

**hyperpeople**

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## OVERVIEW

The record industry collapses in Mexico and China because of the wholesale piracy of CDs; individuals and corporations spend countless billions of dollars in lost time wading through electronic mail, winnowing important messages from the tsunami of spam; Apple Computer resuscitates its failing computer business with the iPod, the first “must-have” electronic gadget of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These seemingly disconnected events are, in fact, part of a single, enormous wave, transforming human communication, turning us into *hyperpeople*.

“No man is an island,” nor has ever been, but now, as we digitally link ourselves into close relationships with others both near and far, our islands sport so many “bridges” to other island that they constitute a constantly-shifting galaxy of continents, new nations of communication. And each of us is a member of many nations. It is this new self-identity – which defines itself through the act of communication with many, many others, and the activities that follow from these relations, which gives birth to *hyperpeople*.

In our new roles as *hyperpeople*, we leverage our connections to each other to make sense of a world which seems intent upon drowning us in a rising sea of information. These human networks are forming as a response to the explosive overload of pervasive digital communication, for one simple reason: we are

coming to rely upon one other to filter meaning from the rising noise of an ever-accelerating culture. This is not a new skill; humans have drawn upon each other's authority and expertise since before the first flourishing of culture, seventy thousand years ago. But now, as the social skills learned in a tribe or a village spread out globally, and are amplified by digital communication, we have networks of expertise – of authority, in the qualitative sense of the word – which have greatly multiplied the expertise of every human being touched by the digital age. This multiplication is as sudden as it is complete – within the last decade we have all been drawn into “social networks” which, as we become ever more dependent upon them, will give us access to knowledge, community, and capability unlike anything we've known before. We are becoming *hyperpeople*.

The lines toward our destiny as *hyperpeople* can be drawn from two convergent trends: the deluge of digital media, as typified by the exponential growth of Internet file-sharing (Napster, BitTorrent, etc.), which is transforming the Internet into the equivalent of a gigantic hard drive, wherein anyone can find nearly any form of media, or, more significantly, share media with everyone in the world; and the rise of social network software (Friendster, LiveJournal, etc.), which supports and amplifies the array of social relationships which are an essential element of human existence. The first trend is overwhelming us with choice, potentially sending each of us into our own private universe of self-selected experience; the second trend keeps us connected, and facing outward, into the human realities of the world. The dynamic tension between these trends, as they become more

and more closely linked, is already giving rise to the organizational forms of human communities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *hyperpeople* rely upon social networks to translate the raw input of an overloaded and overheated media environment into an experience of self-fulfillment. Because so much is out there, we need these networks to become the discerning consumers (and creators) of quality. *hyperpeople* thrive on a diet of “word of mouth” expressions; but these mouths have become a vast chorus: decentralized, instantaneous, and, if not quite omniscient, at least broadly experienced.

Part one of *hyperpeople*, “the world is my hard drive,” concerns itself with the ever more pervasive reach of file-sharing networks, and does not overlook the legal and economic ramifications of these new agents of pervasive copyright theft. At the same time, another issue is raised: the impossibly seductive nature of the file-sharing experience. Because a file-sharing network can bring a quality experience to an individual with little or no cost, they have grown explosively. Despite the best attempts of organizations such as the RIAA and MPAA to slow their growth (or rather, *because* of these attempts), they continue to grow, becoming both more pervasive and more invisible every day. *hyperpeople* boldly asserts that the merchants of mass media – television broadcasters and producers, film studios, recording companies and radio networks – will either be crippled or destroyed in the age of file-sharing, and there is nothing that any of these organizations can do about it, unless they “embrace piracy,” and use these networks to promote their properties.

Beyond the threat to the bottom-line of the media industries, there is a larger and even more implacable trend: the transformation of the world into a single media resource means that any one individual (or *hyperpeople*) can share anything they've created, globally and instantaneously. The hard-and-fast boundaries between "professional" and "amateur" content, already eroding, are about to collapse completely. When this happens, the "media giants" will be competing on a level playing field with an entire planet of creators, each of them putting all of their best efforts into their work. The explosion of available media will result in the disintegration of the mass market, with each individual free to choose from an array of countless millions of offerings.

But how to choose? Having infinite options can result in a "decision paralysis," where the overwhelming consequences of choice simply leave us numb and unable to make any decision at all. This is where the second section of *hyperpeople*, the eponymous core of the book, picks up. While most everyone is familiar with the "six degrees of separation" principle, which demonstrates the reality of human social networks, the explicit digitization of these networks, as typified in hugely popular web sites like Friendster.com and LiveJournal.com, have greatly amplified the power of these social relationships. Transformed from organic and casual affairs into active and omnipresent channels of communication, these social networks are engendering new forms of organization, based on closely-coupled, richly communicative networks of like-

minded individuals. Rapidly evolving into a significant element of the human experience, social networks allow us to draw on the collective strengths of their members. There is strength in numbers, and this strength, amplified by a digitized social network, allows an individual member of that network to have at his or her disposal the intellectual, creative or critical resources of any member of the network. That multiplication of the potential of the individual across the breadth of the social network is intensely seductive – the more you use the network, the more you come to rely upon it. Thus, social networks give rise to *hyperpeople*, individuals who can not (and will not) be easily separated from the social networks which support them.

We will need these burgeoning social networks, we will need to be *hyperpeople*, in order to avoid being utterly overwhelmed by the flood of data arriving on our doorsteps, due to of the ongoing explosion in the availability of digital media. That is the subject of the final part of of *hyperpeople*, “to stupidity and beyond”.

It has always been possible for individuals to fill themselves with experiences which only reinforce their own beliefs, however bizarre or pathological; but now, as the tsunami of digital media unleashed by file-sharing washes over us, it will be difficult to prevent that from becoming the natural state of affairs. Apple’s iPod has become such an archetypal gadget precisely because it allows individuals to assert complete control over their ears; you can listen to whatever you want, whenever you want, wherever you want. This “programmable

perception” is the harbinger of the digital world that is now upon us: just as we can program what we hear, we can also program what we watch and what we read (even what we taste, smell and feel) with a degree of sophistication and precision never before known. This is bound to be the single most seductive aspect of the era of digital media, but it brings with it an enormous price: the more we seek our own private, tailored experiences, the more we lose touch with the common mind, the collective experience of human life. The mass media, whatever their faults, at least provided us with a common cultural environment, a bridge across the gap of personal experience into the interpersonal. As mass media collapse into “personal media culture,” the lines which have connected us will vanish, and each of us will be inhabiting a wholly self-created environment of experience. How can we expect to sustain any sort of culture, when each of us come from such broadly differentiated experiences? McLuhan predicted that the mass media would engender a “global village,” and, for the last forty years, we’ve been living in that village. But now each of us puts on an iPod and retreats into a singular darkness.

We have yet to come to a cultural understanding of how our choices of media shape our experience of the world; that the media we take into us do, in large part, come to shape us. But now that understanding is vital, if human culture is to avoid descent into an almost autistic separation. The seductions of personal media must be counterbalanced by the bonds of human connection. This is where *hyperpeople* have a role to play. Because their whole is greater than the

sum of the parts, *hyperpeople* can withstand the onslaught of media, can use their collective capability as a wax to block the Siren's song. This is the way through, toward the development of an "ecology of the collective mind," a world where human beings, through their own efforts, have utterly transformed what it means to be human.

In one hundred and eighty pages, written in language accessible to the lay reader, and filled with examples drawn from current events, *hyperpeople* will paint a striking picture of the present, framing the challenges and the opportunities of the future, which are even now appearing before us.

*hyperpeople* is not a book of predictions; it is an examination of the world around us, a world which reveals that our future as *hyperpeople* has already arrived.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Internationally recognized as the man who brought virtual reality into the World Wide Web, Mark Pesce has been exploring the frontiers of media, science and technology for over two decades.

The author of five books – including a classic text, *VRML: Browsing and Building Cyberspace*, which sold over 70,000 copies in six languages – Pesce is widely respected as a technologist who possesses vision in equal measure to his technical prowess. Pesce regularly speaks before audiences around the world, lecturing about emerging trends in the arts and sciences, captivating his audiences with a mixture of old-fashioned storytelling and hard-edged facts.

The technology press quotes Pesce frequently, and mainstream publications such as *Forbes ASAP*, *TIME Digital*, *WIRED*, *The New York Times* and *LA Weekly* have profiled him and his views on the future. In addition to his talents as scientist and engineer, Pesce is also a well-respected journalist, writing for *WIRED*, *PC Magazine*, *Feed*, *Salon*, *Flux*, *Internet.AU* and numerous Ziff-Davis periodicals.

In September of 1998, Pesce received two-year appointment as Visiting Professor and Chair of the Interactive Media Program at the University of Southern California's world-renowned School of Cinema-Television. His

mandate – to bring cinema and broadcast television into the interactive era – led him to create a program that encourages creative vision, and is already producing a generation of entertainment professionals shaping the media of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In September 2000, Ballantine Books published *The Playful World: How Technology is Transforming the Imagination*. Pesce explored the design of a new generation of children's toys – Tiger Toys' Furby, LEGO's Mindstorms, and the Sony Playstation 2 – that are changing the way children conceive of the world.

From the SALON review of *The Playful World*:

Pesce pulls together his argument with an impressive amount of research; *The Playful World* offers cogent explanations of complicated technologies and social theories. Especially considering how far Pesce travels -- from the genesis of the Web to the early days of artificial intelligence to the invention of nanotechnology, not to mention theoretical references ranging from Sherry Turkle's online research to Jean Piaget's studies of childhood development. Pesce is a master at distilling complex ideas down to their most important elements and explaining them in layman's terms.

From the UPSIDE review:

This captivating new book by Mark Pesce explores the knowledge, skills and capabilities of human intelligence that are transforming our culture forever.... If you want a preview of the coming world and its humanity, read this intriguing new book.

In October 2003, Pesce was invited to consult for the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS), in Sydney. Over the next year, Pesce transformed the educational curriculum at AFTRS, introducing cutting-edge practices in DVD production, interactive production, and the digital distribution of television programming. Late in 2004, AFTRS appointed Pesce as Lecturer in Interactive Media, and early in 2005 the master's program in Interactive Media which he oversees admitted its first student. In recent months, Pesce has worked closely with Australia's media professionals, helping them to chart a course into the pervasively networked world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many of the ideas explored in *hyperpeople* are the result of these efforts.

## THE COMPETITION

*hyperpeople* draws heavily upon the works of two giants of cultural studies:

Marshal McLuhan and Alvin Toffler.

Howard Rheingold's *Smart Mobs*

Nicholas Negroponte's *Being Digital*

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