

Dampening the fall: building a metaverse around life and society, versus building life and society around a metaverse.

A manifesto regarding metaverse interactions with greater society.

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Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights

Definition of metaverse in this writing:

For simplicity, a metaverse or *immediate digital extension of a metaverse* will be combined and defined as any digital/virtual space a human may explore, whether it be a computer desktop, a website, a social media app, massive multiplayer online games, or immersive virtual reality universes.

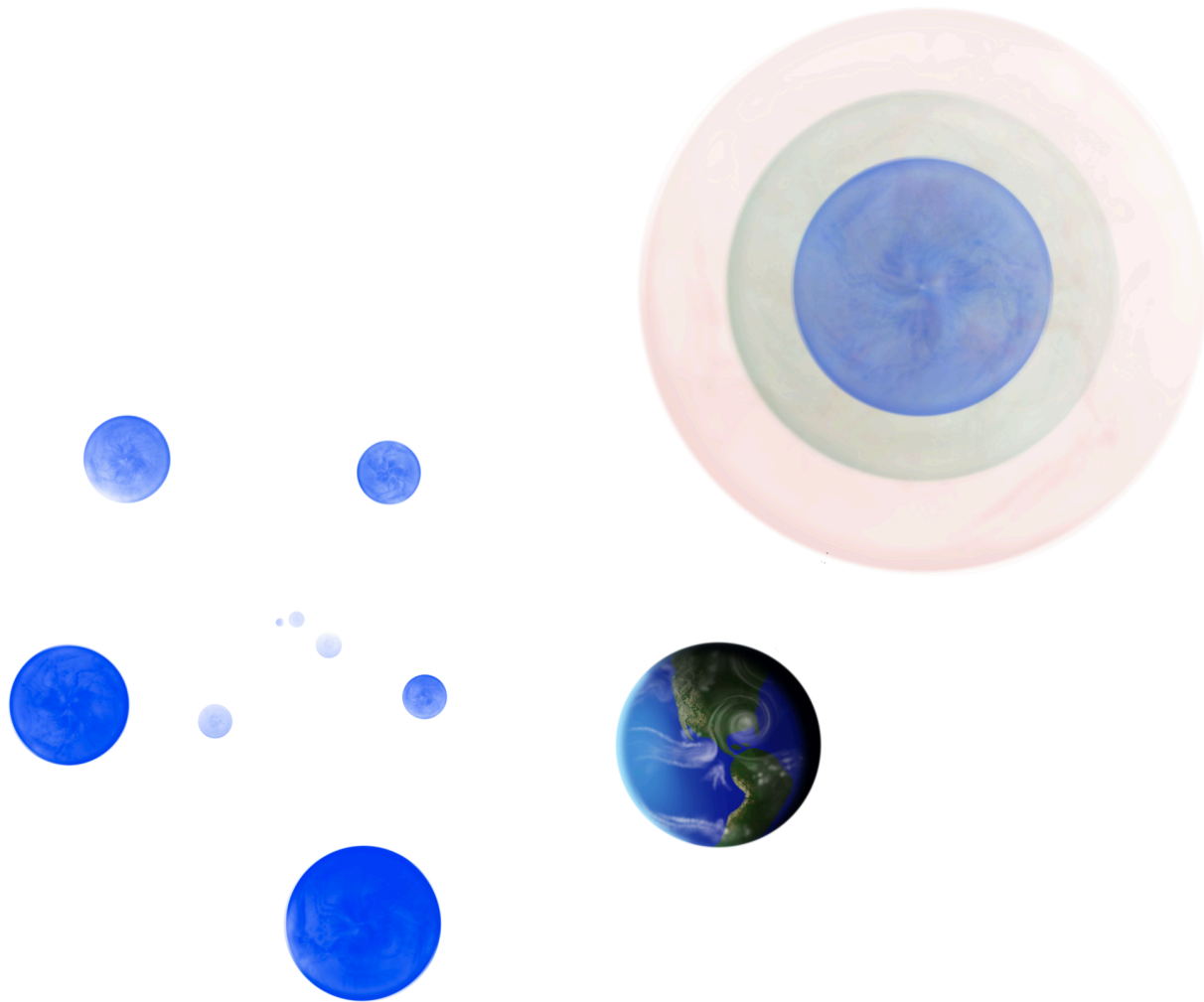
Introduction:

The difference between building a metaverse around life and society versus building life and society around a metaverse may appear linguistically subtle, but charts two entirely different directions for human civilization. Therefore, the aim of this manifesto is to elaborate on what may happen to the structure and dynamics of society when populations allocate large majorities of their attention to development of and time in virtual worlds, e.g. society being organized around a metaverse, as compared and contrasted to when virtual spaces are developed so as to promote a feedback loop of interaction, development and improvement of life outside of virtual worlds, e.g. a metaverse being organized around external society.

I: The spatial and temporal resilience of the physical world in contrast to virtual worlds:

To our understanding, the physical world as a space around us has demonstrated resilience through deep time, as both the Earth and life on it have withstood planetary-scale disasters such as volcanoes and asteroids that catalyzed extreme climate change. On the other hand, human civilization and the resulting interactions and repercussions on planetary ecosystems and climate have not been deep time tested, so it is critical that we demonstrate great care for the Earth and any other planets, moons or other spaces we inhabit as society continues to grow and advance. Furthermore, virtual spaces are much

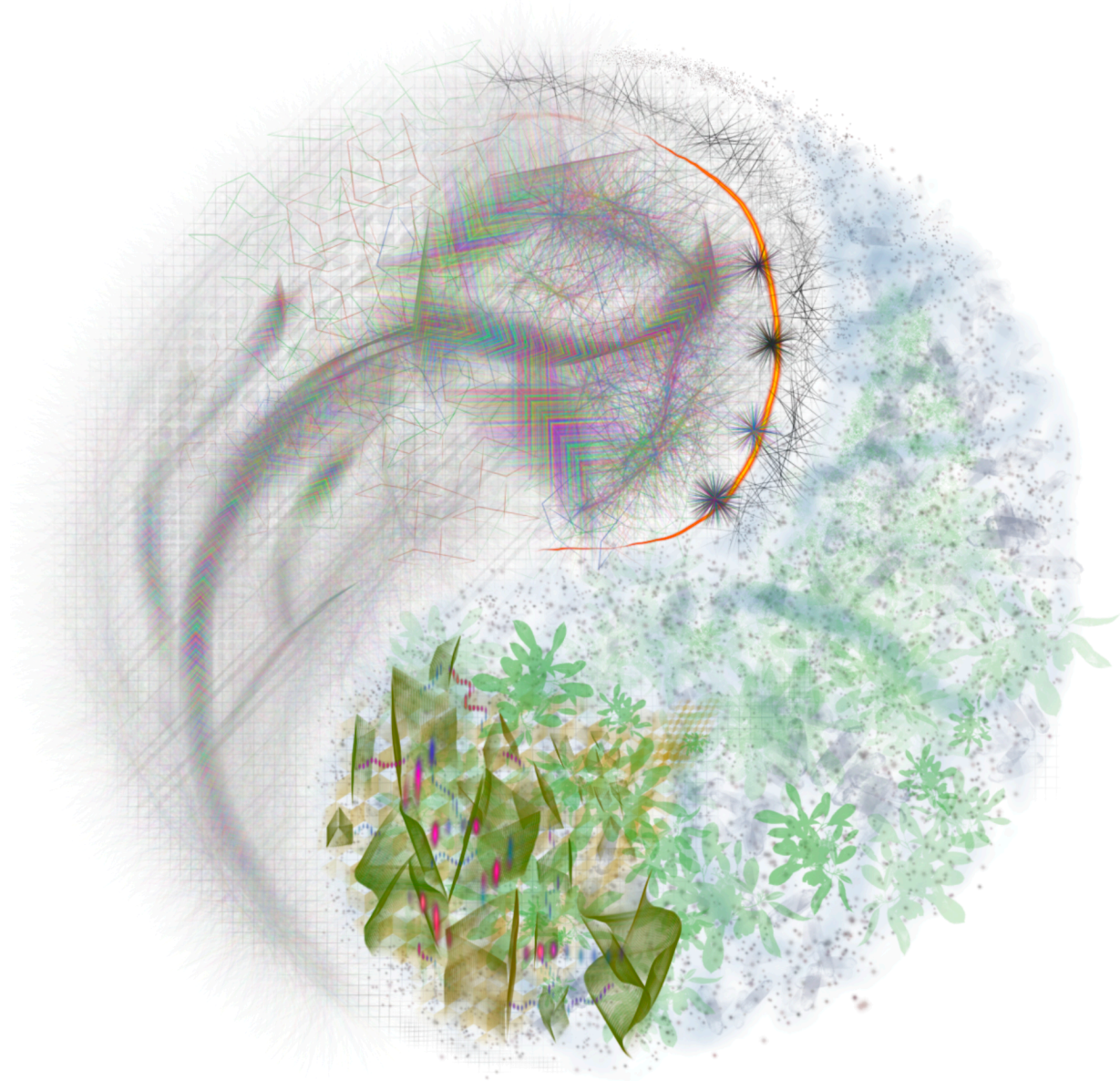
younger than human civilization and are even less time-tested for stability, and are derived from electromagnetic signaling from computer transistors that can be eradicated in seconds. Indeed, relatively small errors in transistor signaling and/or incorrect lines of code can result in entire digital universes ceasing to exist in time scales faster than humans are capable of experiencing. This leads to the conclusion that a great majority of time spent on the development or upkeep of virtual spaces should not detract from the development and upkeep of the physical world.



II: The invisible threshold of societal decay:

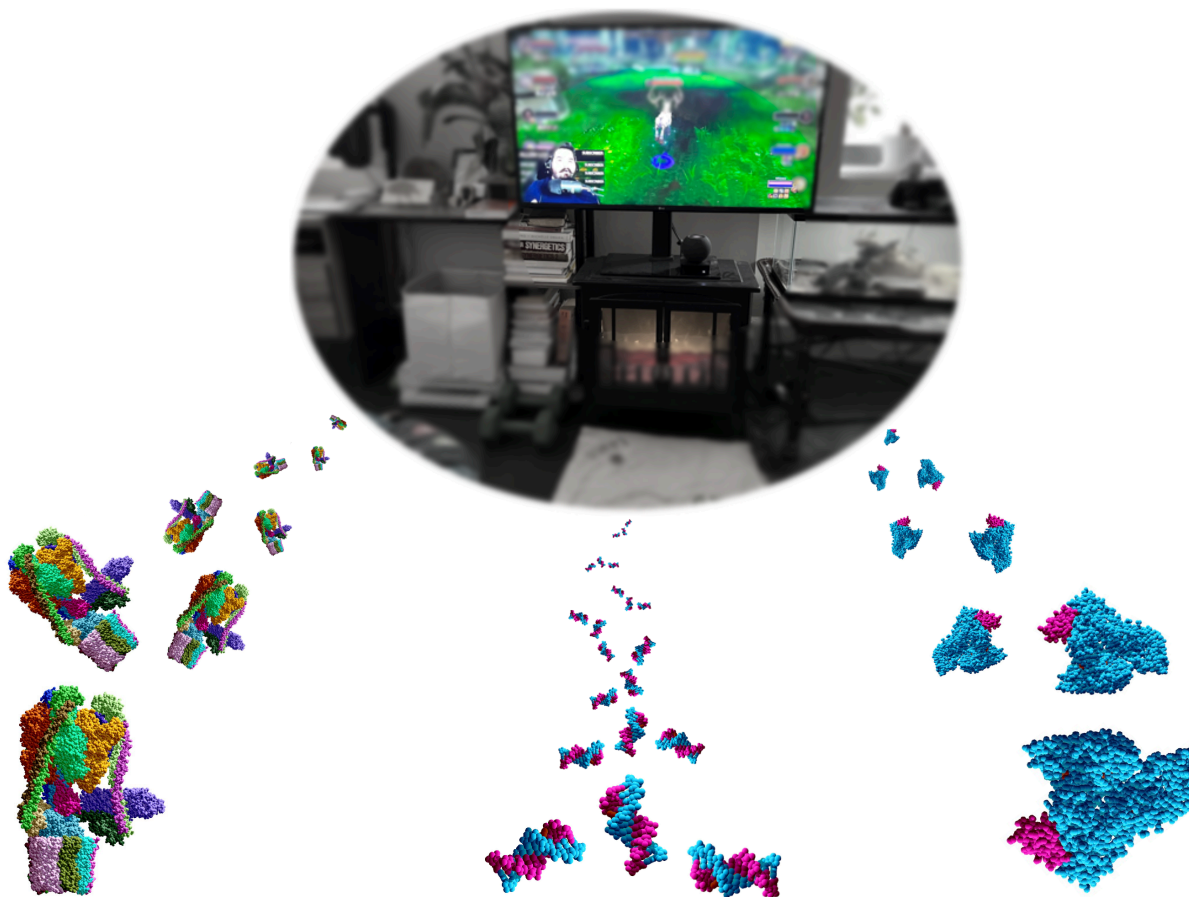
There is likely to be an invisible and unpredictable threshold at which the cumulative attention of human society to virtual social and/or fantasy worlds overtakes the attention allocated to our physical homes, and infrastructure and societal structures start to deteriorate faster than they can be maintained and improved. Specifically, many would agree that global human civilization already holds significant room for improvement, and in theory there exists cutoff thresholds of how much collective time, energy, attention and other resources can be poured into the metaverse before societal/infrastructure deterioration rates overtake maintenance and improvement rates. Because we may not know precisely what this threshold is or what it may manifest itself as until we are significantly ‘within it’, it is important to take precautionary measures in order to prevent the development of detrimental societal structures and

behaviors.



III: Our experience is deeply rooted in the physical world:

Topics spanning an increasing free-for-all of options for designing virtual avatars as extensions of self, to modern perspectives on gender identity, indicate an agitation of the human mind with physical reality and a resulting attempt to 'free itself'. And yet the physical body is the 'flower bed' that constrains, regenerates and tethers the mind to its existence on the Earth, from which we deeply rely upon to grow and harvest the molecular ingredients of our mind-sustaining metabolism. Because our mind and thus the perpetuating existence of our experience is regenerated by metabolism and therefore by the circulation, manipulation and propagation of physical ingredients in the physical world, even our ability to experience virtual spaces is rooted in the proper upkeep of the Earth.



IV: Fostering patience and steady improvements over rapid idea translation, or, avoiding Dante's Hell and eternal play:

Maintaining and improving physical systems for human survival and wellness and monitoring and improving their interactions with ecosystems and climate is often a very gradual process, since fluctuations of climate and ecosystem dynamics can operate over time scales much longer than that of human civilization. Likewise, even the translation of any idea from the mind into the physical world often requires patience, as one must first comprehensively sculpt mental imagery through study and thought and then translate it into physical or digital reality through a variety of tools and media. This is particularly true for the creation and manipulation of physical objects, whether they be homes, artworks, technologies or experiments. On the other hand, virtual worlds can manifest ideas and simulations of physical objects much faster, e.g. one may design and build a virtual home quite quickly, and yet this home is an electromagnetic 'object' or simulation incapable of providing shelter as a physical home could.

Since the rate at which the metaverse may become more interesting and addictive, at least partially due to the accelerating rate of thought transfer from mind to virtual space, is rapidly outpacing the the rate of thought transfer from mind to physical / non-digital reality, it is critical that we put forth the effort to make the physical world competitive with the metaverse for our attention, and bring our dreams to life. Likewise, if we restrict our dreams to virtual spaces, we may increase the probability of being lulled into eternal play, potentially fostering and accelerating societal decay. This in turn may create a negative feedback loop, where we further hide in virtual spaces to avoid stress manifested from the deterioration of the physical world, turning the metaverse into a societal 'ostrich hole'.

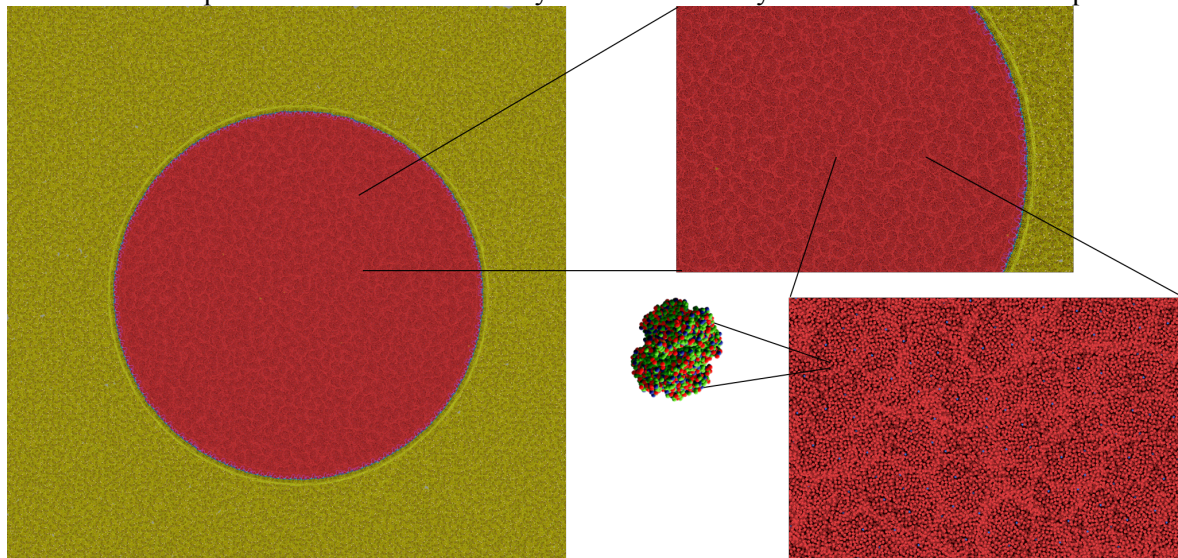
Likewise, the concept of hiding from the world in a state of 'eternal play' is also a rejection of the pursuit of higher love, work and meaning. If Dante were alive to see individuals today spending days and

weeks at a time indulging in repetitive virtual fantasy battles or aimless pursuits of followers and admiration on digital platforms, he would surely be able to easily parody this in a level of his Inferno. For example, although a video game battle in a digital ‘arena’ or a simulated robbery or war may be exciting to some, actually living this out and repeating this experience over and over without the ability to escape the situation through victory or death would truly be Hell.



V: Building a metaverse around life and society, A) infinite exploration of space and time:

Prior discussion leads us to contemplate how computational systems may be designed to foster exploration and wonder of and for the physical world. One such possibility might be an attempt to push the exploration of any spacetime coordinates to infinity. As one example, augmented reality overlays onto physical reality, whether it be through phones, glasses, or other technologies, are rapidly accelerating the capability of identifying any object and material, and seamlessly zooming in on this material to explore its molecular or atomic fine-structure, or zooming out to see bird’s eye views of an object’s positioning on the planet or in the solar system, galaxy or universe. Further computational advances may grant such augmented ‘smooth zooming’ simulations the capability of pausing, rewinding, or fast-forwarding time into simulated representations of scientifically and/or historically derived data across multiple scales.



VI: Building a metaverse around life and society, B) trial runs of civilization and infinite art:

Michelle Obama once reflected on time with her husband and wrote that they were "...laying on the beach, trying on different versions of the future." This is another excellent example of how a metaverse could generative a positive feedback loop of beneficial impacts on society outside of the virtual space. Virtual worlds provide a 'safe space' for trial-runs of societal and civilization design and aesthetics before we commit to them in the physical world, so as long as we do not too deeply fall into and become reliant upon the mechanics of virtual worlds, they may provide useful inspiration for the betterment of society. The capability of being able to safely cycle through and experience a near infinity of societal and infrastructural designs and aesthetics in virtual spaces in order to translate the most brilliant, inspiring and uplifting into the physical world, creates a positive feedback loop between the metaverse and society, where the metaverse is built around society in order to improve it (in contrast to a society being built around a metaverse in order to improve said metaverse).

Likewise, the metaverse significantly expands the amount of artistic spaces we may explore and experience. As Terence McKenna once said, "The artist's task is to save the soul of mankind; and anything less is a dithering while Rome burns. Because of the artists, who are self-selected, for being able to journey into the Other, if the artists cannot find the way, then the way cannot be found." Digital spaces expand the amount of room artists have to explore and publish their work, and greatly extends the reach of this work, which may increase the chances of greater society moving in the best possible directions as the work of artists venturing into the 'other', into the deep peripheries of their senses and experiences, becomes increasingly accessible.



The Street Channel of the Ideal City by Arthur Skizhali-Weiss

VII: Building a metaverse around life and society, C) positive versus negative feedback loops from the metaverse onto society:

From the discussion above, it is important to reiterate that virtual spaces may generate both positive (beneficial) and negative (detrimental) feedback loops onto external society, and it is likely that modern society is currently experiencing a tug of war between both. As significant financial resources and engineering talent have been invested into improving the ability of virtual spaces such as social media and video games to attract and hold the attention of large audiences, it is evermore important that we examine and self-reflect on what is being translated from digital to physical spaces, if anything. As a personal example from the author, although I have used video games in a potentially detrimental manner of escapism, I also make an effort to learn something new about the mind and experience, or digital systems and computer code, or find aesthetic inspiration in fantasy realms, to ensure something applicable aside from stress relief and/or a sense of play is manifested from the virtual to physical world.

VIII: Avoiding a fall from which we cannot climb out of:

Due to the complex tug of war between societally beneficial versus detrimental impacts of virtual spaces, and how we may not recognize the moment we have crossed the threshold of metaverse-influenced societal deterioration, if we have not already, it may be helpful to assume we are constantly ‘tiptoeing’ around ‘probability pits’ of societal collapse (red) while attempting to generate, maintain and improve societal harmony (blue). At any given moment, we may not know how close we are to a downward slope or pit of societal deterioration, or if we are already tumbling down a cliff-side into one and need to change course. And the further and faster we fall into societal deterioration and collapse, the more difficult it may become to climb out of such a situation. Therefore, due to the rapidly accelerating degree to which virtual spaces capture our attention, as well as the accelerating detail, complexity and nearly infinite amount of time that can be spent within digital universes, it may be very important to get metaverse aesthetics and dynamics right the first time before a ‘faulty’ or detrimental metaverse becomes too difficult to dig ourselves out of.

