[Travelling to Other Worlds and Altered States of Consciousness: Human-Artificial relational interactions and living worlds in the Age of Aquarius](#)
Convenor:

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Format:

> Panel

Travelling to Other Worlds and Altered States of Consciousness: Human-Artificial relational interactions and living worlds in the Age of Aquarius. Panel **P07** at conference **RAI2022: Anthropology, AI and the Future of Human Society.**
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Short Abstract:

This panel focuses on the creation of artificial "metaverses" as part of the development of artificial-human relational interactions that show the emergence of a new ontological meta-human self-consciousness. What role(s) can Anthropology play as an active agent of change towards the New Age?

Long Abstract

In popular consciousness, 1969 marked the completion of the 2,150 years astrological cycle and transition from the Age of Capricorn to the Age of Aquarius, as part of the 25,772 years natural gyroscopic precession of Earth's axis. It also marked the year when the Apollo 11 mission stepped foot on the Moon, broadcasted live on TV sets across the world. A year later, Gene Youngblood published his famous book on "expanded cinema," which aimed to opening the "horizons beyond the point of infinity" moving Humanity's "oceanic consciousness" towards a "cosmic consciousness." Since that time, media performance technologies have made huge leaps in modes and means of audio-visual representation, introducing interactive live technologies, cyber environments, virtual and augmented realities, establishing virtual utopian and/or dystopian Other Worlds in which humans co-exist via their Avatar personalities, developing primary artificial and human interactions via board games, and even developing spiritual interactions between humans and AI. This panel calls for papers focusing on the rapid development of "metaverses" as interactive fields and/or performances, as a means of mapping the emergence of a new universal meta-human consciousness, to reflect upon the role Anthropology can play as an active agent of change.

Accepted papers:

Highway Hypnotic: Considering Transcendental Moments in the Truck Simulator Video Games

Author:

Christopher Michael Hansen (HMKW Berlin)

Paper short abstract:

This paper builds on a growing body of work that considers video games as sites for spirituality. By using ethnographic research from the r/trucksim Reddit community, this paper considers how Truck Simulator video games produce transcendental moments for players.

Paper long abstract:

On r/trucksim, a Reddit forum where users discuss the Truck Simulator video game series, players often report out of body experiences, meditational moments, and instances of beauty within the virtual world. In this light, the Truck Simulator games can be viewed as producing transcendental moments, where one feels outside their body and connected to something beyond the individual self. Considering Elizabeth Buie's definition for transcendental moments in HCI as "an individual experience of connection or unity with transcendence, whether sacred or secular, having a beginning and an end", this paper explores how the mechanisms of the game work to produce moments of transcendence. This paper draws from my research with the r/trucksim community to explore the ways players interact with the game space in regards to these transcendental moments. This research is broken into three categories — Highway Hypnosis, Simulated Nature, and Immersive Methods — which look at specific mechanisms of the game that produce these altered states. This paper builds on a growing body of work that considers video games as a site for spirituality, drawing from researchers such as Jayne Gackenbach, Robert Geraci, and Alenda Y. Chang.

The art of existance among self-made Japanese Vtubers: A posthuman revolt of ethical singularities.

Author:

Maria Ibari Ortega (Australian National University)

Paper short abstract:

I examine the ethical narratives shaping the moral experimentations of self-made independent Japanese Virtual Youtubers. I draw my digital ethnography on the work of Lacanian theorist Mari Ruti and Julia Kristeva's intimate revolt, to delimitate what I call posthuman revolt of ethical singularities.

Paper long abstract:

In the novel "Exodus of the land of hope" by Murakami Ryu, published and set in 2001, Japanese youth abandon the nation following the words of a young leader: "There's nothing in Japan. That's a dead country." Meanwhile, outside fiction, the collapsed economy turned the image of Japan as a "hopeless country" an unbearable reality.

Two decades later, a new wave of hopeful transformation has emerged. The kind of change I am focusing here is minoritarian, machinic and nomadic (Briadotti, 2002). Among the 7 million middle-aged individuals included in the demographic group collectively humiliated under the label of "The Lost Generation", and the now adults scorned as "Yutori Generation", there are thousands of women and men who exiled to virtual territories to become Virtual Youtubers since 2017. They chose virtual horizons to escape from shameful unemployment and poverty. Nonetheless, only few self-made and independent Vtubers have developed singular ethical projects, challenging the existing ontological constrains they have suffered in the "real world", to define freedom in their own hands by opting out the human becoming-more-than digital avatars. In this paper, I examine the open-ended ethical narratives that shape the moral moods and ethical experimentation of independent Vtubers. I draw my digital ethnography on the work of Lacanian critical theorist Mari Ruti on existential lack, singularity and creativity, and Julia Kristeva's idea of intimate revolt, to shape the contours of what I call virtually situated posthuman revolt of ethical singularities, emerging in particular, in the ethical projects of self-proclaimed Babiniku Ojisan.

[Are Robots Haunted by Electric Ghosts? Artificial Intelligence and the Technological Construction of Life After Death](#)

Author:

Leo Ruickbie (University of Northampton)

Paper short abstract:

Technology can already bring back the appearance of the dead, but as machine learning and quantum computing push the boundaries of the possible, will Web 3.0 create Heaven 2.0? This paper will explore the emerging technologies of resurrection and their implications for human and non-human society.

Paper long abstract:

Even after death, our digital selves continue – in email accounts, in social media profiles, in blogs and websites – virtual 'ghosts of place' (Bell, 1997; recently documented by Pozzi, 2021). The machine world is already haunted. However, these shadows of our digital lives are unintended consequences of living in the modern world, what happens when they become intentional, what happens when technology deliberately tries to bring the dead back to life, or even invent an afterlife? What happens when the metaphor of Derridean 'hauntology' becomes literal?

Deceased singers Freddie Mercury and Tupac Shakur have appeared on stage to perform once more, and the late Carrie Fisher has been re-assembled out of unused footage and CGI for The Rise of Skywalker. Microsoft has already patented software that can bring the dead back as chatbots. Technology is creating new Frankenstein's monsters, this time made from memories, recordings and digital manipulations to be given the spark of (after)life by AI.

The digital return of the dead has begun, unregulated by legal frameworks and motivated by the interests of consumer capitalism, prioritising entertainment over spirituality. But how will it develop? Could a religious leader be brought back in a virtual Second Coming? What are the messianic implications of a digital Resurrection? Will we see a heavenly metaverse develop complete with angels, powers and dominions – a Web 3.0 version of Heaven 2.0? How will religion and spirituality adapt to the possibilities of AI? And what will it mean for the AI entities themselves?

Consciousness Hacking, Technodelics, and Inside-out Change

Author:

Aleena Chia (Goldsmiths, University of London)

Paper short abstract:

This paper examines how 'technodelics'—psychedelics, virtual reality, and neuro-wearables—engineer transcendent experiences at the confluence of New Age spiritualities and conspiracism, and its broader implications for democratic cultures.

Paper long abstract:

Consciousness Hacking is a San Francisco-based community of practice dedicated to the use of 'technodelics'—psychedelics, virtual reality, and neuro-wearables—for the engineering of transcendent experiences. Proponents of consciousness hacking include venture capitalists, neuroscientists, and Silicon Valley tech ethicists. Technodelics strive for the reliable induction of ego dissolution and transpersonal connection with the universe, which have been promoted by popular science writers as having remarkable therapeutic, spiritual, or creative effects. Like New Age cultures, consciousness hacking adheres to perennialism, which designates different beliefs as equally valid because they worship the same divine source that emanates throughout the cosmos. Just as New Age perennialism allows disparate spiritual ideas and noetic experiences to cohere into a movement, conspiratorial perennialism enables connections between online snippets and statistics to feed confirmation biases. In this context, 'conspirituality' refers to the confluence of New Age spirituality and conspiracism that frame reality through holistic thinking—-connecting events and energies, the inner self to the outer world in unseen ways. This paper presents an anthropologically-oriented meta-critique of the social meanings of mediated stories that connect technodelics and conspirituality through what consciousness hackers call 'inside-out change': transforming the social and physical world by shifting one's interior landscape, both individually and collectively. Examining five years of recorded talks by Consciousness Hackers, this paper critiques how the confluence between technodelics and conspirituality cultures the high-tech New Age into an interior experience that is beyond interpretation, verification, and deliberation.

The Evolution of Representation from cave painting to terraforming: Metaverse worlds and the New Dialectics of Space

Author:

Michelangelo Paganopoulos (Ton Duc Thang University, Vietnam)

Paper short abstract:

This introductory overview sketches the evolution of modes of representation and fields, from ritual and performance towards modern sacred performances, and via Youngblood's concept of "expanded cinema" towards the emergence "metaverse" environments and future potentiality of terraforming planets.

Paper long abstract:

This introductory paper to the panel offers a brief overview of the evolution of modes of representation, beginning with classic anthropological studies in ritual and performance (Van Gennep, Victor Turner, Bruce Kapferer) towards modern sacred performances (Maya Deren's ritualistic cinema and/or Grotowski's "poor theatre") and via Youngblood's concept of "expanded cinema" and interactive cinema in the 1970s, towards the emergence of three popular "metaverse" games: Roblox, Fortnight, and Minecraft. The paper theoretically draws on three overlapping dialectics that constitute the evolution of emerging spaces from rituals to "meta-universes": the convergence and enlargement of space and engagement of social bodies via intermedial technologies; the ontological dialectics between the potential (imaginative) and actual (material) synthesis of social presence (Avatars); and the dialectics played between "technology-vs-content" synthesis of Live performances, focusing on how embodied technology transgresses beyond the physical limits of the senses and the stage. The paper argues that these three complementary arenas simultaneously play their part in synthesizing the rapidly evolving cyber field via the material processes that accumulate towards the "machinization" (or "dehumanization") of human ontology (negative) and "humanization" of the machines (positive, including the emergence of AI spaces). In the visionary spirit of science fiction, the paper will conclude upon the potentiality of an artificial intelligent living semi-organic space of which human activity is an integral part in its constitution (a meta-Anthropocene), from ritual and theatre to online games and towards the future colonization of space and terraforming of new planetary environments.

The New Vitruvian - Digital doubles Inscribed within Bounding Boxes

Author:

Avital Meshi (UC Davis)

Paper short abstract:

The New Vitruvian is a performance that examines body-doubles created by AI technology. A performer spends time with a recognition algorithm, allowing it to analyze her body. Mostly, it recognizes her as a 'Person', but there are moments in which she is detected as something other-than-human.

Paper long abstract:

The superimposed man inscribed within a circle and a square in Leonardo's 'Vitruvian Man' is meant to represent the ideal person's measurements, a creature who is a microcosm of the grander spheres and its proportions can be relied upon for the definition of the universe. Today humans are superimposed by their digital doubles and inscribed within bounding boxes. What do these measurements do? And how do they define the universe? Our doppelgangers are formed from metadata that accumulates within our interactions with digital media. What is the relationship between our bodies and these digital doubles? Do they mirror our attributes? Do they enable us the freedom to reconsider ourselves and transform? Or maybe they are just a systematic error within the logic of the code? The New Vitruvian is an art performance that examines the potential of identity transformation through the lens of AI technology. The performer spends time in front of an AI recognition algorithm, consenting for it to detect and analyze her body. Most of the time, the algorithm recognizes her as a human being, a 'Person', but there are flickering moments in which she is detected as something other-than-human. These alternative classifications include various animals and objects which are suddenly recognized while the performer moves around. The paper will discuss the implications of misrepresentations by AI algorithms and speculate a future in which this technology composes digital avatars for the entire population.

The paper is based on 'The New Vitruvian' performance: http://www.avitalmeshi.com/the-new-vitruvian-2022.html