Avatars in the Trumpocene

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Abstract

This Journal's intrepid reporter Edouard Estaunié provides a first-hand account of new developments presented at Telecoms 2030, the first global telecommunications conference to be held after the devastating Trump Wars.

Excitement is high this morning as we fly into Sydney for Telecoms 2030, the first re-emergence of this global industry conference since the disastrous Trump Wars.

Enrolment from Americans, Chinese and Russians is expected to be low, as all their major cities were nuked in the Mutually Assured Destruction unleashed once Donald hit the red button. The radiation levels in the debris of the target cities remain off the scale. A major application of the Internet of Things now lies in monitoring radiation counters – and air pollution counters – around the globe, and in providing hazard alerts.

The world's political boundaries have drastically changed. We know that China's mainland population, reduced to a paltry hundred million since the terrible conflagation, still exceeds America's residual eighty million, many eking out primitive existences away from their doomed cities. The Russian Oligarchs have reclaimed Alaska and the Baltic States. The Chinese warlords, safe in their mountain bunkers, have claimed the north of Australia, after nuking the US bases at Darwin and Pine Gap. They'd already owned 80% of the farmland anyway.

The new southern Chinese frontier – known to us ironically as the Hanson Line – extends from Cable Beach to Tweed Heads. One upside is that they are showing more care in protecting the Great Barrier Reef – or at least its southern, relatively unbleached rump - than our pre-War Bernardi government ever did. The Reef is now an armed extension of the radically extended South China Sea.

Helga, my colleague from EU Telekom, is saddened. Looking at the images of the harbour captured by the plane's external infrared cameras, she has seen how much Sydney has changed since her pre-War visits. It's not just the dense, purplish grey air pollution covering the city. Sydney, after all, was spared from nuclear annihilation, once Australia had signalled to China its neutrality, in first the Trump Trade War and then his Apocalypse Now. But the air pollution blowing across the globe is unavoidable, and southern Australia is spared the worst.

No, what has saddened her are the effects of the rising sea: all the harbour beaches are now well under water, and the beauty of the Sydney Opera House is obscured by the four-metre high dykes built around it. For the present, the Sydney Harbour Bridge remains high enough to be still usable by road and train traffic.

Our plane is landing itself at Sydney's Badgerys Creek Airport. The former international airport on the east coast is well below sea level, and its protective dykes only permit the landing of much smaller craft. All the contentious pre-War debates about using pilotless planes have been made irrelevant by the horrific changes to the atmosphere, in both turbulence and contamination. Fully automated navigation and aircraft control systems are now quite essential. We land very smoothly, and taxi to the reception portals.

After passing the iris-controlled immigration doors, Helga and I join dozens of other delegates in a commodious driver-less bus arranged by the conference organizers.

Why are there so many attendees this year? Some had predicted that the perfection of avatars and the deployment of giga-speed communications links would negate any further need for conferences. And indeed several of the keynote speakers tonight will be the avatars of home-bound celebrity CEOs. But the gregariousness impulse amongst humans has remained important. The avatar keynote sessions at this conference will be far less popular than those with a real speaker in the room.

With our luggage automatically transported from the airport to our hotel rooms via separate buses, we can go straight to the conference reception area. Once again, iris recognition technology is used to register us conference attendees. I am pleased to see a handful of old friends from the US who have survived the Trump Wars against the odds, and now belong to major research centres in unscorched centres in Canada, New Zealand, the recombined Korea and the new Federation of Free Europe.

One of them is Tony Kerrikov, a stalwart of Amazon Bell Labs who had the luck to be abroad in independent, neutral Scotland when his laboratories back in New Jersey were obliterated. He hails me from across the foyer. "Hey, Edouard! Great to see you! Are you coming to my session?"

Tony's forte was deep packet inspection, before the Wars. He's since teamed up with nanobiologists at Glasgow Tech to create a new field called Molecular ID. Now just the smear of sweat from a finger, not a fingerprint, can be used to identify an intruder, within certain probabilities. It's a potential boon to forensic scientists as well as, controversially, to security services worldwide. And of course to the telcos transmitting the digitally encoded, complex molecular signatures via the Internet of Things.

However the biggest panel session at Telecoms 2030, to be chaired by Helga, is focussed on avatars. The use of avatars is now vital to commercial telecoms: they are the biggest factor in the growth of ultra-broadband traffic.   Their 3-dimensional verisimilitude greatly outperforms the ghostly shapes of the pre-war holographs; they have all the appearance of solid lifeforms, until physically 'touched' by the curious or unwary. Their latency in mimicking or carrying out the instructions of their owners has been reduced to milliseconds, when using giga-link connections. Avatars of course make ideal substitutes for their owners when avoiding expensive travel, or, more typically in this sorry trumpocene, in visiting dangerous locations.

At the end of this session, the chairperson, Helga, dramatically reveals herself to be an avatar. Her real self is in the control booth at the back of the auditorium. (Clever *Fräulein,* that Helga.) She then asks: press the green button on your desk if you are a real life-form, and the orange button if you are an avatar. The audience laughs: of course the avatars haven't yet got the ability to apply pressure to buttons, have they? "That's OK," says Helga, "We know we have 200 desks in this room, and most are occupied. Let's see how many green buttons are pressed."

On the room's main screen above Helga, a computer facsimile of the auditorium starts lighting up with green lights. After a few seconds' pause she asks, has everyone had time to press their button?

Only 35 green buttons have lit up out of the potential 200. But alongside them, 162 orange buttons have been activated.

"That's a convincing majority for the avatars," says Helga. "Which helps us with our next decision. Our Program Committee has nominated the Trump Hotel in Washington DC as the venue for Telecoms 2031. Because radiation levels around the hotel are so high, we've been offered free registration for our conference. Please indicate if you plan to attend Telecoms 2031."

162 orange buttons light up.

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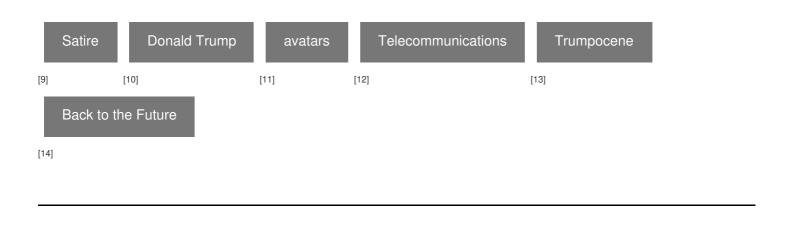ajtde_86_avatars_in_the_trumpocene.pdf [5]

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