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**Title:** Eudaimonic wellbeing without belief? An enactivist approach to the *Performatist* cultivation of meaning through digital media.

### **Abstract**

There is a growing interest in the study of *meaning in life* (MIL) – broadly defined as the perception that one’s life has significance – and of its constitutive aspects (purpose-orientation, comprehension-coherence, self-worth, sense of connectedness and belonging) (see King & Hicks, 2021). The present contribution will provide an embodiment-based approach to the (eudaimonic) use of digital media and fictional narratives for identity constitution and for the development of MIL.

By critically analyzing recent theoretical and empirical work on *self-expansion* through narratives (Slater et al., 2014; Khoo et al., 2021), I will consider different contemporary phenomena: the development of parasocial relationships and hybrid identities, the recent social media trend of “reality shifting” (Somer et al., 2023), and the use of fictional narratives as “symbolic resources” (Zittoun et al., 2003) in political protests (e.g., Fathiya, 2025) and religious practices – e.g., “fiction-based religions” (Cusack & Kosnác̃, 2016).

How can these practices contribute to the cultivation of eudaimonic wellbeing? How can MIL be achieved through the immersion in virtual worlds and through the use of fictional symbols when individuals are aware of the artifactuality of such symbols? I will thus propose and explore the idea that these practices point to a new way of approaching reality – grounded in a need for significance and shaped by the digital media themselves – characterized by a conception of knowledge as embodied *wayfaring* (Ingold, 2013), as a transformational pilgrimage (see also Paul, 2014).

Through an integration of recent frameworks from 4E cognitive science and narrative psychology (Vervaeke et al., 2012; Jaeger et al., 2024; Dings & Newen, 2023) as well as recent developments of the notion of *Homo ludens* (Frissen et al., 2025), I will focus on how certain contemporary practices may express a *performatist* (Eshelman, 2024) mindset, characterized by the aesthetic search for the transcendent – but also of the sacred, of unity, and of meta-narratives – through non/post-metaphysical means (a sort of aesthetic faith). Such an approach can also contribute to clarify other practices of meaning-making through digital media, such as the endorsement and narrative enactment of conspiracy theories – and of conspirituality (Asprem & Dyrendal, 2015) – and paranormal beliefs, for which ludological and performance-based approaches have been recently proposed (Levy, 2022; Zeeuw & Gekker, 2023).

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