of identity and transmediality in the social reality of MR.

The control of the human and disappearance of the self is a continuing theme for philosophy – notably from Michel Foucault through to Baudrillard and Eco discussing hyperreality. Such research culminates in the hypervirtuality of an always online society, and how transmediality in our identity formation during the teen years – which Fanny Georges highlights as a particularly fragile time (2009) – should be structured by an updated digital literacy that not only keeps users safe, but also allows for the freedom of expression to be used constructively, sensitively, and without misunderstanding or bias. Additionally, this digital literacy model keeps the transmediality of signs by textualizing the self as a separate mode to the virtual signs around it, rather than deindividualizing the self into the mass media, virtuality, of social media in Web 3.0.

The cyborg is an example of the transmedial identity demonstrating the use of technology to augment one's identity. Blurring the offline and online body space has been physically explored through body hacking: "an exploration of Eva Hayward's concept of transbecoming, exploring the perpetual change of the body in transition, particularly in relation to posthumanistic transformations" (Olivares 2014: 287).

Continuing the feminist discussion, of special interest to this discussion is the delicate balance between freedom of expression and the loss of grounded identity within this ongoing dialectical exchange. The positive, creative, expression of exploring identity has been explored with the cur-

riculum of the "Cyborg Selfie" by Ernest Truly, with the intention of guiding students through the creation of an online persona:

> In each implementation of the curriculum, between five to ten percent of the learners struggled relating to the concept and seeing themselves as unified. The remainder of the group will say that they understand the concept, and five to ten percent of that group will enthusiastically relate to the concept and seem relieved to find camaraderie within the perception of a fractured self. (Truly 2017: 171)

A key to addressing this transformative identity in the hypervirtual society is education and discussion, as this author has written about at length (Davidson 2020). Digital literacy is lacking in terms of educating about race, gender, sexuality, and identity but it could be the key to equality: "Digital literacy provides access to the power available through technology and media, enabling girls to more effectively resist negative media messages, become media producers rather than solely consumers, and claim their rightful place at the virtual table" (Preston-Sidler 2015: 203).

To enable a freedom of expression at a gender level is expected given the current discourse of gender as a fluid continuum, but we should be careful about the reasons behind such shifts. In contrast to the "extreme otherness" of body hacking, some virtual users may be looking to "fit in" or take advantage of opportunities biased against their offline identities. Such a situation suggests society is failing to provide an equal footing for all people offline and online, and the institutionalisation, or normalisation, of such processes is worrying to say the least; "The illusion of diversity through digitally enabled racial passing and recombination produces a false feeling of diversity and tolerance born of entitlement" (Nakamura 2008: 1674). Nakamura introduces the concept of identity tourism where users wear a skin, which is justified as ludic and fleeting, rather than racist. It is also discovered, however, that some studies also show that different avatars reduce racial bias (Peck, Seinfeld, Aglioti, Slater, 2013).

This is also worrying when we look at the Proteus effect (Yee, Bailenson 2007) and the impact hypersexualised avatars have on the physical health and wellbeing of users. Jesse Fox, Jeremy Bailenson, and Liz Tricase (2013) researched the effect of "rape myth acceptance" – which blames the victim – and seeing one's face on a hypersexualised avatar in a game, concluding "Women who were embodied in sexualized avatars that resembled the self demonstrated greater rape myth acceptance than women who were embodied in other avatars" (Fox *et al.* 2013: 935). Indeed, the mental health

of users who feel compelled to express themselves via an avatar online is critically underappreciated and something that, given the research above, is vitally important to the user as an offline person.

The Self as Selfie

Perhaps a contemporary, every day, equivalent of the avatar-as-self that has been accepted into mainstream culture is the digital selfie. The idea of the selfie as a translation of the self has been discussed (for example, Desjardins 2019) but with the avatar of the hypervirtual, the translation becomes the original and no longer a representation, but a transformation of the communication process itself. Davidson (2021) discusses the role of social media and the digitisation of the selfie, enhancing and commodifying one's self-image within the virtual, institutionalised, narrative. The loss of the physical behind the edited selfie, the snapshot of reality that is staged, edited, filtered, and shared without the original has been turned into an art piece itself – described as performative spectatorship (Hunter 2018).

Understanding the selfie is another aspect of the digital identity schema which indicates the potential future of hypervirtual. Sofia Caldeira eloquently concludes a study of 12000 photos with a statement that demonstrates the problems of identity within the era of Instagram, and how it is different from the analogue era of photography and self-representation:

> These images, in particular selfies, are created in a deliberate and reflexive manner, with the subject reclaiming a larger control over every step of the photographic creation of his own self-image, carefully curating the photographed moments and hiding any undesirable aspects, thus presenting a highly selective and idealized version of himself.

> But, as already happened in the analogue era, and now heightened by the sheer size of the potential Instagram audience, the conscience of this photographic exposition of the self and the pressure to conform to an unattainable ideal often creates a certain sense of discomfort, that can lead the users to seek alternative representation strategies that subvert the logic of direct representation. (Caldeira 2016: 155)

Caldeira points out that the identity formed from these Instagram posts are constantly "in flux" as they require updating and reposting, in order to represent the offline identity online, with each new image replacing the previous one in the constant drive to attain likes and validation, which Caldeira describes as, "a cycle of creation, fascination and forgetting" (Caldeira 2016: 155).

An interesting alternative take, however, is that selfies teach digital awareness (Choi, Behm-Morawitz 2018: 345). The educational value of the selfie as a reflective tool is described in their research, highlighting that the selfie is meaningful in its content, employs a range of techniques, and creatively reduces boredom. Grace Choi and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz highlight the role digital media plays in gratification theory:

> Millennials may hold the expectancy that engaging with social media and participating in the selfie culture will meet their needs of being up-to-date, interacting with others, passing time, seeking information, and escaping the pressures or boredom of daily life. Digital and social media, in particular, may be linked to Millennials' expectancies that selfie-taking may satisfy these needs. (Choi, Behm-Morawitz 2018: 346)

Digital literacy can clearly demonstrate an important role in the identity formation of the user online and offline within contemporary technology. With awareness and education however, the online space can allow for the freedom to express oneself, rather than acting as narcissism or replacing the real:

> Through selfies, artifactual literacies, and video, LGBTQ youth are creating new spaces not only to express their thoughts and identities but also to be known differently. The authoring affordances of youth lifestreaming were an aesthetic communicative power that revealed particularly salient narratives about knowing and making known differently on one's own terms. (Wargo 2017: 575)

With the online space already contributing significantly to the identity narrative of its users, the role of digital literacy should also aim to allow the inclusion of non-English speaking, non-Western users to take advantage of the communicative processes. The architecture of the virtual space is seemingly biased in a way that institutionalizes, and normalises, the identity of others to "fit in" with the majority: "The illusion of diversity through digitally enabled racial passing and recombination produces a false feeling of diversity and tolerance born of entitlement" (Nakamura 2008: 1674).

The use of the virtual being avatar as a representation of an ideal self can be concluded with a discussion on the virtual idol. Hatsune Miku, as the most famous of these virtual popstars, is a piece of software created to allow musicians to add vocals to their songs using a range of synthesised sounds and phonemes. The mascot for the software quickly became popular and, as a holographic virtual being, performs songs created by others who have purchased the software and uploaded their creations to the internet. The

rise of virtual beings who exist as their own selves rather than the personification of a human user is on the rise. The VOCALOID holograms like Hatsune Miku are perhaps the epitome of the Web 2.0's collaborative, virtualised, nature[2]. However, with shows like Dimension Nova, models like Lil Miquela and imma, and even AI therapists pushing the virtual person as a separate entity to the human creator, then the hypervirtual transformation for the human user becomes driven by such interactions with virtual media. The acceptance and normalisation of this communication model leads to the hypervirtual society and transforms what it means to be an individual. I end with a discussion one key area of such transformation – sex in the hypervirtual space.

Digital Love

Sex and relationships in the digital era is already a common discussion – especially with the rise of virtual relationships and so-called girlfriend simulators like *LovePlus* – and its star, Rinko, who is described as a first-year high school student. While such games are still constrained by the hardware of the phone or console, they offer an insight into the possible interactions that may occur between physical and virtual individuals in the future, where avatars may be representations of an actual user, or an autonomous, AI powered creation that simulates human discourse just enough to engage a human in emotional dialogue. The hypervirtuality of the potential future partner takes the fetishization of the computer character to worrying extremes.

Contemporary software highlights the interaction between user and machine, the ability for the sign to be emotionally interpreted by the user. The effect is a form of the proteus effect but also it highlights the uncanny valley theory (Mori, MacDorman, Kageki 2012). The uncanny valley is the mathematical model where affinity is measured against likeness from the obviously artificial, via the unhealthy person to the healthy-looking person. The "dip" in affinity in the middle – the valley – is the point at which likeness become too like the human to be acceptable and is not similar enough to pass for a healthy human. Mori *et al.* use the example of the prosthetic limb:

> One might say that the prosthetic hand has achieved a degree of resemblance to the human form, perhaps on par with false teeth. However, once we realize that the hand that looked real at first sight is actually artificial, we experience an eerie sensation. For example, we could be startled during a handshake by its limp boneless grip together with its texture and coldness.

> When this happens, we lose our sense of affinity, and the hand becomes uncanny. In mathematical terms, this can be represented by a negative value. Therefore, in this case, the appearance of the prosthetic hand is quite humanlike, but the level of affinity is negative, thus placing the hand near the bottom of the valley. (Mori *et al.* 2012: 99)

This is, perhaps, a reason why prosthetic limbs are no longer restricted to simulated skin tones but can be presented as an obviously mechanical limb. The avatars in dating apps, for a similar reason, rely on a cartoonish aesthetic, often lacking noses, and even exhibiting non-human features like horns or animal ears. The notion of the "cute" avatar was researched to discover how it impacted the perception of the message:

> The results of our experiment suggest that avatar cuteness can significantly decrease users' perception of error severity as expected. Nevertheless, it fails to lead to higher perceived social closeness. There could be two possible explanations. First, social closeness can be effectively activated as long as the interaction partner is anthropomorphic [49]. Second, the perception of social closeness can be shaped by interacting with the system for an extended period of time, which was not the case in our experiment. (Cheng, Qiu, Pang 2020)

Sex normalises the abnormal and society often strives to institutionalise behaviour it deems abnormal (homosexuality for example). The role of sex as a driving factor in the move to the virtual/hyperreal space should not be underestimated, especially with expression, experimentation and access considered. Studies have shown significant differences in gender and racial bias between avatars, for example, female avatars in the online life simulation game *Second Life* display more naked skin than men, which potentially indicates a hyper-sexualisation norm among female avatars: "the propensity of female avatars to reveal naked skin persisted despite explicit cultural norms promoting less revealing attire" (Lomanowska, Guitton 2012: 1). While the study lacks data about the gender of the users, beyond the overt pejorative consequence of hypersexualised, nude, females, there is perhaps a rebellion against restrictive, gender-based modesty in wider society – suggesting a possible freedom within the online.

Attractiveness and gender biases actions within the virtual space: "Attractive avatars received more help than less attractive avatars, but female users received less help than male users when represented by avatars that were less attractive or male" (Waddell, Ivory 2015: 112). The consequences for such findings, especially in a society where one is free to choose their online, primary, identity are interesting. Assuming such bias is bleeding

from the offline into the online, then the ability to negate such bias through the manipulation of the avatar may be better than the offline alternative. However, that bias exists, and the role of medialised society in institution-alising such gender bias – as presented by Goffman's hyper-ritualisation of gender in the 1970s – is especially worrying.

Overtly channelling that collaborative message are the music producers creating songs for Hatsune Miku and the virtual YouTubers who record, perform, act, and play games in videos, interacting with their audiences as any content creator does, but hidden behind the persona and avatar of their creation (Davidson 2017, 2020). This avatar moves dynamically and can be include voice changing to completely negate the identity of the original actor or actress. For example, Kizuna AI[3] has an audience of hundreds of thousands on YouTube but the identity of the actress behind the avatar was only revealed (willingly) after 4 years, although technical trouble, legal pa-perwork, and nefarious users all risk revealing ones offline identity by force – as such society will need to decide the protections and rights a user in the Web 3.0 virtual society will have regarding their online/offline identity du-ality and how society is going to protect or legitimise one or both identities.

Since one of the questions of the hypervirtual society is the impact upon the individual umwelt when they interact with others who are ei-ther unknowingly virtual, or whether users don't care and accept the vir-tual being as equally significant to them as a physical human, the question of what legal rights to extend to the virtual identity will either strengthen or contest such attitudes within the communication model. That is, if you interact with a virtual character which legally is someone's identity, then physical grounding behind the sign (the offline identity) becomes essen-tially irrelevant to the online, hypervirtual communication process. While it may be liberating for some, there is the possibility for abuse – as I have shown above – and questions remain about the interaction between human and AI, which will unlikely simulate true human intelligence, but may offer enough feedback to enable some users to form emotional attachment.

Conclusion

The push to the online office by the COVID pandemic undoubtably introduced many users to the online forums and potentials of the virtual society, but it by no means created the process. Such digitisation has been increasing for decades, driven by corporations, governments, and society demanding *more* – more entertainment, more information, more stimula-

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[3] See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUO3KBQsc-k.

tion. The equality and opportunities that the virtual world potentially enables for users who are shy, struggling with their identity, or just enjoy the pantomime, is critically important to the development of the future world of Web 3.0. Due to the issues outlined above, society should be discussing how future generations develop their identity schemas within an always connected, always online, perpetually mixed reality society. The hypervirtual umwelt is the digitised umwelt within the hyperreal digital society. The hypervirtual digital self is currently contained within the hardware screen of the phone or computer, but the increased blurring of the virtual within the physical space (via experiments like Dimension Nova) is creating the situation where, with Web 3.0, the offline and online identity of someone will no longer have any distinction, nor meaning as individual, separate, terms. The hypervirtual avatar will be all that's needed for some users – not just online, but offline too as the distinction between the two spaces blurs further.

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