The Digital Cell, an Analysis of the Digital Media Environment

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Abstract
Digital media, serving as the dominant cultural voice in our contemporary climate, has raised questions of truth; compositing techniques of computer-generated imagery have accelerated the era of post-truth; fluctuating digital images that unfold in source-independent simulations are accentuated by sensations and stimuli. The users of the digital media not only immerse themselves in digital culture but also participate in processes that highlight subjective experience. In an ever-expanding digital environment, how can design thinking function as a creative lens to review the interactive mechanisms of the human experience across digital media? To examine our consciousness in the age of interactive digital media, this essay creates a speculative design and a speculative narrative of how we came to have the montage-like perception. The Digital Cell, an interactive virtual design manifesting the concept of the montage-like perception, the work aims to configure a critical lens to evaluate our aesthetic and synthetic experience in the digital age.

Keywords
Digital media; interactive design; digital perception; design apparatus; speculative design.

1. Introduction

The Digital Cell is a speculative design created on a virtual interactive platform accessible as an avatar. The layout of the design consists of two rooms: 1–Nucleus, an inner spherical room; and 2–Cell, an outer spherical room of the Nucleus. The design uses biological terms to render surreal organic environments, alluding to the essential and complex relationships of digital conditions. The work is a visual manifestation of the concept, the montage-like perception, that overall reflects an inquiry to our aesthetic and synthetic experiences in digital media culture. Through a speculative narrative of how we came to have the montage-like perception, the work examines the relationship between our perception and the interactive mechanism of the media.

2. Nucleus

2.1. The Climate of the Post-Aura

The montage-like perception emerges from the contemporary climate of the post-aura. The first room, Nucleus, is a manifestation of that condition. Fully enclosed by the wall, nuclear membrane, this room reveals a fragmented view of the outside world through pores. As if Nam June Paik's

M200/Video Wall was brought to life, the fragmented view creates montage-like countless scattered images.

Throughout history, the media have shaped the way we interact with and interpret images, and thus the way we interpret reality. The invention of film and photographic media opened up scientific awareness that introduced micro and macroscopic views of our world. This has extended our perceptual development to understand the reality seen through the lens. Today's media technology has introduced new forms of imagery and interactive systems that allow us to immerse ourselves in the screen beyond what we simply see through a lens. The more our sense of reality and perception evolve from media, the more it will continue to influence the interactive mechanisms of human experience across digital media.

Defined by Walter Benjamin, post-aura is "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction" (Benjamin, 1935) Remarked in the age of mechanical reproduction, the post-aura continues to this day
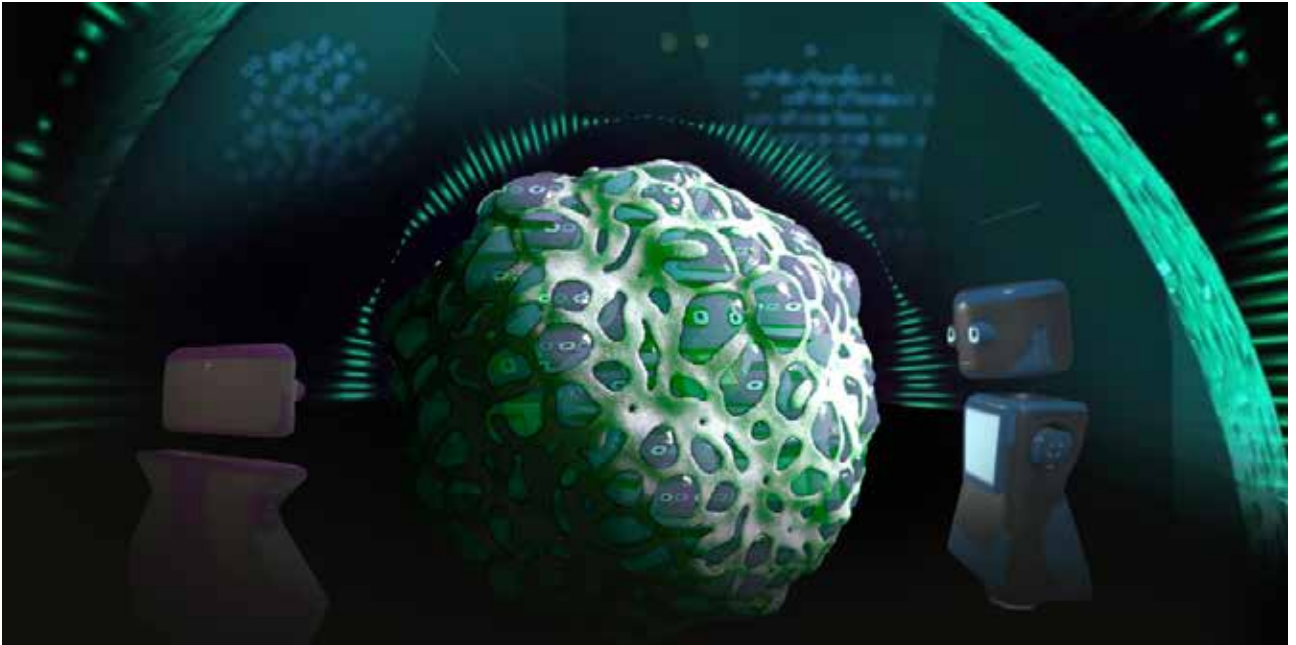
Figure 1. Prototype view of *The Digital Cell*, 2021. Mixed Media, Online.

not only in art but also in our daily experiences. The aura of concerts and art galleries is easily compressed into the way we possess it on our smartphone devices. The audience is physically 'close' to the aura, but such media interventions rather extend the distance to the aura by limiting our view to a smaller screen. Still, these screens are the active lenses that are prevalent today, vividly connecting and mediating reality.

This experience extends to a networked web of media platforms where members of the digital society interact and participate in the process of the post-aura reproduced in the form of mitosis. The high-speed information transmission technology of digital media has created an environment where the real-time world can be experienced up close and indirectly, and furthermore, perform instant sharing and participation in graphic and content creation. We see news turned into memes and digital artifacts, GIFs, and advertising algorithms constantly reappearing in the corners of social media screens. Compressed, converted, transmitted, and manipulated, information and images circulate in a diffuse and fluctuating digital space in the mode of source-independent simulation that inherits the patterns

of the post-aura. In his treatise, The Society of the Spectacle, Guy Debord points out "Where the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior" (Debord, 1967) In other words, media and media-mediated images have a profound effect on us. The more we interact and participate in the means of the spectacle, the greater its impact on our perceptual development.

3. Cell
3.1. The Climate of the Post-Truth
The montage-like perception is therefore a device of post-aura and counter-post truth as a basis for creative and free interpretation of our reality. Manifested in the second room, Cell represents the post-truth world. The Cell is an outer spherical room that encapsulates the Nucleus. The Nucleus, located in the center of the room, becomes the stage for spectators. While the pores inside the nucleus were a lens to see the outside, the pores outside the nucleus are now transformed into a screen that recorded the avatar spectators. The virtual self is technologically mediated in a montage-like scattered view, and the avatar spectators see a fragmented image of themselves.

In the expansion and saturation of the digital environment, the creative leap of reading and the kaleidoscope mode of simulation is required for today's perceptual abilities. We are experiencing that interactive media and computer-generated images are accelerating the era of post-truth, blurring the lines between imagination and reality, and raising questions of authenticity. Likewise, source-independent simulations accentuated by sensations and stimuli further highlight subjective experiences. It shows that not only our experiences but also the character and expression of language change as the medium changes. Because our perception is expressed in language, the medium defines the range of expressions that affect our perception. For example, comparing the two different interactive mechanisms of media between one-way delivery channels such as newspapers and interactive channels such as social media and online platforms, the development of perceptual attitudes is recognized differently. On the contrary to causally ordered structures of newspapers, the interactive mechanisms of computer-based media allow less restrictive and nonlinear structural relationships of clickable, movable, reversible, and manipulable information.

3. Montage-like Perception

As we adapt to changes in digital media and its cultural artifacts, it creates a context for building perceptual awareness in confronting the technological and socio-cultural challenges of post-aura and post-truth: the montage-like perception. It is a perception that processes mechanical speed, overwhelming volume, fluctuations in graphics and information. Information units are refined into fragments and become the material for reconstructing the creative structure of reality. By then applying the nonlinear structure of the learned behavior of digital media, members of the digital society can perform their perceptual ability to freely deconstruct and reconstruct their understanding of reality.

4. Conclusion

In a time when units of information and media are unfolding into the complex mode of spectacle, recontextualizing technological experiences helps rethink current media conditions. By reflecting on how we build our perceptual relationships with media, it aspires to our role as users and creators, therefore, envisioning a new model of participation and a step towards the future of media.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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