

# Virtual worlds' influences on our mental balance and physical health: a survey with philosophical approaches

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## Abstract

Interactive virtual worlds have an impact in our mental and physical balance and as an extension in our health. This survey studies the existing literature in these aspects, from a philosophical approach and concludes on the impact that virtual worlds have to the humans. The process applied involves the analyses of key points relevant to computer games, virtual reality and cyberspace.

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## 1 Introduction

The total harmony of body and mind in Human beings creates mentally and physically healthy people thus creating a healthier society, and hopefully contributing to a balanced world! Asclipios, used to say that a healthy body coexists with a healthy mind [Matina 1997]. Games through the centuries, present a microcosm of the society of the grown ups [Rushkoff 1997]. Interactivity in respect to Technology is the main element which defers interactive computer games from the non digital games. The Greek-Armenian mystic, George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, philosophised that man in his normal state is essentially sleepwalking. So he was suggesting that interaction wakes the senses. The today's modern human being is basically sleepwalking if he/she isn't multitasking. Technology is being revolutionized and in many cases it satisfies our human needs.

## 2 Virtual Reality and Cyberspace

In a sense, everything one sees on a computer is part of the virtual universe [Rush 2003]. One could think that VR is splitting the human consciousness in two. The Here, is where we physically are located the body becomes part of the machine. The There, is where we are sent mentally in another world. So what is the status of the user, and how it influence human mental and physical balance? The user is no longer a passive viewer but becomes an active participant because of the mental and physical involvement. A VR environment is based on a sensory level, so it could be thought as an extension of the body. The impact of cyberspace can be frame

in two visions, the pessimistic and the optimistic. The pessimistic view is one of irony according to the Writer William Gibson, [Gere 2008], author of *Cyberspace* and *Neuromancer*. The day when VR becomes more powerful than reality will be the day of the big accident. According to the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan, the optimistic view is the use of fully enveloping virtual environment and it could make one re-create the sensation of well-being. This could be very interesting in the development of the idea of comfort in order to go back to the Self. There is an extremely beneficial impact of the technology through the Virtual reality therapy, which treats patients with anxiety disorders and phobias. It involves game-like environments which through navigation encourage therapy of various subjects such as airplane phobia etc. Several scientific studies have been performed proving the positive influence of virtual environments. In [Fernandez-Aranda et al. 2012] the authors through the research project, *PlayMancer*, developed and evaluated a serious video game designed to remediate attitudinal, behavioral and emotional processes of patients with impulse-related disorders.

## 3 Conclusion

Technology is neutral. It is up to humans to become positive or negative. Demographics also play an important role. The more digital a society is the more impact technology has in humans. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze points out, the machine is always social before it is technical [Gere 2008]. There is always a social machine which selects or assigns the technical elements used. Digital refers not just to the effects and possibilities of a particular technology. It defines and encompasses the way of thinking and doing that are embodied within that technology, and which makes its development possible.

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