



In a world fraught with conflicts over the ability to manipulate discrete and correlative entities, Project Humedia endeavours to explore the possibilities of an understanding of a humble humanity as enmeshed media within the world. Transcending the philosophical movements from objects to things and the related debates, discourses and dichotomies with subjects and agents, we propose a step into an embrace with media and mediation between entangled constituents of this common world. Given the increasing amounts of ink spent on articulating notions of permeability and partibility of personhood and the concurrent research developing enmeshed human/animal-computer interfaces, it is only too appropriate to explore what are the broader possibilities of humans as capricious media in all temporal paradigms – as humedia.

## What is humedia

Humedia is a term coined by Ian Russell in 2007 to describe his call to transcend the evidential dominance of egoistic and individualistic obsessions with human existential exceptionalism.<sup>1</sup> Through a critical re-engagement of the enmeshment of humanity in the world as humedia, Russell suggests that we can both transcend dichotomies within philosophies of 'being' and politics of 'humanities' and enable equal sharing in the diverse and discrete mediations of our uncertain world.

At humedia's core is a transcendence of both the 'man' in 'human' and the 'being' in 'human beings'. Movements beyond discourses of 'being' acknowledge the steps taken within contemporary arts, sciences and spiritual traditions to leave behind the opposed pulpits of Western Christian human exceptionalism and Darwinian materialism. Movements beyond 'man' expand the bounds for understandings and expressions of mediated lifeworlds allowing for non-gender, non-sex, non-species and non-existence specific conceptions and practices of mediation.

This articulation of mediation may seem as if it gives primacy to practical' experience over the significance of sentiment in the world. What Project Humedia emphasises, rather, is the normalising potential of sentiment as awareness of continually present, non-exclusive acts of sharing. Thus, humedia as transcendence is both effectual and affectual through an acceptance of placement and responsibility of flows of media as entangled information, materials and sentiments.

## Why humedia

More than simply organisms, humans are weighed down by the evident task of self-discovery, revelation and understanding.

<sup>1</sup> Russell, I. 2007 'Objects and Agency: Some Obstacles and Opportunities of Modernity', *Overcoming the Modern Invention of Material Culture*, *Journal of Iberian Archaeology* (vols. 9/10), 71-87.



Thus, the conception of humans as media has the benefit that it does not make a distinction between material functions of the human organism and the communicative functions of, for lack of a better term, the human mind. In an art historical sense, perhaps this concept should be articulated as humans as multimedia. However, in seeking to transcend posthumanist discourse, Project Humedia feels that the term multimedia is redundant in that media is already plural. Thus the addition of the prefix multi- suggests that media inherently requires choice – towards one medium. Project Humedia proposes that humans are immediately and always have been present as media and are not reducible to any single medium. What we call ‘humans’ are merely the tangles of flows and webs of interrelated media, and thus we are a location for development, change, growth and discovery. This philosophical-political call is not new nor is the evidence for mediation. The practical (not conceptual) enmeshment of humans within media is visible in all modes of temporal paradigms – and through a recognition of this, Project Humedia will achieve:

### *enablement*

We are and never have been without media or mediations in this world. There is no vacuum in which an ideally formed human functions. Although there can be a blind assumption made by some of an ideally formed ‘human being’ by which we measure experience and philosophical enquiry, Project Humedia asserts that what is core to human narratives is not ideal form but adaptable mediation.

Humans are in constant and continual negotiation with media in their everyday lifeworlds. Shoes on feet, clothes on bodies, air in lungs, wind on skin, tools with tasks, light with eyes, mobile phones and ears, keyboards and hands, the internet and social lives - media saturate our permeable participation in the world. There are also those subtle and overt mediations with prostheses (physical, digital and mental) upon which many of us rely - glasses, pacemakers, prosthetic limbs, brain-computer interfaces, neuro-prostheses, digital avatars...

Humedia incorporates all manner of media and mediations as an attempt to transcend possible prejudices or discriminations against some mediated lifeworlds. Within humedia, no distinction is necessary between what is normative and adaptive as the forms of what we may poetically term ‘humanity’ are continuously fluid. Thus, Project Humedia does not dwell in the essentialist and reductive thought patterns which seek to alienate the sentiment and desire of enablement. Humedia embraces, however, the sentiment and irony of apprehension relating to these media and mediations, and approaches these emotions as access points for discovery and the development of new understandings.

With the steadily increasing number of conflict casualties who require the use of advanced physical prostheses to accomplish everyday activities, humedia asserts the critical



need for collaborations between the arts, humanities and sciences in the normalisation of the lifeworlds of mixed mediated humans in the world. Indeed, the adoption of prostheses as modes of enablement and augmentation of the human form can be said to be found in all temporalities. Thus through Project Humedia, an opportunity to create archaeologies of media and humedia as non-exclusive narratives will become possible.

#### *ecological responsibility*

This is a step beyond human ego-centric discourse to an understanding of humans not as prime movers but as a constituent media. Thus the divisions between the world for humans and humans in the world dissolve as we accept our place in the dynamic ebbs and flows of our shared uncertain world. The radical impact of this for considerations of global ecological risks is that it forces an awareness of the constituent roles that humans play in ecological development and change without presupposing ethical or moral positions. It does not egoistically argue that we should take care of the world so that the world takes care of us. Rather, it asserts an acceptance of position within the larger ecological phenomena of existence and urges participation rather than control as a means to engage these risks.

#### *equality through mediation*

Humedia as a project transcends gender, sex and species specific conceptions of mediation in the world. It seeks to place all entities in a shared, equitable flow which – although often chaotic – allows for equal opportunity for potential intermediation. It also embraces all manner of human interaction with prostheses and augmentations, thereby transcending prejudice and discrimination against modes of human expressions and actions which may not fit accepted philosophical or ideal human forms.

#### *normalisation through mediation*

To achieve this proposed equality of form through mediation, humedia addresses directly the post-modernist fear of the loss of significance and meaning through mediation. Humedia stresses a move away from quests for authoritative truth and derision against technologies of simulation, emulation and representation. At the core of humedia is an appreciation of the critical role of sentiment in the normalisation of modes of mediation. Following the spirit of the recently departed Jean Baudrillard, Project Humedia engages the world as media through participations and shared fluid exchanges between mutually enmeshed entities. Rather than focusing on the radical changes that new mediations pose to 'traditional' lifeworlds, humedia asserts the integral similarity between all modes of mediation in all temporalities.

## *acceptance of new mediated lifeworlds*

The practical (not conceptual) enmeshment of human beings with digital media is now common knowledge. We are far beyond the science fictions and fantasies represented by mangas such as *Ghost in the Shell* (1991) or *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1994). Science today is already succeeding in the enmeshment of neuro-synaptic functions with digital code. The most notable success was in 2005, when a tetraplegic named Matt Nagle had the BrainGate chip-implant manufactured by Cyberkinetics Neurotechnology inserted into his brain, successfully controlling a right precentral gyrus (an area of the brain responsible for arm movement). Just by thinking he was able to control a robotic arm.

With the advent of active digital prostheses as modes of enablement, the divisions between 'real' and 'digital' lifeworlds are eroding. Project Humedia places itself at the brink of these divisions and endeavours to normalise the acceptance of new media and digital lifeworlds through affective intermediated events. Within Project Humedia, digital prostheses are the normalised, constituent and growing enmeshment, expression and social, physical and intellectual enablement of humans through digital media and within digital spaces and architectures.

Reconceptualising humans as (un)stable and adaptable media, humedia embraces the sentiments which normalise and enable communication through the nascent digital lifeworlds of the internet and other digital portals. This will allow for a resonance and reconceptualisation of all social science, humanities and arts research – creating spaces for narratives of humanity as media expanding the bounds and transcending the limitations of dominant temporalities and paradigms.

## **The Project**

Project Humedia will advance the intellectual and artistic exploration of the concept of humedia in all disciplines, specialisations and arts.

It will embrace all modes of media and endeavour to express fluid and shifting narratives of media in the world.

It will stage events which explore humedia as participatory, shared, intermediated, communicative exchanges between mutually enmeshed entities in the world.

