



Break Out Groups from the Robots & Avatars Forum – 25th November 2009

Break Out Group 1

Skills Sets and Resources | Attitudes and Psychologies

Introductions of group participants flowed quickly into a wider discussion where a key concern was how to apply ideas around robots and avatars **practically, socially** and from the point of view of **people**. One participant asked the question ‘how can this be **human scale**?’ and whether the future will be ‘**technology driven or an end unto itself**?’.

Issues around **real-space** and **real-time** use of technology led into a fascinating discussion around traffic lights and road markings in cities. This provoked discussion around the **ethics** of technology as we asked questions around how certain forms of technology can be seen as giving away **responsibility**? Or how technology can be seen as offering **protection**? Conversely, discussion around the *removal* of traffic lights and road markings in cities suggested that this gives ‘**power**’ back to the individual and in particular necessitates an increase in **eye contact** between people in cities. The ethical and political implications of increased eye contact as a mode of communication were also contextualised in terms of the humanoid form of the avatar (that they have ‘eyes’) and also in terms of web based video conferencing spaces such as Skype.

There was discussion around cyber bullying with one participant suggesting that this exists for both young people, in the school scenario *and* adults, in the workplace and is already a major issue arising from the proliferation of online identities and avatars.

As we began to grapple with ideas around how it might be possible to move **beyond the ‘screen’** as frame for experiencing virtual space, we were also provoked by the question “what happens when the electricity goes off?” And by way of moving the body and the **human back into the centre** of the discussion the group also attempted to acknowledge the ‘we’ as a fundamental part of understanding the future development of digital technology. One participant commented on how important **knowledge exchange** is in the development of future thinking, criticising some sectors who currently behave as ‘islands that don’t communicate with each other’.

Social Networking sites, in particular Facebook, became important in the discussion as a tangible lens through which participants were able to articulate thoughts around virtual identity with comments around ‘degrees of **intimacy**’ in **virtual space** and the group was asked “if you *visit* Facebook or is it *in* your life?”.

The group then shared questions and thoughts that had been provoked by the forum as well as the further debate and discussion in the break out group. These questions are below:

- The avatar as your personal assistant - how can avatars be there to help us? (a bit of us that helps us)
- What are the differences between playing out and testing different identities in playgrounds and digital?
- How do we instil different patterns of responsibility in these contexts?
- How are we ‘becoming’ with these new tools?
- Is technology taking away more than it promises to give back?
- Are we driving technology or is technology driving us?
- How can we harness intergenerational skills into real collaboration?
- Is it making our lives better?
- Who is and can be in charge and what might that mean socially, politically and economically?
- How do you look a robot in the eye?
- How can we think in terms of hundreds of millions of years - and how will this help our conception of the future?