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## Plus Ca Change, Plus La Meme Chose: Online Communication As Still Offline

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**Abstract.** This article continues a series on the psychology of virtual reality (VR). As opposed to previous articles that focus on putative psychological consequences of VR technology (VRT), the present article posits that such consequences may be apocryphal.

Much has been made of hypothesized psychological change via an online communication revolution. Specifically, email and the World Wide Web are said to entail novel communication modes--virtual realities (VR)--that may induce change in behavior, emotion, cognition, and motivation. (VR sometimes is ascribed to mode of communication, the nature of communication, the experience of communication, the content or substance that is being communicated, and/or that which is being constructed and interpreted.)

Moreover, psychological changes ascribed to VR also are described as (1) concurrent or epiphenomenal with a VR communication; (2) subsequent to it; (3) subsequent to a requisite number, cumulative intensity, or sequential pattern of VR communications; (4) antecedent to initial or further VR communications; or (5) in various ways residues or sequelae of interactions between VR and non-VR communications. There is also further elaboration that the robustness and nature of psychological change stems from the VR communication mode itself versus combinations of all the VR ascriptions--mode, nature, experience, content/substance, construction/interpretation. Yet again, psychological change is sometimes discussed as entailing VR ascriptions--especially experience, construction/interpretation. All of this assumes that the various aspects of communication can be decontextualized and fragmented in an ecologically valid manner regardless of the sociohistorical moment. With all of this, the online communication revolution neither presents a new conception of reality--VR--nor a new VR technology (VRT). If this is the case, how can one validly speak of VR and VRT-induced change?

The Construct of VR is Old But Only Viewed As New. VR is implicated in the oldest and most basic pursuit of philosophy and philosophical psychology--epistemology. Is there an objective reality towards which one can virtually approach through sensation (cf. Hume) or reason (cf. Plato or Kant) ? Is objective reality a priori an apocryphal conception masking what can't be apperceived (cf. Hinduist-based texts), falling away through a succession of appearances (cf. Buddhist-based texts), or flying away before language clarification (cf. Wittgenstein) ? If there is an objective reality, does mind preshape perception and cognition as VR experience, or is it the product of VR experience? These questions and attempts to answer them may reflect the angst of being in a world of ambiguous and tenuous meaning and stability as posited by existential philosophers.

In lay psychology, VR usually denotes approximating one's notion of reality through self-reflection and reflection of the other. In one's naive phenomenology, thinking and feeling about the past, present, and future underlines that VR, as construct is anything but new. In fact, historians have long noted that varying conceptions of VR often become a basis for cooperation or conflict within the self or between self and other. Ultimately, conceptions of VR--under assault by alternative logics and rationalities that may be perceived as illogics and irrationalities--are girded only by faith and can become motive forces in

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the world's sublime and evil moments. For example, to foster the sublime or attenuate evil--with mixed results at best--revolutionary movements target government, science, technology, art, society, and culture through engendering VRs as Utopian mythologies.

The Construct of VRT is Old But Viewed As New. Mental health intervention techniques have long constituted VRT via role playing, psychodrama, hypnosis, meditation, cognitive and cognitive-behavioral therapies, psychochemotherapies, and tension-relaxation exercises. VRT also comprises ritual--above and beyond mental health intervention techniques--through the immersion in cultural experiences such as dance, drama, epics, myths, paintings, sculptures, and even computer-generated prostheses supporting intrapsychic processes. Moreover, VRTs have been espoused by purveyors of so-called "brainwashing," "thought control," neurolinguistic programming, and mass marketing geared towards commercial products and political candidates and policies.

Conclusion. The VRTs exemplified by online communication modes--email and the World Wide Web--are as offline as past modes. They are as instantaneous or slow, as reality-approximate or reality-divergent, as immersion-imbued or not as other modes. They in no way take us any closer to Objectivism or Subjectivism, or for that matter, Heaven or Hell. Paeans to a brave new world may reflect the primary process of a sociology not the psychology of new technology. (See A political psychological primer of virtual reality sequelae for mental health professionals. (October 24, 1997). IBPP, 3(13); Cioffi, G. (1997). Perception and cognition in virtual reality. *Ricerche di Psicologia*, 21, 69-97; Frigione, F. (1996). Helios and the Obscure: A look at the "virtual reality" of the psyche. *Giornale Storico di Psicologia Dinamica*, 20, 101-106; Glickson, J., & Avnon, M. (1997). Explorations in virtual reality: Absorption, cognition, and altered state of consciousness. *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 17, 141-151; The political psychology of virtual reality: Scandinavian trail blazing. (July 18, 1997). IBPP, 2(12).) (Keywords: Virtual Reality.)