

**AIA 2019- Panel Proposal (Chiara Battisti- Paola Carbone-Sidia Fiorato-  
Annalisa Volpone)**

**Thinking out of AI algorithms. Technological determinism in digital  
culture**

The panel aims at investigating the challenge of artificial intelligence (AI) to the concepts of 'volition' and 'personhood' from the interdisciplinary perspective of literature, technology and culture. It is unmistakable that we have entered a new phase of digital culture that, even if already widely foreseen by scientists, writers and artists, is nowadays seducing as much as invasive and mystifying. If, on the one hand, the categories of human, transhuman and posthuman help to culturally decode some reference frames, on the other hand, Internet of Things, research on Human-centric Digital Age and a renewed human-machine interaction “transforms bit by bit all aspects of our societies and economies and change the way people live and behave” (see Horizon 2020). Accordingly, established cultural assumptions are challenged. The new ethical, cultural and social questions, that are changing our perception of the real and bringing forth a redefinition of society, will be investigated.

Abstracts

Chiara Battisti (University of Verona- chiara.battisti@univr.it)- **“Life 3.0: *Westworld*, Volition and Identity”**

This paper will explore the concepts of identity and volition as problematized in the 2016 HBO tv series, *Westworld*. The series is based on the 1973 film *Westworld* written and directed by Michael Crichton. The story takes place in a fictional, technologically advanced amusement park in which very realistic androids (“the hosts”) perform as characters from Wild West according to the scenarios prepared by the employees of a company called Delos. The park welcomes many high-paying “guests” who are free to experience their wildest fantasies within it without fear of revenge from the hosts, who are prevented by their programming from harming humans.

The series raises many philosophical questions about the potential impact of human-like robots powered by artificial intelligence, about robots’ consciousness and the ethics of artificial intelligence, thus introducing some of the most contemporary issues about technology and neuroscience into the realm of pop culture. It also presents the more complicated issue of a revision of the fundamental distinction between legal “subjects” and “objects of rights” based on volition, in the sense of capacity to form and express a will, which leads to legal consequences.

Paola Carbone (Università IULM – paola.carbone@iulm.it)- **“Digital Technology, AI and Human Rights”**

If the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were written today, probably along with “the rights to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services” (Art.25), access to digital technology would be certainly mentioned. Indeed Art 27 claims that “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits”, that is to say that any human being should take advantage of scientific advancement, but in the new Millennium access to technology is a necessary condition to be full citizens rather than an entitled right.

Nicholas Negroponte's project, *One laptop per child* (2005) along with the El Plan Ceibal (Conectividad Educativa de Informática Básica para el Aprendizaje en Línea), realized in Uruguay in 2007 to promote a national policy of digital inclusion for those children living in low-income communities, underline how, in order to be a member of body politic, it is important to possess a digital device, to be connected and to participate in the construction of a new vision of the world mediated by digital progress. To *belong to a community* means to actively participate in digital culture. If we expect a citizen to assume a particular behaviour and attitude towards the community and himself, a citizen with, rather than without, a digital device can represent a different niche of expectations and volition.

Considering how literature and the arts depict dystopic scenarios ruled by a technological determinism, it is strange to realize that such policies/projects consider digital technology as an enabling instrument more than a determining one. In their perspective, technology is supposed to preserve the equity and human dignity (see human rights) in the local and global *polis*.

In such a context it is worthwhile considering how the *Draft Ethics Guidelines For Trustworthy AI* (Working Document for stakeholders' consultation, Brussels, 18 December 2018) asks stakeholders to define the rules for the development and use of AI with an “ethical purpose', grounded in, and reflective of, fundamental rights, societal values and the ethical principles of *Beneficence* (do good), *Non-Maleficence* (do no harm), *Autonomy of humans*, *Justice*, and *Explicability*.” Isaac Asimov's “Three Laws of Robotics” are leaving the fictional world to enter our daily life and the EU legislation.

While digital ontology is reconfiguring identity, culture and social relationships, these constant references to human rights and dignity deserve investigation.

**Sidia Fiorato** (University of Verona – [sidia.fiorato@univr.it](mailto:sidia.fiorato@univr.it)) – Artificial Intelligence in Fairy Tales: Merissa Meyer's *Cinder*

Fairy tales have always proved powerful tools in illustrating cultural development and change, articulating man's anxieties and fears, as well as hopes and desires. Marissa Mayer's *Cinder* (2012) uses the traditional story of *Cinderella* as a framework for reflections about the contemporary posthuman anxiety. The protagonist is the best mechanic of New Beijing, a dystopian futuristic society ruled by humans who coexist with cyborgs and different kinds of androids which are

continuously improved thanks to ongoing technological advancements and which occupy a subordinate position in the society. Cinder is a cyborg and her hybridized body, characterized by bionic parts which augment human faculties, is inscribed at a crossroads between traditional cultural tenets (according to which she is cast a subhuman status and remains at the margins of society) and claims for a multiplicity of existence (she is capable of human feelings, she demands notice and claims agency). Her interactions with the other characters and in particular with her (step)-family's android Iko, who seems to lead an autonomous existence due to a "programming error", lead to phenomenological and ontological reflections on the definition of personhood in a technologically mediated society.

Annalisa Volpone (University of Perugia- [annalisa.volponr@unipg.it](mailto:annalisa.volponr@unipg.it))- **“We have broken those limits”: agency, subjectivity and intentionality in the technodystopic worlds of Jeanette Winterson’s *Stone Age*.**

This paper discusses the human-machine and the human-non human relations in the transtechnological dystopic worlds depicted by Jeanette Winterson in *Stone Age* (2007). The protagonist, a woman called Billie Crusoe, who lives in the fatally damaged planet Orbus (which seems to be a representation of the Earth after the climate change), falls in love with a highly advanced female robot named Spike, who belongs to a new species known as “Robo Sapiens”. They find themselves on an expedition to Planet Blue where the surviving humans should move in order to start a new life in a healthier and more hospitable environment, suitable for human civilization. Billie experiences repeating history on several doomed worlds and narrative scenarios, each time more questions raise about the bodily natures, the boundary between organic and technical, and the dualist male/female definition. Winterson describes the posthuman subject as an embodied consciousness represented by a gendered Robot, who rebels against the systematic dismantle of her data (memories) and the idea that she is a machine for re-use. Her AI doesn't accept to be wiped clean because, as she explains to Billie, she can never forget. Spike's breaking of the limits within which she was supposed to evolve as a Robo Sapiens challenges the very notion of agency and intentionality that are no longer the sole attributes of human beings. The more the relationship with Billie becomes serious the more the boundaries between human consciousness and non-human consciousness are blurred and superimposed eventually calling for an epistemic shift between physical and technological, material and artificial.

## **BIONOTES**

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