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

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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, Fortnite, 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.