

## The transformation between virtual and actual through multimedia

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### Preposition

what cannot be sensed is virtual

- analog is actual, digital can become actual, imagination can become actual

To follow the preposition I would like to discuss the transformation between virtual and actual in the context of performance, specifically a performance that contains the perspectives of audio, visual, and body. Through the discussion we may reflect on what virtuality in performance is.

Audio refers to sound. A sound wave is analog because it exists in a continuous format. It cannot be physically seen but can be heard or experienced bodily through vibration. Sound is actual. When sound is transformed into a seeable form, such as graphs of the sound waves, the dimensionality of sound changes. The sound wave can be processed into digital form. When sound is processed into digits, a discrete form, the dimensionality of sound is reduced. The sound becomes virtual.

Visual refers to image, light, or, in general, what can be seen. A body or an object in real space is an analog visual signal. They exist continuously with spatial coordinates. Analog visual signals can be processed into digital images. Digital images exist virtually. Without a computer screen or a digital display they cannot be seen. Once an unseeable form is carried out through a physical platform or medium, the representation of the unseeable becomes actual to the viewer.

The transformation between audio and visual is to change their dimensionality. Audio contains a dimension characterized by time. The visual is two- or three-dimensional, characterized by space, such as a two-dimensional sphere or three-dimensional object. To transform audio into visual is to expand the time characteristic into space. To transform visual into audio is to finally compress space into a timeline.

A physical body is inherently actual. It can be transformed into an image of the body through a mirror or a camera. The transformation happens from three-dimensional space into two-dimensional projection. The image of the body is not the body itself but a representation of the body, which is actual as well. A body can be transformed into sound. From three-dimensional to one-dimensional can be direct compression or first through the virtual, the digital, and then expansion into the higher dimension.

A body can also be described as written text. The text itself has a linear characteristic. According to Flusser, text is written or read in a linear fashion. Text comes from a code that cannot be sensed directly, i.e., the alphabetical code or symbolic code. When the text is written on a piece of paper or a canvas or digitally on a computer, it is visualized by expanding its linearity into two-dimensionality. Or when the text is sculpted as a three-dimensional object, the virtual code becomes actual.

A body can be transformed into a bunch of digits. For example, the measure of our body fat, bone density, eye distance, emotional quotient, number of brain cells, or hormone levels. These numbers can then be transformed into other media, audio, or visual by increasing their dimensionality. Does increasing the dimensionality increase the actuality? From a phenomenological point of view, actuality is related to what we are able to perceive. We are used to perceive between one to four-dimension. The non-sensible zero-dimension or greater than four-dimension are virtual to us. When we are able to transform zero-dimension digits into three-dimensional space that can be seen, heard, or sensed, it becomes livable and experienceable, thus becoming actual. "Virtual reality" can be the actual world we live in in the future. Virtual reality is not virtual anymore. A transhuman can be our friend or even a new generation. Perhaps what we should consider further is whether we wish to live with such a future. The discussion is beyond this essay.

Getting back to performance as an art form, how does it differentiate itself from the actual world we are living in? A performance of sound, visual or a body is four-dimensional. It asks for a viewer to experience both the space and time dimension. A viewer perceives through the senses. The viewer navigates the space and has a dialogue with their inner self. The performance is like a mirror for the viewer. Through this mirror, the viewer can take in the information, compute, and transform the world they are experiencing into the their imagination. That is to say, the viewer enters into the mirror, becoming the imagined and allowing new information to be born. The transformation from one actual world into their actual imagination through a threshold of virtual latency is actively processed by the viewer. Virtual latency exists through the viewer's decoding in this experiential process, which means detaching from the dimensionality of the actual performance. If the viewer has difficulty generating virtual latency from this experience, then the information carried by the performance is redundant to them. From this perspective, experiencing a performance is not so different from experiencing our daily world. What one experiences has the potential to generate imagination that is actual. If the world the viewer is experiencing highly resembles their daily life, less energy is needed to decode the experience. The imagination may not differ much from what already exists in their mind. Thus, not much new information can be generated through this process. If the world is new to the viewer, virtualization takes effort because decoding the experience and transforming it into the viewer's virtual latency requires extra energy.

Actualizing the imagination is to expand virtual latency into dimensional-sensible world. It requires not only the informational difference between the viewer and what is being viewed but also an active effort to make the virtual relatable for the viewer in an actual world. Once the viewer is able to make the effort of actualizing this experience, they embark on the journey of actively generating new information. That also means the viewer actively reduces and expands the dimensionality of the actual through their experience. This movement of dimensional change is directed by the viewer in the relative informational difference between the actual and themselves.

From this point of view, creating a performance is the act of generating an informational difference between the viewer and what is viewed within a four-dimensional world, such that virtual latency can exist. It then becomes the responsibility of the viewer to decide whether to actualize their experience or not. The greater the difference, the higher the latency, and the more effort is required from the viewer to generate new information for themselves in this process.

What about performances that feel familiar, directly relatable, and offer instant stimulation? Social-media reels or spectacular shows remain firmly within our grasp, giving us immediate awe, laughter, or tears — like instant noodles, a painful piercing, a heart-breaking relationship, or an injection that helps. The question is: what do we need from these experiences if we cannot learn something new from them? Why do we need performance as an art form that transforms us, rather than just giving us another consumable experience? A performance that has high virtual latency must have gone through a creative process of deep dimensional transformation. When a viewer enters this mirror, they do not merely see themselves; instead, it requires an effort like that of a creator to actualize their imagination.

Reference:

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