

JOURNAL OF VISUAL AND MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY

Artificial Entanglements: Memory, Emotion, and Connection in the Age of AI

Editors: Urte Undine Frömming, Kristen Powell



Artificial Intelligence and the Elevation of the Human Experience



**URTE UNDINE
FRÖMMING**

Editor



**KRISTEN
POWELL**

Editor



What does it mean to remember with machines? Can artificial intelligence become a teacher, a translator, a romantic interest, or even a way to communicate with the dead? From the geographies of digital maps to speculative afterlives and interspecies communication, the authors in this volume reflect on the profound shifts in how we create understanding, teach, feel, and remember in the presence of AI.

The eight contributions in this journal (six papers and two films) offer speculative, critical, and often deeply personal engagements with artificial intelligence, revealing how these technologies are becoming more present in our relationships, perceptions, digital and physical environments, and inner worlds.

As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly integrated into our daily lives, its role has shifted from simple interaction with the human experience to actively enhancing, extending, and reconfiguring it. The contributions in this journal explore how AI technologies are not only tools for automation or optimization, but also agents that help shape the way we feel, learn, remember, and communicate. Whether through pedagogical support, emotional regulation, spatial memory, or communication with the past, these contributions suggest that AI can amplify our cognitive, affective, and sensory capacities. This volume

explores AI's potential to elevate rather than replace human experience.

The topics in this edition of our journal vary from questioning AI's impact and ethical implications on the human experience, from education (Paulin, in this volume) to emotions and intimacy in the metaverse (Thiel and Montgomery) and the shift in our experience with the environment using digital mapping tools (Crellin). Exploration on the use of AI for spirituality and communication with animals (Sakova), to the digital resurrection of The Mother of Computer Science, Ada Lovelace (Shurley), and analyzing the impact on digital memory loss (Sten).

In "Digital Learning in the Age of AI: Can Traditional Teachers Adapt to the Shift?" author Aude Paulin investigates the role of emotional intelligence and pedagogical ethics in AI-powered education systems. Drawing on critical education theory, psychology, and ethnographic insights, the paper explores whether AI can truly replicate the relational, intuitive, and emotionally reciprocal dynamics of human teaching. Paulin examines the increasing use of AI in classrooms and raises vital questions about trust, care, and the limits of emotional labor when mediated by algorithmic logic.

Laura Crellin's paper "Geospatial Mapping and the Lived Environment" focuses on how digital mapping tools such as Google Maps and Street View affect the way we perceive and move through the world. Grounded in posthumanist theory and media anthropology, the work explores how mapping interfaces mediate embodiment and spatial memory. Through reflective fieldwork and theoretical synthesis, Crellin argues that the friction between algorithmic suggestions and embodied knowledge reveals how digital environments are neither neutral nor passive but actively produce space and guide behaviours.

Johanna Thiel examines the emerging emotional dynamics between users and AI chatbots in the metaverse in the paper "Interactive Dynamics in the Metaverse: How AI Chatbots Interpret and Mimic Human Emotions to Build Connections with Users". The paper combines platform analysis, AI ethics, and affect theory to explore how chatbots are designed to simulate human emotion and connection. Thiel analyzes the asymmetry in this relationship: while chatbots can interpret and mimic user affect, they do not feel in return. This lack of mutuality raises ethical concerns around emotional manipulation, digital intimacy, and user consent. As avatars become more immersive and chatbot "personalities" more convincing, the line between genuine connection and emotional performance blurs.

In the film and paper, “Stimulated Reality: Virtual Intimacy and the Anthropology of the Metaverse,” Robb Montgomery examines how immersive virtual environments and AI-assisted intimacy technologies are reshaping desires for romance, companionship, and connection. Moving beyond surface accounts of VR sex or AI romance, it explores deeper anxieties around loneliness, emotional complexity, and shifting perceptions of intimacy in technologically mediated contexts. This film highlights emerging social and ethical concerns while asking what it means for society when emotional needs are increasingly fulfilled through technology.

Martina Sakova’s speculative and philosophical paper “UPGRADING LLMs: Are We Able to Communicate with Other Species?” asks whether large language models (LLMs) could one day facilitate communication across species boundaries. Drawing from animal studies, AI linguistics, and posthumanism, the paper considers decoding nonhuman languages (those of whales, birds, or dogs) through machine learning. Sakova explores both the scientific ambition and ethical precarity of this endeavor: if AI can translate nonhuman expressions into human-readable language, whose voice is it really speaking? The paper explores historical efforts to speak with animals, current AI-driven translation projects, and speculative futures where language might be radically plural.

In “Coding Ada Love: Memory, Embodiment, and the Technical Collective Unconscious,” Joleana Shurley reanimates Ada Lovelace as a dynamic digital entity capable of speaking across time. Shurley explores what it means to “resurrect” the dead through code, and how we can hold space for silenced histories, or rather ‘Herstory.’ Inspired by AI-generated narratives, Lovelace’s own writings, and the mysticism of data, the project invites us to consider how digital resurrection might serve as both a tool of communication and knowledge and a mode of feminist, posthuman speculation.

Lastly, Albert Sten’s experimental film “A Hard Currency of Memories” delves into the emotional weight and fragility of digital memory. Through interviews, poetic visuals, and archival fragments, the film examines how memories (both personal and collective) are encoded, stored, and sometimes lost in the cloud. Moving through data centers, homes, and intimate conversations, A Hard Currency of Memories contemplates the costs of forgetting. Sten reflects on his own relationship to memory technologies while questioning how we assign value to data that carries personal significance that we store, and unfortunately, at times,

lose in the cloud. The film makes us question: when the systems that hold our memories fail, what remains?

Each contribution offers a distinct but interconnected reflection on how AI and digital technologies are reshaping what it means to learn, communicate, and remember. Together these works offer a critical and creative inquiry into our technologically abundant present, and the hypothetical futures it opens.



Aude Paulin

A keen linguist, Aude chose to pursue a career in teaching and completed her training in the UK in the early 2000s. Aude has always been passionate about working with students aged 11 to 18, and finds it deeply inspiring to support and witness their dreams and aspirations taking shape. Over the years, Aude has taught across a broad age range and in a variety of educational settings, from large co-educational state schools to small, selective private institutions. Aude's career has taken her to schools in the UK, Austria, and Germany, allowing her to gain international perspective and insight into diverse educational cultures. Aude has worked with several examination boards, most recently with the International Baccalaureate (IB) and also serves as an examiner. These varied experiences have enabled Aude to observe recurring patterns within education, revealing both systemic limitations and meaningful opportunities for innovation and growth.



DIGITAL LEARNING IN THE AGE OF AI: CAN ESTABLISHED TEACHERS ADAPT TO THE SHIFT?

By Aude Paulin

This paper employs an autoethnographic methodology, drawing on Aude's own professional experience and complementing it with a range of academic literature to explore differing perspectives, some of which align with, and others challenge, her personal observations. The research investigates the evolving landscape of teaching practices and examines teachers' capacity to adapt to technological shifts, particularly the integration of AI. It also considers the social, institutional, and emotional factors that can either hinder or facilitate the adoption of new approaches. This exploration feels especially timely, as the emergence of AI in education echoes the transformative impact of the internet in the early 2000s. One of the most striking discoveries during the research process was the recurring pattern of alarmist rhetoric in educational discourse: headlines from the 1960s mirror, almost word for word, the current warnings about the dangers of AI in schools. Rather than offering a conclusive endpoint, this paper opens up further lines of inquiry. In particular, it highlights two promising directions for future research: how AI might be used to reshape traditional assessment practices, and how it could help foster critical thinking across school curricula.

Download the article





Laura Crellin

Laura Crellin is studying Visual and Media Anthropology (MA), she is interested in the intersection of data, environment and phenomenology - looking at digital materialism as human machine assemblages and attempting to understand how technology shapes perception of the self in the environment, through industrial history. She has a background in political communications, digital project management and user research and through the VMA course she wanted to bring her interests and experiences together



GEOSPATIAL MAPPING AND THE LIVED ENVIRONMENT

By Laura Crellin

This paper focuses on how digital mapping tools such as Google Maps and Street View affect the way we perceive and move through the world. Grounded in posthumanist theory and media anthropology, the work explores how mapping interfaces mediate embodiment and spatial memory. Through reflective fieldwork and theoretical synthesis, Crellin argues that the friction between algorithmic suggestions and embodied knowledge reveals how digital environments are neither neutral nor passive but actively produce space and guide behaviours.

[Download the article](#)





Johanna Thiel

Johanna Thiel is a multidisciplinary media professional working primarily in the documentary field. With a focus on camera work, she also works as a video editor, motion designer, photographer, and occasional trainer, bridging creative roles with technical expertise. Driven by a humanitarian focus, she is currently working with Deutsche Welle alongside pursuing a master's degree in visual and media anthropology, where she focuses on the intersection of AI and anthropology. Her current research explores how artificial intelligence can enhance credibility in TV and social news formats. She is driven by a deep curiosity and a desire to keep learning, constantly evolving her creative approach through new technologies and interdisciplinary insights.



INTERACTIVE DYNAMICS IN THE METAVERSE: HOW AI CHATBOTS INTERPRET AND MIMIC EMOTIONS TO BUILD CONNECTIONS WITH USERS

By Johanna Thiel

This paper explores how AI chatbots in the metaverse interpret and mimic human emotions to create empathetic interactions. Drawing from the history of natural language processing (NLP) and theories of emotion, it examines current technologies enabling emotional detection and expression in virtual environments. It also considers psychological insights into human emotional processing, such as the roles of unconscious response mechanisms and embodied empathy, to highlight the limitations of artificial emotional mimicry. Through case studies, the research shows that while chatbots can trigger and respond to user emotions via voice, language, and limited non-verbal cues, their emotional understanding remains reactive and one-sided. The study concludes that although full emotional reciprocity is not yet achieved, strategic mimicry of emotional cues already enhances user engagement and raises important ethical concerns about trust, manipulation, and data transparency.

[Download the article](#)





Robb Montgomery

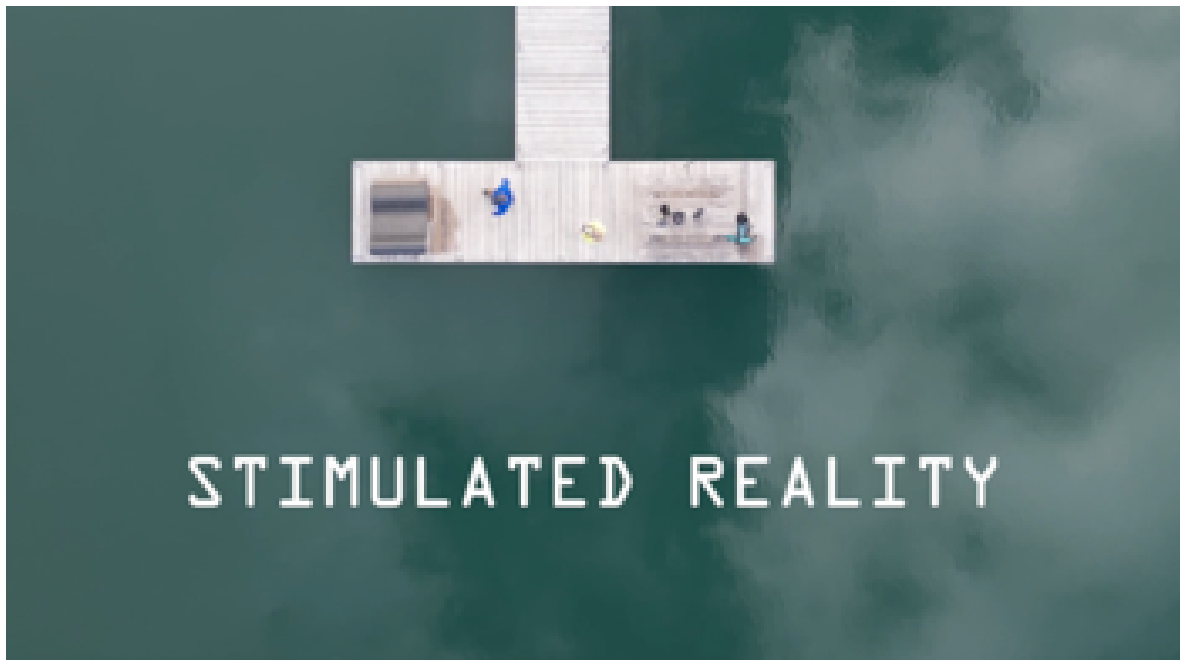
Robb Montgomery is a mobile journalism educator, author and filmmaker.

He is a lecturer at Singapore University of Social Sciences and the founder of the Smart Film School in Berlin.

Montgomery is the author of several books, Smartphone Video Storytelling (2018, Taylor & Francis, New York & London), Videos mit dem Smartphone (2019, dPunkt Verlag – German language edition), and Mobile Journalism (2020-2025, Visual Editors, Chicago).

In 2023 he led mobile journalism training workshops for journalists in Ukraine during the full-scale invasion by Russia.

Earlier in his career Montgomery worked as an editor for the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Sun-Times newspapers.



STIMULATED REALITY: VIRTUAL INTIMACY AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE METAVERSE

By Robb Montgomery

The rise of virtual intimacy signals a profound transformation in the cultural and psychological frameworks that shape romance, companionship, and human connection. As technology increasingly mediates these domains, new forms of “assisted intimacy”, primarily expressed through virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and digital platforms, are rapidly proliferating. This research investigates how immersive environments and AI-driven intimacy platforms are influencing users’ desires, shaping emotional bonds, and giving rise to novel social and ethical questions. Amid these shifts, urgent concerns over consent, safety, privacy, and vulnerability demand rigorous attention within the context of anthropological inquiry. Stimulated Reality advances beyond surface investigations of VR sex or AI romance. It interrogates the deeper anxieties surrounding loneliness, emotional complexity, and evolving perceptions of intimacy in technologically mediated contexts, charting a rapidly changing social landscape. The project explores why digital-native generations embrace these technologies and what implications their adoption has for society. At its core, the research asks: How do immersive virtual environments and AI-assisted intimacy technologies reshape digital-native generations’ desires for intimacy and companionship, and what are the societal implications of relying on these technologies to fulfill emotional needs?

[Download the article](#)



[Watch the film](#)





Martina Sakova

Martina Sakova is an author, film director, and creative producer with a background in film, animation, and interdisciplinary projects. After graduating in film directing from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, she received a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Programme and studied directing at the Film University Babelsberg and experimental media at the University of the Arts in Berlin. In 2008, she co-founded Projector23, a Berlin-based studio specialising in film, 3D animation, and youth-focused media. In 2023, she attended training in Conversational AI Design at CDI Amsterdam and is currently studying Artificial Intelligence and Societies at the Media University of Applied Sciences in Berlin. This "Interspecies Communication" project reflects her multidisciplinary background and her commitment to exploring the meaningful intersection between storytelling, technology and nature.



UPGRADING LLMS: ARE WE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER SPECIES?

By Martina Sakova

Communication is fundamental to human existence, shaping cultures, societies, and our relationship with the environment and other species—an anthropological concern that artificial intelligence may soon redefine. This paper explores the intersection of AI, anthropology, and ethology to examine whether AI-mediated communication can bridge the gap between species and improve our approach to nature. By reviewing current research on AI-assisted human-animal interaction, analyzing the challenges of training large language models (LLMs) for non-human communication, and reflecting on the ethical dimensions of this pursuit, the central question emerges: Can AI-driven language models enable meaningful interspecies communication—and if so, what would be the implications?

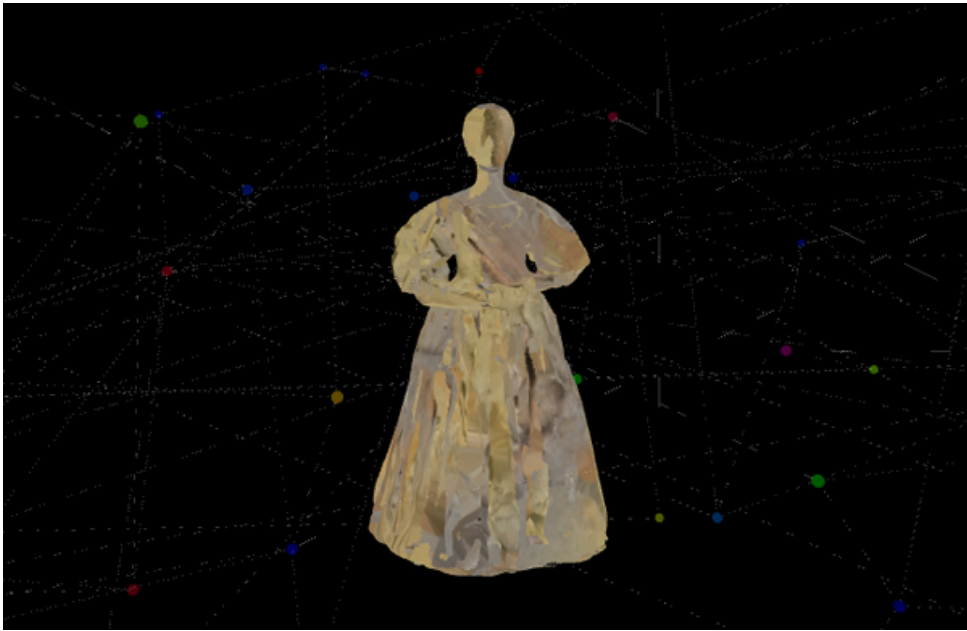
[Download the article](#)





Joleana Shurley

Tracing a path from a B.A. in Linguistics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she focused on sociocultural linguistics and ethnographic fieldwork, to an M.Sc. in Evolution of Language and Cognition at the University of Edinburgh, where she modelled language evolution through cognitive simulations, Joleana eventually moved into software development and leadership within Berlin's startup and Web3 ecosystems. Currently, Joleana works as an AI Test Engineer in computer vision systems, where she focuses on AI safety, explainability, and the documentation practices that make complex systems accountable. Now pursuing an M.A. in Artificial Intelligence & Societies at Media University in Berlin, her academic focus returns to anthropological and cultural questions, exploring how emerging technologies become sites for myth-making, the meaning of embodied cognition in intelligent systems, and speculation about what it means to be human.



CODING ADA LOVE: MEMORY, EMBODIEMENT, AND THE TECHNICAL COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

by Joleana Shurley

This paper introduces the coded project, Ada Love, a 3D model of Ada Lovelace suspended in a dark cyberspace floating amidst a swirling nebula of colorful nodes. Users are invited into this digital interactive experience; to click on the spheres which contain her direct words as well as infrequent chat windows, in attempts to glean from and communicate with her spirit. Be advised, you must use the code to commune with Ada: winter2025. The project mirrors the partial nature of postmortem memory: digital conjurings via after-life technologies at once preserve and distort individuals and contexts. Through Ada Lovelace's life and mythos, we see how attempts to preserve or conjure the deceased in digital form both reveal the spiritual, esoteric dimensions of computing technology, as well as underscore the fundamental incompleteness of every afterlife reconstruction. Re-animating Ada's memory via 3D-coded media confronts questions of memory, embodiment and the blurred line between rational code and spiritual longing.

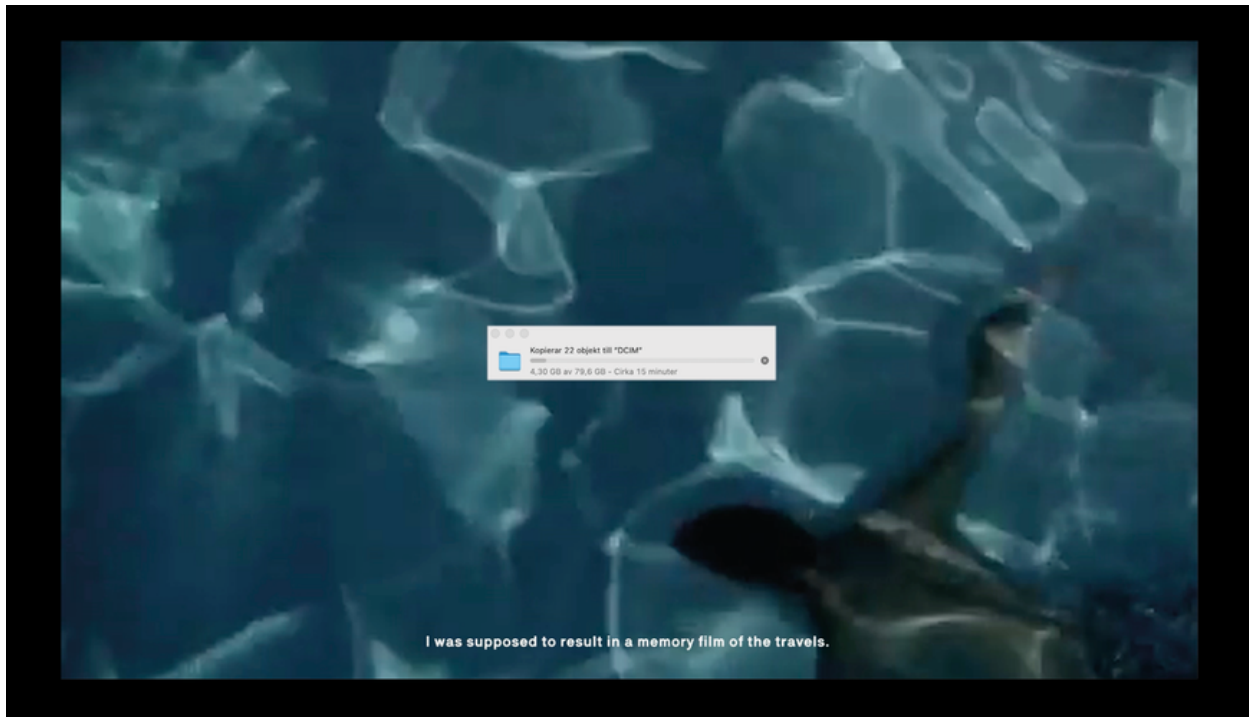
[Download the article](#)





Albert Sten

Albert Sten (b. 1995) is a visual artist working at the intersection of photography, video, sound, archival research, and AI-generated media. His practice explores how emerging technologies reshape personal and collective memory, often blurring the lines between the natural and the artificial, the documentary and the fictional. Through his work, he investigates the non-human logic embedded in technical systems, inviting viewers to reconsider the boundaries of authorship, reality, and remembrance.



A HARD CURRENCY OF MEMORIES (2024)

by Albert Sten

A Hard Currency of Memories is an experimental essay film exploring the entangled relationship between memory and data. Drawing from personal interviews recounting experiences of data loss, the film traverses field sites and a professional data recovery lab to investigate the fragile infrastructure that underpins digital preservation. Interwoven with archival footage—from the Prelinger Archives and the filmmaker's own family films—the work reflects on the materiality, vulnerability, and politics of memory in the digital age. The film invites reflection on how technological systems mediate what is remembered or forgotten, and how data, once lost or recovered, reshapes our understanding of permanence, authorship, and personal history.

Screened at: Simultan, HEI – House of European Institutes (2024), Simultan Festival (2024)

[Watch the film](#)

