

Isidro G. Pentzke
Stuart Steck
Research Paper
August 2017

Whose reality is it!

“I know you're out there. I can feel you now. I know that you're afraid. You're afraid of us. You're afraid of change. I don't know the future. I didn't come here to tell you how this is going to end. I came here to tell you how it's going to begin. I'm going to hang up this phone, and then I'm going to show these people what you don't want them to see. I'm going to show them the world without you, the world without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries, the world where anything is possible. Where we go from there, is a choice I leave to you.”
Neo, The Matrix 1999.

This was the closing quote from the late 1990's movie called The Matrix, classified as a Sci-Fi Fantasy movie. In this movie, Neo, the main character is awakened from a virtual reality by his co-star Morpheus. Morpheus comes to Neo and explains that everything he has ever known to be true is a lie. He conveys his theory through the following quote: “What is real? How do you define 'real'? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then 'real' is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain.”

With this quote, Morpheus offers Neo a glimpse behind the golden curtain. On one side of the curtain, Neo lived in bliss knowing only his life as it had always been. On the other side of the curtain, a world of unanswered questions. In this reality, Neo would become the one that would expose the world that most never knew existed. Numerous people may think this choice would have sounded like that of a lunatic. Yet, George Orwell in his book 1984, describes A lunatic as a minority of one. By understanding this minority Neo made his choice to go deeper into the proverbial rabbit hole.

Even though this is a Sci-Fi Fantasy movie, this movie seems to mirror today's reality in various ways. Not to the extreme that we live in, in terms of a fully immersed virtual reality. But rather, in the sense that we seem to lose ourselves into today's technologically advanced world.

Every day we seem to be moving towards a more digital world. It seems as though we have a more intimate relationship with our technology than we do with actual people. This has vastly changed the way we communicate.

In an article written by Lesley Alderman, called *The Phone We Love Too Much*. Alderman makes a strong opening statement which is meant to inform the reader of the growing reality that technology is no longer a device to help us in our day-to-day activities, but rather, a more cultural vice, one in which we have slowly become dependent on. I quote, “We have an intimate relationship with our phones. We sleep with them, eat with them and carry them in our pockets. We check them, on average, 47 times a day — 82 times if you’re between 18 and 24 years old.”

Alderman continues to state that this change seems to affect not only our face to face communication but our love lives as well. He is quoted by saying “In our quest to be connected through technology, we’re tuning out our partners and interrupting a kind of biological broadband connection.” This quote is very important as it seems to resonate with both the Sci-Fi movie like *The Matrix* which has a love story entangled in it, as well as in reality, where many seem to have lost a physical connection when it comes to communication. This loss of physical connection seems to change the way we see our own reality. Making it difficult for some to read each other and giving a false feeling of their situation.

This all brings us to the question of what causes individuals to formulate a different idea about their situation? In a related article written by Seth Stephens-Davidowitz called “Don’t Let Facebook Make You Miserable,” Stephens-Davidowitz pulls together data that suggest that this false feeling of a situation is caused by none other than our own doing. Our own fear of being socially accepted is a norm that we look for and as such, we tend to pick and choose what we tend to share. We as individuals tend to turn to social media to feel fulfilled by the amount of “likes” we get on a status or a picture when in reality, that does not make you better in society nor does it make you feel any kind of happier.

In this article, Stephens-Davidowitz alludes to the truth we all know but refuse to acknowledge, “We are all dimly aware that everybody else can’t possibly be as successful, rich, attractive, relaxed, intellectual and joyous as they appear to be on Facebook. Yet, we can’t help

comparing our inner lives with the curated lives of our friends. Just how different is the real world from the world of social media?"

In this quote, Stephens-Davidowitz stabs at the heart of the beast, just as Neo did at the end of the movie, *The Matrix* in which Neo expressed that the program Smith had grown, passed the creator's control. It is this parallel between reality and virtual reality where we find ourselves today.

It seems that we as humans twist our reality to suit our needs. We do this to feel empowered over our own reality. We also might do this to not face our fears, or have to relive something that brings back less than happy memories; perhaps we do it to hide behind pain or the fact that we may lead less interesting lives and the fear of being judged by that. Stephens-Davidowitz capitalizes on this fact and shares evidence that others are not always as happy as they may seem. Stephens-Davidowitz states that he has found that many people are not as happy as they may post about on social media. He does this by using Google as a data platform. Stephens-Davidowitz states I have been studying aggregate Google search data. Alone with a screen and anonymous, people tend to tell Google things they don't reveal to social media; they even tell Google things they don't tell to anybody else. Google offers digital truth serum. In this statement, Stephens-Davidowitz seems to bring to light an even harder question what kind of effect does social media have in our society today? Is it harming us or is it really making us feel that much more connected to the world?

In an article written by Rachel Simmons called *How Social Media Is a Toxic Mirror*. Simmons discusses the harm that happens to young social users when exposed to an abundance of social media. Simmons expresses that many of today's youth; over the past ten years have come to know the digital social world as a place of social exception, where they can say and post images freely giving a feeling of anonymity. This feeling of anonymity seems to come with a price, the price of a youth's outlook on their own self-worth.

She goes on to express that the youth of today are at high risk of cyber bullying. This term cyberbullying is one that is constantly growing and changing. This term no longer means just a written attract, it now comes in a form of lack of likes, emojis, and images. For a young person, this kind of virtual immersion does not seem to be a choice, but rather a way of life.

Simmons quotes a young female as saying “I don’t get to choose how I’m going to leave my apartment today,” one young woman told me. “If I could, my body would look different. But I can choose which picture makes my arms look thinner.”

In this quote, Simmons starts to dial in some of the big problems that a virtual immersion can have on reality. This is what Morpheus offers Neo in the movie The Matrix when Morpheus challenges what reality really truly is. This change is one of communication and the loss of information which can make one feel abandoned or confused.

In my work, The Process of Loss, I challenge the viewer’s reality by making them enter an alternate reality, where my work has been augmented for the viewer. In one reality, my work is just a blank board, and in the next, my work exists in full color. Meanwhile, giving the viewer the feeling of never leaving his/her reality.