

Identity in Telepresence

How do we know another person in a mediated environment? The advent of computer-mediated communication and the communication between man and machine has changed this question. Can we tell who or what we are communicating with? Perhaps more important... does it matter? Identity can be defined on the computer as 'the sum of your virtual presences'. Individuality is invented out of distinctive choices of identity; options made available through the options offered by culture. Telepresence allows access to various cultures that are not limited to place or time. It also allows for the blurring of self and other. Where do we as human beings end and others begin? Where is the end of 'myself' and the beginning of a link that gives us access to another person's senses?

Jerry Kang asks, "Does identity – as it relates to social relations – require privacy?" He begs the question of whether we need places where we are not under surveillance so we can develop relationships and thus experiment with our own identities? On-line identity has been described as creating an illusion of the presence, and even closeness of other people who are distant in space and time.

Some people say that the entirety of identity is comprised of the total Central Nervous System, and that once we can project the entire Central Nervous System, we can project the entirety of identity, and this is referred to as "telepresence". Others argue that feeling is tactile and that moods exist, but that the mood isn't necessarily present in the body, but that the body is in the mood.

Identity is said to be fragmented and indeterminate. Telepresence and identity bring us to the brink of projecting a complete identity, and when we are able to do these two things will result: 1) Social relationships will forever be changed; 2) The blurring of the distinction between audio/visual reality and physical reality will no longer exist.

Julian Jaynes says the "Bicameral Mind" will undergo another revolutionary transformation, a transformation that was as profound as the one that occurred at the Enlightenment. This was when humans became capable of abstraction and anthropomorphism and created God.

Primary and Secondary relationships will be changed. The blurring of identity has come about through technological advances in terms of computer-mediated relationships such as telepresence.

Technologies can be thought of as networks of interacting human, organizational, human-made objects and practices. Each element both make up and consist of the networks of which they are a part. This is the definition of a Technology Actor Network, or TAN.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) was developed initially to provide a better answer to the question “what is technology”? ANT argues for thinking of technologies as actor networks, which are mixtures of relationships among human and nonhuman entities. From the perspective of ANT, the construction of a technological network or system is an active process. The more passive elements of a system are “actants”, the more active are “actors”. Actors are active agents in the production and the reproduction of the network. Stable TANs have discernible trajectories. These trajectories are strongly influenced by the operation of those entities that become actors.

In ANT humans can be a type of “actant”. Humans are not more important than others are in terms of their potential and their capacity to be “actors” well as “actant” entities. Therefore, another basic and important ANT premise is the potential for nonhuman agency.

Mindfrog avoids the trap of imagining that discourse as a closed universe. The Mindfrog Project instead recognizes the need to broaden the idea of signification or representation or identity. We recognize that every aspect of the transformative linkage may come in all types of more or less hybrid material forms, which may have little to do with language. We recognize the underlying generative processes can be impacted by new developments. Technologies have real impacts that are informed by the understandings that humans have and influence Technology Actor Network (TAN) reproduction.

The relative degree of autonomy of any particular TAN can be analyzed in terms of its manifestations in the various moments of reality (empirical, actual, and/or generatively real) in which it is implicated.

Technologies have material, determinant qualities because they embody the momentum of previous human activity. This momentum is particularly difficult to change in the short run when an actual TAN –integrates widely dispersed practices. It is the limitations on human action enacted by such momentums that justify the classification of ‘agency’ to the nonhuman components of technology actor networks.

We have to look at identity with new possibilities.