Editorial: Everything Is A Matter Of Distance

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& Pablo Velasco

In physics, distance is measured as the product of speed and time; in mathematics, it is defined as the total path travelled by an object from one point to another. Both definitions share an operational clarity but capture only a single dimension of the relationship between objects. The lived reality of distance—and its counterpart, proximity—resists such simplifications. As the Uruguayan poet Cristina Peri Rossi once wrote, "in love as in boxing, everything is a matter of distance",[1] invoking a layered and ambiguous interplay in which closeness and separation constantly reconfigure one another while also engendering feelings that defy to be framed into a formula, or so we think.

One recurring question in the contributions that follow is how space itself is produced, shaped, and manipulated in contemporary techno-culture. Proximity today is engineered through techniques of approximation—statistical modes of patterning identities, collectivities, and affective bonds to corporate infrastructures. Critical vocabularies have long privileged *distance*—critical distance, aesthetic distance—but we are already immersed in these approximations as we are addressed, enrolled, and captured through platforms and other interfaces of affective persuasion. The challenge, then, is to ask: how might critical digital culture research manoeuvre in this terrain—from platforms to infrastructures, from interface to aesthetics, from love to boxing?

The articles in this issue shift across different media - from sound to software, visual cultures to performance. The authors explore how bodies move and are moved, how images, and sounds are extracted, and transcribed in algorithmic technologies, and what is not captured in the dynamics of near-distant-remote modes of sensing and modeling. All this implies different scales and recalibrations where proximity is not necessarily "near" in the traditional sense (but it can be); remoteness is not necessarily only "far." The algorithmic politics of distance must also contend with the *logistics of approximation*, i.e. the statistical basis that is evident for example in machine learning technologies, including their potential modes of violence. A violence that is both geo-political, takes place in systemic exclusions of people, and generative forces activated by near or far relations that pull in human, nonhuman

and more-than-human bodies into datasets, representing them as numbers that can be pulled and pushed into exponentially evolving input and output relations.

The publication offers various interpretations of such relations, and it builds on the research workshop organised by DARC/Digital Aesthetics Research Center (Aarhus University) in collaboration with transmediale festival for art and digital culture, Berlin, in 2025. It expands on workshop's 'proceedings', a process started in the run to the transmediale festival when participants, prior to meeting IRL, circulated and commented on essays of 1,000 words. Essays have been published, edited and commented on a shared wiki (using Media Wiki software), discussed (and reduced) at a workshop, published and distributed at the festival[2] using web-to-print techniques that build on the JavaScript library Paged.js[3] and the works of an extended community network.

We use the word 'proceedings' as a verb and an action as we continue to interrogate how proximity and distance unfold in the production of academic writing, for instance the idea of peer review, or the conventions of formats and formatting, or the use of particular software for text processing or print. To proceed with is a continuous action that unfolds in multiple ways and over time, with multiple methods, across a shared space of inquiry which sometimes is the networked server, or the rooms in Silent Green where participants and contributors to this issue gathered. To proceed with research is to continuously redefine relations and distances; stretching, spacing, pulling things, concepts and bodies into and out of relations that can be processed or (mis)understood, or explained, or followed, scaled, or reduced, fit into tables or expanded into cities and streets. In these movements relations are re-composed and experienced in different ways proposing new interpretations and constellations of reading and moving bodies.

Such recalibrations are necessary to account for how different bodies are pulled into relations by different forces--forces that shift with the changing coordinates of time and space. This dynamic is apparent in the contribution by Megan Phipps who explores the digital and technologically mediated condition of over-exposure to signal and image, and its impact on our sensorium. Drawing on the experimental work of VJ Peter Rubin and the architecture of Berlin techno events in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Phipps investigates techno-aesthetics generated by Rubin's "sensory architecture" – a fusion of visuals, movement, and rhythm crafted for such events as Mayday and Chromapark. In these spaces, bodies are not simply immersed in sound and light but are tangled with the digital, network, political and architectural infrastructures that frame them. Simulation emerges as much from data structures as from embodied feedback loops. Phipps names this the *techno-ontological fold*, a conceptual frame for understanding contemporary digital life where existence is shaped by "the pulse of notifications, the infinite scroll of feeds, the curated tempo of livestreams." The effect of reduction of reality through algorithmic means also takes place sonically. Nico Daleman explores how the technology of "noise reduction", not only separates noise from an acoustic signal, but introduce its own algorithmic noise. Active noise cancelling is embedded in

many sound devices and populates our video mediations (e.g. through zoom or alikes), offering an encapsulated soundscape, or a transductive transparency (through "hearthrough" modes). Daleman argues, however, that this process is not merely a naive phenomena, and introduces two dissimilar modes of perception: the one more commonly perceived, and the second and algorithmically altered one. Processes of filtering, interception, and conversion, generate a disembodied and ideal signal, a violent and alienating disruption disguised as an improved listening experience. This mediated distance takes place also through image manipulation, as Katya Sivers shows in the case of Russian mainstream media. Departing from the case of a political intervention from an employee of state media during a live broadcast, Sivers traces back the historical role of manipulated images and censorship in soviet and post-soviet political regimes. Beyond mere acts of censorship, Sivers argues that "image laundering", or the distortion and manipulation of images through technology, acts as a political fabrication of reality. Acting as an epistemic obfuscation, the practice of alteration of images, modifies the conditions upon which they can be experienced, in particular in the context of warfare imaginaries.

In their critique of algorithms and their effects on queer bodies, Christoffer Koch Andersen examines queer struggle to create distance from algorithmic capture. They trace how queer lives inhabit liminal spaces, zones "between being targeted and dismissed by algorithms," that resist and refuse the violence encoded in binary logics. These in-between states open possibilities of "keeping with the complex uncodability of transness in opposition to the binary limits of algorithmic technologies." Koch Andersen turns to aesthetic potential of this uncodability proposing that trans lives can manifest as a glitch, a disruption that both reveals and unsettles the algorithmic order. This glitch becomes a way of co-producing liminal distance making the violence of algorithmic systems visible while asserting modes of existence beyond capture. In doing so, they reposition algorithmic distance not solely as exclusion, but also as a terrain of possibility where not fitting the binary code becomes a generative act. Daria Iuriichuk examines how proximity is created through digital intimacy. Platforms like Onlyfans mediate a type of content that simulates and even commodifies intimacy. This production of proximity is, however, not natively digital, and has an embodied history, which Iuriichuk explores through the lens of choreography. In this sense, choreography is a technology that encodes tradition, social structures, and affect. The abstraction of movement is also data, and as such, the author offers choreography not only as a dance strategy, but also as an analytical tool to explore contemporary digital intimacies. Through a series of short case studies, choreography is dissected and shows both its potential to enable systems of control, and its subversive capacity. Extending these questions of mediation and value into the institutional sphere, Sami P. Itävuori examines the generative possibilities and limitations of AI in museum practice. While AI increasingly shapes how museums operate as collectors of art responsible for sharing art with the public, it also complicates how art is communicated and experienced. Itavouri contrasts the *computational approach to aesthetics* found in computer science, with its emphasis on metrics and

optimisation, with the values of artistic authenticity, creative labour and aesthetic experience. The point of contention is the fact that museums often remain passive adopters of AI-powered software, allowing artworks to circulate as digital images whose value drift from the original context. In this translation from physical to digital a shift in proximity occurs where audiences are brought closer to collections through instant access, yet distanced from sensory, spatial and cultural encounters that give art its depth.

Taken together, these contributions reveal that distance and proximity in digital systems are never fixed states, but constantly shifting relations that are engineered, contested, reimagined across sensory, political and institutional domains. Proximity is not inherently intimate, while distance is not necessarily alienating. In networked culture, they are mutable coordinates constantly influenced by algorithms, interfaces, infrastructures, and cultural practices that shape them. Digital systems continually recalibrate these relations, pulling us into certain configurations while pushing others away, often without our consent. What emerges is a complex cartography of near and far, intimate and remote, invisible and visible, which demand new methods for navigating, resisting, and reconfiguring the spaces in which we find ourselves.

When researching contemporary post-digital culture, the task is to understand the interplay between distance and proximity as a field in which to act. Peri Rossi reminds us about the rhythms of love and boxing and the affects they engender, and the terrain of technoculture might need similarly radical choreography. We must be willing to enter and exit proximity strategically: to step in when intimacy is weaponised and step back when distance breaks systems of capture. This means refusing the default corporate settings of digital infrastructures, unsettling the coordinates of near and far that algorithms stabilise, and inventing counter-geographies that redistribute access, attention, and power. Taking proximity as tactical and distance as insurgent, the challenge is to operate across these with intention of remaking the conditions of relations so that they no longer serve extraction and control but open space for collective autonomy, care and transformation.

We hope the workshop and its proceedings are an example of such intentions of which effects are assembled and maintained through collective effort. This would not have been possible without the active participation of not only those mentioned to this point, the authors of articles but also the wider network of participant-facilitators (which includes Nicolas Malevé, Søren Pold, Jussi Parikka, Maya Erin Masuda, Paul V. Schmidt, Ruben van de Ven, Matīss Groskaufmanis, Kola Heyward-Rotimi, and Maja Funke). In addition, we appreciate the institutional support of SHAPE Digital Citizenship and Digital Aesthetics Research Center at Aarhus University, the Centre for the Study of the Networked Image at London South Bank University, and transmediale festival for art and digital culture, Berlin.
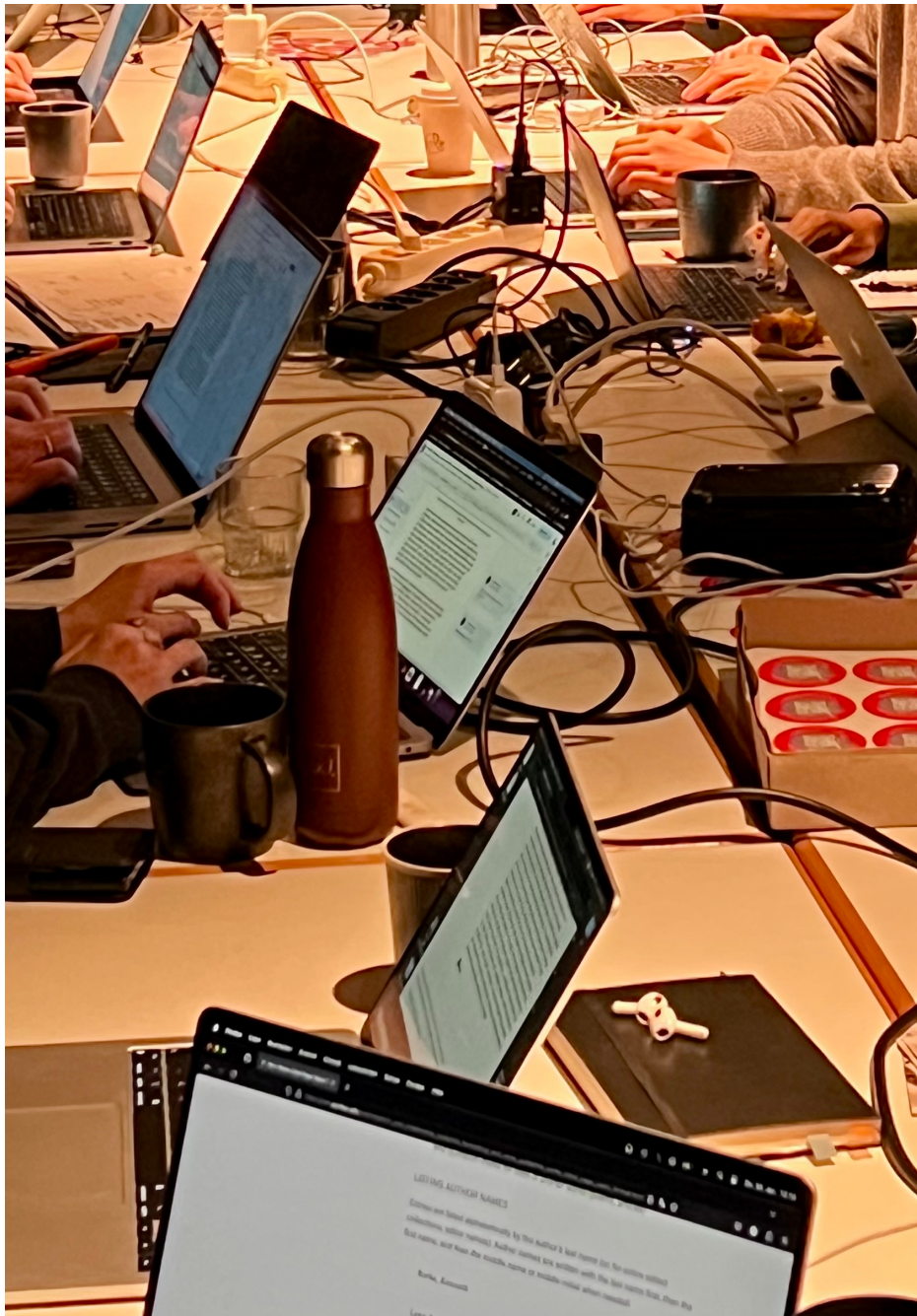
"Everything is a matter of distance" DARC workshop at Silent Green, Berlin, 29-31 January 2025.

Notes

1. ↑ Peri Rossi, Cristina. *Otra vez eros.* Lumen, 1994.
2. ↑ The proceedings publication can be downloaded at: https://ctp.cc.au.dk/semi/read/147/pdf
3. ↑ https://pagedjs.org/

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