

Virtual Reality

- A significant supplement for the physical world

Starting from a dream this short paper discusses: virtual ways of creating a physical presence or experience.

At age, 5 or 6 I had a dream, crawling under a table in my living room I ended up at my grandparents' house. Looking out into the room from underneath the tablecloth I realized that I somehow had crossed time and space. I remember thinking what a convenient possibility and the dream has come to my mind ever since surely because the feeling of unbound movement.

So far, the dream has only come true in the world of Star Trek and other sci-fi scenarios. But today we face a reality where new technology is bringing us closer to physical experiences in virtual realities. Firstly, by use of information technology, it is possible to form a virtual reality¹ that represent, being at my grandparent's house and in their nearness. With a mix of different medias, it is now possible to communicate in an enhanced way. By certain tools, I can speak to them in form of sounds and written words and see them by use of webcams. All this happens in real time and in separated locations. This is one of the ways we experience how virtual reality can be used in absence of a present physical reality.

Secondly, as part of the technological development there has been research on and developing of virtual realities that has a 3D environment in which the physic body is used a not only the eyes, ears and hands (Wennberg 2002, Davies 2002). These virtual realities constitute a reality that – according to the researchers – “*enable us to experience our place in the world afresh*” (Davies 1998:101). In other words, the virtual realities make a difference to the Cartesian understanding of body, subject, and nature.

Both types of virtual realities bring me closer to the experience of actually being at my grandparent's house. The first because I can see and hear a representation of them and there home and the second because I can get a virtual experience of being immersed in their house.² Two different realities give me different virtual experiences of being at my grandparent's house. The fact is though, that none of them and not even both of them together will give me physical experience of being there. There is much more included in the physical reality.

First, it is because the physical reality talks to all senses simultaneously. Take again, the example from my grandparent's house. A visit is unique because of a complex mix of many ingredients: the atmosphere, the sounds - from my grandparent's voices, when they walk, and sounds from outside, smells etc. And most inexpressible of all their physical presence can't be reduced to a picture, digital sound, or words.

Second, when we “enter” the virtual reality our entrance will always rely on physical experiences. We recall situations or sentiments learned or experienced earlier. Recalling a feeling of love will for example rely on the physical experience of love. If someone can't recall this feeling, he or she will recall an imagination of what love is like – according to other physical experiences happiness, beauty etc.

This is why the virtual reality is a significant supplement to the physical reality and not a substitute. We can form a virtual reality that will be so close to the physical one as we can imagine it. Constructing it by help of information technology gives us enhanced possibilities to

¹ Virtual Reality is defined as a personal imagination in mind perhaps shared and figured through words, pictures and/or animations. It means that the concept Virtual Reality is very broad and take in even the reality, that comes to the mind, when someone tells a story. The concept is faithful to the concept Stones rely on in “Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? (Stones 1999).

² This depends on a virtual reproduction of my grandparent's house or a virtual reality that can reproduce the feelings I get being at their house.

sharpen this even more by confusing the brain to believe it actually has a certain physical experience. This reality can't replace the physical experience of being in their house, but it can give experiences in lack of the presence of the physical reality.

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