

The Interim State: between the Actual and the Virtual

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ABSTRACT

While engaging with a virtual world, the human subject has experiences that are different than the ones experienced on a daily basis in the actual world. This means that although the human subject takes his/her actual existential ‘background’ within the virtual environment (Vella, 2015) and might opt to fashion his/her virtual subjectivity on the basis of his/her ‘background’ (Westerlaken, 2017), it is still a situation that is “*parasitic on the richer involvement we have with the things we directly perceive*” (Dreyfus, 2000). Therefore, this means that such experiences do not form part of our actually-experienced actual world experiences.

In this paper I argue that the information gained from the experiences within virtual worlds does not belong to our Virtual Subjectivity – which is the subject’s unique existential perspective within the virtual world formed by the unison of the actual subject with the avatar (Vella & Gualeni, 2019). This is because such experiences form, first and foremost, a part of the Actual Subjectivity and therefore does not exist on its own. Hence, since the Virtual Subjectivity is generated only by the engagement of the Actual Subjectivity with the Virtual World, knowledge cannot pertain to the Virtual Subject. All knowledge gained virtually belongs to the Actual Subject. However, not all of that knowledge is needed in the Actual Subject’s daily life. In this paper I am going to divide the knowledge gained virtually into three categories:

- 1) Some knowledge is only useful strictly within a particular Virtual World, such as knowledge of magic casting in the Witcher Series (CD Projekt Red) which is not the same as the knowledge of magic casting in the Legend of Zelda Series (Nintendo). Therefore learning magic casting cannot be done as a general concept that fits all games and it is not something that the Actual Subject is able to practice in the Actual World since it is a non-existent concept.
- 2) Some knowledge could or could not someday pertain to and be useful for the Actual Subject’s daily life, such as learning how to plow a field. Let’s imagine that a person is not a farmer and has never plowed a field. Should s/he be exposed to the interactive experience of plowing in a virtual world, the information about plowing that

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was gained in that world would fall within the Interim State. This is because it is information that may or may not be applicable to the actual world but is however very useful when engaging in a farming virtual environment.

3) Some knowledge is useful to the Actual Subject for his/her daily life, might help improve a job, a skill or deeper understanding of a subject. However, as already mentioned, and as will be explained in more detail in the following chapter, I do not support the claim that virtual knowledge can be identical to actual-life experienced knowledge. I consider such knowledge as enhancing one's actual experiences, since without the virtual opportunity, some knowledge would not have been possible to attain or would have been too dangerous or risky (Gualeni, 2015). However I argue that such knowledge and experiences should not take the place of actual-life knowledge and experiences since the former is always limited and incomplete in comparison to the latter.

What I propose, therefore, is that the information gained from the virtual experiences becomes encapsulated in a state within the Actual Subject which I will call the Interim State. The Interim State is important to be conceptualized because it is the result of the pool of information that a subject attains while engaging with virtual experiences. This information will then either remain in the Interim State – if it belongs to the first two categories mentioned above – or else, if it belongs to the third category, it will become part of an actual subject's daily life use. In this way, the Interim State can be understood as a storage and a filter of knowledge.

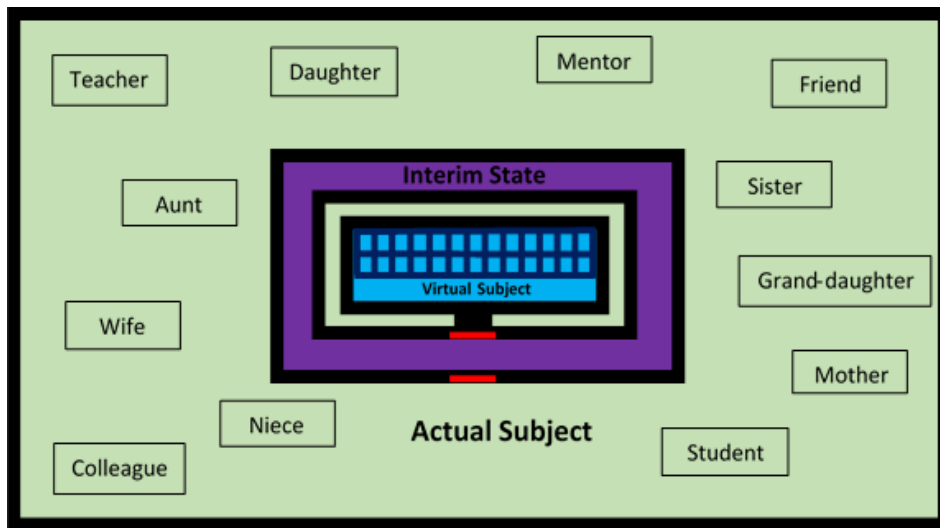


Figure 1: The Interim State

It does not mean that if one reads a book about magic and has acquired the concept of magic use or watches a friend play Call of Duty (Activision) and has understood the dynamics of the game, that s/he has created an Interim State. In this paper I will argue that non-interactive forms of mediation, such as books, allow the user to access the mediated content only through the user's subjective imagination. Also, experiencing Call of Duty passively, does not give you the experience that is acquired by an active player. On the other hand, actively engaging with interactive media, leads to the activation of the subject's different faculties, allowing him/her to have a phenomenological and existential relationship with the virtual world s/he is in (Gualeni & Vella, 2020). I will also make a distinction between movies, theatre and Live-Action-Role-Playing Games (LARP) on the one hand and virtual worlds on the other, arguing that the first group of experiences involve the same world and body as the actual-subject's however in virtual worlds, the experiences are happening in a different world

and body that might have very different dynamics and characteristics than the ones in the actual world. This, I argue, makes the knowledge that is gained virtually of a completely different kind than any other knowledge one is able to attain in the actual world.

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