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Digital Anthropology: Technology and the Frontiers of the Human

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The mid-twentieth century paradigm of cybernetics, with its focus on control, communication, and feedback loops in complex systems, provided a crucial framework for understanding the logic of the networks that would come to define our age. This logic finds its ultimate expression in the contemporary digital condition, which Marshall McLuhan presciently analyzed as a new stage where media act as comprehensive extensions of our nervous systems and social bodies. Today, this is no longer a prediction but a foundational reality: the Digital Revolution constitutes a fundamental anthropological event, reconfiguring the core categories of being, agency, and community.

Our pervasive immersion in algorithmic environments, datafield selves, and virtual presence continuously test the established boundaries of the human. The emergence of the *Homo Digitalis*, as termed by David Miller, signifies a new condition where, following Bernard Stiegler, technology seems to form the very essence of the human, yet operates as a *pharmakon*, simultaneously a remedy for and a poison to memory, attention, and the social bond. In a world of increasingly porous boundaries between organism and machine, where psychic and artificial forms of intelligence interact constituting emergent social networks, philosophy's perennial questions demand urgent re-examination within digitally mediated existence.

This thematic issue of the *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* seeks to interrogate this transforming landscape through a dialogue between philosophical tradition and contemporary interdisciplinary thought. We aim to foster a systematic reflection on how the digital reconfigures human experience and identity.

The inquiry navigates several critical frontiers. A primary challenge lies in developing an Ontology of the Digital and understanding the new Anthropological *a priori*. This pursuit moves beyond asking what digital technology does to interrogate what it is and, more fundamentally, what kind of world and subject it co-constitutes. It begins by grappling with the metaphysical status of the “digital body” and the nature of “virtual presence.” Is a digitally extended or represented self a derivative illusion, or does it constitute a genuine mode of being-in-the-world? Phenomenological inquiry, particularly the work of Thomas Fuchs on intracorporeally, provides a crucial lens, examining how empathy, social understanding, and shared presence are mediated – and potentially transformed – through digital interfaces that both connect and disembody. This analysis of mediated experience intersects with a macro-level investigation into how the pervasive infrastructure of platforms, algorithms, and data

networks actively constitutes a new historical and existential *a priori*. In the spirit of Peter Sloterdijk's spherology, these digital infrastructures are not neutral containers but active, atmospheric forces that generate new "spaces of coexistence," defining the rules of engagement, visibility, and interaction. Finally, this ontological shift reconfigures the very notion of agency. Following the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour, agency is no longer a property exclusive to humans but is distributed across hybrid networks. The question thus becomes: how do algorithms, interfaces, and data flows act as participants in shaping action, meaning, and social reality? Together, these perspectives – phenomenological, existential, and sociotechnical – frame the digital not as an additional layer of reality, but as a constitutive dimension of a new anthropological condition.

This ontological reconfiguration directly implicates a second frontier: Ethics, Agency, and Technomoral Virtues. The central problem here is no longer merely applying traditional moral frameworks to new tools, but understanding how the very conditions for autonomy, responsibility, and deliberation are being recast within algorithmic and datafied environments. A core challenge lies in the diffusion of responsibility: as decisions are increasingly shaped by or delegated to algorithmic systems and distributed networks, traditional models of individual moral accountability become inadequate.

The reconfiguration of ethics and agency is inseparable from a third critical frontier: that of Algorithmic Governmentality and Infrastructures of Power. The Foucauldian concept of governmentality – the art of governing combining techniques of domination, disciplining, and regulating populations – finds its most radical contemporary expression in the digital milieu. Platforms and algorithms are not mere neutral tools; they constitute active infrastructures of government that produce new political rationalities and forms of subjectivation. This systemic exercise of power intimately shapes a fourth domain: the digital transformation of Subjectivity, Identity, and (Dis)connection. The formation of the self is now staged within a field tensioned between cultural imperatives of authenticity and the contemporary compulsions of self-exploitation and relentless optimization. The digital mediation of sociality raises profound questions about the future of interiority, spirituality, and the possibility for genuine, affectively anchored connection.

These shifts force a fifth, methodological reconsideration of Epistemology and the very concept of *Homo Digitalis*. The ethnographic "field" itself becomes hybrid, fluid, and often non-localized, demanding innovative approaches such as digital ethnography and the tracing of sociotechnical networks. This new terrain creates a constitutive, and often problematic, tension between the depth of qualitative, hermeneutic understanding and the broad, quantifying logic of Big Data analytics. A sixth frontier concerns the altered experiences of Temporality, Memory, and their Politics, fundamentally shaped by new regimes of digital acceleration. This structural acceleration, a core concern of Paul Virilio's critique of speed and perception, manifests in the relentless velocity of information flows, the compression of attention, and the demand for real-time interaction, reshaping the very fabric of social time. These converging lines of inquiry compel us, seventh, to look toward the Thresholds of the Human, to critically evaluate the competing utopian and dystopian narratives of transhumanism and posthumanism.

Finally, a distinctive and revealing challenge emerges in the domain of Creativity, Humor and Digital Culture. Until recently, creativity was considered an exclusive capacity of humans or intelligent beings. Given that AI can now replicate many activities characteristic of humans, the question arises whether machines can be genuinely intelligent or if creativity remains an exclusive human trait. In other words, does AI have the capacity to generate novelty, or is it

limited to recombining existing information? This foundational interrogation finds a concrete and pervasive testing ground in the phenomenon of digital humor. As a socially situated practice, humor is profoundly transformed online, shaped by platform affordances, algorithmic visibility, and networked virality.

We invite submissions that explore these interconnected themes:

- Ontology of the Digital and the Anthropological A Priori
- Ethics, Agency, and Technomoral Virtues
- Governmentality, Algorithmic Power, and Digital Infrastructures
- Subjectivity, Identity, and (Dis)connection
- Epistemology and Methodology: The Field of *Homo Digitalis*
- Temporality, Memory, and the Politics of the Digital
- Thresholds of the Human: Utopias, Dystopias, and Possible Futures
- Creativity, Humor and Digital Culture

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