



In the book by Jaron Lanier that we have on our curriculum, he makes a point of something he calls the *valley of the uncanny*. The uncanny is not directly scary, but conveys a stronger/weaker sense that something is deeply wrong. We can react with head-aches, nausea and bewilderment.

A classical example of uncanny is [David Lynch's](#) *Twin Peaks* ("the owls are not what they seem"). When the edge—or, gap—between an fictitious immersive experience and the current reality of our daily lives becomes blurred, our brains make trouble for us. It is difficult to learn from it.

This is something that could teach us about the way we learn by *immersive* methods: we need what we experience to *belong* in the *alternative reality* that we are immersed in, so that we can *retrieve* what we have learned *from it* in the contrasting framework of the *daily reality* in which we live our lives.



In his book *You are not a gadget—a manifesto* (2010), Jaron Lanier takes a critical position on *digital* technologies, from the position of a *practitioner* in the field. He coined the name virtual reality (VR) for technologies designed to explore inter/action in visually & operationally *altered* surroundings.

With a pair of *goggles* and a *glove*—sometimes a whole *suit*—a world of role-play of *gaming* and role-play developed *alongside* a range of applications of VR in e.g. remote-/micro-*surgery*. New forms of interaction allow to explore alternative relations between *experience* and *language*.

There is a discrepancy *between* whom and what the technology was originally *made for* (applied sciences such as physics) *and* whom it eventually came to *serve*—often based on platforms that were locked in, at early stages of tech-development—based on poorly conceived premises:

“While MIDI squeezes musical expression through a limiting model of the actions of keys on a musical keyboard, UNIX does the same for all computation, but using the actions of keys on typewriter-like keyboards. A UNIX program is often similar to a simulation of a person typing quickly.”

Lanier collects string-instruments and loves particularly the ones that challenge the type of constraints featuring in [MIDI](#) and [UNIX](#). The *violin* is a good example: where MIDI/UNIX breaks its materials into manageable pieces, the violin features a *continuity* also typical of human experience.

We can operate in VRs where we have *bodies like lobsters and move under water*. Or, have *bodies and wings like angels in a celestial world*. We adapt quickly to both. Yet, we discover a *sense of being us*, or ourselves, *across* worlds as different as these. We have something computers don’t have.

On this basis, he is critical of artificial intelligence (AI). Basically, he argues that these technologies will serve *actions* with the same *inadequacy* as MIDI/UNIX, based on patterns of human behaviour sampled from crowd-sourcing the internet, and that featuring in that intelligence of the *cloud*.

He argues that AI is an idea for a kind of commercial crowd-control—with no inhibition on its scope and ambition—that will impoverish *human experience* and its phased *collaborative intelligence*. The warning he states in the book on our curriculum won him the [Frankfurt bookfair peace prize](#).

An interesting point in his book is one he makes on a kind of *split* in human nature: **1)** that we are born [dependent](#) on our parents, have to learn the same things more than once, as the proportions change as we grow; **2)** the ability that our brains have to sense and operate in alternative worlds.

Example **1)** I learned how to sports-dive when I was 12 and the course stopped before the summer; after the summer I had grown taller and heavier and had to learn everything anew; **2)** if an alternative reality is clearly different, our brains accept it; if it is almost the same it starts protesting.