Dysphoria Mundi (Venice, 27-29 Sep 26)

Ca'Foscari University of Venice and Arsenale La Biennale di Venezia, Sep 27–30, 2026

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Dysphoria Mundi: Making and Breaking World Models.

World models, whether in their recent application in AI research, their understanding in computational theories of cognition, or in the modelling of complex earthly dynamics, seem to be the apotheosis of the drive in machine learning to absorb, and ultimately govern, the entire world. What unites these projects is therefore not a single technical architecture, nor even a single epistemology of modelling, but a shared pressure placed on the concept of the model itself. In each case, ‘world model’ names a different relation between representation, prediction, compression, and control to produce differentiable simulations of the world, in and through which an agent might learn and be trained.

Through this two-days conference, Dysphoria Mundi seeks to engage with the promissory ambitions of world models, and the estrangement they produce. Models built to understand, know, and inhabit the world often do not fit the beings that should be living through them. Following Paul B. Preciado, this misfit presents itself as a dysphoria. Rather than interpreting such dysphoria as mere errors to be corrected, or a condition to either accept or resist, Dysphoria Mundi asks what this very misfitting reveals about the structural exclusions operated by these models, the dimensions they 'shallow out', and the possibilities for praxis their opacity, paradoxically, opens up. Researchers and artists will bring their perspective and knowledge to collaboratively explore such limits and possibilities by thinking through four intersecting strands of inquiry concerned with world models, and world modelling more broadly.

Symposium program

DAY 1 (28.09) - Aula Mazzariol, Dorsoduro 3484/D, Calle Contarini, 30123 Venezia.

9.30 - 10.10: Welcome speech from Scientific

SESSION 1: Brains that model, models that world
Chair: Raffaele Andrea Buono (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

10.15 – 10.45: Mazviita Chirimuuta (University of Edinburgh)
A Genealogy of Thinking as Modelling
10.45 - 11:15: Ben Pulver (University of Toronto)
Modelling Topological Uncertainty: Towards a Situationist and Pataphysical Critique of a Cybernet-

ic Worldview
11.15 - 11.30: Coffee Break
11.30 – 12.00: Stephan Besser (University of Amsterdam)
Best Possible Worlds: Predictive Processing and the Universalizing Poetics of Generative Models
12.00 – 12.30: Aline Guillermet (University of Cambridge)
Modelling the brain and artistic world-building
12.30 – 13.00: Moritz Kriegleder (University of Vienna)
World models as conditions for machine consciousness
13.00- 13.10: Commentary by Raffaele Andrea Buono (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

SESSION 2: From representation to simulation
Chair: Riccardo Petrini (Bibliotheca Hertziana)

14.30 - 15.00: Ellen Charlesworth & Amira Moeding (University of Luxembourg & University of Cambridge)
A blind god – on counterfactual sensing and the myth of the omniscient observer
15.00 - 15.30: Lars Pinkwart (University of Zurich)
Image and action. Generative world models as 'inverse media'
15.30 - 16.00: Emilie K. Sunde (Durham University)
What ought world models look like?
16.00 - 16.30: Hannah Peuker (Ruhr University Bochum)
Redeeming the World through Simulation? World Models and the Realist Legacy of Film Theory
16.30 - 16.40: Commentary by Giulia Flenghi (Bibliotheca Hertziana)

SESSION 3: Modelling the world, burning the world
Chair: Lachlan Kermode (Brown University)

17.00 - 17.30: Jan Knöferl (University of Regensburg)
Twinned Futures of the Planetary. Governing Climate through What-If Simulations in Destination Earth
17.30 - 18.00: Charlotte Merchant (University of Oxford)
Resolution Without Realism: Doubt, Critical Limits, and the Kilometer Scale
18.00 - 18.30: Charles Stankievech & Ala Roushan (University of Toronto & OCAD University)
Colony Collapse Disorder: From Solar Cults to Planetary Computation
18.30 - 18.40: Commentary by Leonardo Impett (University of Cambridge)

DAY 2 (29.09; AM) - Arsenale - Sala d'Armi A, piano 1°, Campo de la Tana, 2169, 30122 Venezia.

10.00 - 10.20: Opening speech - Leonardo Impett (Bibliotheca Hertziana)

SESSION 4: Dysphoric imaginaries
Chair: Violaine Boutet de Monvel (Bibliotheca Hertziana)

10.20 – 10.50: Alexandra Gilliams (Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)
Worlding Beyond Representation: Artistic World Models and Planetary Coexistence
10.50 - 11.20: Jacqueline Rowley (Norwegian University of Science and Technology)
Meshes of the Possible: World Models and the Politics of Anticipation

11.20 - 11.50: Eryk Salvaggio (University of Cambridge)
Counting the World on Six Fingers
11.50 - 12.20: Silvia Cipelletti (University of Lugano)
Videographic Worldbuilding Against Algorithmic World Models
12.20 - 12.30: Commentary by Valentine Bernasconi

DAY 2 (29.09; PM) - Ca' Dolfin, Dorsoduro 3859/A, 30123 Venezia.

KEYNOTE LECTURE:
Modeling cognition and life as 'coded imperative structures'
Giuseppe Longo (École Normale Supérieure, Paris)
16.15 - 17.30: Roundtable discussion

Reference:
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