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Scene/unseen – Approaches to VR, biosensing and eyetracking in Digital Geography

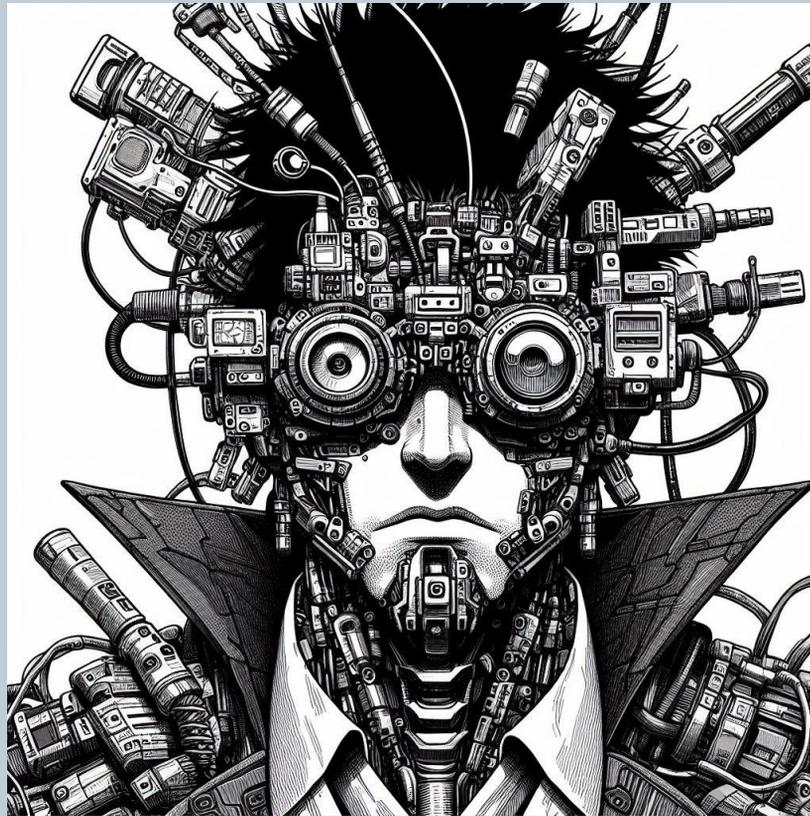


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Tess Osborne (University of Leicester)
Phil Jones (University of Birmingham)

07.05.2024 12:00-13:30 (Hörsaal 5)

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It is commonly accepted that the digital is now inescapably interwoven with our everyday lives. There are, however, some areas where this connection appears more explicit, particularly where technological artefacts are literally connected to our bodies. In this paper we explore three of these technologies, virtual reality, biosensing and eyetracking. All three involve body-worn devices that attempt to make visible the invisible: VR immerses us, seeing digital worlds that otherwise exist only in code; biosensing renders our physiology into numbers and graphs; while eyetracking literally lets us see what we see.

In *A research agenda for digital geographies* (2023) we highlighted key themes that require critical attention from digital geographers, in particular intimacy, embodiment and fragility. For this paper we use VR, biosensing and eyetracking as case studies for reflecting on the intimacy of our connections with technology and how this intimacy shapes our understanding of the body. We also highlight the fragility of these connections and their dependence not on the materiality of a piece of technology but on the whims of the corporation that created them. Drawing on some of our experiments with different pieces of equipment, we reflect on both how they can be used as tools for generating research materials but also how they allow us to critique the wider ambitions of the tech sector.

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Biographies:



Tess Osborne is a digital and health geographer based at the University of Leicester. Her work has examined the research potential of biosensing technologies as well as questions around urban stress and wellbeing in older populations. She is a co-founder and current chair of the Royal Geographical Society's Digital Geographies Research Group.



Phil Jones is a cultural and digital geographer who has worked at the University of Birmingham since 2003. He has published on a range of issues from urban regeneration and creative economy to walking methods and wellbeing. He has an abiding interest in technology and is a co-founder and previous chair of the Royal Geographical Society's Digital Geographies Research Group.

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