THE BLITHESOME OTHER

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The expansion of our digital selves has long been experienced through a multitude of digital images – the cyber avatars created for online and video games, and lately shared social VR platforms, augmented reality enhancements and overlays in Snapchat and other social media platforms or digital prefiguration created in Photoshop or alike software. The proliferation of the digital other, on the other hand is reaching the knee of the exponential function with the bursting development of AI. The digital other isn't unfamiliar – the media specificity of animation films and computer games builds on the notion of the digital other (or digitally created human-alike non-human other). As technology evolved and AI entered the field of creation, the digital other left the uncanny valley and become increasingly human. With the exponential development of virtual effects creation, virtual humans indicate the convergence of real-time and computer-generated media starting with Avatar (James Cameron, 2009) and the Metahuman Creator recently announced by Unreal Engine that allows for accessible and easily customizable digital characters for any kind of virtual production. Alongside this development, the digital other also left the well-defined fictional entertainment field of appearance and increasingly penetrates situations beyond mediated leisure. As part of the field of affective computing, virtual humans are created to converse, understand, reason and exhibit emotions. These automated agents with three-dimensional bodies can perform tasks through natural language-style dialogs with humans deployed in healthcare. Virtual influencers such as Lil Miquela, Imma or Blawko, are on the rise on social media and we can just speculate about the possible implementations beyond deep fakes and identity theft using images of non-existing humans imagined by a GAN (generative adversarial networks). The paper examines these phenomena in the context of the predicaments of contemporary capitalism amended by adjectives such as cognitive, immaterial, affective, platform or surveillance. All these adjectives converge around the shifting interest of capitalism from material production to the colonization of the mind. Philosopher Byung-Chul Han suggests a turn to "psychopolitics", a mode of operation of contemporary capitalism defined by new technologies of power targeting the immaterial and psychic human existence. Artist and theorist Warren Neidich goes even further in looking at how the production of material objects has been overtaken by the production of psychic effects and software agents that calibrate and control our choices and desires. How do virtual humans, their production, representation and deployment cater main forces of contemporary capitalism. What is their affective field comprised of and what are some of the lurking ethical complications regarding our interaction with virtual humans? While addressing these questions, the paper will look at art projects such as the IG account myfriendsylvia or the strange music videos of Mario Klingemann that reflect on and creatively deconstruct the forces behind virtual humans and our entanglements with them.

Szilvia Ruszev is a film editor, media artist and scholar working across different media formats. Her broader research interest focuses on sensuous knowledge, montage theories and politics of post cinema. Her own artistic work relates to very personal moments, certain states of emotional solitude in relation to the Other, both in its particular and abstract notion. As editor, she collaborated with internationally acclaimed directors such as Peter Greenaway, Anders

Østergaard, and János Szász. Her award-winning work has been part of numerous international film festivals and exhibitions such as Karlovy Vary IFF, TIFF Toronto, Berlin IFF, Siggraph and Codame. Between 2010-2016, she was a faculty member of the Editing Department at the Film University Babelsberg Konrad Wolf. Currently, she is an Annenberg Fellow, pursuing a Ph. D. degree in Media Arts + Practice in the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California.