

Digital Human Twins: Our Future Data Selves - Opening keynote for Body of Knowledge conference as part of Digital Body Festival London November 2024

Bodies of Knowledge Conference was a key element in the Digital Body Festival London November 2024 - Talks and Panel Discussions.

Artists, digital innovators, policy, funders and creative industries experts discuss the new directions and ideas that are driving forward thought around digital culture, technology and theories of embodiment.

Ghislaine Boddington delivered the Open Keynote - Digital Human Twins: Our Future Data Selves.

This keynote explored the evolving concept of Digital Human Twins as the next frontier in self-representation, with a particular focus on the convergence of data, technology, and the human body. Digital Human Twins are set to become our future data-driven companions, evolving alongside us through AI and real-time biometric data.

Using Boddington's three decades of research into the virtual physical body, presence and intimacy and my present practice-led research into AI Hybrid BioTwins she delved into these developments, investigating the ethical, philosophical, and societal implications, including the issues around ownership and privacy of personal biometric data.

The virtual representation of self has a history rooted in body tech experimenters since the late 1980s using performative telepresence, motion capture, animation and, in the 21st century, in gaming, e-sports and virtual worlds. It has been further extended by more recent developments in augmented reality, sense tech, immersion experiences and holography. Performing arts historical examples to be shared will include Rebeca Allen with Twyla Tharp, Yacov Sharir, Company in Space and Merce Cunningham amongst others.

Today the ability of digital human twins to support our personal and professional lives across health, education, professional, entertainment and social interactions illustrates a profound shift in how we perceive our identities and our presence in the world. As this research suggests, digital human twins will not only augment physical presence, but will grow and learn with us across life, a companion that could also represent us after death.

This presentation was illustrated by Boddington's long term expertise through her creative direction within the collectives shinkansen - sound and movement research (1989-2004) and body>data>space (2005-date), recognised pioneering work on the live body and virtual physical blending.

From international curated programmes of work such as Virtual Incarnations (Dance Umbrella 1999-2001), Future Physical (Arts Council 2002-4) and Robots and Avatars

(Nesta/EU 2009-12) and immersive installations like "Me and My Shadow" (National Theatre/EU 2012) and Collective Reality (Nesta/FutureFest 2016-20).

She drew on recent research led practice work through her research at University of Greenwich - the My AI Hybrid BioTwin project (2021 to date). These public facing projects have, with her expert commentary work for the BBC on the human factor within technological futures since 2016, demonstrated how immersive environments are challenging the traditional boundaries of selfhood.

By examining both the historical and contemporary use of avatars and virtual companions, this presentation kicked started the conference and provoked discussion on the future of identity and presence, the evolutions to come and the psychological/ethical frameworks necessary to protect and maintain these personalised digital extensions of ourselves. Ultimately, this presentation asked: how far can we go in merging physical and virtual identities, and what will it mean for future generations to possess such a complex, data-driven self?

"What an important, thoughtful contribution- really framing the event and providing historic and contemporary context to many of the talks. Throughout the day, speakers kept coming back to the important points you raised specifically regarding fake newness and the link between diversity and innovation. I am looking forward to the recording of this keynote as I think your reflections here will continue to mark a reference point for years to come. Brilliant contribution!"

"Agreed - this needs to be shared more widely because there are a lot of artists, work, and important moments that can be lost - without people like Ghislaine to keep them alive, the knowledge doesn't pass on"

Supported by Digital Body Festival - audience of dance technologists, creative industries experts, immersion and policy experts.