

Can non-anthropocentric relationships lead to true intimacy with technology?

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Abstract

When we change the way we communicate, we change society.” [1]

This panel aims to provide audience with a context to understand how social media technologies and the daily updating of the self is challenging our preconceptions of screen-based ‘Internet’ communication and influencing the development of our cultural/ personal identity(s) and sense of self. [15] It will explore the use of portable; individual; personal; non identical; devices and their impact to our current lives through the present innovative communication apps. The panel would question whether being intimate with technology, in a non-anthropocentric way could provide new critical reflections on the self and how gender stereotypes will form the Internet of Bodies and the future human / machine directions.

Anastasios Maragiannis: Texting a Machine: Assembling an emotional response.

Existing research into contemporary machines, or in other words ‘robots’- captivating through a more humanoid oriented definition- generally complexes on a superficial unknown exploration of human senses and communication practices. Contemporary society is shaped on numerous technological communication disputes that initiate throughout a unique immersion of our portable devices, our sexual intersubjectivities and gender affinities. However, this relationships between individuals and their artificial counterparts routes back to the ancient Greek eras where ‘antikithira’ mechanism used to communicate data. That formed our future and therefore our emotional response to machinery. [2]

Prevailing stereotypes

Certainly, our world is not only about stereotypes but also it is about fixed, prearranged patterns that allow us – or not - to be more creative in our non-creative existence. Hundreds of online apps operable through the Internet, tolerates us to reconnoitre emotional qualities that can

mirror our human essentials in prescient terms of artificial responses. We use these technologies thinking that we could communicate more, and we could aid this communication by rethinking and reshaping our physical life. We use the online apps to text to someone that we think is there to listen and respond to us, however the response we get doesn’t necessarily mean that a real human is on the other side of this interaction. [3] There is a well-defined distinction here that lies between a physical and a virtual life. However this correlation is still blurred and not yet discovered. What kind of creative approaches appear possible for dealing with these complexities? But just as we getting along with ‘blind’ communication and uncertain emotions into future technology, we become less precautionous with the openness around sexual identities emotions and communication with the ‘other side’ [4] of our machine a practice that social torture part of our society. Within this panel I would like to discuss the impact of the screen based communication process through the individual portable devices and explore ‘our’ no-gender attitude. Consequently robotics and there fixtures mechanisms (apps) allows us to further explore our restricted by the society nature, and offer us the chance to be as exposed as we think we want to be. What is the role of art in this exploration?

Stacey Pitsillides: Can non-anthropocentric relationships lead to true intimacy with technology?

The concept of human machine communication is a theme that has driven the plot of many sci-fi [5] scenarios. It is a powerful overarching narrative, which allows us to question as an outsider, some of the most fundamental principles of what it means to be human. This includes but is not limited to our personal ethics, our political systems and our social interactions. When we communicate with technological others such as

robots, or avatars in virtual worlds, by; plugging in, talking, texting, typing, touching et al we are redefining the relationship we have with the body as an embedded and entangled definition of self. It is this definition of self that allows us to be intimate with others, as we define both the relationship and the meaning of certain interactions. On the other hand a non-anthropocentric approach to intimacy may give us new versions of the human, perhaps even introducing concepts of the Posthuman [6] that have the potential to blur the boundaries between technology, the body and the self.

Artistic Freedom

Within this panel I would like to question whether being intimate with technology, in a non-anthropocentric way could provide new critical reflections on the self and give the developers of robots and avatars the artistic freedom to go beyond the human both in form and mode of interaction. Rather than aiming for AI or empathy inducing features i.e. teaching technological beings how to be better humans, we may instead consider how the affordances and materiality of different kinds of technology and how they can augment and develop new and enchanting approaches to human interaction. [7] When considered from an artistic perspective rather than a technological one, we may ask what are the affordances of robotics and virtual reality and what kind of experiences would define intimacy in these new forms?

Janis Jefferies: Closer and The Nether: the end of intimacy as we once knew it.

In the mid 1990s, when access to the internet was on the rise, there were many debates about on line interaction carried out in Internet Relay chats or chat rooms (and Multi User Domains). The second, and the one hand there were some who celebrating the fantasy and pretense of role-play partly because it was faceless and any identity could be chosen. Sherry Turkle's 1995 view was celebratory, "*As players participate, they become authors not only of the text but also of themselves constructing new selves through social interaction*". [8] On the other hand, there were those who were unnerved by the very lack of an ethical dimension to faceless identity: distance could lead to deception, intimacy in private projected on public display, a dissolution between private and public boundaries of safety and surveillance.

Shifting Representations of Technology

This short paper discusses 2 plays some 20 years apart to note the shifting representations of technology, what the implications are for experiencing feelings of intimacy and how 'sexbots' programmed to suit all your needs impact on the young and the not so young. Patrick Marber's 1997 play (and then film) *Closer* (commissioned and performed Cottesloe, National Theatre, London) illuminates this view through an

exploration of new technology. It was probably the first play by a British playwright and produced on the British stage to explore the ways in which an on stage representation of two people communicating through the interest as well as the use of mobile phones. When one character is asked whether he frequently visits the on-line environment, the reply is specified as 'Net'. [9] In one of the scenes most remembered by visitors, two main protagonists interact in an on line sex chat while one identifies himself as Anna (another character in the play with whom he is in love [10]), then proceeds to play a practical joke on the other by arranging to meet in real life. Nearly 20 years later, another play, Jennifer Haley's *The Nether* (2015) takes on the complexities of advanced technology where the darker side of the Net is explored. [11] How much of the web do we *really* know about? *The Nether* projects some of our deepest social fears with the aim of interrogating technology, projection and simulation in which a lucrative site called 'The Hideaway' hosts punters, retaining their anonymity by adopting avatars, are able to have sex with virtual children. What do young people think? Young people's relationships in the early 21st century include a host of devices, social media websites across heart emojis on Instagram or instant messaging. A report released by the Pew Research Center in Technology (October 2015) includes interviews with Americans aged between 13-17. [12] It notes that many teenagers enjoy the anonymity of text messaging as a pleasurable aspect in all stages of dating. The negative aspects of technology, such as surveillance and trolling, are played out publicly on social media for all to see. Named after the wicked troll creatures of children's tales, an Internet troll is someone who stirs up drama and abuses their online anonymity by purposely sowing hatred, bigotry, sexism, racism and misogyny. This is the world of *Closer* and *The Nether* as the move is made from the stage (literary) to the platform (social media).

Ghislaine Boddington: The Internet of Bodies - future human / machine choreographies.

Today's world of connectivity between humans and objects of all kinds - virtual and physical - is extending rapidly, as the experimental and pioneering work of pre millennium artists and creative moves into mainstream debate, development and usage. In the next 10 years the Internet of Things [13] aims to link us to all the "stuff" around us, everything we need to work with and for us. Additionally we start to see the evolving linkage of our bodies directly to machine and virtual "others", in particular opening up real-time looping of all our senses to the robots and avatars we create or choose to relate to. I call this the Internet of Bodies - physical and virtual, human and machine.

Synthetic emotions

I would like to examine on this panel how this affects the concept of love? How are we shifting this, the most universal of all human needs, into new belongings, attachments and fulfillments? Can we adjust to and fully accept the evolution of love into “synthetic emotions”?

Using examples from topical curatorial practices, both my own co-curations[14] and others (such as Lyst, Technophilia, Lovemetruely) plus recent mass viewed films and tv dramas such as “Her” and “Humans”, it seems that the next decade is destined for intensive ethical and moral debates on the human / machine loving - from love bots to synths, teledildonics to cryonics the debate is on its way. As implants and sensors shift real-time connectivity to the inside of our physical body, biogels, touch and gaze tech will deepen immersive environments. How will this effect our social abilities in the real-world - will the psychologies of confused identities and power play cause chaos? Or will these shifts only have limited negative repercussions, as we acquire 21st century skills of rapidly blending parallel virtual/physical realms for joy and positive release?”

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