

Editorial for Issue 7.1 Virtual Creativity (VCR)

Themed Issue: Revisiting *Astronauts and Avatars*

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Welcome to this first issue of Virtual Creativity. The journal has been re-launched this year, extending its reach and its potential impact in the field of Arts, Science, and New Technologies. This themed issue is the result of ideas formed two years ago at a special symposium held at the *Towards a Science of Consciousness Conference* held at the University of Helsinki in the summer of 2015. The symposium entitled *Astronauts and Avatars* brought together a visual artist, a dancer and philosopher, a filmmaker engaged in neuroscience and a space scientist and was the starting point to a conversation that explored the link between the experience of the body in extremes of space such as those found in the zero gravity conditions in outer space or the relationship to embodiment in virtual space. A central question was how artists and scientists approach the relationship between embodiment and technology, and between the body, space and consciousness. The full symposium report with the abstracts of the speakers can be found at the very end of this issue.

In this issue the conversation continues in the first three articles presented here. Moving from the complex embodied/disembodied experience of the avatar body in collaborative virtual environments, through to the links made between space art and virtual worlds, and finally to an exploration of the very real experience of zero gravity in the context of contemporary artists' research.

Catarina de Sousa contributes an article *Virtual Corporeality and Aesthetic Experience* in which she considers that the experience of the body in the Metaverse is not always an experience of the flesh when considering the avatar. In her article she explores the embodied mind, the phenomenal body, and embodiment in collaborative virtual environments. The article explores how virtual corporeality may emerge from this tension in the manipulation of avatars in Creative Collaborative Virtual Environments, what affordances enable this emergence, and how it impacts aesthetic and creative experience. In *Art in Weightlessness: From Outer Space to Virtual Worlds* Maja Murnik suggests that what she terms Space art and art within virtual worlds share conceptual and even ontological commonalities. Related to this are three issues that she examines: the 'problem of gravity', the extensions of the body and the issue of scientific abstraction. Several art projects are discussed relating to these themes including the Futurist manifestos of aerial art, space poetry, and Slovenian 'postgravity' artist Dragan Živadinov's *Biomechanics Noordung* and *Noordung:: 1995–2045*. Finally, in *Naïve subjects: intra actions and gravitational states* artist Louise K. Wilson explores the field of contemporary artists' research of varying gravitational states. Wilson herself participated in a parabolic flight above Star City in Moscow in 2001 and gathered interviews pre and post flight with the participants. Wilson emphasizes that the temporary transformative states that are experienced in a parabolic flight are strongly affective and meaningful and sets it in a longer timeline

of her own experiences in specific research environments being subjected to scientific study.

The second part of the issue focuses on the body's experience of gravity and this time we are very pleased to present this through a photo essay, a piece of art writing, and finally a symposium report. The photo essay by Artist-Astronaut Sarah Jane Pell entitled *Following the body's natural edge to the Abyss of Space* explores what she terms the underexplored bodily transformations that occur beyond the impact of the Earth's environment. In her most recent work 'Performing Astronautics' she seeks to translate the first-person tacit knowledge of the 'astronautic body' and connect or differentiate it from other forms of embodiment on Earth and under the Sea (Pell has also worked as a commercial diver). Through joining performing arts practice with astronautics she aims to harness the more intangible qualities of the microgravity experience. Further to this is a piece of Art Writing that imagines a quotidian experience of gravity and falling entitled *It's Ok to Fall*. In it artist Taey Iohe writes of Muni, a fictional character, who undertakes a journey to a zero-gravity training facility in Ireland. During this journey she explores what it means 'to fall'. Finally the Symposium report on *Astronauts and Avatars: Exploring Consciousness through the Art and Science of Embodiment* completes the issue. The outline of the symposium is given alongside the abstracts from each of the speakers, Susan Kozel, Thais Russomano, Louise K. Wilson, and Pia Tikka. There are also excerpts from the interview conducted with Susan Kozel undertaken by myself and presented as part of the symposium.

We would like to thank all of the contributors to this volume, and to the journal reviewers who have enabled the work to be developed and expanded upon in such interesting ways.

I am very pleased to become the editor of this journal and I look forward to producing a series of high quality issues over the coming years, and engaging in current discussions in Art, Technology, and Science in the context of virtual creativity. If you have an idea for a future special issue related to the themes of this journal please do get in touch with us. We are also interested in supporting interdisciplinary conferences in Art, Technology, and Science to bring their conference discussions to a wider audience reach. To this end our next issue 7.2 focuses on work presented at ISEA2017 in Columbia, the first ISEA to be held in South America. Founded in the Netherlands in 1990, ISEA International (formerly Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts) is an organisation fostering interdisciplinary academic discourse and exchange among culturally diverse organisations and individuals working with art, science and technology.