The “lost kids” in Metaverse: How video games could serve as the platform for the next-generation P4C

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ABSTRACT

There have always been two opposing positions on the relationship between games and learning. Popular opinion has been vocal about the negative effects of games, but the emerging trend of game-based learning holds games up as the true future of learning. Rather than making hasty assertions about the two, this paper first attempts to return to a philosophical definition of the spirituality of play, and then to reflect on and weigh the pros and cons of game-based learning. While gamification enhances the learning environment and experience in all its aspects, the fundamental problem of ‘external over internal’ prevents it from truly realizing the ultimate concept of children’s philosophy that Lippmann sought, namely to lead children to an active search for the meaning of their own existence. The arrival of the Metaverse seems to have provided the opportunity for this change. On the one hand, it greatly overcomes the shortcomings of gamified platforms, thus bringing philosophical survival and gamified learning closer together and opening the possibility of reconfiguring education with a philosophy at its core. But on the other hand, the Metaverse is not perfect; on the contrary, the monitoring of upgrades, the total datafication of people, and even the inequality of “mediated passivity” are all issues and challenges for the future educators of philosophy for children.

Keywords: spirituality; gamification; Metaverse; philosophy of the child; narrative

1. Introduction

Plato solemnly states in his Laws, “I believe that one should remain serious about serious matters. What, then, is our proper way of life? One should spend one’s life in play and those children we raise must begin in the same spirit.” Clearly, in the eyes of the philosopher-king, play is not insignificant, trivial and boring, but on the contrary plays a vital role in human life. To take play seriously is to take life seriously. More notably, play (Paidia) is thus intrinsically and closely related to the education of children. Why, then, has there been so much criticism of video games in recent times, even from some of the most accomplished philosophers? One possible explanation is that today’s video games are in fact games in name only, but have lost the “spirituality” that they are supposed to have. To borrow from Johan Huizinga’s classic summary: “Games bring a temporary, limited perfection to an imperfect world and a chaotic life. Play demands an absolute and supreme order.” Thus, it seems that while scholars like Greg Toppo and James Paul Gee have been advocating gamification as the ultimate platform for the future of learning, they have probably...
also overlooked and even ignored the spiritual dimension of ‘learning’ itself so let’s start with this and move on to a deeper consideration of games and learning (especially philosophical learning).

2. The Metaverse and the original meaning of children’s philosophy

Learning is about ‘spirit’, not just ‘intellect’ or ‘intelligence’. What is spirit? It is, to borrow G. W. F. Hegel’s classic summary from The Phenomenology of Spirit, “an unshakable and indissoluble ground and starting point for the action of all mankind, the aim and goal of all mankind, the self-consciousness of the whole self in thought”[4]. From this we can clearly outline three characteristics of the spirit: firstly, it is a movement of self-reflection, self-discovery and self-realization; secondly, the most essential link and bond of this movement is precisely thought; and thirdly, what is thus ultimately realized is the community of mankind. Thus, the basic method of learning is rational thinking, the basic way of learning is spiritual growth, and the basic purpose of learning is spiritual interchange between individuals.

Game-based learning not only does not fit this definition of spirituality, it is always contrary to it. The basic approach to gamification is never rational thinking, but rather a more flexible and open adherence to and use of rules; the process of gamification is not so much about spiritual growth and maturity as it is about the increasing refinement of skills. Thus, even if gamification achieves some kind of spiritual maintenance between children, it is extremely fragile and short-lived, and can even be described as a cluster that scatters as it goes: “The digital inhabitants of the web do not gather they form a special form of ‘pooling but not gathering ’ special form, without a soul, and without a mind”[5]. But the emergence of Metaverse, ‘Virtual Worlds’ or the ‘3D Internet’ (Web 3D) seems to be profoundly changing the landscape of digital agglomeration. Firstly, the Metaverse is no longer just an integral part of the real world, but is increasingly evolving into a vast parallel and independent world, even subsuming the real world within itself. It does thus appear to show a clear direction and purpose of transformation from the ‘real world’ to the ‘virtual world’, which is also a fundamental and radical process of transformation of the human spirit itself. Although this process may not be what Hegel called the movement of the spirit back to itself, it at least contains the possibility that, however faint it may be, it is always worth the effort of human beings to pursue and realize it. Secondly, because of its great openness, plurality and complexity, the Metaverse also makes the “citizens” of it not content with merely following the rules, but often need to use their own ideas and wisdom to create new rules. The Metaverse is not a simple expansion or replication of the existing world; rather, it is an unprecedentedly new world of unimaginable possibilities, which opens up enormous space for the free creation of human thought[6]. Likewise, the Metaverse provides a tangible bond and platform for the cohesion of individuals, as its ingenious 3D technology allows all individuals to experience The Metaverse also provides a tangible bond and platform for the cohesion of individuals, as its ingenious 3D technology allows all individuals to experience an immense sense of immersion and presence.

This last point is where the truly transformative significance of the Metaverse lies. According to Julian Lombardi and Marilyn Lombardi, the development of the Internet can be roughly summarized in three stages. The first was the ISP (Internet Service Provider), which had clear boundaries and the closed nature of “Members - only”[6]. The second stage, the Internet (Web), has achieved the greatest possible openness and plurality of connections between users, thus revealing richer and more dynamic audiovisual elements, but there is still an insurmountable flaw: the Web itself is still a two-dimensional, flat medium, which makes it impossible to fully reproduce the experience of being present in the real world. The emergence of the Metaverse is clearly a decisive step forward. It has an unprecedented “enhanced capacity for visualization and anthropomorphism”[6], which allows it to create a “vivid” experience of presence “as if it were right in front of us”. What we experience in the Metaverse are not just visual images or
symbolic representations (words, emotions, actions, etc.), but “Contextualized Copresence”[^6]. In short, people are no longer passing ideas and emotions to each other across a screen, through a flat web page; now, in the Metaverse, we have removed all interfaces and intermediaries from each other and returned to the initial, basic state of everyday life, which is direct face-to-face dialogue and interaction. We are not just transmitting information, but we are acting and changing our surroundings in a real and direct way[^6]. In other words, if the Internet is still just a communication tool embedded in the real world, then the Metaverse is getting closer and closer to a real and complete ‘universe’. In other words, if the Internet is still only a communication tool embedded in the real world, then the Metaverse is getting closer and closer to a real, complete ‘universe’. We “use” the Internet to “do” all sorts of things, but we are “in” the Metaverse, doing all sorts of things. Doing all sorts of things. This is an obvious and dramatic change, which deserves to be examined and reflected upon in depth.

While there are obvious technical bottlenecks to the Metaverse (e.g. server costs, resource consumption, etc.)[^6], it is a dominant, if not unique, trend towards the future. It is spreading to all aspects of human society and, in the case of learning and education, the subject of this paper, it also substantially expands and enhances the burgeoning game-based learning, in particular by greatly complementing and enhancing the “spiritual” aspect, which has always been weak or even missing. This leads explicitly to the central theme of ‘teaching and learning in children’s philosophy’, which is much needed below.

Ultimately, one of the most fundamental shifts in gamification and game-based learning after entering the Metaverse is the shift from ‘Entertainment’ to ‘Serious’[^7], from a mind-flow experience to a spiritual experience. (from the experience of Flow to the experience of spirituality. Of course, the starting point and reference platform of the Metaverse is undoubtedly video games, and most scholars would point directly to the influential game Second Life as the year of the Metaverse’s creation. However, to simply see the Metaverse as expansion and derivative of established video games is clearly a superficial and even superficial view. Fundamentally, the Metaverse was born out of video games, but in turn transformed the games themselves. Games in the Metaverse are and will be radically changed in every way, from form, function, method and purpose, becoming more and more ‘serious’, intellectual and spiritual. Ian Bogost has said that video games can (and already do) “do” all sorts of things in life besides entertain, while Lars Konzack further emphasizes that “doing philosophy “After the Metaverse stage, gamification as a ‘philosophical experiment’ has increasingly shown its unprecedented urgency and importance[^8]. It can even be said that doing philosophy is the most basic way of learning, survival and even spiritual growth for the children born and raised in the Metaverse as “indigenous”.

Such an extreme and bold ‘hypothesis’ must, of course, be followed by a solid and detailed ‘proof’. Fortunately, even though the ‘philosophical play design’ advocated and envisaged by Conchak is still in its infancy, the essential relationship between philosophy and children, and indeed the educational system as a whole, has long been made clear by the pioneer and founding father Matthew Lipman in the field of philosophy for children. The essential relationship between philosophy and children and the education system has been clearly highlighted by the pioneer and founder Matthew Lipman. In response to the obvious shortcomings of the current educational system, he not only advocated the introduction of philosophy as an important part of the process of correction, but also explicitly proposed the idea of “philosophical inquiry as the Model of Education”[^9]. The “Model” is a concept that is not only a good example of how to make the best use of philosophy, but also a good example of how to make the best use of philosophy. The key word “paradigm” (Model) suggests to us that philosophy is not just a missing link in the current educational system, if only so, then just add some philosophy courses will suffice. On the contrary, Lippmann’s argument seems to be much more extreme, going so far as to suggest that
philosophy should be the core and ‘prototype’ for a complete reconfiguration of the entire educational system. This, of course, raises questions. While it may be understandable to emphasize the fundamental and central position of the subject of philosophy in higher education, is it necessary to introduce such ‘deep and obscure’ philosophical ideas to ‘interfere’ with the normal development of children’s minds at primary and even pre-school levels? Jean Piaget, for example, clearly states that children under the age of 10 to 12 are not capable of rational thought at all[10]. However, there are at least two obvious flaws in this assertion. Firstly, it underestimates the complexity of rational thought, i.e. it is confined to certain established patterns and laws, rather than recognizing the considerable openness and flexibility of rational thought itself. Reasoning and arguing logically is clearly rational thinking, but so is speculating imaginatively[11]? To move from concrete examples to abstract universal concepts is rational thinking, but so is the clever use of images and metaphors to make a case? If rational thinking cannot, and should not, be understood in a narrowly restricted way, then it is reasonable to be more open-minded and discerning about children’s education itself.

How, then, can education be reconstructed through philosophy? Firstly, Lippmann pointedly identifies two fundamental flaws in today’s education system, which treat children as “heirs” rather than creators[11] and which focus more on the “transmission” of knowledge than on the “discovery” of truth. “Discovery. His solution to these two problems is also very simple and clear, and can be summarized in a series of three questions and three basic propositions that follow from them. First, what is education? It is not merely the transmission of knowledge, nor is it confined to the walls of the schoolyard; rather, “any activity that helps us to discover the meaning of life is education”[11]. The “meaning” here is clearly not confined to the little things in life, but is It has a fundamental existential meaning: the meaning that children “crave” must be relevant to their lives, pointing to the anxieties and confusions that have to be asked, and even to the anxieties and confusions that would be unsettling if they were not asked[11]. This allows us to respond to the fundamental question: why should philosophy be, or even must be, the core and prototype of children’s education? Why should philosophy be, and even must be, the core and prototype of children’s education? It is because, in contrast to other disciplines that teach specific skills and knowledge, philosophy is the only one that truly satisfies, fulfils and advances the ultimate essence of education, which is to inquire into and seek the meaning of life. Philosophy guides children to focus on their own existence, inspires them to ask fundamental questions, and develops in them the basic methods and literacy to ask, think, answer and question effectively and well. Philosophy is the only way to keep children’s minds full of wonder[11], rather than being hypnotized or even paralyzed by rounds of indoctrination and losing the desire and ability to ask questions.

So, we come to the third key point of Lippmann’s philosophy of children, which is how to explore meaning. He gives seven specific ways to do this, but it boils down to nothing more than the phrase: “To discover meaning is to Discover Connections[11]. To connect is both to thread together existing knowledge, but equally to open up to different and different ways of thinking in the direction of the unknown. Philosophical reflection as connection is a fundamental trend in the history of philosophy, from Plato’s dialectic, to Immanuel Kant’s innate synthesis, to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s rhizome, are all evidence of this. It is for this reason that philosophy can effectively address one of the most difficult problems in education today, namely fragmentation. Lippmann has repeatedly highlighted this problem in several of his books. Even the spatial planning of schools is fragmented, leaving children with the impression that learning is an activity that takes place in a closed space, with no connection to the wider world of life ‘out there’. “There is no relation to the wider world of life. How, then, is philosophy the key, or even the only cure, for this persistent problem of fragmentation? Firstly, philosophy asks fundamental questions and contemplates ultimate meanings, thus of course bringing
together different discrete disciplines into an organic whole[11]. Secondly, philosophy is, after all, the child’s concern with itself (“Souci de Soi”), which begins with curiosity, unfolds and is implemented in Finally, philosophy is not only contemplation, but also practice; the whole world of life and even heaven and earth and the universe are the stage for philosophy. It must remain open, fluid and dynamic. In this way, philosophy connects not only different disciplines, but also the self and the world, time and space, the inner and the outer. This echoes Lippmann’s clear distinction between two related aspects of philosophical education for children, which in a narrow sense is a holistic connection and reconstruction of existing fragmented disciplinary systems, but in a broader sense is supposed to point to future forms of life and practice[9].

3. From the Internet to the Metaverse, from gamification to “philosophizing”

Although Lippmann’s critique is incisive and his ideas are inspiring, they are not always translated into concrete teaching practices. The specific classroom teaching and discussion methods he offers still feel focused on the development of various thinking skills and do not show much ‘survival’, let alone spiritual growth. Likewise, his detailed syllabus and planning, apart from highlighting the comprehensive and holistic nature of the subject, seems to have added a few more classes to the timetable, without much potential to stimulate curiosity and thought. Even the titles of his two masterpieces are clearly contradictory to their underlying philosophy, which is itself about constantly making connections, crossing boundaries and opening fields, so why must the emphasis be on making it ‘goes to school’, ‘in the classroom’? “in the classroom”? If Lippmann’s ideal approach to philosophical education is the living, face-to-face ‘dialogue’ of Socrates in the context of life, then why must it be cocooned in a set of syllabuses?

A logical explanation for this apparent contradiction would be that Lippmann’s cutting-edge ideas could not really be realized in the educational environment and on the platform of the time. Max Weber had already criticized the ‘stratification’ of education, and Michel Foucault had already analyzed the various temporal, spatial and physical and psychological mechanisms of ‘discipline’ in schools. To break free from these centuries-old traditions and constraints is therefore not a matter of ideas and sentiments alone, but must also be underpinned by a real change in technology and media. Thus, it can be argued that the recent trend towards gamified learning, and even the shift from the Internet to the Metaverse, is a step-by-step fulfilment of Lippmann’s insights and predictions that were far ahead of their time. The internet has broken through the space and time boundaries of classrooms and schools, gamification has increased the initiative and motivation of students, and social networks have brought children closer together. All of this is a step-by-step, bit-by-bit implementation of Lippmann’s basic educational concept of “discovering connections as discovering meaning”, which gradually leads to his Communities of Inquiry. The ultimate ideal of transforming classrooms into communities of inquiry[9].

However, as mentioned above, gamification in the Internet phase was still mainly focused on ‘skills’ training and rarely involved the more holistic concept of philosophy. It was only after the Metaverse stage that philosophizing came to the forefront of the agenda. This is quite consistent with the development of games themselves, where more philosophical forms such as ‘philosophizing’ design, meta-games and game ecology have only recently become central issues. It is not possible to go into detail about the process of this transition here, but it is useful to explain the inner threads of the transition from gamification to philosophizing in relation to one key point. That is Paul Gee’s early principle of Situated Cognition: “Human learning is not merely an activity that takes place in the mind, but is thoroughly embedded in (or situated in) a material, social, cultural world[12]. Among the as many as thirty-six specific approaches he lists in Games That Change Learning, this principle serves as an un-
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brella and cross-cutting one.

In fact, this principle fundamentally touches on the central theme of the distinction between inside and outside. This can be further distinguished between the superficial and the deeper aspects. On the surface, as Paul Gee argues in his book, it is first and foremost about the ‘internal design grammar’ (the grammar of content) and the ‘external design grammar’ (the grammar of social practices and identities) of the game itself[12] In short, the game is much more than it is supposed to be and has been in a complex and close relationship with the wider social field outside. There are different ways of ‘playing’ and even ‘using’ the game, and what is explicitly stated in manuals and guides is only a small part of the picture. On a deeper level, the distinction between inside and outside relates to the fundamental relationship between mind and world. This point is further developed in Pilar Lacasa’s comprehensive study of learning in virtual worlds, where the term ‘internal representation’ refers not to the internal rules of the game, but to the internal (i.e. ‘endowed’) nature of human thought. In contrast, external representations point to the broader “invented” and acquired medium of human thought[13].

“In contrast, external representations point to a wider range of material, technological media that have been ‘invented’ and attached to them later in life. Traditionally, it is generally assumed that human thinking takes place (primarily) within the inner mind, which is fundamentally dominated and dominated by the inner, although it also needs to be aided and facilitated by various external tools, media, and environmental conditions. For example, to calculate a slightly more complex mathematical problem, one must not rely solely on mental calculation, but must also use at least pen and paper, keyboard and screen. But all of these material technological tools are merely extensions and accompaniments of the mind’s capabilities, and they cannot be thought of as thereby overstepping their authority or even beginning to command the brain and mind, unless it is a whimsical science fiction plot. In fact, the more complex the form of thought, the greater the degree of abstraction and the wider the domain involved, the more obvious that fundamental dominance of the mind becomes. Plato’s metaphor of the ‘helmsman’ and the ideal of the ‘philosopher-king’ in the Ideal State are both of this kind. No matter how advanced technology is, it is after all the mind and its ideas that will lead the way, plan the program and overcome obstacles and difficulties.

In fact, the contextualized cognition explained in depth by Paul Gee does not go beyond this basic presupposition of “inside and outside, but inside dominant". For example, although “human thinking is deeply rooted in the concrete experiences of life”[12], this is at best a starting point for thinking, but never a decisive factor. On the contrary, they can only play their proper role in the cognitive process once they have been encoded by the brain in an abstract way. For example, although game-based learning makes extensive use of a variety of ‘modalities’ (images, text, signs, interaction, abstract design, sound, etc.) outside of the traditional mainstream medium of text[12], all of these are merely aids and accompaniments, as it is the ideas in the mind that ultimately play a leading role It is still the mind, and not the pictorial or even the sonic mind, that plays the dominant role. Likewise, the emphasis on the ‘need to think in action’ in no way implies that thinking should be directed by blind action, but rather that it should be more attuned to the complexity of reality, adept at adapting strategies to specific contexts, testing, developing and revising existing theories. It is for this reason that Paul Gee explicitly emphasizes the subjective direction of ‘conscious and explicit reflection’[12]. It is true that no matter how advanced and expanded the technology and media platforms of gamification may be, they are after all only tools to serve human beings, means to achieve human ends, and ‘external’ conditions to assist the human mind in thinking.

This being the case, it would be logical to assume that the aim of game-based learning must be to use the richer, more developed and open external technological networks and media platforms to constantly return to and deepen the inner world of the human mind. However, the opposite is true. It is
true that gamification has done a great deal to expand the dimension of ‘inside-out’, contextualizing, multimodalsing, multi-pathing, transferring, distributing, and busying itself. But this has also allowed it to become increasingly immersed and lost in the external dimension, to the detriment of the inner mind and spirit. Gamification, although it has largely enriched the means of teaching, opened up the learning environment and stimulated the interest of the students, has not fundamentally responded to or substantially advanced the difficulties in children’s philosophical education left behind by Lippmann. This is particularly evident in two distinct ways. On the one hand, although Paul Gee repeatedly emphasizes such seemingly distinctly philosophical dimensions as ‘critical thinking’, ‘meta-level thinking’ and ‘the principle of self-knowledge’[12] but these are mostly applied to the solution of specific problems and the development of specific thinking skills, and rarely do they rise to the “meta” dimension to think about the “big questions”, not to mention the established framework and patterns of human thinking itself. The ‘big questions’ are seldom considered in a ‘meta’ dimension, let alone in a holistic reflection, creation and transformation of the established frameworks and patterns of human thinking. In this regard, game-based learning has not been able to develop the ‘big questions. In this regard, game-based learning fails to reach the higher level of open-ended ‘imaginative thinking’ that Lippmann emphasizes, and that it only learns to ‘use’ tools without really beginning to ‘test’ existing tools and thus ‘test’ them. “It only learns to ‘use’ tools, but does not really begin to ‘test’ existing tools and then ‘invent’ new ones; it only enhances the child’s intelligence, but does not fully demonstrate the higher spiritual power. Perhaps game-based learning does make children ‘smarter’, but not ‘wiser’. In the end, it ends up making children ‘receivers and absorbers’ of knowledge (even if they are often active and positive receivers), rather than leading them to the higher purpose of being ‘creators and inventors of ideas’.

On the other hand, the most obvious divergence between game-based learning and Lippmann’s educational philosophy arises from the fact that the former operates almost exclusively in the realm of teaching and learning in the natural sciences or the equally distinctly empirical social sciences, with little real engagement with, or concern for, children’s reflection, questioning and even creation of the ‘meaning of existence’. In the writings of Paul Gee and Toppo we find plenty of scenes of learning physics and mathematics, but never the straightforward questions about life itself that are often found in the philosophical dialogues of Socrates and the philosophy classes of Lippmann: “What is justice, beauty, freedom?” or even “Why do you go to school?”[11]. The absence of this key dimension of philosophy is, arguably, the greatest concern of the growing trend towards game-based learning. Lippmann has criticized the education system of his time for not fostering independent thinking, for not allowing children to think more deeply, more effectively, more differently, and thus more relevantly to their own existence. But all these ills have not really been reflected upon and effectively treated on the current platform of gamification, and even the urgency and importance of the issue has gradually been obscured and forgotten. In this regard, Lippmann’s basic idea of ‘philosophical inquiry as an educational paradigm’ remains a central issue for all educators today. We must be clear that gamification does not solve all the problems, it does not even touch the most fundamental ones.

But the arrival of the Metaverse is somewhat of a giant leap forward for children’s education, which had been stuck in a rut. Its 3D immersion world adds more spiritual depth than just spatial depth, as it creates an unprecedented environment in which children can truly engage in open-ended “philosophical experiments” in a way that is “concerned with themselves”. There are, of course, different understandings of philosophical experimentation, but here we would like to emphasize just one point, namely that it is not just about accepting, learning, understanding and applying a particular (certain) established philosophical theory, but also about testing, questioning and challenging existing concepts and theories[8]. It is even about creating one’s
own unique, new philosophical thinking, and in doing so, constantly asking oneself questions, searching for the meaning of existence in the world, and connecting with each other’s hearts and minds. to connect with each other’s hearts and minds. Philosophizing and spiritualizing seem to be exactly what the Metaverse brings to gamification in terms of substantial enhancement and even profound transformation.

But of course, this change did not happen suddenly; its seeds were already embedded in game-based learning itself, namely in identity and narrative. The misalignment and even anxiety of identity is clearly the root cause of the imbalance in gamification, which has developed ‘outwardly rather than inwardly’. In the traditional learning environment, the self as the subject is clearly dominant, and in the face of books and various learning materials and tools, the self-absorbs knowledge, asks questions and searches for answers. Faced with a variety of objectified knowledge materials, the ‘I’ should not just be a passive recipient, but should actively explore and synthesize them, ‘internalize’ them, enhance my own abilities, and move towards spiritual awakening and maturity. But it is this self-knowing and self-aware ‘self’ that becomes an extremely difficult problem in the new context of game-based learning. The fundamental difference between game-based learning and traditional learning lies in the fact that the former is more ‘interactive’. This interactivity is not just about the interaction between subject and object, as this level of interactivity is obviously also prevalent in traditional learning processes. The interactivity of video games is more distinctly immersive and present. In short, gamification is not merely the outward expansion and realization of the inner capacities of the self; it goes further by ‘projecting’ the self externally, into various virtual world scenarios, as a differentiated ‘avatar’. The self is externalized onto the screen, divided into different avatars, and even migrated into different environments. This is both the most obvious strength and the most fundamental weakness of gamification. The strengths are self-evident, as immersive immersion is a great motivator for active participation and learning, interactive learning adds to the ongoing fun of the learning process, and group and networked learning brings children together. However, the shortcomings and bottlenecks seem equally obvious and difficult to overcome. If the self is constantly being externalized, divided and differentiated, which self is the real self? Which one is the real dominant self? Which ego is relevant to the process of learning? This always leads to the Lippmannian question: in what sense is learning an active search of the mind that must and should be undertaken by the ego? These fundamental questions certainly do not arise when there is a fluid and unhindered transition between the self and its incarnation. But unfortunately, in the context of gamification, contradictions, divisions and even conflicts between the two are not uncommon. Paul Gee distinguishes between the forms of the self that exist in gamification as ‘virtual identity’, ‘real-world identity’ and ‘projected identity’[12], which is generally accepted by the academic community. Obviously, this triadic distinction is only the basic and initial form, as it is entirely possible to derive more complex and intertwined variations, such as virtual identities that can be further differentiated and derived, while real-world identities are also inherently pluralistic, which makes the “projection” and “transformation” between the two more and more complex and tangled. But even in the simplest of situations, when a real me sits in front of a computer in front of the virtual me on the screen, the two are not always at peace with each other, as is the case with Paul Gee’s account of the love-hate relationship between the real himself and the virtual Pearl. Perhaps he finally feels a sense of self-knowledge and reflection in his heart, “proud of himself”[12], but what is the essential connection between all this and the Pearl on the screen? Is “she” merely a puppet in my hands? Is she not also like me, but a subject acting and making choices in another, that another world?

Perhaps it is the confusion and anxiety caused by the fragmentation or even division of the self that ultimately leads to the internal and external imbal-
Gamification does its best to externalize, divide and derive the self, but it is precisely the ultimate subjective question of ‘who am I’ that it is unable or even unwilling to contemplate. If the inevitable crisis of alienation and even fragmentation of the self in the process of externalization cannot be resolved, then it is clear that gamification, apart from making great efforts in the ‘peripheral’ aspects of the learning environment, learning methods and learning techniques, does not really get to the innermost core of Lippmann’s educational philosophy, which is the active reflection, exploration and cultivation of learning as the self. Perhaps it is for this reason that philosophical inquiry about the self is never, and cannot be, the subject of game-based learning, and it could even be argued that the game-based environment itself is a considerable hindrance to, or even a disruption of, philosophical thinking.

However, all of this has clearly improved and changed dramatically since entering the Metaverse stage. The combination of gamification and philosophizing has led to a fundamental change in the process and shape of learning within the Metaverse. There is only one point to focus on here, and that is the narrative. It is also a common practice in the philosophical education of children to guide them into a realm of philosophical reflection and dialogue through storytelling. The reason for this is explained in a rather profound way by Lippmann. In the child, the three learning paths of ‘scientific interpretation’, ‘symbolic interpretation’ and ‘philosophical interpretation’ are often closely intertwined. In short, children’s minds remain integrated and open, and do not fall into an artificial pattern of disciplinary divisions or even oppositions. The use of vivid imagery and rich metaphors to bring in knowledge and philosophical reflection has always been an extremely effective way forward. This is certainly the case with game-based learning, which takes ‘storytelling’ as a great way to learn to an unprecedented level, thanks to its powerful interactive and immersive gaming environment. In traditional classrooms and classes, teachers and students are still just ‘telling’ and ‘listening’ to stories, and then ‘discussing’ and ‘sharing’ insights and experiences. “But by entering the virtual learning space of the game, children are more able to ‘enter’ the story and even adapt and create it. We see that the gamified environment enables learning in a way that was not possible before, and that is through active, ‘hands-on’ experience. If in the classroom we are merely the tellers and reflectors of the story, in the game we are further transformed into the ‘playwright’, which undoubtably reinforces both the learning and the self, and thus binds them more closely together: it is not just someone else’s story. It is not just a story of “others”, it may be “my” own story; it is not just a story told, it is a story “acted out” or even “lived out” by me. It is not just a story that is told, it is a story that I “act out” or even “live out”. Paul Gee has identified experience as the primary characteristic of ‘active learning’[12]. Among the six rules of game-based learning in virtual spaces summarized by Lim, ‘learning by being’ is also key. The six rules of game-based learning in virtual spaces summarized by Lim, in which “learning by being” is also a key component[16], are clear evidence of this.

Even so, as mentioned above, the alienation and fragmentation of the self remains a prominent and difficult problem. We can take “learning by being” as a fundamental principle, but it always leads to a series of difficult questions: “Whose being?” “Which being?” or even “Why does it exist?” The Metaverse, on the other hand, overcomes the inherent problems of gamification, both in terms of the self and in terms of learning. Firstly, the self in the Metaverse is not externalized, divided or projected; on the contrary, it is ultimately ‘one’ with the real self, and there is no division or conflict. In short, in the gamified environment, the ego and its dopplegangers are “simultaneously” in different spaces and even worlds, but in the Metaverse there is only one ego and only one world, and the ego is not divided but undergoes a “transformation”, i.e. The ego does not split, but undergoes a “transformation”, that is, it constantly leaves its real body and “enters” the only Metaverse. The distinction between inside and outside that is always entangled in gamification does not appear in the Metaverse at all, because every-
thing has entered, or is about to enter, the “inside” of the Metaverse, which is the greatest of all. To understand this profoundly, one must first of all be clear about one basic fact: the Metaverse is not another parallel universe, it is not another virtual world outside the real world; on the contrary, it is the next world into which mankind is about to enter, the only complete world. It is not a parallel to the real world, but is destined to “replace” it as the next real world in which human beings will live. The powerful technological engine behind this replacement process can be understood in terms of three major changes to the “augmented reality system”, as outlined by Azuma. Firstly, the immersive technology of the 3D Internet will gradually blur or even erase the border between the virtual and the real; secondly, interaction and communication in virtual worlds will become increasingly real-time, smooth and ‘smoother’; and finally, big data technology is transforming all aspects of the human being, from body to mind, into data that can be stored, processed and circulated[17]. In a gamified environment, we interact with avatars and data through interfaces but in the Metaverse, we communicate with real individuals in real scenarios. Here, there is neither the problem of bilocation nor the dilemma of self-alienation at all. In the Metaverse, however, the different forms and dimensions of the self-achieve an ultimate unity, becoming ‘in-world’ survivors. However, there are at least two fundamental differences between the being in the Metaverse and the being in the physical world before it. Firstly, while the latter still has the human body as the basis, core and background of existence, the former tends to construct a whole new system of personality with data at its core. In short, if the latter is ‘Being in Body’, the former can clearly be described as ‘Digital Person’. In the Metaverse, it cannot be said that the material and corporeal dimensions are completely erased, but they do become increasingly weaker and more marginalized. Secondly, this leads to another fundamental difference. Whereas the physical body has a finite existence, i.e. an “evolutionary” process from birth to death, the data person, on the contrary, exists in a way that is increasingly free from the constraints of natural life and thus closer and closer to the form of a digital body (Avatar), which can be stored, repaired, even rewritten and erased. It is not quite appropriate to call it Immortal, for it is no longer in the natural rhythm between life and death. In this respect, there is no boundary between play and learning, or indeed between learning and life, in the Metaverse: it is inherently born from a gamified platform, and thus has a whole set of gamified learning models; but at the same time, it transcends the dilemma of gamification’s ‘internal and external divisions, the disorientation of the self’, and more directly integrates learning with the self’s survival. In the Metaverse, learning and absorbing any knowledge becomes easy, readily available and not a matter of concern at all. The only real learning and education would then be a logical progression towards the ultimate idea Lippmann had in mind, that of being concerned with one’s own survival. Moreover, the children in the Metaverse are not only “concerned” with their own survival, but are also able to rewrite their own personalities, rewrite their own lives, and even reboot their own lives. For everything is a game, a game of existence itself, and the game of existence itself is the ultimate goal of learning and education in the Metaverse. In this sense, survival learning in the Metaverse is a veritable philosophical experiment, because the children’s only ultimate concern is “why am I alive”, “why am I living this way”, “what would I do if I had a different personality? What would happen if I had a different personality, a different way of living?”. Thus, guided by these fun-
damental philosophical questions, they are constantly experimenting with life, choosing different paths, weighing different outcomes, and considering different meanings. Survival in the Metaverse is undoubtedly philosophical and, as never before, realizes the ultimate ideal of ‘philosophy as a way of life’ that has been in place since ancient Greece. To borrow from Edward Castronova’s poetic summary: “The Metaverse is the art of our existence. It is a play, and we are all actors. It is a book about us, and we are writing it with our own lives.”[16]

4. Conclusions: The Metaverse and its discontents

Intuitively, the Metaverse really does have a few approximations to the end of human history, or even an infinitely perfect digital heaven. But is it the ultimate wonderland, or the cold end? No definite conclusion can be given yet. Or rather, it would not be wise to give a definitive answer. In the face of the future of the Metaverse, it might be wise not to give a yes or no, good or evil verdict, but rather to ‘do’, to act. To intervene in a complex reality, to become involved in a field of contending forces, to engage in a Deleuzian “Critique et Clinique” and thus to keep that future(s) open, unknown, possible. Leave the future to the future, leave the judgement of the future to the children of the future!

Nevertheless, it seems necessary to offer a few critical reflections on the Metaverse. In fact, when Neal Stephenson gave his original vision of a ‘Metaverse’ in his masterpiece Snow Crash, there was already a lingering air of greyness and despair in the words of this grandiose vision of the future. The mood of despair. It can be argued that the three basic features he predicts with the eye of fantasy the global Internet, incarnational existence, and immersive environments[18] have become or are becoming become the reality and essential form of the Metaverse. Perhaps it is for this reason that when we look back at earlier texts from today’s reality, we may be better able to read in them a few warnings and even alarms. It is true that the Internet is transcending the natural limits of life and death and that existence is gradually becoming a game of infinite reboots, but is this the perfect future? Perhaps not. What is most disturbing about the Metaverse is that it is also pushing the boundaries of total human surveillance and manipulation to an unprecedented degree. Nowadays, we are all increasingly like “Inside the Fishbowl Looking Around”[18] because the space left for us to be “outside” and for us to be “outside” is becoming smaller and smaller, even close to disappearing. The space and possibilities left to us ‘outside’ have become smaller and smaller, even close to disappearing. A crucial technical prerequisite for the construction of a Metaverse is precisely the comprehensive and exhaustive datafication of the human being, which of course necessitates the placement of countless “Embedded Sensors”[17] in the physical world to capture every movement, even every thought, of the human being, and even a thought. This is supposedly to improve understanding of people, but it is a total manipulation of people. And with the help of powerful immersive technologies, the manipulation of the Metaverse takes on an almost invisible and even invisible appearance, gradually obscuring and erasing every border between reality and the virtual, and gradually removing every “external” element that intrudes into the smooth and self-contained network of the Metaverse. This is the most important future trend in technological development, because “the most profound technologies are those that make themselves invisible”[17]. As Avalanche describes, technology is changing the human Bioware in its entirety, even at the deepest level, changing the “Deep Structures” of the human brain. “Borrowing again from Castronova’s trenchant critique, it can be argued that the Metaverse may have eliminated, to the greatest extent possible and most thoroughly, all kinds of inequalities in human beings (status, identity, gender, etc.), but it still retains a fundamental inequality, which is that of control-being-controlled, or of the control of the human being. That is precisely the inequality between control-being-controlled, or active-passive. The Metaverse is a grand, endless, even infinite cycle of survival, and everyone in it is a player in the game. But is it true that everyone is engaged in active
philosophical inquiry, or even that they can and want to be philosophers? Not really. Perhaps the opposite is true. Only a few people at the top of the pyramid are doing active thinking\[16\]. The large ‘base’ of people is in fact in a deep, inextricable and unchangeable state of ‘media passivity’\[16\]. Is the Metaverse really the ideal space for philosophical learning and education? Is it possible to realize the vision of a philosophical existence in it? We certainly have reason to ask a big question mark.

But even so, it is not necessary to give up hope for the future. The Metaverse is supposed to be a place of experimentation and play, and it is up to each of us to take up the responsibility and mission of philosophical reflection. While we are not in a position to offer a comprehensive diagnosis or cure, we can at least mention one point that deserves attention, and that is what Stigler says in his book What Makes Life Worth Living? (What Makes Life Worth Living), the British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott’s theory of the ‘transitional object’. It originally referred to the intermediate zone of transition between mother and child, which is neither the “inner psychological reality” nor the “outer world”\[19\], but which can and should have a broader social meaning. This is how Stigler proposes that we use transitional objects to re-establish the “love connection” between people\[20\], thereby curing the increasingly passive symptoms of the spirit, such as ruthlessness, homogeneity and laziness, that are spreading in technological space. But he overlooks the crucial point of play, as Winnicott repeatedly and explicitly refers to the space in which transitional objects operate as a ‘playground’\[19\]. How, then, can the Metaverse of gamified learning and philosophical existence truly establish the kind of caring and loving transitional relationships between people? How can a caring and loving transitional middle ground between people be truly established in the Metaverse of playful learning and philosophical existence? Perhaps the educator is the key player. As the Metaverse has profoundly changed the traditional state of learning and play, it has also placed new demands and tasks on educators. It will be incumbent upon educators of the future to make the

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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