



# New Space vol. I

A fundamental framework

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This is the first article in a series of reports tracing the development and ensuing investigation

of new "Phygingality" and (or) a conscious existence within the meta.

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A difficult term to wholly describe, the Metaverse in contemporary popular imagination accounts for the radical evolution of the technological ecosystem through a consistently evolving integrated network of 3D virtual worlds. Matthew Ball, co-founder of Ball Metaverse Research Partners speculates that this 'will slowly emerge over time as different products, services, and capabilities integrate and meld together' (2020). Fundamentally, it must be noted that the Metaverse does not replace the internet, but rather builds on it and therefore should be looked at as 'the next phase of the internet' (2021). In the same way that the development of mobile internet technology allowed us portable access to virtual space with continuous connectivity (rather than tied to a specific room with a computer), the Metaverse lays out the potential for a network of interconnected experiences.

Pointedly, the networked aspect of the Metaverse demonstrates that it does not exist in one singular place but merges with our existing universe across multiple new spaces. In turn, these new spaces enable multi-sensory interactions and seamlessly embodied communication (Mystakidis 2022). Hence, the term 'New Space' more accurately accounts for the all-encompassing and integrated aspects of these technological developments.

Already, there are meta-levels to our existence thanks to infinite connectivity and our daily encounters with the digital. Furthermore, the boundaries between physical and virtual are being increasingly blurred. An example of this is when engaging with VR gaming devices, during which our virtual avatar responds to our physical self and simultaneously moves through virtual realms. Now, we are present in the virtual space itself (ie able to walk through it), rooted in our physical bodies whilst extending our capabilities virtually. The New Space develops this further by bridging the gap between the two realms we already jump in and out of multiple times a day. Futurist Richard van Hooijdonk speaks of a future in which our physical world will merge with the digital, speculating on a 'fully immersive virtual reality' (2022) which will free us from our physical bodily limitations. This new iteration of the internet then, is arguably the first leap in technology where the physical can be brought into the virtual.



For media theorist Marshall McLuhan, 'medium or technology is the change of scale, pace or pattern that it introduces to human affairs' (1964, p. 8). In terms of New Space reconfiguring the capacity of humankind, the restructuring of any significant widespread technological innovation and societal developments will significantly broaden societal capabilities.

Notably Laura Corti (2022) highlights that, 'historically, the digital world has been ideated as a disembodied form of mediation' and points to New Space's capabilities as an 'embodied paradigm that considers the body as an essential element of the action'. In the last twenty years, society has grown accustomed to virtual representations of self in many forms.

Edward Castronova in his essay exploring the human experience of virtual worlds, describes the avatar as 'the representation of the self in a given physical medium' (2003). More recently, Merrill Johnson (2022) investigated the relationship between avatar and user with a focus on embodiment and 'a feeling of presence'.

Nevertheless, the very materiality of the world we live in and our bodies navigating that world must be touched upon when considering New Space. Distinctions between what constitutes as material and immaterial are contextually dependant, although anthropologist Daniel Miller defines material beyond artefact, instead claiming the very process of something being present means it has then materialised (2007). A defining factor of the New Space in everyday is the fundamental shift toward thinking of virtual realms as valid materiality-wise. Critically, this involves a comprehensive understanding of the integrated way in which New Space merges with our material bodies. Through this, we can challenge the Cartesian assumption of dualism (which approaches the body as a passive surface adorned with representation) and instead focus on embodied presence in New Space.

With such importance placed on the body, we must also consider the feeling of being virtually encapsulated in New Space, while being physically rooted in one's body.

Philosopher Michel De Certeau (1984) gives examples of shared human feelings that cannot be fully articulated - such as when walking through a busy city space or sinking into a hot bath. Similarly, when existing in New Space, whether that be as an avatar, interacting with others, or purchasing an item, the hybridity of physical and virtual will inevitably arise as an affective experience with similar complexities to that of the human feeling of existence.

Already, the affective capabilities of technologies have been widely explored, and as new media continues to infiltrate social practices in the way that McLuhan predicted, we can look towards this philosophical notion to explore this in terms of New Space. Previously described as the 'bodily intensity or the concentration of bodily forces' (Massumi, 1995, p. 27), Affect theory comes to define an energy of sorts (Fox, 2016). In the humanities, Affect refers more specifically to the sensational (Hickey-Moody, 2013) and defines feelings that are embodied. So, the affective characteristics of New Space are arguably a key aspect to focus on, through an exploration of its sensational qualities. In this framework, we now have a method of understanding New Space's ability to extend the self in ways that have never been done before. Distinctly revolving around embodiment and presence, New Space orients around interconnectivity and immersion with the material body firmly at its core. In this sense, the embodiment we experience in New Space can be better understood as a constant process of re-embodiment with endless potential for development.

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