Virtual Reality

The Oxford Dictionary defines Virtual Reality thusly: the computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional image or environment that can be interacted with in a seemingly real or physical way by a person using special electronic equipment, such as a helmet with a screen inside or gloves fitted with sensors.

I think it is difficult to define something that continues to evolve at a fairly rapid clip, something that by nature, unnaturally, is a moving target. In these especially difficult times, our lives now depend on our own evolution for survival. Warp speed is another term that comes to mind, that indicates study of Mankind’s collective imagination. Indeed, if we can think it, we can do it.

As I type these words I recall the learning of the keyboard itself, the QWERTY layout, the home row, and the ability to see my own thoughts put into words on a virtual piece of paper (just now remembering “I” before “E”) and correcting myself without the aid of correct-o-type or white out.

In the context of our big artistic and technological picture, the history of our reality, and, for argument’s sake, if that history were condensed into a twelve month year starting with the earliest cave paintings on January first, we are only in the final second of the last minute of December 31st. The last century and a half of technological wonder occurred in the last half minute.

You could say that cave paintings, or perhaps hieroglyphics were the TIVO of their days. Without commercial interruption, these forms of communication could be revisited by the artist again and again, as well as by his community and future generations.

When communication becomes art, it affects the psyche of the audience, evoking emotions in that audience. It adds, subtracts, and in some instances divides the perceived reality. Reality can be manipulated by sight and sound, for a moment, or forever. When one says “I saw it with my own eyes, and I heard it with my own ears,” he is, at the time, believing “it” to be true.

Midway through the last century I was born. Around the same time Rock n Roll was born. Early on I showed promise as an artist and a musician. I enjoyed and excelled at both, but I chose to further my education formally as the former, knowing that I could incorporate the latter at the same time, using music as the inspiration for the art. A program of study at college after failing art in High School, was termed as ABC. Art, Broadcasting and Cinema. At the same time I was indulging in, and participating in the new music of the day, again using it as the inspiration for my art. As I developed my style of painting and photography I realized I had something to offer.

Education in the late 70’s was a far cry from what it is now. Growing up and going to school meant reading, writing, and producing art with only two dimensions at my disposal. The digital age was only just dawning. Right down the street from where I studied art were a couple guys tinkering with Ones and Twos in a garage and starting a business called Apple. I was painting murals, taking photographs and learning to play the flute in the same artistic community, at the same time exposing myself to the advances in the established mediums. Further down the road from school was a place called Hollywood where the biggest manipulators of reality worked. I was enthralled by the advances in filmmaking. Early on, specifically 1973, I was introduced to the idea of multi-media. Live music on the grandest scale incorporating theatre, film, stage effects, characters and concepts, ostensibly for entertainment purposes, and of course for the purpose of repeat business, became the love of my life. I knew I could never be that particular artist as I still consider him to be the best at what he does, but I could be part of the process.

Enter life. My education was interrupted but I kept my eye on the advances in film, acquired a decent 35mm Canon with a couple lenses and moonlighted in the New York downtown music scene as well as the aforementioned grand scale. The same roll of film could capture Madison Square Garden and CBGB in the same night, while at the same time I made a living in the culinary arts.

As we all know, the digital revolution caught fire in the 1980s. Analogue tape and vinyl gave way to digitally recorded discs, video tape was replaced similarly and satellite TV expanded that media way beyond CBS, NBC, and ABC. My own early dream of designing album covers was realized, and in short order was asked to adapt to the CD format.

Two or three films stand out in my memory of those times, representing the advances in media. Flash Gordon <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flash_Gordon_%28film%29>

American Pop (Rotoscoping) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Pop>

Brainstorm (Natalie Woods last film as she died during production)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brainstorm_(1983_film>)

I entered the desktop publishing arena by way of our first computer (Hyundai SX) and an HP laser printer. Scanning art was still becoming less expensive but working in a service bureau provided me with hands on training bridging the analogue and digital worlds. Acquiring a small fanzine caught the eye of the artist, mentioned earlier which led to producing a multimedia box set, containing a vinyl picture disc, a remastered CD, VHS documentary, and an up to date lyric book. It sold out as one of the first box sets of its kind.

I ran the magazine for about 10 years while working in the print industry while constantly dabbling in the live performance arena. I crossed the not so imaginary lines between stage, backstage, audience, and broadcast media.

With all that being said, and many of the ideas and inventions predicted by myself and others coming to fruition, one idea that should be developed is Holography. Is this the future of Virtual Reality?