Symposium »Unheimliche Freunde«

PROGRAMM

Donnerstag, den 10.9.2020

16:00 Begrüßung und Einführung
Marcus Burkhardt, Thomas Macho und Gloria Meynen

16:30-17:30 Keynote: Ann Cotten. IFK Wien, Kunstuniversität Linz.
»A staged conversation« [EN]
Moderation: Gloria Meynen

18:00 Evening Lecture: Thomas Macho. IFK Wien, Kunstuniversität Linz.
»Un/Canny Friends. On the Fascinating History of Doppelgangers« [D/EN]
Moderation: Gloria Meynen

Freitag, den 11.9.2020

UNCANNY SENSES
Moderation: Tobias Matzner

10:00–10:55 Kim Albrecht. metaLAB, Harvard University/Universität Potsdam.
»Artificial Senses« [EN]

»Abnutzungserscheinungen. Semantiken von Verbrauch und Verletzung an den Schnittstellen und Interfaces organischer und technischer Körper« [D]

»Puppen, Zombies, Algorithmen. Der Transhumanist BeachBoy Memex und das Verschwinden des weiblichen Körpers« [D]

— Lunch —
Symposium »Unheimliche Freunde«

Fortsetzung Freitag, den 11.9.2020

UNCANNY AGENTS
Moderation: Marcus Burkhardt

»Zusammengefaßte Wesen und digitale Schauspieler*innen« [D]

»As Real as Rihanna?! - The Curious Case of Miquela Sousa. About 3D/CGI-Influencers and ‘Synthetic Media.’« [EN]

— Kaffeepause —

16:45-17:45 Artist Performance: Anna Bromley. Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln/HFBK Hamburg.
»Deep Poison« [EN]

18:00-20:00 Evening Lecture: Janina Loh. Institut für Philosophie/Universität Wien.
»Uncanny Agents – A Critique of Transhumanism as an Excluding Ethics« [D/EN]

Moderation: Tobias Matzner

Samstag, den 12.9.2020

UNCANNY FICTIONS
Moderation: Gloria Meynen

10:00-10:55 Jiré Emine Gözen. BTK, Campus Hamburg.
»Die unheimlichen Freunde in der Cyberpunk Literatur: Frankensteins Monster, das sind wir.« [D]

— Kaffeepause —

»Remote Access Science Fiction und die Fernwartung der Menschheit« [D]

»JUST KI-DDING? Humor und Transspezies-Flirts in Roger Vadim’s Barbarella (1968) und Spike Jonzes Her (2013)« [D]
Around 1978, a metaphor found its way into English android research that the roboticist Masa-hiro Mori had defined in 1970: the »uncanny valley«. Robots that resemble humans too much instill fear and terror. Like us, but never familiar, they inhabit the »uncanny valley«. But today, the uncanny valley has almost disappeared. Thanks to RFID chips, GPS and a wide variety of body sensors, our bodies and identities have themselves become interfaces, mouse pointers and prosthetic hands with which algorithms trace and continue to write our profiles. The valley that Mori dug out between the industrial robot and the Nō mask is now levelled. What remains is a suspicion: that the ghosts and the undead are not only the robots, but ourselves as well.

**UNHEIMLICHE FREUNDE ★ ABSTRACTS & BIOS**

Ann Cotten. IFK Wien, Kunstuniversität Linz: »A staged conversation«, Keynote Lecture [EN/D]

In a staged conversation, five machines and one organic human talk about questions of culture, taste, feminism and science. Thanks to the refined education of the host, there is no violence. The set-up reflects the artificiality of an adult human being, particularly the construction of the culture of female-presenting. Cybernetic topoi, such as the tic of regarding everything as a machine, help to see the story in a more realistic light and logically decipher mysterious human behaviour patterns. Also it is decided once and for all what kind of questions a female presenter has to answer and which ones she doesn’t and shouldn’t. Also of interest is how we learn patience from robots. No answer is reached on the question whether or not associations lose their charm when ironed out flat. To answer this, it would be necessary to trace how the value structure of charm is put together.

**Thomas Macho.** IFK Wien, Kunstuniversität Linz. »Un/Canny Friends. On the Fascinating History of Doppelgangers«, Evening Lecture [D/EN]

**Kim Albrecht.** metaLAB, Harvard University/Universität Potsdam, »Artificial Senses« [EN]

The modern ideology that good design is »as little design as possible« is, in its essence, the neglection of uncanny machines. The drawn distinctions on the surface hide the subface and assign as little agency as possible: »It just works. Seamlessliy«. In the early 2000s, documentary filmmaker and artist Harun Farocki distinguished a new kind of image. He called them »operational Images« – pictures that are part of a technical operation, a process in which they are needed to execute a specific goal. Contemporary interfaces are operational; we do not open our map application to enjoy the map’s beauty, but rather to get from place A to B, to fulfill an operation.

The interfaces presented throughout this talk offer a counter-narrative to the notion of good design, our seamless machine interactions of Operational Images. »Images of Operation« render slices of the machine subface to observe parts of the hidden uncanny processes. A reflection into the mechanics and infrastructures that allow for our current worldview in the first place. These images will not lead us anywhere but expose the hidden uncanny structures of the seemingly familiar.

**Kim Albrecht** visualizes cultural, technological, and scientific forms of knowledge. His diagrams unfold and question the structures of representation and explore the aesthetics of technology and society. Kim holds a BA in graphic design, an MA in interface design, is a principal researcher at metaLAB (at) Harvard and a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Potsdam in media theory. As knowledge designer and aesthetic researcher, Kim Albrecht explores the boundaries of visual knowledge in the post-digital age.

**Anna Staab.** Lehrstuhl für soziologische Theorie. Zeppelin Universität Friedrichshafen. »Unglaubwürdige Dinge«/»Dubious Objects« [D]

The paper considers interactions between subjects and objects, subjects and subjects, and objects and objects through inter-faces as a form of mask as a connection in which two surfaces design themselves and each other to enable connectivity to each other. In other words, it proposes to consider interfaces not as surfaces of a (technical) object designed for a subject, but as a relation. It is then assumed that (1) only in and for this relation is determined who acts as object or subject and who is treated as subject or object and that (2) this connection arouses mistrust of one’s own representation as well as that of the counterpart just as much as mistrust of one’s own and the counterpart’s perception. With regard to the inter-faces of the theatre productions Uncanny Valley (Rimini Protokol) and Kroniek (Florian Fischer), we will observe how these forms of distinction can become observable and be set in motion. Questions about the essence or core of the self and the counterpart, about processes running in the background and reasons for which what is shown is shown and what is perceived is perceived intensify in the experience of the interface as unit of the distinction between action and experience and as unit of the distinction between concealing and showing. Objects, like subjects, elude investigation into or knowledge about their essence or their core - and it is the notion of this that makes dealing with them uncanny.
Anna Staab, born 1990, studied cultural sciences and dramaturgy in Friedrichshafen, Maastricht and Munich, was Visiting Research Fellow at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2015 and worked as a production dramaturg at Theaterhaus Jena, Residenztheater Munich and others. Since September 2019, she is research assistant at the Chair of Sociological Theory at Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen.


Gunter Lösel. Department Darstellende Künste & Film, Zürcher Hochschule der Künste. »Zusammengeflickte Wesen und digitale Schauspieler*innen« [D]

With the development of speech-enabled AIs that have already found their way into our living rooms and social networks – in the form of Siri, Alexa, Corona, Mitsuku, Rose, Cleverbot, etc. – machines reveal their new quality as social interaction partners. New relationships between humans and machines are emerging, which penetrate deeply into the self-conception of humans and make it questionable. In the theater, this leads to an experimental human-android theater in which the machine agents are given more and more autonomy. They can »play along«, conduct dialogues, hold monologues. From an artistic and technical point of view, it is a challenge to invent theatrical forms and experimental settings that make such new constellations visible, experienceable and performable. Under the title »Chatbots Onstage«, various experiments have therefore been undertaken at the Zurich University of the Arts over the past two years to bring digital agents onto the stage.

To this end, the university has cooperated with computer experts from Google Deep Mind, developed a speech-enabled AI and trained it with dramatic texts. Several hybrid beings were created that are capable of conducting dialogues with humans, in particular JANN-Z, a being that was specially trained for emotional, dramatic dialogues. In further steps, theatrical settings were designed that investigate under which circumstances such a dialog-capable machine is experienced by a theater audience as »live«, »present« and possessing its own personality. In this contribution, Gunter Lösel will introduce the experimental series, show videos of the resulting theater piece ”Almost Human” and outline the further considerations. In a live demo, the audience can interact with JANN-Z to get an impression of this patched-up being and the simulation of personality, presence and liveliness.

Gunter Lösel is a researcher and actor holding a doctorate in Theatre Studies as well as a diploma in psychology. He is heading the Research Focus Performatives Practice at the Zurich University of the Arts and published on the themes of embodied cognition, improvisation, collaborative creativity and artistic research since 2004. Currently he is the main applicant of the project »Research Video« (SNF-funded). He is an accomplished actor in improvisational theatre, a member of the German National Team of Theatresports (2006), founder of the »Improtheater Bremen« and member of the price-winning duo »Stupid Lovers«.
Today, many Internet users interact daily with smart search engines such as Siri or Alexa or with AI and AR-supported web chatbots, which have more or less anthropomorphic features. Some users may have even become already 'friends' with virtual influencers such as Miquela Sousa on Facebook, Instagram, and Co.

Anyone, who has long been navigated with a 3D/CGI avatar through the realms of video and computer games, knows too well that personality profiles are always fabricated and scripted, i.e. they always contain a particular narrative. Edited and curated 3D/CGI avatars like Miquela Sousa can be characterized as active actors and smart agents in contemporary communication networks.

Masahiro Mori's »Uncanny Valley« (1970) has long since become a sea of data, filled with information, on which we like to surf with our smart AI avatars. As an alter ego, the digital avatar exemplifies how far the human body functions as a screen and interface in networked societies. However, this somewhat strange process will probably not further hinder the triumph of »Synthetic Media« – a creative combination of computer-generated image material and AI capabilities. Perhaps only some cognitive dissonance will still remain: namely, seeing a best friend in smart 3D/CGI influencers like Miquela Sousa on social media and, at the same time, fearing her digital puppet-makers, who ultimately pull strings for us consumers.

Thus, today, algorithm-driven cute avatars are used to trigger emotions and to communicate values via styles. Herewith, 3D/CGI influencers, combined with storytelling, gain a more and more social-cultural impact on consumptive societies.

Pamela Scorzin. FB Design/FH Dortmund »As Real as Rihanna?! - The Curious Case of Miquela Sousa. About 3D/CGI-Influencers and »Synthetic Media« [EN]

1992 Magistra Artium and 1994 Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. After assistance, habilitation at the Department of Architecture of the TU Darmstadt in 2001. Subsequently, various lectureships and professorships at the Universities of Siegen and Frankfurt am Main and at the ABK Stuttgart. At the same time, freelance work as an international art critic. Member of the AICA since 2006. Since 2008 Professor of Art History in the Department of Design at the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences and Arts. Numerous publications (German, English, French, and Polish) on art and cultural history of the 17th to 21st century. Lives, works, and researches Dortmund, Milan, and Los Angeles, and is on social media under the pseudonym 'Levania Lehr.'

Anna Bromley. Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln/HFBK Hamburg, »Deep Poison« Sound Collage and Artist Lecture [EN]


Janina Loh. Instituto für Philosophie/Universität Wien. »Uncanny Agents - A Critique of Transhumanism as an Excluding Ethics«, Evening Lecture [D/EN]

Anna Bromley develops exhibitions, installations, performances, texts, radio conversations and plays which address interruptions in representative ways of speaking. Recently her works were shown in HKW, nGbK, Bärenzwinger, AgVA CIAT and SAVVY Contemporary Berlin, as well as in MUU Helsinki, documenta14 Radio, Musrara Mix Jerusalem, Academy of the Arts of the World ADKDW Cologne, and Fondazione Arthur Cravan di Milano. Anna’s recent research project is devoted to radio practices in protest networks. In 2020, she is a Fellow at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne.

Jiré Emine Gözen BTK/Campus Hamburg, FB Art&Design, »Die unheimlichen Freunde in der Cyberpunk Literatur: Frankensteins Monster, das sind wir.« [D]  

This talk will take the audience on a journey through the history of Science Fiction which is home to many »uncanny friends«. Taking Mary Shelley’s »Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus« as a starting point, it will be shown how an implicit narrative established itself as early as the 19th century, formulating an unbridgeable acceptance gap in relation to such »uncanny friends«, such as Frankenstein’s monster, whose creation is rooted in technological advancements. This narrative has continually shaped literature, art, philosophy, and popular culture to this very day. However, Cyberpunk literature, as a movement within Science Fiction, initiated a paradigm shift in the 1980s by reflecting a radical change of the condition humana. »The Uncanny Valley« of Masa-hiro Mori is thereby undauntedly traversed, and it is made clear that the spaces of experience opened up to the human by new media and technologies have already modified and changed them significantly, and will continue to do so. Modified by our technologies it becomes clear that no longer the “others” - i.e. machines, robots, or artificial intelligence - are the “uncanny friends” but humankind itself became the monsters of Frankenstein. This perspective is especially insightful when it comes to understanding and evaluating contemporary phenomena - last but not least the current pandemic and its outcomes.

Barbara Eder. Kunstuniversität Linz, »Remote Access Science Fiction und die Fernwartung der Menschheit« [D]  

The age in which our computers became pocket-compatible devices, competing
with our closest friends, is one of the more recent in human history. Communication between the limits of local subnets is technically possible since the early 1980s – as an eerie process in itself, that philosophy and science fiction are both concerned with: The hallucinations of Swedish metaphysician Emanuel Swedenborg, who is said to have seen a fire break out in Stockholm while having dinner in Gothenburg, caused Immanuel Kant to continue his anthropology with a pragmatic intention in 1766; for science fiction authors, on the other hand, remote access is not a scary phenomenon at all. In the sci-fi series *Die Terranauten* (1979-1981) human «drivers» steer interstellar spaceships using PSI energy, in Reinhard Jirgls *Nichts von euch auf Erden* Mars returnee BOSXRKB i 8-15-9-14-8-1-18-4 uses alphanumeric strings to make himself understood on earth; in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Hainish Cycle*, there is a remote maintenance technology that half a century later would become an important instrument in LINUX system automation and no longer operates in the service of cybernetic control: ansible is a device for delay-free communication at the speed of light, in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) it saves and transmits the minority reports of the androgynous and indigenous.


Sowohl *Her* als auch *Barbarella* enthalten Sequenzen, in denen es zum Flirt zwischen Mensch und körperloser KI kommt. Der Schwerpunkt des Beitrags liegt auf der vergleichenden Analyse der Flirtsequen-

Barbara M. Eggert, Dr. phil. joined the University of Art and Design Linz in 2019. In addition to her PhD in Art History, she holds an MA both in German Language and Literature/History of Art (University of Hamburg) and in Adult Education/ Museum Studies (Humboldt-University Berlin). Important steps in her international career were research periods at SFMOMA (2007), at the Vitra Design Museum (2014–16) and at Danube University Krems (2016–19) where she co-designed the MA programme »Collection Studies and Management«. Her main research interests are museum cultures and media that combine text and image. Currently, she works on her habilitation project on comics in museums and exhibitions.

Symposium »Unheimliche Freunde< / »Uncanny Friends< at the Ars Electronica Festival 2020. Concept and organisation by Gloria Meynen (Dept. Media Theories/ Kunstuniversität Linz), in cooperation with International Research Center for Cultural Studies (IFK), and Working Group »Data and Networks«, Gesellschaft für Medienwissenschaft (Marcus Burkhardt/ Universität Siegen, Tobias Matzner, Universität Paderborn, und Eva-Maria Nyckel, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin).