German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group

Monday, June 3rd, 2019, 18:30h

Technologies of Presence:
Modeling Emotion in Robots with Heart

Daniel White, Freie Universität Berlin & Hirofumi Katsuno, Doshisha University

Intersections between entertainment industries and artificial intelligence research in Japan have resulted in a growing interest in modeling affect and emotion for use across a variety of media platforms, including wearable devices, virtual reality, and in particular companion robots. Combining advances in computing with market explorations in technologies of care and companionship, the most recent social robots created for popular consumption in Japan augment a sense of presence and intimacy by literally giving these platforms a face. This attention to the design and ascription of agency to media technologies enables a feeling of co-awareness that incorporates non-human entities into the social network of relationships. Moreover, as these robots connect human users while also inviting them to interact directly with robot bodies via tactile features such as furry bodies and wagging tails, with sensors connected to cloud-based artificial intelligence, they not only facilitate affective interactions but also enable the collection of new kinds of emotional data.

This presentation explores the social implications of emerging affective capacities to connect intimately to and through companion robots. Drawing on discursive readings of scientific papers and fieldwork among engineers and users of social robots, the talk outlines collaborative efforts to apply an anthropology of affect and emotion to shifting relationships between technology and intimacy. By examining how artificial intelligence functions as both a technological and discursive tool driving robot design, it argues for a renewed look at how technology transforms the fictional and performative capacities through which consumers in Japan cultivate relationships with an increasing variety of social agents. In addition, given the many ethical, legal, and political implications of these developments, the talk introduces experimental ethnographic methods for building channels of communication and collaboration between anthropologists and robotics engineers.

Daniel White is a postdoctoral researcher in the Graduate School of East Asian Studies (GEAS) at Freie Universität Berlin. Trained in cultural anthropology, he analyzes cross-cultural approaches to affect and emotion in cultural policy, public institutions, and in the fields of affective computing and artificial emotional intelligence in Japan, Europe, and North America. He is currently analyzing emotion modeling architectures in affective technologies in Japan such as wearable devices, biosensors, and companion robots.

Hirofumi Katsuno is an associate professor of media studies and anthropology in the Faculty of Social Studies at Doshisha University. His primary research interest is the socio-cultural impact of new media technologies, particularly focusing on the formation of presence in technologically mediated environments. He currently researches aspects of tactile design in social robotics in Japan.

About:

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for scholars conducting research on contemporary Japan. Meetings are held once a month and are open to speakers from all disciplines of the social sciences. The event is open to all. Registration is not necessary but appreciated, online at www.dijtokyo.org.

Venue:

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)
Jōchi Kioizaka Bldg. 2F, 7-1 Kioichō,
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0094
Phone: 03-3222-5077

For directions visit dijtokyo.org/access