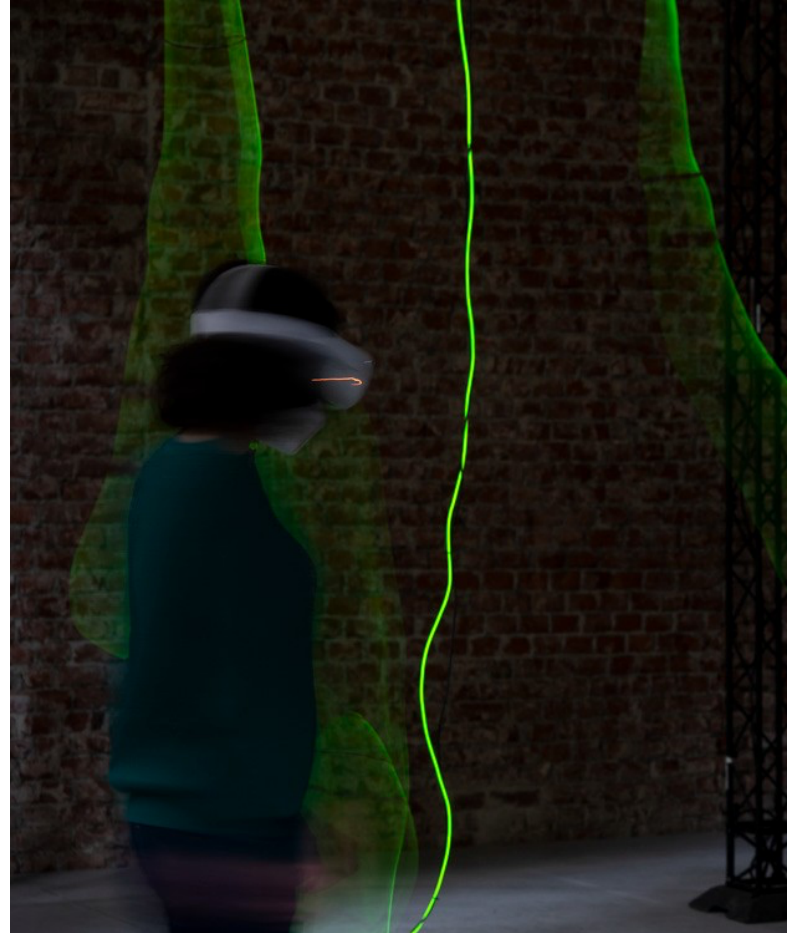




## AN-ICON ANNUAL WORKSHOP 2022

April 20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022



Visitors at Emilio Vavarella's performance *The Italian Job – Job N.3, Lazy Sunday*, 2022, held at Casa degli Artisti, AN-ICON Virtual Residency. © AN-ICON, photo by Rosa Cinelli

### AN-ICONOLOGY History, Theory, and Practices of Environmental Images

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO  
DIPARTIMENTO DI FILOSOFIA  
"PIERO MARTINETTI"



## PRESENCING WORLDS

Organised by

Fabrizia Bandi  
Anna Caterina Dalmasso  
Roberto Paolo Malaspina

Palazzo Feltrinelli  
Università degli Studi di Milano  
Via Castello, 3, Gargnano, BS

## RATIONALE

The concept of presence, the feeling of “being there” and living as an embodied subject in a virtual world, has been investigated extensively in media studies and aesthetics. The progressive blurring of the threshold between the virtual and real world, as well as an increased awareness of the co-constitution between body and technology, puts once more into question the concept of presence and challenges us to develop new critical perspectives and research paradigms.

Presence studies have played a pioneering role by focusing on how remotely operated machinery and virtual reality technologies (Held, Durlach 1992; Ijsselstein, Riva 2003; Lombard et al. 2015; Slater 2003; Farocki 2004) can convey a sense of being in a place other than our physical location. In technological mediated experience, the sense of presence is characterised by a perceptual illusion of non-mediation (Lombard, Ditton 1997) and a feeling of transparency (Bolter, Grusin 1999). “Presence” hints both at the notion of “telepresence” (Minsky 1980; Sheridan 1992) that describes the possibility to remotely act in a physical space through machinery information exchanges; and at “presence” as the feeling of inhabiting different forms of virtual environments (Slater, Wilbur 1997; Slater 2018).

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has further emphasised the presence effect of digital media technologies, as social relationships and everyday activities have been guaranteed through the mediation of screens and videoconference platforms. At the same time, in contrast with the meaning so far presented, in recent months, the term “presence” has become increasingly associated with in-person interactions and with the physical presence of spatial proximity that has been precluded as a result of social distancing. These two complementary articulations of presence – as, on the one hand, the sensation of being elsewhere created by digital and virtual reality technology, and, on the other hand, the irreducible proprioceptive experience of our bodies in the flesh – need to be brought together and investigated in their reciprocal connection.

In the narrative of immersive environments, in order to access the virtual world, the body of the experiencer

needs to disappear behind a headset and to be isolated from the physical environment. As Jaron Lanier stated in one of his famous definitions of virtual reality (Lanier 2018), those who wander in the virtual space look “preposterously nerdy and dorky” to onlookers. Just like a seer, the experiencer seems to belong to a dimension of clairvoyance, as if entering a sacred space of divination (Dalmasso 2019), consecrated by the very gesture of tracing the grid of so-called guardian space (Grespi 2021). The experiencer’s body opens up a dimension of overlapping and in between. Although elsewhere, this body is present more than ever as it constantly enables the constitution of the virtual space through multisensory stimulation (Kozel 2007). However, the same body is also the potential source of excess and emersive effects, as the intrusion of physical space brings them back to the opacity of the interface and the hypermediation of virtual reality media.

The complex sense of presence elicited in virtual environments relies upon the ability of devices to recognise and react to the user’s gestures and spatial location (Calleja 2011). The constitution of the virtual image is the product of a negotiation between the computer-generated environment and the movement of the experiencer’s body and embodied gaze. How do motion tracking and the biometrics interface both enhance and affect our sense of presence? How does this modify the way we understand presence?

As we address the world in the flesh, “presence”, in Dufrenne’s phenomenology (Dufrenne 1953), is what binds us to reality. It represents the nascent state of sensible experience and the condition of possibility of knowledge. The subject as a lived body is capable of grasping the original and raw level of the experience through a “bodily understanding.” Presence is, therefore, the primordial horizon of perceptions, which, as Merleau-Ponty would say, in principle can never be thematized (Merleau-Ponty 1945).

As a result, the presence effect arises critically in the fold between the physical and the digital or virtual space, especially challenged in immersive media experiences. As the sense of displacement is a constitutive element of the very notion of the virtual (Lévy 1995), immersive media re-establish new ways of territorialisation which entail, consequently, renewed

forms of embodiment. To better understand the different gradients of presence in immersive environments at issue here, it is necessary to delve into the relationship between the experiencer and the virtual space and, thus, to outline a phenomenology of virtual space (Schubert 2009; Champions 2019).

Virtual reality compels the experiencer to become embodied within the environmental image, often through full or partial avatarization, whether as a figure – possibly manipulated and assembled by the users themselves – which bears similarities with the human body, a non-human avatar, or a “disembodied” gaze. The very term “avatar,” derived from the Sanskrit “avatāra” (“descent”), means, in Hinduism, the incarnation of a deity in human or animal form, raising the theological background that permeates the entire virtual reality scenario.

Moreover, under certain conditions based on plausible similarity to the user’s bodily features and on system responsiveness, avatarisation can not only elicit a strong sense of presence but even induce a body ownership effect (Spanlang et al. 2014), namely the feeling of proprioceptive congruence between one’s own and the virtual body – a technologically enhanced and extended version of the well-known “rubber hand illusion” (Botvinick and Cohen 1998).

How does the experience of embodying an avatar elicit a sense of presence in the user? What kind of relationship can we establish between the virtual body and the physical presence of the user’s body in the flesh? How can the fact of inhabiting a virtual body impact the processes of self-representation and the constitution of biocultural identity?

If the virtual reality experience could reach such heights as to induce a body ownership effect, these different modes of presence call for a careful analysis of the possible meanings of quasi-embodiment of another cultural, gender, or racial identity (Taciowski *et al.* 2020; Freeman, Maloney 2021). Being present in a virtual world could determine a potential space of identity and bodily experimentation, but, at the same time, it is also double-edged, since it could end up reproducing normative grids and enhancing hegemonic gazes.

This seminar aims to investigate the medium of virtual reality and the experience of immersive media through

the intertwining of the different meanings of presence outlined above, in order to bring to light the multiple aesthetic, political, and social perspectives they entail, as well as to detect their criticalities and unravel their expressive potential.

Possible covered topics:

- modes of presence in virtual environments and immersive media
- embodiment and presence effect in VR, AR, and XR
- philosophical and anthropological theories of the presentification of the image
- phenomenology of virtual space
- media-archaeological investigations of presence effect
- opacity, gaps and emergent effects of virtual-reality experience
- the role of the presence effect in the constitution of biocultural identities
- social virtual reality and modifications of behavioural settings (Proteus Effect)
- the creation of VR experience, performances and installations
- VR pornography, immersive journalism, pro-social and humanitarian VR

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**PROGRAMME****April 20<sup>th</sup>****17.00**

Welcome address

Andrea Pinotti, Università degli Studi di Milano Statale

**17.30-18.45**Matthew Lombard, Temple University, Philadelphia  
*Presence in context: A personal introduction***April 21<sup>st</sup>**

-Chair: Anna Caterina Dalmasso, Università degli Studi di Milano Statale

**9.30-10.45**Mauro Carbone, Université "Jean Moulin" Lyon 3  
*Shared Screens and Scuba Masks. Augmented Presence, Virtual Immersion, and the Metaverse in Post-Covid Times***10.45-11.15**

Coffee Break

**11.15-12.30**Susan Kozel, Malmö University Performing  
*Mixed and Virtual Realities***12.30-14.00**

Lunch Break

-Chair: Alfio Ferrara, Università degli Studi di Milano Statale

**14.00-15.15**Federica Cavaletti & Alessandro Costella, Università degli Studi di Milano Statale  
*Richie's Real Emotions. The role of attitudes in the induction of emotions in Virtual Reality***15.15-16.30**Andrea Gaggioli, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan  
*Transformative Presence: Exploring Novel Spaces of the Self in the Phygital Era***16.30-17.00**

Coffee Break

**17.00-18.15**Sofia Seinfeld, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC-CITM), Barcelona  
*Representing the Body in Virtual Reality***April 22<sup>nd</sup>**

-Chair: Pietro Conte, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

**9.30-10.45**

Alice Lenay, Université Paris 8 Vincennes - Saint-Denis

*From me to you. Desire and Othering through VR headset and videophone***10.45-11.15**

Coffee Break

**11.15-12.30**Philippe Bédard, Carleton University, Ottawa  
*Feeling present/Being present***12.30-14.00**

Lunch Break

- Chair: Margherita Fontana, Università IULM, Milan

**14.00-15.15**Sarah Kenderdine, École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)  
*Embodied Museography*

## ABSTRACTS AND BIOS

MATTHEW LOMBARD, Temple University, Philadelphia

*Presence in context: A personal introduction*

### Abstract:

This informal talk will introduce presence based on my experiences observing, studying and theorizing about the concept for the last 30+ years. I'll explain how I came to be, and remain, so interested in presence; review some of the many ways it's been defined and how it's related to other concepts; provide a diverse selection of familiar and esoteric examples of how it's been applied (knowingly or not); and describe how I've come to view the advantages and limitations of several measurement techniques and methods used to study presence phenomena. I'll conclude with some 'big picture' thoughts about the importance of presence in terms of both its promise for a variety of human endeavors and experiences and its peril (and thus the need for a presence code of ethics).

### Bio:

Matthew Lombard (Ph.D., Stanford University, 1994) is Co-founder and President of the International Society for Presence Research (ISPR, <http://ispr.info>) and an Associate Professor in the Department of Media Studies and Production and the doctoral program in Media & Communication at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. His research centers on individuals' psychological and physiological processing of media presentations and experiences, with particular focus on the concept of (tele)presence. His work has appeared in academic journals including *Behaviour & Information Technology*, *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, *Human Technology*, *Journal of Communication*, *Human Communication Research*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, and *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments*. For more detailed information please visit <http://matthewlombard.com>.

MAURO CARBONE, Université "Jean Moulin" Lyon 3  
*Shared Screens and Scuba Masks. Augmented Presence, Virtual Immersion, and the Metaverse in Post-Covid Times*

### Abstract:

5th November 2021: Mark Zuckerberg posts on his Facebook profile Meta's first brand campaign video and promises that «this is going to be fun.» Note that «fun» is sort of key-word of Meta's brand campaign in order to promote its metaverse, namely «Horizon Worlds.» Indeed, in mid-February 2022 that word recurses also in another Meta video broadcast on the occasion of the Super-Bowl. In this case, the slogan concluding the video promises: «Old Friends, New Fun.» Now note that 5th November 2021 is also when the Metropolitan Government of Seoul, South Korea, announces its decision of self-developing a metaverse platform to be used across the city administration, explaining that «Metaverse is expected to be the main [...] communication channel in the post-COVID-19 era.» Is this about fun or protective touchless interactions? Two different narratives of the metaverse understood as our probable «meta-polis» to come. Which one will prevail?

### Bio:

Mauro Carbone is Distinguished Professor of Aesthetics in the Faculty of Philosophy of the Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University, and an Honorary Member of the Institut Universitaire de France. Influenced by phenomenology, in particular by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, his present research focuses on contemporary screen experiences and how they are changing our relations with ourselves, others, and the world. His most recent authored books are *Philosophy-Screens: From Cinema to Digital Revolution* (State University of New York Press, 2019), and *Merleau-Ponty-Ponty's Poetic of the World. Philosophy and Literature*, written with Galen Johnson and Emmanuel de Saint Aubert (Fordham University Press, 2020).

SUSAN KOZEL, Malmö University Performing  
*Mixed and Virtual Realities*

Abstract:

This talk will emphasise practices: the practices of phenomenology, dance and artistic research that transpose movement into Mixed and Virtual Realities. One research project used a variety of motion capture and VR visualisation techniques to expand the phenomenological articulations and post-digital materialisations of movement. The work produced was the installation *The Bronze Key* (in collaboration with Ruth Gibson and Bruno Martelli). The second experiments with the potential for somatic states to be conveyed through Mixed Reality techniques. The work produced is the Mixed Reality Choreography *CATALYSTS – Somatic Resonance* (in collaboration with Margret Sara Gudjonsdottir, Jeannette Ginslov and Keith Lim). This piece premiered at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICI) in Berlin in February 2022. It is a large installation integrating analogue and digital materials to activate the archives of choreographer Margret Sara Gudjonsdottir. The intention is for the somatic states of the dancers from the archival material to ripple forth into the physical space through the many layers of material bodies. This talk will emphasise how bodily movement and somatic states are not trapped within MR or VR technologies: movement and affect spill outwards once again into the diversity of the outside world. The mediated presences are fundamentally porous. MR and VR are not destinations, they are active states of potential.

Bio:

Susan Kozel is a philosopher and artist working at the point of convergence between dance, philosophy and responsive digital technologies. She is a Professor of New Media with the School of Art and Culture of Malmö University in Sweden. Her research takes the form of both scholarly writing and collaborative performance practices.

Her PhD on the *Phenomenology of Dance* was awarded in 1994 from the Philosophy Department of the University of Essex; since then she has taught at a range of design, dance and media departments in the UK, Canada and the Nordic countries. From 2012-2018 she directed Living Archives, a major research project into archiving practices funded by the Swedish Research Council. Her research into Somatic Archiving and the Performance of Memory continues by means of artistic practice and critical engagements with Augmented, Mixed (AR/MR), and Virtual Reality platforms.

Her scholarly contributions span theory and practice: her book *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology* (MIT Press 2007) exists alongside numerous articles, essays, archived lectures, and art work (such as *The Bronze Key* with artists Gibson / Martelli, and *Conspiracy Archives* with choreographer Margrét

Sara Guðjónsdóttir.) Her current work considers affective choreographies in which phenomenologies of affect are cultivated to enhance bodily agency in contemporary surveillance cultures.

FEDERICA CAVALETTI & ALESSANDRO COSTELLA,  
Università degli Studi di Milano Statale  
*Richie's Real Emotions. The role of attitudes in the induction of emotions in Virtual Reality*

Abstract:

In 2016, a VR application was released that claimed to enable the users to live (through) the experience of climbing on top of a skyscraper and feeling “real” fear of heights. The name of the application is *Richie's Plank Experience*. What this application exploits is a particularly extreme instantiation of a well-known phenomenon in VR: i.e. presence, in its two components of “place illusion” and “plausibility illusion” (Slater 2009). How can we feel *real* fear, knowing that the precipice we are exposed to is not? This brings to the debate around the so-called “paradox of fiction” (Radford & Weston 1975). Following Noël Carroll (1990), what induces real emotions in fiction is the *thought* of what is represented (e.g., a vampire). The more vividly a thought is evoked, the stronger the corresponding emotions will be; which may explain why VR is such an effective emotional trigger.

On this grounding, what we aim to investigate - focusing on *Richie's Plank* in particular - is whether the participant's *attitude*, induced by different settings, can act as a “filter” for *thought* and modulate the character and intensity of the induced fear. More specifically, we aim to compare the effects of receiving playful *versus* serious instructions.

By testing with simulations triggering acrophobia as an especially well-established class of experiences, we hope to shed light on the broader issue of the seemingly contradictory nature of VR-induced emotions.

Bio:

Federica Cavaletti obtained her PhD degree in Humanities (curriculum: Communication, Media, and Performing Arts) at the Catholic University of Milan in 2020 and is now a Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Milan, within the ERC-funded project AN-ICON. Her research spans aesthetics, media studies, and the cognitive sciences, and it combines theoretical and empirical methods. Currently, she is working on the first-person experience of virtual reality environments, also in relation to applications in professional domains such as psychology, psychiatry, and medicine.

In addition to having published several papers in international journals, Federica is the Italian translator of W.J.T. Mitchell's *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics*.

Alessandro Costella graduated (BA) in Engineering of Information in 2017 at the Department of Engineering of Information at the University of Padua. In 2020 he concluded his MA at the University of Milan in Computer Science, developing a videogame making use of physical automata in its implementation. During 2021 he worked as a research fellow within the AN-ICON ERC project, focusing his research on the development of virtual environments and the study of technological tools employed in their creation and fruition. In 2022 he started a PhD project in Philosophy and Human Sciences at the University of Milan. His research now focuses on studying and developing Augmented Reality and IoT technologies as prostheses for users with manipulative disabilities.

ANDREA GAGGIOLI, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan  
*Transformative Presence: Exploring Novel Spaces of the Self in the Phygital Era*

Abstract:

There are experiences in life that can change us forever, in terms of core beliefs and values, eventually leading to the construction of new meaning. Despite anecdotal accounts of transformative change are found in a number of historical biographies and in the popular culture, the psychological process of transformative change has not been systematically investigated. In my talk, I will focus on the potential of presence in virtual spaces as a process that allows individuals to explore new spaces of possibilities for thinking, feeling and acting, by providing novel lenses or frames through which understanding themselves and reality. Furthermore, I will discuss the possibilities afforded by emerging “phygital” worlds as a catalyst for personal and transformation.

Bio:

Andrea Gaggioli is professor of psychology at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan and director of the ExperienceLab ([www.xp-lab.it](http://www.xp-lab.it)). His research focus is to understand human experience and its role in fostering positive personal change, using a broad spectrum of methods, instruments, and technologies. At the applied level his goal is to integrate neuroscience, design, and art to design transformative experiences that improve people's wellbeing and boost their creativity.



SOFIA SEINFELD, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC-CITM), Barcelona  
*Representing the Body in Virtual Reality*

Abstract:

We are currently witnessing an unprecedented diversification of computer interfaces. Nowadays, we are able to interact with virtual worlds through diverse means beyond the usual mouse cursors. For instance, in VR it is possible to interact by means of a life-size virtual body seen and controlled from a first person perspective, a phenomenon also known as embodiment in VR. In this talk I will discuss a series of psychological and cognitive concepts in relation to embodiment in VR. Such concepts include body ownership, agency, and peripersonal space. Finally, I will also review some evidence showing that embodiment in VR might also impact participants' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, being a potentially useful tool to tackle some current social challenges, but also raising ethical concerns.

Bio:

Sofía Seinfeld is associate professor and researcher in the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC-CITM). She was a postdoctoral researcher in the University of Bayreuth, working in the European Union funded project Levitate. She earned her PhD in Virtual Reality and Clinical Psychology from the University of Barcelona, working as a researcher in the EVENT Lab and VERE project. During her PhD, Sofía studied the use of immersive virtual reality and body ownership illusions, to tackle problems such as domestic violence, racism, and fear of heights. Currently, her research focuses on exploiting multisensory integration principles and feedback to enhance human computer interactions in virtual reality and novel interfaces.

ALICE LENAY, Université Paris 8 Vincennes - Saint-Denis  
*From me to you. Desire and Othering through VR headset and videophone*

Abstract:

Can I be you, just for ten minutes? Can I walk in your shoes so I can better understand you? Some recent experiences, involving screens and the body's movements, aim at producing a deeper identification between the viewer and someone else – another participant or another character. I will focus my analysis on two artistic researches. The first one is carried out by the collective BeAnotherLab. They are creating stories and experiences to connect different people using VR headsets. The second one is a protocol by three artists: Distant Movements (Annie Abrahams, Daniel Pinheiro et Muriel Piqué), based on the videophone interface Zoom. Located in different places, the participants try to connect with each other on the interface by closing their eyes in front of their webcams and giving each other movements directions to do with their bodies. Here, the screen is not to be accepted as a barrier but as an opportunity to connect with someone else, bringing a new level of empathy with fantasies about fusion. The other is not an image anymore, but a sensation within – an-icon. The images and/or sounds work as an index to be interpreted with the whole body considered as the ultimate screen. These experiences give us an opportunity to question the heaviness of these ambitious stories and protocols from a political standpoint. From meeting someone else to the fantasy of owning another body, these devices bring new tensions between identification and confrontation. The issues of appropriation and identity will allow us to consider the “key counter-properties” of an-icons . Embracing the distance – not trying to “solve” it – seems to be the condition for relationships to exist.

Bio:

Alice Lenay is a French artist and researcher. She is associate professor at the University of Paris 8, where she teaches contemporary art and leads workshops based on experimentation, mostly with performance and video and the use of “camyscreen” (screens loaded with cameras, especially smartphones and computers). Her doctoral thesis, “Interface-à-face. Les visages de la rencontre à travers les écrans”, questioned the relationships we can have with other faces on screen, by building on phenomenological research. Realized in the framework of her doctoral art-based thesis, her film *Dear Hacker* (60') has been included in various festivals and exhibitions. She pursues her studies on online “listening protocols”, through a methodology of “performance as research” which questions the very embodied relationship with screens.



PHILIPPE BÉDARD, Carleton University, Ottawa  
*Feeling present/Being present*

Abstract:

While Virtual Reality (VR) has long been recognized for its ability to generate a sensation of *presence*—of seeing through one’s own eyes a space that is different than that which one is physically occupying—the implications of this convincing illusion of “being there” merit further consideration. This is especially true in the context of non-fiction storytelling, where VR’s ability to foster a sense of presence can lead to what Kate Nash has called “improper distance.” If, according to Nash, “‘being there’ constitutes the paradigm case of witnessing,” how can we make sure VR’s ability to create the impression of presence be used to create an ethically sound witness position? (Nash 2018, 121).

The goal of this presentation is to question the role of presence in the context of non-fiction VR. Specifically, I want to argue that while VR might create the conditions necessary to foster the *feeling* of presence, the task of *being present* for the other is up to the individual user. In other words, rather than focussing on VR experience that put users “in the shoes” of a character to imagine what it is like to *become* a character in the story, I want to consider how VR might merely allow users to *be there* (for someone else).

As I have argued in an earlier essay, an empathy machine is only as productive as the individual using it. What this means is that the ultimate potential of non-fiction VR is not in automatically making us *know* or *understand* the complex inner lives of others, but rather in allowing us to feel present in distant times, places, or contexts. Nevertheless, the user is ultimately responsible for *being present*, which I take to mean recognizing the mediated nature of that experience and using this newly afforded perspective to intentionally take on the work of empathy, compassion, or whatever we might choose to call it.

Bio:

Philippe Bédard recently completed a doctorate in film studies at Université de Montréal, where he wrote a dissertation on the body-camera-space relations of select camera movement technologies throughout film history. His research interests include film technology and aesthetics, phenomenology, Virtual Reality, virtual production, GoPro cameras, camera movement and screendance. Along with Alanna Thain and Carl Therrien, he is the co-editor of an upcoming edited collection titled *States of Immersion: Bodies, Media Technologies*. In the context of his postdoctoral project in the department of Film Studies, Bédard focuses on the notion of empathy in virtual reality (VR). Working under the supervision of Aubrey Anable, his research project aims to redeem the idea that

virtual reality might be an “empathy machine” by rethinking both the notion of empathy itself and the ways contemporary VR experiences have attempted to foster it.

SARAH KENDERDINE, École Polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)

*Embodied Museography*

Abstract:

Immersive experiences are synonymous with many sensorial attributes; not only vision but also a range of acoustic, kinesthetic and somatic characteristics. Immersion is also emotional, and is entangled in the dynamics of affecting and being affected. It is characterized by an intense connection of the subject in an interactive and inter-affective situation that combines thinking, feeling, and acting. Immersion is capable of producing a sensation of presence that is, the sensation of ‘being there’ in a mediated environment. These qualities of immersion are based on the multimodal nature of human perception and the senses, which are activated in immersive environments via various interfaces, through which participants engage as actors within synthetically generated digital worlds. Immersion is synonymous with contemporary museological strategies for interpretation, experience and engagement. Remediated through participatory interfaces, such as mixed, augmented and virtual realities, this presentation explores new performative platforms for the complex archetypes that emerge out of computational practices as they intersect with art heritage in museums. These embodied installations are equally focused on affirming and activating visitors’ sensory experiences, while also grappling with the critical implications of the digital materialities that digital objects possess in post-original form.

Digital copies (digital twins, mirrorworlds, metaverse), are technologically empowered to offer forensic insights into invisible dimensions, generating unforeseen hypotheses and connections. These objects also propagate powerful auras which rise to the surface entangled with the affective qualities of the originating sources. Such augmented replicas are able to draw us into unparalleled tactility with the textures, patinas and geometries of their counterparts. With its propensity for peripheral vision, machine learning has amplified the possible futures for curatorial and artistic practices, antagonizing outdated notions of authority, authenticity and access. These practices are generating perpetually new archival entities, concurrently formed and formless. Digital facsimiles also decolonize matter as they defy hegemonic narratives, helping to liberate things from their colonial entrapments, confronting authoritative discourses, historical sedimentation, and contested social relations. In cases of heritage at risk due to warfare,

iconoclasm and climatic catastrophe, digital copies have enabled communities to become more resilient to loss. They can also provide reservoirs of cultural memory and instruments for those on the margins to 'speak back' to their oppressors.

The paper presents a cumulative narrative that embarks on these cross-cutting themes, traversing the simulacrum, mirrorworlds, digitaltwins, crypto currency and machine intelligence while engaging the issues of mimesis, reenactment, memory, and decolonization.

**Bio:**

Professor Sarah Kenderdine researches at the forefront of interactive and immersive experiences for galleries, libraries, archives and museums. In widely exhibited installation works, she has amalgamated tangible and intangible cultural heritage with new media art practice, especially in the realms of interactive cinema, augmented reality and embodied narrative. Sarah has produced 90 exhibitions and installations for museums worldwide including a museum complex in India and received a number of major international awards for this work. In 2017, Sarah was appointed professor at the École Polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland where she has built the Laboratory for Experimental Museology (eM+), exploring the convergence of cultural heritage, imaging technologies, immersive visualisation, digital aesthetics and cultural (big) data. Since 2017, Sarah is director and lead curator of EPFL Pavilions a new art/science initiative. In 2020, she was named in the Museum Influencer List 2020 – The Power 10 by Blooloo and, Switzerland's Top 100 Digital Shapers by Bilanz in 2020 and 2021. In 2021, Sarah was appointed corresponding fellow of The British Academy.

## THE AN-ICON PROJECT

Recent developments in image-making techniques have resulted in a drastic blurring of the threshold between the world of the image and the real world. Immersive and interactive virtual environments have enabled the production of pictures that elicit in the perceiver a strong feeling of being incorporated in a quasi-real world. In doing so such pictures conceal their mediateness (their being based on a material support), their referentiality (their pointing to an extra-iconic dimension), and their separateness (normally assured by framing devices), paradoxically challenging their status as images, as icons: they are veritable “an-icons”.

This kind of pictures undermines the mainstream paradigm of Western image theories, shared by major models such as the doctrine of mimesis, the phenomenological account of image-consciousness, the analytic theories of depiction, the semiotic and iconological methods. These approaches miss the key counter-properties regarding an-icons as “environmental” images: their immediateness, unframedness, and presentness. Subjects relating to an-icons are no longer visual observers of images; they are experiencers living in a quasi-real environment that allows multisensory affordances and embodied agencies.

AN-ICON aims to develop “an-iconology” as a new methodological approach able to address this challenging iconoscape. Such an approach needs to be articulated in a transdisciplinary and transmedial way:

- 1) HISTORY – a media-archaeological reconstruction will provide a taxonomy of the manifold an-iconic strategies (e.g. illusionistic painting, pre-cinematic devices, 3D films, video games, head mounted displays);
- 2) THEORY – an experiential account (drawing on phenomenology, visual culture and media studies) will identify the an-iconic key concepts;
- 3) PRACTICES – a socio-cultural section will explore the multifaceted impact of an-iconic images, environments and technologies on contemporary professional domains as well as on everyday life.