

ÉCOLE D'ÉTÉ DOCTORALE  
« SÉMIOTIQUE ET PHILOSOPHIE DE L'IMAGE NUMÉRIQUE »

# INCARNATION NUMÉRIQUE

VISAGE, ICÔNE ET SENS À  
L'ÈRE DU MÉTAVERS

THÉORIES, MÉTHODES,  
EXPÉRIENCES

28-30

JUIN

2023

COLLÈGE DES BERNARDINS  
20, RUE DE POISSY  
PARIS

## PROGRAMME DE L'ÉCOLE



COLLÈGE DES  
BERNARDINS



UNIVERSITÀ  
DI TORINO



CENTRO PER LE  
SCIENZE RELIGIOSE

FONDAZIONE  
BRUNO KESSLER



Face  
Aesthetics in  
Contemporary  
E-Technological  
Societies

# TABLE DES MATIÈRES

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>PROGRAMME</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>ABSTRACTS</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>INFO &amp; CONTACT</b>	<b>31</b>

# INTRODUCTION

---

Le terme « embodiment » a été très utilisé dans les sciences humaines et sociales, ainsi que dans certaines disciplines d'application théorique — comme l'architecture — notamment comme contrepartie de la paire dialectique embodiment/disembodiment, où, cependant, le terme sémantiquement parlant est surtout le dernier, c'est-à-dire disembodiment ; cela indique, en fait, comme le suggère le préfixe « dis- », une disparition de quelque chose qui était là auparavant, une soustraction. Dans ce cas, c'est le corps qui est soustrait, et on entend par là qu'il est éliminé dans des situations où il est d'habitude culturellement présent. En fait, c'est précisément en relation avec le numérique que le terme « disembodiment », avec ses dérivés, a été de plus en plus utilisé ; la numérisation de pans toujours plus étendus de contenus culturels, de relations sociales et même de comportements individuels, a conduit à une réflexion sur la façon dont ils se transforment en leur forme disembodied.

Cela a également amenés à réfléchir au fonctionnement des phénomènes sociaux et des situations culturelles esthétiquement embodied, sur lesquels d'entre eux ont résisté plus que d'autres à ce processus numérique d'absence de corps, et s'il pouvait également exister des formes de re-embodiment, c'est-à-dire la réaffectation d'un corps à des entités ou des phénomènes qui en avaient été privés par la numérisation largement comprise. Comme c'est souvent le cas, cependant, cette réflexion sur la contemporanéité a encouragé une utilisation plus large de la triade dialectique embodiment/dis-embodiment/re-embodiment, car la soustraction du corps à l'ère numérique a également souligné la façon dont il était au contraire présent à l'ère pré-numérique, dans des situations qui, auparavant, apparaissaient au contraire sous un jour idéaliste et idéalisant, incorporel ; un accent différent et plus profond a été mis, par exemple, sur l'étude de la matière, corporelle et autre, en tant que phénomène omniprésent dans les cultures humaines mais négligé par les chercheurs ; le caractère profondément « sexué » que l'embodiment introduit dans chaque contexte où il apparaît comme un élément significatif a également été exploré.

# INTRODUCTION

---

Cependant, toute cette prolifération de réflexions sur la soustraction numérique du corps, sur la résistance à celle-ci, sur la présence cachée du corps dans les phénomènes pré-numériques, a souvent omis de considérer un élément essentiel : dans de nombreux cas de disembodiment numérique — peut-être la majorité — le corps ne disparaît point ; il est certes transposé dans une autre matière expressive, comme les pixels, par exemple, mais il ne disparaît ni par rapport aux sens qui en saisissent les images, les sons, les mouvements — et de plus en plus aussi la tridimensionnalité et le toucher, jusqu'aux dernières expériences d'odorat numérique — ni par rapport à la culture, qui continue à accorder à ces corps transposés la même centralité qu'elle attribuait à ceux en chair et en os. La pandémie de 2019-2021, qui a essentiellement agi comme un agent accélérateur et donc révélateur de processus déjà en cours, a bien mis en évidence à quel point le disembodiment numérique était en fait un phénomène translationnel dans lequel, comme dans toutes les traductions, différentes étapes de transposition coexistent, de l'entièrement embodied des malades invisibles à la sphère numérique, enfermés dans leurs souffrances et leurs services de soins intensifs, à l'entièrement disembodied du monde Zoom, le nouveau zoo numérique des corps pandémiques, avec ses cages et ses comportements obsessionnels.

La prolifération de l'hybride, et sa difficile gestion et conceptualisation post-pandémique, a également suggéré avec force que différents niveaux d'embodiment et de disembodiment coexistent dans la vie contemporaine, dans laquelle les plus grandes aspérités, de la sphère relationnelle à la sphère professionnelle, découlent précisément de cette coexistence imperméable de formes de l'individu avec différents degrés d'incarnation.

Mais on peut surtout saisir le fond du problème si l'on essaie de traduire le terme anglais « embodiment » dans d'autres langues, par exemple les langues romanes ; en français, en effet, il n'est pas possible de traduire « embodiment » par « incorporation », qui a un autre sens, celui de l'adhésion d'un élément individuel à un ensemble pluriel auquel il est incorporé, comme s'il s'agissait de l'adhésion d'un membre du corps au

# INTRODUCTION

---

corps lui-même.

Les dictionnaires, en revanche, suggèrent « incarnation » et « personnification » comme traductions de l'anglais « embodiment ». Ce problème de traduction révèle alors un postulat idéologique qui conditionne toute réflexion sur la triade embodiment/disembodiment/reembodiment : en réalité, ce qui est perdu dans les phénomènes dits de désincarnation numérique, ce n'est pas le corps, avec sa figure, son esthétique et sa sémantique, à savoir ce n'est pas le corps en tant que forme, qui est au contraire préservé, mutatis mutandis, par la transduction numérique ; ce qui est altéré, en revanche, c'est la matière expressive du corps, c'est-à-dire ce substrat matériel auquel le corps en tant que forme donne forme. La matière du corps-forme est la chair, ce que le corps a en commun avec la nature, mais que les formes et les processus de la culture transforment en chair-substance, en chair formée pour devenir un corps.

Il s'avère donc que l'étiquette « disembodiment numérique » fait en fait référence à des phénomènes de soustraction de chair, de « désincarnation ». Lorsque j'apparais sur Zoom pour un cours universitaire en ligne, ce n'est pas le corps que je perds, ou du moins pas la forme corporelle entière, qui est « traduite » par le numérique, mais le corps-chair, celui avec lequel je ressens le monde et j'en suis ressenti. D'ailleurs, les modes hybrides de communication numérique, si répandus depuis la pandémie, ne dérangent pas parce qu'ils juxtaposent des personnifications à différents degrés d'embodiment, mais plutôt parce qu'ils réunissent des personnifications à différents degrés d'incarnation, des corps qui sont parfois eux-mêmes faits de chair et d'os et parfois au contraire sont des avatars de lumière.

Si, toutefois, on commence à réfléchir à « l'incarnation », à la « désincarnation numérique », à la « réincarnation post-pandémique », etc., on comprendra pourquoi cette terminologie a été le plus souvent évitée dans les études sur la philosophie du numérique ; elle, la terminologie, révèle que derrière une telle philosophie émerge, inattendue mais encombrante, une théologie du numérique :

# INTRODUCTION

---

l'incarnation et la réincarnation sont des termes du lexique religieux. On s'aperçoit cependant qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une simple coïncidence lexicale, mais qu'elle renvoie aux présupposés idéologiques des formes de vie numériques, présupposés qui s'enracinent dans la genèse des cultures du corps et de sa représentation, et qui finissent inévitablement par impliquer les « mythogrammes » de la sphère religieuse.

Dans les cultures influencées par le christianisme, et donc par l'Occident, l'incarnation est celle d'une transcendance devenue corps non (seulement) par des mots ou des images, c'est-à-dire par une transposition du logos divin dans des symboles ou des icônes — comme cela se produit dans d'autres cultures religieuses — mais aussi dans un indice corporel du logos divin, dans la chair. La chair du Christ est la chair de la chair des fidèles, et les fidèles sont, dans le christianisme, la chair de la chair du Christ. L'idée de réincarnation, en revanche, est souvent évoquée en relation avec d'autres cultures religieuses, qui postulent une errance du principe spirituel individuel à travers différents types de corps jusqu'à la libération finale, et donc à travers des cycles qui attribuent à ce principe différents modes de chair, et de multiples incarnations. À y regarder de plus près, cependant, même dans le christianisme, et surtout en relation avec la réflexion théologique et spirituelle sur le sort de l'âme après la mort et après le Jugement, la question cruciale de l'issue des corps et de la chair dans l'au-delà, de la réincarnation des âmes en présence de la transcendance, se pose également, par exemple dans la spéculation philosophique de Tertullien et d'autres Pères ainsi que dans la transposition que Dante fit de telles questions théologiques.

Il convient alors de réfléchir, dans une optique résolument interdisciplinaire, à la mesure dans laquelle l'idéologie de l'incarnation et de la réincarnation, socle de la culture de l'image chrétienne, a influencé et influence encore l'idée d'une translation du corps hors de celui-ci, de sa désincarnation numérique. Il est nécessaire, par exemple, de se demander comment la transsubstantiation, à savoir le changement de la forme du corps du Christ mais son maintien dans une autre substance, transposée dans la matière du pain, n'est pas exactement le contraire de

# INTRODUCTION

---

la désincarnation digitale, qui est en revanche une transformation, en ce sens que la forme du corps de l'humain reste dans la forme, mais transposée dans une autre substance, dans la matière protéiforme des pixels.

Le dogme, et la ritualité liturgique qui le rend pragmatiquement possible, consiste précisément dans la possibilité de faire mémoire du corps divin dans sa forme transsubstantiée, dans laquelle la forme change, et la matière change, mais miraculeusement pas la substance, qui devient en fait celle du pain, une substance que les fidèles peuvent manger et ainsi transformer en nourriture pour leur propre corps ; mnémotechnique alimentaire, donc, qui, à travers le sacrement dogmatique, transforme l'indexicalité du corps christique en indexicalité du corps des fidèles ; en un certain sens, ils deviennent, avec leur corps nourri de pain eucharistique, la nouvelle incarnation du Christ. Dans la désincarnation numérique, en revanche, le corps perd sa propre matière, et devient non pas incarnation mais avatar, un terme qui dérive, non pas par hasard, d'une autre tradition religieuse, dans laquelle ce qui est attesté n'est pas une permanence indexicale du corps avec une forme différente et à travers une autre matière mais avec la même substance, comme dans la transsubstantiation précisément, mais une permanence iconique du corps avec la même forme mais une autre matière, dans laquelle la substance apparaît, peut-être précisément par rapport au grand modèle idéologique de l'incarnation, comme une substance simulacre, non sacramentelle.

Simulacre et sacrement : à ce couple dialectique vient, presque naturellement, aboutir la réflexion sur « l'incarnation numérique », sur combien la résistance culturelle à embrasser pleinement la transmutation du corps en pixels est à la base conditionnée par l'idée que la véritable transmutation du corps ne peut être séparée de la chair, d'une représentation qui est en réalité une re-présentification. La résistance ontologique à la sémiotique numérique est peut-être également due à cela, aussi bien qu'au cercle vertueux qui, dans toute la tradition chrétienne, est généré entre la transsubstantiation et l'iconographie ; les chrétiens intériorisent le corps du Christ à travers un indice miraculeux,

# INTRODUCTION

---

reproduit de manière sacramentelle à chaque eucharistie, mais ils se souviennent de lui à travers une multitude d'icônes qui ne représentent pas le corps du Christ mais le représentent. Entre l'un et l'autre, entre les indices qui transsubstantient et représentent et les icônes qui transforment et transmutent mais ne peuvent que représenter, se trouvent les images miraculeuses du Christ, symptôme culturel de la faim iconique des communautés chrétiennes, de leur volonté de combiner la mnémotechnique indexicale, fondée sur la substance, avec une mnémotechnique iconique, fondée sur la forme, alors que toutes les deux sont constamment redites et re-contextualisées par la mnémotechnique symbolique du logos.

La prolifération d'images désincarnées à l'ère numérique cherche alors aussi à satisfaire cette faim iconique, le visage jouant un rôle central dans la poétique de la personnification tout comme dans l'iconographie chrétienne, mais elle laisse insatisfaite la faim indicielle des communautés, leur soif d'images acheiropoïètes, de reliques, d'eucharistie. Au lieu de cela, les communautés numériques sont souvent caco-caristiques, dans le sens où elles fourmillent de réincarnations iconiques mais manquent de réincarnations indexicales. On peut se demander si le paroxysme de la recherche d'une transmutation ultime du monde dans sa trans-figuration numérique, celle du métavers, par exemple, n'est pas finalement la tentative désespérée et extrême de réunir, dans le numérique, non seulement des visages mais aussi des corps, non seulement des icônes mais aussi des indices, de ré-incarner au lieu de re-embodier. À l'arrière-plan de toutes ces dialectiques complexes se trouve la mort, la perte de substance dans la permanence des corps, et dans leur devenir progressif autre forme et autre matière. Cet arrière-plan est assorti d'une question sur le salut : quelle part du salut peut être trouvée dans une réincorporation non charnelle, dans le mythe d'une trans-mutation et d'une trans-formation numérique des corps ? Est-il possible de remplacer le rituel salvateur de l'incarnation chrétienne archétypale, de l'Eucharistie, par une incarnation numérique immatérielle, une nouvelle Eucharistie faite non plus de pain mais de pixels ?

Massimo Leone, Graziano Lingua, Gemma Serrano

---



# PROGRAMME

---

**MERCREDI 28 JUIN**

**PETIT AUDITORIUM**

**9h00**

**Introduction**

**MASSIMO LEONE**

Université de Turin

**GRAZIANO LINGUA**

Université de Turin

**GEMMA SERRANO**

Collège des Bernardins

**OLRIC DE GÉLIS**

Collège des Bernardins



**9h30**

**Conférence plénière**

**JUAN ALONSO ALDAMA**

Université de Paris Cité

**DENIS BERTRAND**

Université de Paris VIII



**SIMULACRES ET RÉCURSIVITÉ**

**11h00**

**Pause**

**11h15**

**Atelier de créativité numérique à partir de la conférence plénière.**

**Dirigé par :**

**ANTONIO LUCCI**

Università di Torino

**ALESSANDRO DE CESARIS**

Université de Fribourg/Collège des Bernardins



# PROGRAMME

---

**MERCREDI 28 JUIN**

**PETIT AUDITORIUM**

**12h30** Présentation de projets postdoctoraux sur  
« l'incarnation numérique du visage »/1

**GABRIELE MARINO**

Università di Torino



**Questioning the Face: Towards Face Equality**

**FEDERICO BELLENTANI**

Università di Torino



**Facing Death: A Semiotic Investigation of Digital Memorials and Commemorative Practices Centered on the Face**

**GIOVANNI PENNISI**

Università di Torino



**How Many Selves? Pathological Disembodiment, Re-Embodiment, and the Multiplicity of Presence**

**REMO GRAMIGNA**

Università di Torino



**'Deepfakes', 'Cheapfakes', and Simulated Realities. Techno-Societal Scenarios of Digital Face Manipulation**

**13h30** Pause

# PROGRAMME

---

**MERCREDI 28 JUIN**

**PETIT AUDITORIUM**

**15h30**

**Présentation de projets postdoctoraux sur  
« l'incarnation numérique du visage »/2**

**SILVIA BARBOTTO**

Università di Torino



**The Decomposite Portrait: Practices and Experiences  
of Numerical Embodiment**

**ANTONIO SANTANGELO**

Università di Torino



**Faces of Our Times**

**FRANCESCO PILUSO**

Università di Torino



**Semiotic Exercises between Sacred and Profane:  
Performativity and Embodiment of Fetish Objects in  
Christian and LGBTQ+ Communities**

**BAAL DELUPI**

Università di Torino



**Activisms in the Metaverse: Reflections, Tensions, and  
Opportunities**

**CRISTINA VOTO**

Università di Torino / Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero

**Operative Faces: The Unborn between Iconicity and  
Uncertainty**

# PROGRAMME

---

## MERCREDI 28 JUIN

### PETIT AUDITORIUM

16h45 Discussion

17h45 **Installations numériques**  
**Dirigée par CRISTINA VOTO**  
Università di Torino / Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero

18h45 Fin des activités

## JEUDI 29 JUIN

### PETIT AUDITORIUM

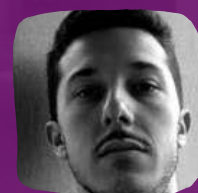
9h15 **Conférence plénière**  
**BETH SINGLER**  
University of Zurich  
**AI and Religion: Imaginaries, Simulations, and  
Generated Worlds**



10h00 Pause

10h15 **Atelier de créativité numérique à partir de la  
conférence plénière**  
Dirigé par :

**FRANCESCO STRIANO**  
Università di Torino



# PROGRAMME

---

**JEUDI 29 JUIN**  
**PETIT AUDITORIUM**

**12h15** Présentation de projets postdoctoraux sur  
« éthique et techniques de l'incarnation »

**ALBERTO ROMELE**  
Università di Torino



**Quel impact des images dans la communication scientifique autour de l'IA ?**

**GIACOMO PEZZANO**  
Università di Torino



**Le nouveau visage de la philosophie : Philosophie des médias**

**ANDREA OSTI**  
Università di Torino / Collège des Bernardins



**Images et pratiques d'usage, entre matière et esprit : une proposition de recherche philosophico-anthropologique**

**ALESSANDRO DE CESARIS**  
Université Fribourg / Collège des Bernardins

**Métempsychose numérique : Sur la transcendance comme imaginaire technologique**

**13h30** Pause

**15h30** Discussion

# PROGRAMME

---

## JEUDI 29 JUIN PETIT AUDITORIUM

**16h00** Conférence plénière  
**MARIA GIULIA DONDERO**  
FNRS / Université de Liège  
**L'art et la mise en scène du corps des images**



**16h45** Pause

**17h00** Atelier de créativité numérique à partir de la  
conférence plénière  
Dirigé par :

**ALUMINÉ ROSSO**  
Université de Lyon / Université de Liège



**19h00** Fin des activités et apéritif dans le foyer

# PROGRAMME

---

## VENDREDI 30 JUIN

### PETIT AUDITORIUM

10h30 Conférence plénière  
**PIERRE CASSOU-NOGUES**  
Université Paris VIII  
Filtres



11h15 Pause

11h30 Atelier de créativité numérique à partir de la  
conférence plénière  
Dirigé par :

**NICCOLÒ MONTI**  
Università di Torino  
**DARIA ARKHIPOVA**  
Università di Torino



13h30 Pause

15h30 Conférence plénière  
**FANNY GEORGES**  
Université Sorbonne Nouvelle  
La médiation socionumérique de l'existence



16h15 Pause

16h30 Atelier de créativité numérique à partir de la  
conférence plénière  
Dirigé par :

**GIANMARCO THIERRY GIULIANA**  
Università di Torino



18h30 Conclusions de travaux

# ABSTRACTS

---

**JUAN ALONSO ALDAMA**

Université Paris Cité

**DENIS BERTRAND**

Université Paris 8-Vincennes-Saint-Denis

## Simulacre et récursivité

Notre propos est double et ses deux volets se joignent. Il s'agira d'abord d'interroger le concept de simulacre, sa définition, son statut, le parcours de ses acceptions au sein des Sciences Humaines et Sociales : à travers les travaux en sociologie de Jean Baudrillard qui l'ont inauguré et popularisé, ceux d'Algirdas Julien Greimas en sémiotique qui l'ont radicalisé jusqu'à le mettre au foyer de toute énonciation comme des interactions passionnelles, ceux de Paolo Fabbri, en socio-sémiotique, qui en ont déployé les potentialités à travers une réflexion plus générale sur la stratégie. Le simulacre, entre incarnation et avatar. La consolidation de ce concept, qui n'est pas la chose tout en étant la chose et autre chose, nous ouvre à une seconde direction, en lien avec le monde numérique : celle de la récursivité. On posera cette opération syntaxique en abyme comme emblème culturel de notre époque numérisée et de ses modes d'accès au réel. Une sorte d'équivalent contemporain de ce qu'a été au Moyen Âge le statut de l'allégorie. Depuis l'opération grammaticale (« la sœur du cousin de la tante de ma filleule ») jusqu'aux dispositifs informatiques et à ses manifestations les plus indirectes dans les réseaux sociaux, la récursivité produit un effet d'éloignement graduel du référent, allant jusqu'à une vertigineuse mise en abîme. Sa saisie comprend toutes les modulations modales – épistémiques, véridictoires et pathémiques – qui lui font cortège. La relation entre une figure sémantique – le simulacre – et un phénomène syntaxique – la récursivité – peut ainsi fournir les éléments d'une « grammaire » pour envisager en termes tensifs – c'est-à-dire sans rupture de continuité – les jeux de désincarnations graduelles comme de réincarnations hybrides, dont le visage – exemple canonisé – est, plus que le corps lui-même, l'enjeu crucial.



# ABSTRACTS

---

**DARIA ARKHIPOVA**

Università di Torino

**NICCOLÒ MONTI**

Università di Torino

**Atelier de créativité numérique à partir de la conférence plénière de Pierre CASSOU-NOGUES**

This workshop offers the participants a hands-on learning experience with recent AI tools, mainly DALL-E 2 by OpenAI, that allow users to create images via verbal written inputs. These AI tools are a form of machine learning technology that uses mathematical and logical linear regressions to suggest or create content for users based on similar categories and patterns that the algorithm has been trained on. These tools can be used to create unique digital representations based on an input from natural language. In other words, they translate phrases and sentences in selected languages into coherent digital images based on syntactic components. First, we will introduce some broad theoretical guidelines to understand how AI multimodal translation works, both on a technical and semiotic level. On the technical side, we will introduce the bases of how these AI tools function on a mathematical level; whereas, on the semiotic side, we shall offer some groundwork on how to analyze the outputs generated by such tools, but each participant is free to choose how to conduct their analyses according to their own preferred framework. Second, we will guide the participants through a collaborative moment of creation via text-to-image using DALL-E 2 tools. Participants might be divided into groups where they will be asked to translate a selected phrase in natural language (in English or French) to digital representation using tools of DALL-E 2 and create 3-5 possible outcomes that later could serve as an object of semiotics analysis. Third, we invite participants to analyze and present one of the outcomes (digital image) in the context of all outcomes generated by the same class of prompts.

# ABSTRACTS

---

Each group will be invited to present their mini-results and explain why the chosen methods of semiotics analysis are rather suitable to the exact case. This workshop will provide all necessary knowledge to understand better how AI tools for syntactic translations between natural language and digital image work and how semiotics can be applied to their analysis and critique.

## Structure of the workshop:

- **Introduction: theory of AI translation & multimodality (30 min)**
- **Text to image using AI tools: DALL-E 2 (20 min: 3-5 images)**
- **Semiotics analysis of AI tools: analysis and presentation of the results (7-10 min/ group)**
- **Discussion and critique**

## SILVIA BARBOTTO

Università di Torino

### The Decomposite Portrait: Practices and Experiences of Numerical Embodiment

The operational mechanism of the digital image is to be systematically problematised according to theoretical criteria that are difficult to circumscribe to a single disciplinary sphere. The criticality of numerical embodiment, otherwise designatable as a variant of a material disembodiment, resides precisely outside the numbers and the codified binarism that sustains them, to settle instead where dialogue is established between different areas of meaning belonging to the ethical and political, anthropological and social domains: from numbers to semantic articulations, from meaning to data, in a continuous mutually mutable and changeable institutional succession, the composed and recomposed subjectivities traverse an itinerary that creates expressive manifestations, viable traces, experiences and systems of relations. The indexicality inherent to signs that have a direct relationship with the signifying object is called into question with digital and specifically algorithmic innovation, precisely because the relationship between tangible availability and the generated sign (be it visual or sound) takes on gradations of uncertainty to the point of eventual annihilation. The decomposed portrait is a critical and provocative response to what in the late 1880s was called the composite portrait, a photographic collecting technique invented by the psychometrist

# ABSTRACTS

---

Francis Galton, aimed at immortalizing and classifying the individual face by highlighting, according to deductive logic, the average type. This proposal, laden with chrono-geographical ideologies, certainly aimed at establishing a certain idea of normality, and thus pigeon-holing the human being according to inclusive or exclusive gradients: there are numerous studies on the manipulations and repercussions of the case, and there are numerous research studies that emphasize the reiteration of these dynamics in the contemporary key of e-society, where the eugenic dimension of the norm/normalization continues to be in force, prevailing and dangerous. The theoretical contextualisation of the decomposed portrait positions itself on a similar organizational axis on a formal and plastic level (including, however, digital culture) and subverts structural and figurative logics by aiming to compose the self, on the basis of abductive, experimental and deconstructive criteria: at the summer school in Paris, the path taken and the state of the art of this research will be shared, audio-visual experiences of self-portraiture will be proposed, and the works of some artists who might fall within this semantic field will be shown. The relationship between the subject of the inscription and the inscribed object thus seems to change: we are faced with a kind of fluctuating material re-elaboration in which the compositional assemblage approaches intangibility and originates data that can be considered as the hypostatizing element that, reified, becomes substance and form. But we also find ourselves at the moment when the subject of the real, made up of reality constructed in matter and discourse, needs to confirm its subjectivity personally and collectively, even though this consciousness may lead to the decomposition of unitary, synthetic, compact individuality.

**FEDERICO BELLENTANI**

Università di Torino

## **Facing Death: A Semiotic Investigation of Digital Memorials and Commemorative Practices Centered on the Face**

Digital memorials appeared in the late 1990s with the growing availability of digital technology and the Internet and developed since then due to the increasing integration of our lives with the digital. Commemorations, remembering and mourning have since diversified significantly in different digital memorial technologies: memorial websites, tribute pages, social networking sites, blogs and virtual commemorations on video games. Faces are central elements in digital memorials and commemorative practices, being it both an inter-face providing access for the memories of the dead and a text constantly invested by many interpretations and practices.

# ABSTRACTS

---

The face thus becomes a tool for commemoration, remembrance and mourning, supporting and expanding users' practices and experiences during the time surrounding death. Exploring the connection between memorialisation, face and digital technology, this presentation investigates digital memorials and commemorative practices and the meanings of faces within them. To do so, it first develops a semiotic-oriented framework for the design of digital memorials to ensure that digital technology remains centered on human needs and meanings. It then goes on applying this framework by analyzing three kinds of digital memorials and commemorative practices, especially focusing on face-based ones: 1) institutional digital memorials; 2) open, creative and playful solutions to reimagine contested monuments and memorials; 3) institutional and vernacular digital-native commemorative practices.

**PIERRE CASSOU-NOGUES**

Université Paris VIII

## Filtres

A partir de deux films réalisés avec Gwenola Wagon (*Virusland 2020*, [www.virusland.org](http://www.virusland.org)) et *Les Agents #01*, je discuterai de la fonction des filtres, sur les plateformes comme Tiktok ou Snapchat, en tant qu'ils s'appliquent aux visages comme à la réalité, et de quelques uns de leurs détournements possibles.

**BAAL DELUPI**

Università di Torino

## Activisms in the Metaverse: Reflections, Tensions, and Opportunities

In recent years, the question of how to adapt our daily practices to the digital-virtual world has been recurring in different fields of social discourse (Angenot, 2010). Some critics point out that the virtual world can never replace the flesh-body as a presence and event, and that the development of new technologies is undermining the human body; while others, more optimistic, point out that it is impossible to escape the hybrid life in which we already live, and that the most sensible thing to do is to embrace technology that promotes comfort and a supposed "freedom". It is true that there is also a third position built by people who are critical of the virtual world, but who, far from leaving the fate of this operation to the powerful like Meta-Facebook, understand that it is essential to dispute meaning in order to create better worlds by regulating the technological developments (Tamez, 2022). In the midst of these debates, the question of the

# ABSTRACTS

---

body is something that continues to disturb artists, activists and people interested in ensuring that the virtual does not reduce the corporal (Ávila Albuja, 2017). However, the appearance of the metaverse and augmented reality have made us rethink everyday practices, showing in many cases how unnecessary face-to-face meetings and costly meetings can be avoided from these virtual settings. But not only that, there is also the fascination with the creation of a world that some call "parallel", in which they design their avatar and configure another reality. Within the framework of these debates, activist artists such as Nadia Tamez or Mark Skwarek consider that the metaverse is an opportunity for social protest since it is possible to build a new reality by connecting people from different places who suffer inequalities, and thus be able to make common claims. This has been demonstrated by different activists in the Occupy Wall Street protests and in the global forum Meta Spark Creators Connect, linking people from different places through the metaverse, to propose collective creativity in the midst of capitalist development. This work aims to analyze the political meanings that activists build in the metaverse space, especially from the faces, to then reflect on the potentiality or limitations that the absence of the body-flesh implies in the digital space. What creative and collaborative horizons does the metaverse allow? How are the faces and bodies of activists embodied in that time-space? What are the communities and identities that are configured in these encounters? How can relationships be established between these spaces and those of face-to-face on the street? These are some of the questions that will be tried to be answered from a socio-semiotic perspective in connection with notions of political theory and performance studies.

**ALESSANDRO DE CESARIS**

Université de Fribourg / Collège des Bernardins

## **Digital Metempsychosis: Transcendence as a technological imaginary**

The dominant imaginary in the analysis of our relationship with technology understands technologically mediated experience as a form of metempsychosis: the subject moves from the physical world to another world, a digital space in which he or she can acquire a new body and a new identity. This cultural strategy, much in vogue in the debate on virtual reality, is actually very old, and constitutes the way in which we have interpreted numerous aspects of human life: the relationship between life and death, the experience of listening to the rhetorician's word, the experience of reading, the difference between the possible and the real.

# ABSTRACTS

---

The aim of the presentation will be to show that this cultural strategy is based on a certain way of presenting medial differences (differences between two ways of being of the same object) as object differences (differences between two different objects in two different spaces). By showing the centrality of the relationship between media and space, this theoretical framework (which we will call the Plural Worlds Model) fails, however, to clarify the meaning of this relationship. For this reason, a monist model (One World Model) will be proposed to interpret technologically mediated experience.

**MARIA GIULIA DONDERO**

FNRS/Université de Liège

## **L'art et la mise en scène du corps des images**

Ma conférence débutera par des réflexions sur l'impact de la numérisation sur les supports originaires des images picturales et photographiques, ces images étant prises en considération comme des corps constitués d'une enveloppe et d'une chair qui résistent ou accompagnent les manipulations dont elles font l'objet. Ensuite, mon intervention portera sur des analyses d'images artistiques qui mettent en scène le corps des images suite à la révolution du numérique pour essayer de comprendre la manière dont le discours de l'art aborde une réflexion originale sur le corps des images numérisées, ou nativement numériques, (vulnérables, déchirées, au support instable et changeant, etc.) jusqu'à mettre en crise ou au contraire à valoriser notre culture occidentale.

**GIANMARCO THIERRY GIULIANA**

Università di Torino

## **Life, Death, and Rebirth in Digital Games: Atelier de créativité numérique à partir de la conférence plénière de Fanny GEORGES**

Description : this workshop will be devoted to digital games, an object of study that is emblematic of digital embodiment and that can now be used by universities for both research and educational purposes. Starting from some of Fanny Georges' works on the themes of digital identities and digital death, during the workshop we will try to develop together the design of a digital game that makes use of avatars, embodiment and effects of presence in order to convey a particular message related to the themes discussed or capable of simulating an experience of digital reincarnation. After an introduction on the

# ABSTRACTS

---

general semiotic principles of meaning-making in digital games, participants will work in groups to create in 30 minutes such a game. Finally, during the last part of the workshop the ideas presented will be discussed and analyzed together with the speaker.

## REMO GRAMIGNA

Università di Torino

### **‘Deepfakes’, ‘cheapfakes’, and simulated realities. Techno-societal scenarios of digital face manipulation**

The speed AI-based technology is developing is unprecedented. ‘Deepfake’ technology is a case in point as it has altered the way we think of the human face in contemporary societies. Faces are becoming something very different from what we were accustomed to just a few years ago. The shift from faces to ‘artificial faces’ or ‘cyberfaces’ is apparent in the uses of deepfakes, a fairly new AI-based technology that is improving at a fast pace and is able to create a digital countenance/semblance of faces created ex-nihilo, hyper-realistic synthesized copies of human faces. Today, such matters are at the forefront of discussion and pose several pivotal questions of ethics, privacy, security as well key issues of epistemological and philosophical nature. As it is the case with the advent of any new technology, deepfakes and its widespread use have created heated debates dividing the public opinion into two fronts: the techno-enthusiasts and the techno-skeptics. The implication of this emerging phenomenon is plenty. Deepfakes capitalize on the effect of veracity enmeshed in the medium of photography and video-making (seeing is believing) in order to purport a simulated reality that can be used for different purposes: from political propaganda and disinformation, to parody, art-forms and creativity as well as a way to foiling face recognition and protect one’s identity. The line between real, fake, truth and falsity is being blurred. The forms of deepfake question the validity of any image. Due to the blurring of the distinction between evidential and fictional, real and virtual, true and false, these types of synthetic media function both as a potential source of disinformation and deception, and as a novel and experimental form of creativity, posing new challenges for the research.

# ABSTRACTS

---

**GABRIELE MARINO**

Università di Torino

## Questioning the Face, Towards Face Equality

My research within FACETS has been aimed at studying the face by questioning it: what do we mean by face, what are its defining criteria and its boundaries, how does it change over time, how do we represent it, what value do we attribute to it? I have been concerned with de-naturalizing the face, trying to show how it would work as a semiotic device with a triple articulation: there is something we show to sociality (*visus, visage*), there is our physiognomic mask thanks to which we give expression to our emotions (*vultus, expression*) and there is a surface of our biological body that acts as a material base (*facies, face*). It is only when we equip the latter - the 'biological face' - with parafacial devices (such as make-up or accessories, or when we modify it, e.g. with surgery or tattoos) that we discover its possibility, that we can imagine a 'natural face' (i.e. which does not precede, rather follows, the 'culturalized one'). Even the universality of the face is doubtful: let us think of the profound difference between Western and Eastern stylizations of the face (e.g. smileys or emoticons). In a semiotic perspective, there is no ontological - rather enunciational - opposition between face and mask, and the latter is not to be overlapped with the idea of falsehood (although it is possible to articulate a typology of 'visageness' whereby the face is opposed to disguise [mask replacing the face], anonymity and fake [face working as a mask]); the mask is endowed with its own autonomy and value: as a matter of fact, there are subjectivities, which we might provisionally call 'forms of quasi-life', which are purely semiotic and narrative (e.g. imaginary and virtual musicians, virtual influencers, etc.), to which we feel the need to provide a face. Behind these 'masks', there is no face - these entities are *Doppelgängers* of nobody. The face, then, is a *skeuomorphism*, something that is retrieved even when it is not strictly necessary. The efficacy of the face is, in fact, powerful (history is studded with peculiarly iconic, haunting and contagious faces, from the Turin Shroud to Hitler to Kanye West; our communication has become increasingly 'facialized', let us think of emoji, selfies, etc.), as we traditionally consider it as the interface onto which the underlying form of life is projected, and we postulate it as the unavoidable mark of a given subject's identity; in this sense, the face is a normative and conservative device. But what does it happen when we deal with no face - with a disrupted or 'deleted' face - when we cannot recover a face in its entirety (let us think of pandemic medical masks and the whole field of 'visible difference')? These questions force us to look in the mirror and explore the issue of identity with new eyes - or with no eyes at all.



# ABSTRACTS

---

**ANDREA OSTI**

Università di Torino

## **Images and Practices, Between Matter and Soul: A Proposal for a Philosophical-Anthropological Research**

Images have often been studied in terms of their cultic value as material objects. Before their technical reproducibility (Benjamin), images had their own object identity, were linked to a specific space-time, and were related to practices of use. At the same time, theological and metaphysical reflection had conceived imagery as a theoretical paradigm of classical cosmology and Christological incarnation, while its outcomes had frequently led to a legitimisation or delegitimisation of such cult practices. As new communication technologies took hold, theoretical frameworks emerged that gradually moved away from metaphysics and reflection on the practices and use of images as material objects to focus instead on the centrality of the processes of derealisation triggered by such technologies. The purpose of my presentation is to retrace some of the fundamental moments of these paradigms to question the role and function of images in digital society.

**GIOVANNI PENNISI**

Università di Torino

## **How Many Selves? Pathological Disembodiment, Re-Embodiment, and the Multiplicity of Presence.**

In this contribution I will offer a reflection on the concepts of disembodiment and re-embodiment as they emerge from the psychopathological literature, analyzing the phenomenological data coming from studies conducted on the relationship among self-consciousness, mental illness, and devices that "multiply" presence. When I mention such devices, the first one I refer to is the most ancient of all: the mirror. Several experiments on the perception of one's face in the mirror in schizophrenia have shown how the experience of self-recognition is associated in this pathology with a high incidence of distortion phenomena such that the patient's visage is transformed into a face with alien or monstrous features. Similar instances of transfiguration are also found in non-pathological subjects, especially in experimental settings where mirror recognition takes place in low visibility conditions; in such situations, the perception of the distorted face is accompanied by a high rate of dissociation of one's identity from that of the altered face. Interestingly, in the same

# ABSTRACTS

---

experimental settings, schizophrenic patients show a lower degree of dissociation from the face in the mirror than control subjects: thus, it could be said that, given certain environmental contingencies, while mirror observation may lead individuals without any pathology to phenomena of disembodiment (detachment of one's identity from that of the face in the mirror), in schizophrenic subjects it may constitute a form of re-embodiment (attribution of the self to a face with unusual features). Other intriguing data come from studies on mirror self-face perception in Capgras syndrome. This disorder is characterized by the patient's belief that loved ones have been replaced by look-alikes. There are some documented cases, however, of subjects with this syndrome reporting that they themselves have been supplanted by "doubles", who only manifest themselves when the subject stands in front of the mirror. Again, we are faced with an example that stimulates reflections on the dynamics of re-embodiment and disembodiment: if the mirror, in a Lacanian perspective, can in fact be defined as a medium that allows one to "embody" one's body image through a process of continuous re-updating of sensory data about one's face and body, it seems equally true that there are certain conditions in which it turns into an instrument of disembodiment, and that these conditions need to be investigated in order to understand the co-implications among the malfunctioning of certain brain mechanisms, the cognitive function of tools that multiply presence, and the emergence of the sense of self. Finally, I will provide a review of the literature on the use of Virtual Reality to treat eating disorders. In recent years, several studies have shown how prolonged sessions of exploration of a virtual environment via VR devices are capable of attenuating the feeling of "detachment" from one's body image typical of such illnesses. This is a paradigmatic case of the relationship between re-embodiment and disembodiment, which highlights the relevance of the phenomenological distinction between first- and third-person perspectives in clinical settings, while suggesting potential future developments for the treatment of certain psychopathologies.

**GIACOMO PEZZANO**

Università di Torino

## The new face of philosophy: a philosophy of media

The goal of the presentation is to introduce my general project of a media-philosophy, that is, of a philosophy not just "of" and "on" new visual and digital media, but properly "with" and "through" them. Hence, I will discuss the main question of what it could mean to see philosophy, claiming that the traditional answer was "nothing!", because the received view is enframed by a textual bias according to which philosophy is made of written words and not of images of

# ABSTRACTS

---

any kind. Then, I will highlight the epistemological and technological limits of such a setting, suggesting that for philosophy it's time to present itself with a new face: a more visual and inclusive one.

**FRANCESCO PILUSO**

Università di Torino

## **Semiotic Exercises between Sacred and Profane: Performativity and Embodiment of Fetish Objects in Christian and LGBTQ+ Communities**

The paper highlights analogies and differences between two social processes of community building based on the production, sharing and consumption – in terms of embodiment - of fetish objects, which assumes a utopian and ludic (Floch) social value as the results of performative semiotic operations by the members of the community. (1) In Christianity, the transubstantiation is a miraculous process through which the Eucharist becomes the body of Christ without changing its appearance. The actual body of Christ is never revealed, but continuously re-veiled by the ritual of consecration in which the Eucharistic assumes its fetishist and secretly hidden value (Ricci). As a self-fulfilling prophecy, the words of the consecration ostensibly speak of their own power and foster the believers' faith in the miracle; they work as a reflexive linguistic act, of which extraordinary but invisible effect is function of the liturgic code shared and performed by the faithful. In turn, through such a repetitive performance (Marmo), the sacred acquires a human sense: a new body-form and substance-flesh, transposed in the edible matter of the bread (Leone). In the sacrament of the holy Communion, the believer incarnates and embodies the transcendent divinity and, at the same time, is incorporated in the body of Christ and of his Church, in the Community of the faithful. (2) The second case of study concerns the LGBTQ+ community and, specifically, the expression and the construction of gender identity enabled by some gender swap apps and filters. In analogy with the process of transubstantiation, the transformation of gendered facial traits, towards a desired utopic (transcendental) gender identity, is crystallized by a fetishized and simulacral (rather than sacramental) object: the filtered self-picture. The outcome's funny effect of sense and existential value (especially for transgender and non-binary users) is the result of a ludic performance that reflects on the technological and ideological mechanisms through which the gender is codified in the apps and signified in the semiosphere. Though lacking a substantial material component – dissolved in the protean matter of pixel - the swapped gendered picture maintains the focus on the body – in particular, on the face - as a socio-cultural (relative and relational) form (Leone), actualizing the spectrum of its semantic virtualities and expressive

# ABSTRACTS

---

potentialities, fostering not only individuals' gender performativity (Butler), but also their embodiment of/to the LGBTQ+ social community, sharing and (dis)playing a common gender code.

**ALBERTO ROMELE**

Università di Torino

## **What impact do images have on scientific communication about AI?**

In this short presentation, we will discuss our research on images and the imaginary of artificial intelligence (AI). Instead of discussing images and their contents, we will discuss their effects in science communication contexts. In particular, we will discuss the results of an experiment conducted in recent months. About sixty university students were asked to read an article about AI in three versions: one without images, one with an image from the CNRS Images catalog, and one from Shutterstock. The students had to comment on the article's logical coherence, credibility, and commitment. The objective was to see if images have a specific impact on the perception of science communication on AI.

**ANTONIO SANTANGELO**

Università di Torino

## **What impact do images have on scientific communication about AI?**

There are faces that appear iconic to us because they belong to individuals whose personal stories seem to perfectly embody certain cultural models that we all use to interpret the world in which we live. Often they are identified by the media, especially cinema and television, which in recent years have presented us with more and more characters looking for a new way to assign meaning to their existential experience. Their stories seem to be structured to undermine the more traditional semiotic models, in particular those of the theory of narration, as if it were no longer possible to narrate the contemporary as it was done in the past, according to the schemes codified by scholars such as Propp, Greimas or Lévi-Strauss. Referring to the tripartition of the types of stories that can be told according to Ferraro (2015), of class Alpha, Beta and Gamma, I therefore intend to show how some particular but well-known recent films and TV series question certain tools attested in today's semiotics, urging the development of new theories to describe the way in which the sense of the narrative of our time is determined.

# ABSTRACTS

---

**CRISTINA VOTO**

Università di Torino / Universidad Nacional Tres de Febrero

## **Operative Faces: The Unborn Between Iconicity and Uncertainty**

In 2003, the video artist Harun Farocki introduced the category of "operative image" as pictures that neither entertain nor inform but are part of an operation. In his video *Auge/Machine III*, he referred to the "operative image" in resonance with Allan Sekula's "instrumental image" as a type of image subject to mechanical reading. Farocki's reflection on the status of the image at the beginning of the Third Millennium also resonates with Vilém Flusser's propositions on the technical imaginary category to examine the mechanical functionality of images. In times when more and more information and spheres of operation are being coded into our optics, becoming data, averages and standards, the operative image serves as a means to an end, where the action is already contained within what is visible. In this regard, recovering Farocki and updating his proposal to our iconosphere we can define the operative image as an image that is applied with operative logic, making it instantly analyzable. The focus on the operativity of the visible raises questions about what things in the world are and do. While operative images provide insight into the wonders of technology and help us to theorize about the image, there is concern about the (re)embodiment of these images in socio-cultural pragmatic experiences such as contemplation, interpretation, and reasoning. To understand the agency of the operative image I will propose a comparison between a particular type of face: the face of the unborn, analyzing the way this face-type turns operative, the issue of life in scientific and dissemination contexts. Recovering from the scientific and feminist literature, I will consider the image of the fetus, defined by the historian Barbara Duden as an object created by technology and for Donna Haraway as a condenser of origin stories, an icon to configure the concepts of person, family, nation, origin, and future. The face of the unborn is an image that operates by disembodying the experience of pregnancy from the awareness of women. To achieve my objective, I will first analyze Lennart Nilsson's photographic service entitled 'Life Before Birth', recently republished by Time and first appeared in 1965 in Life magazine. The service documents the evolution of the human embryo that turned iconic: for the first time, an eighteen-week-old living fetus is depicted in an intrauterine image breaking down the scopic barriers that have made, until that moment, the unborn as an unseen and unverifiable presence. Secondly, I will analyze another service that was published by the same magazine in 1990 and realized through an electron microscope. While the first is on the side of representation of the visible, the

# ABSTRACTS

---

second service turns operative things that lie beyond the optic's horizons and dissociates vision from sight. Finally, I will take into consideration images resulting from AI-powered 4D ultrasounds as operative images capable of enabling us to new concerns about prediction and uncertainty.

# CONTACT

---

massimo.leone@unito.it

Collège des Bernardins  
20 Rue de Poissy  
75005 Paris

---

Cette activité résulte d'un projet qui a reçu un financement du Conseil européen de la recherche (CER) dans le cadre du programme de recherche et d'innovation Horizon 2020 de l'Union européenne (convention de subvention n° 819649-FACETS).

La participation est gratuite. Nous acceptons volontiers les propositions de participation des doctorant(e)s et des post-doctorant(e)s.