

Chapter 17

Non-Verbal Communication Language in Virtual Worlds

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, the virtual space has been changing, and the skills acquired by users have been improved, and the avatars, as well as the settings, have graphically become more and more sophisticated. In virtual reality, the avatar without an appropriate animation would move in jerks in a disharmonious way similar to a robot, but endowing it with a particular postural animation, you make a conscious choice of what information you want to transfer with its appearance and its posture. In recent years, research has focused on the study of communication and its importance. The purpose of this contribution is to analyze the animations present in Second Life trying to trace a socio-psychological picture of the non-verbal communication process in a virtual environment.

INTRODUCTION

In the 16th century, even Leonardo da Vinci became interested in “interpersonal intelligence” and the importance of observing the behavior of others. Here is what he advised the young artist:

“Be vague often times in your strolling to see and consider the sites and acts of men in speaking, contending, laughing or fighting together, what acts are in them, and what acts do the surrounding people, dividers or viewers of these things”.

In this trace left by Leonardo we discover all the importance of observation, which allows us to grasp important aspects both within people and within the environment, which surrounds us. Participant observation is, in fact, a methodology that was used in the investigation described in this essay

Virtual worlds have hardly been studied by the academic world and it is not easy to find references to compare this work with. This essay wants to impact on the potential of this world, which is believed to stimulate a lot of thoughts on relational processes but also, as will be seen, on communication processes.

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The author, starting from her own didactic experience in the field of communication and combining it with participant observation started years ago in the virtual world, decided to examine:

1. What connection exists between the real, or physical, world and the virtual world with respect to communication processes and whether either of the two worlds influences the other;
2. Whether there is a breakdown of the stereotypes of Non-Verbal Communication that, learned in the course of one's life, are activated spontaneously in the real world and if, instead, they are translated into the virtual world or completely abandoned.

Thanks to participant observation, three areas in which the aforementioned communication has developed strongly in recent years were explored:

1. Physical characteristics (The avatar's body)
2. The avatar's clothing
3. The movements and postures of the body (Animations)

The final purpose of this contribution, starting from the observation of the virtual world most frequented by adults, is to demonstrate the potential of this world to be useful for future projects dedicated to social actors as young people, not only adults, as observed in this survey.

Young people could acquire, by playing, greater awareness of the importance of communication, in particular, non-verbal, without excluding the possibility of involving them in acquiring the knowledge of new professional skills aimed at programming in virtual environment.

Non-Verbal Communication (NVC)

Communication plays a decisive role in everyone's life and separating verbal communication from non-verbal communication is not possible because both are part of the communication system as a whole.

Non-verbal communication performs several useful functions such as: providing information, managing impression, exercising influence, regulating interactions, and expressing intimacy.

While verbal communication is explicit because it uses words, non-verbal communication acts using other transmission channels such as posture and gestures (La Pensée, Lewis, 2014), in the majority of cases spontaneous movements, some of which are handed down from one's own culture, but which the body unconsciously transmits and which can escape even oneself. Furthermore, Ekman (1982) states that Non-Verbal Communication (NVC) can find its roots in culture where some gestures / emblems summarize a concept socially shared and understood in the community of social actors but at the same time it manifests itself in a completely personal body language that somehow escapes the actor's own awareness.

Non-communication is not possible and within humans that is an innate and necessary condition.

The expressive function of non-verbal behavior includes both the communication of interpersonal attitudes and the exchange of information relating to the presentation of oneself. The latter analyzes the aspect of the social actor, its proxemics, its posture and a whole series of information that returns an image of himself (feedback) that influence the reading of the interlocutor (receiver).

Therefore, as Burgoon, Guerrero & Floyd (2010) state, there are eight non-verbal codes commonly recognized by academics such as the kinesics, the olfactory, the haptic, the chronemic, the vocal, the

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