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報告

バーチャリティの詩学

ゲーム、コスプレ、マジック、宇宙における「別様に生きること」の試論

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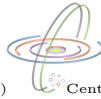
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抄 録

人々は「ここ・今」に存在しない別様の (alternative) 世界をどのように経験できるだろうか？ どのような条件がバーチャルな経験を生み出し、それは私たちの生活にどう影響するのだろうか？ 近年のVR技術や生成AIの発展によって、「非物質的」なものとの関係性は劇的に変化した。しかし、私たちが出会うバーチャリティは、VR技術に限定されるものではない。本論文では、「バーチャルな経験」を可能にする条件としての詩学 (poetics) を日常的な事例とともに検討する。そのために、「動態的な記号過程の文化心理学」および「複線径路等至性モデリング」における可能 (possible) の概念と、シモンドンの「個体化理論」におけるポテンシャル (potential) の概念を手がかりに、バーチャリティを理解するための試論的考察を行う。具体的には、ゲーム、コスプレ、マジック、宇宙についての事例研究を通じて、現実性 (reality) がいかに創発するのかを提示する。バーチャリティは私たちの経験を形作り、まだ存在しないものを現実を生み出し、詩的なやり方で異種混交性へと没入することを可能にする。

キーワード：バーチャリティの詩学、現実性、別様に生きること、
複線径路等至性モデリング、個体化理論

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Report

Poetics of Virtuality

An Exploratory Study of Alternative Ways of Living in
Gameplay, Cosplay, Magic, and the Cosmos

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Abstract

How can people experience an alternative way of living that does not exist in the ‘here-and-now’? What conditions give rise to such virtual experiences, and how do they affect our lives? Advances in virtual reality (VR) technologies and generative artificial intelligence (AI) have drastically changed people’s relationships with nonmaterial things in recent years. This paper explores the role of poetics in enabling such experiences by drawing on examples from everyday life. To this end, the paper adopts the concept of possibility as developed in the ‘cultural psychology of dynamic semiosis’ and ‘Trajectory Equifinality Modelling’ (TEM), as well as Simondon’s concept of potential from his ‘theory of individuation’, to guide an exploratory consideration of virtuality. Rather than viewing virtuality as merely an unreal representation or technology, this study reexamines it as involving a pre-individual (metastable) phase of experience that can be immersive, performative, ephemeral, or continuous. Through case studies involving gameplay, cosplay, magic performances, and engagement with the cosmos, this paper demonstrates the emergence of alternatives as lived realities. These practices show that virtuality actively feeds on ongoing experience and actuality itself. From this perspective, virtuality is not distinct from everyday reality. Even when the object of virtuality is physically distant, psychological distance constitutes the ‘inside edge’ of a person’s horizontal border of the semioscape. Virtuality shapes our experience, enabling us to bring things that do not yet exist into being and to immerse ourselves in heterogeneity poetically. Cultural psychological research on virtuality thus approaches virtual experience as a subjective semiotic *umwelt* situated within everyday reality, where detouring towards collective meaning-making takes priority over sensory virtuality.

keywords: Poetics of virtuality, Reality, Alternative ways of living,
Trajectory Equifinality Modelling, Individuation theory

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I Introduction

How can people experience an alternative way of living that does not exist in the ‘*here-and-now*’? What conditions give rise to such a virtual experience, and how do they affect our lives? Advances in virtual reality (VR) technologies in recent years have made it possible to visually reproduce idealised aspects, whereas the rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has enabled people to generate ideal conversational partners, images, music, and text. Regardless of whether a world exists in the real world, people can form communities with others they encounter, experience alternatives, and express new versions of their identities. Thus, one might argue that people’s relationships with nonmaterial things have changed drastically.

However, virtual experiences are not confined to VR technology. These range from anime or manga pilgrimages (*seichi junrei*), where people visit real locations to experience fictional settings from a character’s perspective, to arranging home audio environments to replicate the sound of a favourite artist, and using bath additives to recreate the atmosphere of a hot spring resort at home. In these examples, we feel the virtual—not entirely unreal, yet at the edge of perception, distant from the reality of our everyday lives. Therefore, this study is not concerned with any specific technology, but rather with the conditions that enable us to experience virtuality. The organisation of the virtual experience, which we might call the *poetics of virtuality*, is unique and cultural because it is rooted in everyday life.

Trajectory Equifinality Modelling (TEM) (Sato 2017; Sato et al. 2016, 2021), which is based on cultural psychology, describes how alternative possibilities are imagined culturally and how potential tensions and conflicts can lead to life trajectories branching off in new directions. There are several variants of cultural psychology, one of which is Valsiner’s version, often described as the *cultural psychology of dynamic semiosis* (Valsiner 2014a). It conceptualises culture as an affective semiotic process that guides human development within an irreversible period. From this perspective, although it is possible to distinguish between ‘possible’ and ‘potential’, it is still necessary to discuss their dynamic relationship in everyday experience. In addition, a theoretical understanding of virtual experiences in TEM needs to be developed because they deepen our notion of ‘reality’ throughout the life trajectory.

In anticipation of the ensuing discussion, this paper introduces the two central concepts of ‘possible’, understood as culturally guided branching, and ‘potential’, conceived as a field of tensions towards the uncertain. In this study, these two concepts are related to the pre-realisation of pathways. The virtual is considered a phase of experience, or an experience that feels like the edge of the ‘*here-and-now*’ horizon, where new values are emerging.

To illustrate how an ‘everyday virtual world’ can emerge for an individual, this study examines a range of practices and experiential domains, including gameplay,

cosplay, magic performances, and encounters with the cosmos. These examples clarify how physical and psychological distance can facilitate virtual engagement. This study engages with the boundary of meaning-making in cultural psychology, a liminal field in which experience has *not yet been fully semiotised, yet the complexity of wholeness is already perceived as significant*. This liminal situation is one of the creations in between, where possible futures emerge from potential tensions.

II From Ideological ‘Virtuality’ to Phase of Experience

In everyday language, the term ‘virtual’ is often used to refer to that which is ‘unreal’, ‘immaterial’, ‘simulated’, or ‘imitative’. However, such usage is insufficient for understanding how people enter and experience worlds that are not located *here-and-now*, such as the fictional worlds of anime and manga, fantasy encountered in magic performances, or distant domains such as outer space. Such experiences cannot be fully understood if the virtual is merely considered as the opposite of the real.

Etymologically, the term ‘virtual’ derives from the Latin *virtus* and, since the mid-fifteenth century, has carried the meaning of ‘being something in essence or effect, though not in fact; existing virtually, though not actually’ (Etymonline n. d.). From the outset, the term implies that what is experienced may be non-actual while nevertheless overlapping with actuality itself. In this sense, the virtual has never been completely separate from experience; it has always been proximate to it.

In Aristotelian thought, the terms ‘virtual’ and ‘potential’ were originally considered equivalent. However, it was not until the late twentieth century that thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze and Pierre Lévy sought to redefine this concept by distinguishing between the two (Tisseron & Tordo 2025). As Tisseron and Tordo (2025) explained, potential is opposed to reality in that it can only be realised over an extended period, whereas the virtual is opposed to the actual in that it can be brought into being rapidly and intentionally. The emphasis here is on the virtual as something that can be swiftly and deliberately actualised because of its fine-line boundary.

Within the Bergson–Deleuze tradition, it should be noted that Deleuze’s critique was directed less at the concept of the potential than at a specific interpretation of ‘possibility’. Bergson’s critique of the concept of ‘the possible’ is based on the idea that philosophy has incorrectly viewed it as a negation of ‘the real’ and as containing ‘less’ (Bluemink 2020). More precisely, they criticised the deterministic process as opposed to the genesis of novelty. In this sense, ‘possibility’ is a pre-drawn blueprint for development, such as the ‘fate of the embryo’, along which becoming merely traces an already-given trajectory. Such an understanding of the ‘possible’, and of potential when interpreted in the same way, implies a linear view of the generative process and denies the generation of something new.

Furthermore, the concept of the virtual is deeply intertwined with reality. Sometimes we perceive things that do not exist. Pearson (2005), referring to a crucial passage

cited from *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past or In Search of Lost Time*) by Proust (1954, 1983) as developed in Deleuze's discussion of the 'virtual', states the following:

The discovery of lost time enables the artist to give a new truth to the times of life, including time past, and to find for every sign embedded in materiality a 'spiritual equivalent' (RTP 878; SLT 912). However, we need to determine the nature of the experience that is being described in the passage and that is said to be **neither simply of the past nor of the present**. There is also the encounter with the virtual, that which is said to be **'real without being actual, ideal without being abstract'**.

(Note: RTP refers to the original French edition published in 1954, and SLT to the English translation published in 1983 (Pearson 2005, p. 1123). Emphasis and slight modification added by the present authors.)

In this context, when the virtual is generated as a concrete experience that is independent of time and never truly exists, two modes of experience become apparent: the first is when it is experienced as an unmediated, direct perception (such as instinctively dodging an object flying towards you in VR), and the second is when it acts as a field-like sign that mediates mental processes (such as the awe or impact felt when experiencing a space scene in VR). The latter can be considered the emergence of a *hyper-generalised affective sign field* (Valsiner 2014a). The notion of a non-individual or pre-individual reality that is distinct from, yet interacts with, what is usually called 'the real', as suggested by Deleuze's concept of virtuality (Bluemink 2020), resonates strongly with Simondon's concept of potential individuation.

III Revisiting Possibility:

Creative and Imaginative Constraints in the Equifinal Trajectory

Within the Bergson–Deleuze tradition, the concept of the possible was examined critically as belonging to fate-determined terminology. Therefore, it is positioned in different virtual dimensions. In contrast, cultural psychology and TEM redefine the concept of the possible in a creative manner.¹⁾ TEM is an approach or methodology for depicting the genesis of actuality (*Aktualgenese*: Sander 1930; Werner 1956). To clarify the implications of 'possible' in TEM, it is helpful to outline several of its core concepts that are relevant to the present argument.

Firstly, *equifinality* is the core concept of TEM and functions as an axiom of ontogenetic processes in organic systems. According to this axiom, a system can reach a similar endpoint by following different trajectories, even when it originates from the

1) The concept of the 'possible' in psychological literature, including cultural psychology, is systematically reviewed in Glăveanu (2018).

same initial state (Driesch 1908; von Bertalanffy 1968). While multiple trajectories may unfold throughout life, social guidance directs them towards a specific teleogenetic field: equifinality. This guidance prevents multilinear trajectories from expanding into infinite diversity while sustaining the coexistence of similarity and heterogeneity.

Second, irreversible time is represented along the horizontal axis of TEM. Human life unfolds irreversibly, generating continuous novelty. Even when life appears cyclical and returns to what seems to be the same point, the experiential state is never identical. Rather, such a recurrence implies a spiral or helical movement over time (Campill & Valsiner 2023).

The vertical axis represents the relationship between reality and possibility. Within the dimension of *Aktualgenese*, the ongoing development of human existence, real and imagined events are considered equally valuable (Valsiner 2014b). From everyday anticipations such as ‘It might rain today’ to existential deliberations concerning the origin of life in the universe, fiction and confabulation function as trajectories through which actuality is formed (Bartlett 1932; Wagoner 2009; Valsiner 2021). In the psychological domain, no two experiences are identical or shared in the same way, and all experiences are equally true for the person experiencing them. Accordingly, within TEM, reality and possibility are considered equivalent in terms of actuality.

Thus, imagination (Zittoun 2006; Zittoun & Gillespie 2016; Zittoun & Valsiner 2016) and the possible paths it reveals become an actual part of a person’s life. However, imagination must be defined in a manner that is neither overly flexible nor deterministic. If we imagine an infinite number of options, we lose our sense of direction and cannot develop. The restricted nature of imagination directs creativity within the boundaries of our cultures. Rather than being infinitely continuous, possible trajectories towards an uncertain future tend to be guided towards an equifinality zone. Cultural constraints are defining features of human life. Human *Aktualgenese* is not confined to biological processes alone but is continuously modified through cultural tools and mediational systems. As Jerome Bruner points out:

But ‘constraint’ puts the matter too negatively. For biologically imposed limits on human functioning are also challenges to cultural invention. The tool kit of any culture can be described as a set of prosthetic devices by which human beings can exceed or even redefine the ‘natural limits’ of human functioning. Human tools are precisely of this order—soft ones and hard ones alike. (Bruner 1990, p. 21)

Therefore, within TEM, it is not assumed that possible options are prepared in advance. When something is deemed a ‘possible’ option, it should be understood as an emergent process arising within socio-historical constraints in the present moment. For example, someone whose grandfather was a teacher may feel that becoming a teacher was a predetermined option even before graduating from university. However, viewing this as a historical legacy or ‘an option granted from the outset’ is itself the consequence of that subject’s experiences and choices. Furthermore, the ‘how’ of meaning-making

in becoming a teacher can dynamically transform through the process of social and personal interplay within life trajectories (Tsuchimoto & Sato 2024). While we live in hypercomplexity, every movement of our existing reality triggers ideas and positions to collide, fuse, break, split, and reposition, creating the imagination for compromises and innovations throughout the known (Campill et al. 2025).

Possibility acts as a boundary for the future (Marsico & Tateo 2017; Tateo & Marsico 2023). While these borders may constrain individual trajectories, they do not operate as pre-specified blueprints. Instead, these borders are continually reconstructed through the dynamic semiotic process of relating the self to society, as described by Valsiner. It is precisely through such constraints that individual life trajectories can remain unique, yet demonstrate similarities to the experiences of others.

IV Potential and Individuation: Simondon’s Resonance of Virtuality

Potential, which is distinct from possibility, is a promising concept that indicates a state of readiness for transition in human development. Simondon used this concept in his theory of individuation, which he developed to understand *ontogenesis*. From a cultural psychology perspective, the ontogenesis of human life is the emergence of philosophy and values (Sato et al. 2009, 2014). A notable recent development in TEM is the introduction of individuation or transduction as defined by Simondon. Transduction refers to the creation of new alternatives through imagination to resolve the ‘B-problematic’, in which multiple options emerge as future equifinalities (Simondon 2020; Tanaka et al. 2021). While Simondon’s theory is valuable in that it applies transduction to three levels of ontogenesis—physical, vital, and psychosocial (Simondon 2020)—it overlooks a crucial aspect of human development by focusing on perception as ‘psychological’.

Simondon was not interested in the individual as a finished or stable entity, but in the process of individuation itself. Instead of starting with the individual, he seeks to understand this process (Simondon 2020). Ontogenesis occurs in a metastable state with potential, rather than in a static state. Furthermore, he proposed that all systems are in a state of continuous becoming and are pre-individual beings with the potential for further individuation.

Transduction is a central process in ontogenesis. This is the process by which a pre-individual, metastable system full of potential tensions discovers new organisational structures. In Simondon, transduction is almost synonymous with ontogenesis. As he states, ‘transduction applies to ontogenesis and is ontogenesis itself’ (Simondon 2020, p. 14). He characterised transduction as follows:

Transduction is therefore not merely the reasoning of the mind; it is also intuition, because it is that through which a structure appears in a domain of a problematic as providing the resolution to the problems posed. But contrary to deduction,

transduction does not go elsewhere to seek a principle to resolve the problem of a domain: it extracts the resolving structure from the very tensions of this domain, just as the supersaturated solution crystallizes due to its own potentials and according to the chemical species that it holds, not with the contribution of some foreign form. [...] Transduction is a discovery of dimensions whose system makes the dimensions of each of the terms communicate, such that the complete reality of each of the terms of the domain can become organized into newly discovered structures without loss or reduction. (Simondon 2020, p. 15)

A key characteristic of transduction is the ‘conservation of information’, as defined by Simondon (Simondon 2020, p. 15). This concept is central to his critique of dialectics and Gestalt psychology. While Gestalt psychology privileges form (Gestalt) as a complete and stable structure, Simondon argues that form itself has no precise potential because it is already finished. Instead of form, he proposes the concept of information, which is open to ontogenesis. Notably, he reinterprets Gestalt’s description of the ‘good form’ as a metastable configuration of information.

According to Simondon, information cannot exist within a given entity. Instead, it emerges through a systemic and holistic process of signification arising from tensions between different realities without eliminating any of their elements. Garelli (2020) observed that information functions as a directional force that promotes future individuation. Accordingly, the ‘good form’ is not a stabilised or fixed configuration but rather a form that is rich in energetic potential and charged with future transductions. This form continually generates further individuation by enabling the anticipation of future transformations (Garelli 2020) and does not cease to provoke thought.

In Simondon’s framework, transduction is the process by which pre-individual potential is realised during individuation. Importantly, this process is ongoing and continuous, with the potential repeatedly being taken up and reorganised. Similarly, when we apply the notion of transduction to the aforementioned TEM context, we do not view the transductive process as a means of achieving complete resolution. Instead, this leads to the emergence of a new trajectory: reconfiguring future life paths. In other words, it is an endless individual (Fukuyama 2026; Fukuyama & Sato, 2025). Transduction is the imaginative generation of new alternatives to resolve conflict, resulting in ephemeral equifinality. Earlier psychological literature often characterised transduction as a childish or primitive mode of reasoning. For example, Jean Piaget defined transductive reasoning as a child’s tendency to perceive connections between unrelated events without using deductive or inductive logic (APA Dictionary of Psychology 2022). However, in terms of developmental and cultural psychology, transduction should not be viewed as a retrospective error. Instead, it is a forward-looking mode of problem solving and meaning-making in situations of conflict and tension (Kanzaki et al. 2022). In this sense, transduction emphasises the creation of novelty in the future through the tension between personal and collective cultures in life trajectories (Tsuchimoto 2025).

In summary, the distinction between ‘possible’ and ‘potential’, as discussed above, relates to future trajectories. ‘Possible’ refers to specific future pathways that are culturally imagined, in which constraints are an integral part of the creative process. In contrast, the notion of ‘potential’ designates the heterogeneous tensions underlying such branching. Notably, the concept of the virtual is remarkably similar to potential, in that they both refer to the phase in which the pre-individual becomes a new form. They are closely related to reality as vague yet accessible non-material fields. The former relates to the conditions of actuality, while the latter relates to transduction or ontogenetic processes.

V Poetics of Virtuality: Living Alternatives as Real

Having outlined the conceptual framework for considering alternatives, this section examines three empirical cases to illustrate these dynamics. In everyday life, people can create alternative experiences that can be lived in direct and bodily ways. Examining how virtuality operates differently in each case reveals that it is not static but changes dynamically in response to cultural and subjective conditions. It should be noted that these examples are autoethnographic in nature and have been reconstructed through dialogues with other authors and researchers based on the experiences and understanding of the first author.

5-1 Gameplay: Virtuality as an Immersive Acting Reality

The experience of playing games demonstrates that the dimensions of the virtual and the actual, and of the real and the possible (potential), are not independent of one another. For instance, in massive multiplayer online (MMO) games or the Metaverse (virtual community platform), users enter game worlds through mediating devices and engage in forms of social interaction that would be impossible in their everyday lives. Encountering a new game world can be described as the actualisation of a virtual game. Yet the experiences lived within the game appear to the player as a concrete form of reality—the sensation ‘I am playing a game’ is real. Moreover, in contexts such as devising strategies to defeat enemies or designing layouts in virtual housing systems, multiple future options emerge as possible trajectories.

The virtual experience is accessed intuitively and immediately. The first engagement with the virtual world occurs the moment an application is launched, and the virtual world rapidly manifests itself in the player’s experience. In contrast, possibility is an assemblage of resources such as items, actions, strategies, spatial variations, and patterns of movement, which are engaged in either habitually or deliberately. In this sense, possibility is semiotic and, therefore, very much a part of culture.

The focus should, of course, be on the creative and dynamic process of generating

new meanings, not on the static process of merely selecting one option from those set up by the game. Instead, it should be a creative and dynamic process that generates new meaning, exploring how one might enjoy using the given tools. Consider a different type of example: games such as *Enemy Zero* require players to deduce an enemy's location solely through sound. In these scenarios, players do not have direct access to the visually displayed 'correct answer' on the screen. Instead, they synthesise various auditory cues, to creatively devise a better approach, thereby crafting their own subjective gaming experiences. Indeed, visually impaired individuals often employ such creative methods to engage in gameplay. When such creative possibilities begin to emerge, it is precisely that affective, rather than cognitive, sense of 'this might be a good way to go' that manifests as another aspect of the virtual.

5-2 Magic Performance: Virtuality as Emergent Belief

During magic performances, the audience encounters moments that break the rules of everyday reality and evoke an immediate and intuitive sense of surprise. However, this surprise does not stem from a rejection of reality. Rather, it depends on our shared understanding of how reality operates. For instance, a ball falling on the ground is not magical because it conforms to everyday expectations. Expectation here is merely virtual—it anticipates the future but is rooted in the present, a product of imagination drawing on resources from the past. When the ball defies gravity by floating, vanishing, and reappearing elsewhere, or multiplying it by two, the audience experiences astonishment. Magic events emerge only when an event transgresses the agreed boundary of what is ordinarily possible.

The dynamics of reality become clearer when we consider an infant observing a magician's trick. For a baby, the concept of object permanence—the understanding that an object continues to exist even when it disappears—may not yet be established. Consequently, games such as Peekaboo can genuinely surprise babies while being entirely predictable for adults. Alternatively, magic can be understood as fundamentally dependent on visual reality, similar to gameplay. In a purely auditory world, such as in darkness or for blind people, most magic tricks do not work. This indicates that the reality of magic is organised through a specific perception of reality. Therefore, what counts as real depends on one's understanding of the structure of the world.

A shared understanding of a 'world of magic' is presupposed by magic performances, in which magical moments such as levitation, disappearance, or transformation are possible. Within this virtual world, magic emerges as a real phenomenon experienced through sensory and physical surprises. Although 'magic' belongs to the realm of fantasy, it is momentarily experienced as real.

In short, magic performances are based on a shared understanding of everyday rules and determine what fantasy is. When the boundary of the 'usual' is broken, a manifestation of virtuality emerges—the possibility that 'magic may exist'.

5-3 Cosplay: Virtual Atmosphere as Guidance

Cosplay is often understood as imitating fictional characters or reproducing a fictional world. However, these interpretations are superficial. Before specific anime or manga narratives or characters are created, the ‘otherworldly’ virtual atmosphere must first be translated into ‘possible’ pathways. This atmosphere is shared not only by the creators of anime and manga but also by the public who enjoy watching them, including cosplayers.

Although anime and manga are products of imagination, engaging with them—seeing, feeling, and becoming characters—makes the individual feel very real. Cosplayers use costumes, photography, and posing techniques to construct an alternative self oriented toward a character. When it comes to ‘Nijigen’ (two-dimensional) cosplay, which is inspired by anime, manga and similar sources, the emphasis is on the virtual nature of the costumes. In ‘Nijigen’ works, costumes are usually depicted only in terms of colour and shape, and their material properties and fabrics are often left undefined. This indefiniteness becomes a source of imagination and virtual potential within cosplay. Cosplayers engage in their own unique materialisation, thoroughly interpreting the character’s personality, the work’s worldview, and the scene’s atmosphere—deciding, for instance, that “this character would wear this fabric”—as they see fit. While cosplay of ‘three-dimensional’ works (such as live-action films and idols) has a ‘correct’ costume, cosplay of ‘Nijigen’ works leads to as many diverse interpretations as there are cosplayers. This plurality of interpretations demonstrates the creative possibilities that emerge, when virtual indefiniteness is introduced into reality.

In cosplay, virtuality is manifested not only in costume creation but also in the retouching of photographs. For cosplayers, the essential feeling of ‘I’ve become the character!’ arises from the process of preparing to become a specific character, taking photographs, and viewing the selected retouched images. Their photographic styles vary at this point, but examples include ‘shooting at real-world locations that evoke another world’, and ‘retouching and compositing photographs to create an otherworldly feel’. The latter process of bringing the visually externalised self closer to an idealised virtual world or character clearly demonstrates the actualisation of virtuality. Retouching techniques that create a sense of levitation or magical effects, realise the virtuality of elements such as liberation from gravity or the presence of non-existent lights and forces, which are impossible in reality. In particular, actions that transcend human physical limitations, such as characters flying through the sky, cannot be perceived, unless we distance ourselves from reality using specific retouching techniques as a mediated sign. Starting from their real bodies and locations, cosplayers achieve the ‘impossible’ in ‘Nijigen’ works by overlaying virtuality using these techniques.

5-4 The Cosmos: Virtuality as Poetic Reality

Although the Apollo missions established lunar exploration as ‘real’, not everyone has experienced it in the same way. For many people, experiencing the lunar landscape in the same manner as astronauts is a virtual experience. We still encounter the lunar surface from a distance using images, recordings, stories, and other mediated forms.

Contemporary planetariums, as well as cosmos-related VR and cinematic experiences, can be understood as extensions of these cultural acts. Here, the focus is not on the Moon as an object to be reached but on its role as a virtual domain that continually opens new forms of virtuality.

Throughout history, lunar surfaces have been layered with various meanings. Celestial phenomena such as lunar cycles and eclipses have been incorporated into myths, calendars, astrology, and religious rituals. In this sense, the visible reality of our vantage point on Earth has given rise to cultural possibilities and the poetics of seeing the Moon. The overwhelming distance between Earth and the Moon enables the Moon to be perceived as a sacred, pleromatic landscape.

Therefore, people who contemplate the cosmos from Earth, as well as astronauts who explore the spiritual realm rather than space, attempt to bridge the realities of the ‘distal’ (*there-and-then*) and ‘proximal’ (*here-and-now*) worlds by utilising a multitude of semiotic resources. Yet it is precisely here that a distinctly different tonal reality emerges from that experienced by astronauts, who feel the ‘literal real’. This is the essence of the poetics of virtuality: the subjective movement connecting the virtual and the actual.

VI Conclusion

This paper reexamines virtuality, viewing it not merely as an unreal representation or technology but also as a pre-individual (metastable) phase of experience that is sometimes immersive, sometimes performative, sometimes ephemeral, and sometimes continuous. Through case studies involving gameplay, cosplay, magic performances, and engagement with the cosmos, this study demonstrates how alternatives emerge as lived realities. Virtuality is not limited to escaping from or imitating ‘reality’ in these cases. Instead, it is an everyday reality that expands and reorganises the physical world. These practices demonstrate that virtuality actively feeds on ongoing experience and actuality itself.

The concepts employed in this study—real, possible, potential, virtual, and actual—are not intended to create rigid divisions. Rather, they operate as interconnected modes of experience explaining how individuals perceive alternative realities and connect them to the present. Crucially, virtuality, understood as perceiving orientations

of ‘aboutness’, does not operate alone. It works in conjunction with imagination to create culturally restricted possibilities. Therefore, virtuality is not a parallel domain detached from reality; it cocreates reality under physical and material conditions.

From this perspective, virtuality is not distinct from everyday reality. Even if objects are far away, like the cosmos, psychological distance constitutes the ‘inside edge’ of a person’s horizontal border of the *semioscape*. Virtuality shapes our experience, enabling us to bring things that do not yet exist into being and immerse ourselves in heterogeneity poetically.

The proposed discussion contributes to our understanding of contemporary media environments, such as VR and generative AI, in which questions of reality are increasingly prominent. In such circumstances, people often find themselves in a state of ‘disrupted liminal metastability’ at a systemic societal or individual level—that is, they are ‘subjects-in-crisis’ whose equilibrium is compromised by crisis (Stenner 2025). However, the compromise of equilibrium is not confined to crises. Experiences that evoke a *sense of wonder*,²⁾ such as turning points in life, aesthetic encounters with art, or immersion in anime worlds, call into question the existing sign hierarchy by reconnecting it with bodily hierarchies. This is an immersive, sensual process accompanied by surprise, beauty, or sublimity that guides the subject towards an *affective leap* (Tsuchimoto et al. in print; Valsiner 2014a). In summary, the everyday practices examined in this study demonstrate that virtuality operates through the dynamic interplay between sensation and semiotic processes through which reality itself is continuously reorganised.

Recent psychological research on VR has adopted a narrow focus on experimental approaches such as bodily sensations, personal space, and communication associated with avatar use. This is a natural consequence, given that VR technology has been developed based on James Gibson’s concept of affordance—the idea that subjects directly perceive the possible actions afforded by their environment. Viewing VR technology in terms of meaning generation has created a rich field of research. This perspective considers VR technology to be more than just a device for reproducing sensory stimulation or perception; it is also a technology concerned with the holistic process of human conscious experience (Sato 2025). Cross-cultural psychology offers no obvious reason for VR to be a subject of research. In contrast, cultural psychology explores the general processes of generating action and meaning as higher human psychological functions. It views the subject as negotiating with the environment through cultural sign mediation, rather than directly. Cultural psychological research on virtuality explores VR as a subjective semiotic environment (*Umwelt*; Kull 1998; Uexküll 1909) within the context of everyday reality, where *detouring* towards collective meaning-making is primary, and sensory virtuality is secondary.

2) The concept of the ‘Sense of Wonder’ was introduced by Sarah Awad (Aalborg University) during an intensive lecture at Ritsumeikan University, in which she discussed the experience of passers-by encountering Aalborg city wall art. Such experiences compromise equilibrium and share similarities with magic and VR.

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