SS4: ELSI of Living with Cybernetic Avatars: How to Build Better Relationships between People and Avatars

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Description
In 2020, the Japanese Cabinet Office listed several ambitious goals under the project referred to as the "Moonshot R&D Program." The first of these goals is to create "a society in which people are free from the constraints of body, brain, space, and time" by utilizing what they call "cybernetic avatar" (CA) technology. CA refers to not only technologies that involve robots as human substitutes and CG avatars in the virtual reality (VR), but also to information and communication technology (ICT) and robotic technologies that effectively expand people's physical, cognitive, and perceptual capabilities. This does not only mean that each person uses their own avatars to carry out various activities, but also that one extends one's existence and cognition by sharing or merging abilities with others through avatars. One of the motivations behind this goal is the concern about the serious decline in the birthrate as well as the aging of population in Japan, which will result in decline in its working population. Another is the interest in promoting individual lifestyles which reflect the diversity of people's cultural and/or ethnic backgrounds, values, abilities, ages, etc.

However, this aim cannot be achieved by technology alone. CAs will drastically change some very basic human conditions; for instance, it has been so far impossible for a person to be present at many places at once or to be many persons equipped with different appearances, voices, or other characteristics. Nor have we ever interacted with people through artificially created human-like agents. Therefore, as the number of people living with CAs increases in society, many ethical, legal, and social implications (ELSI) issues are expected to emerge.

In this session, we will particularly focus on the questions concerning relationships or interactions involving humans and CAs. For example, how should we think of the relation between the avatar and the operator's personhood? Do we need new norms for the interaction involving CAs and a real person that are different from those for the human-human interaction? How can we manage private matters expressed through CAs. Is the friendship or love through CAs a fake or new reality? Does this technology enhance our social skills or does it actually weaken them? These are new problem areas that we have not experienced before

and will become increasingly important as more and more people live with avatars.

As a goal of this session, we will discuss ELSI issues related to the relationship between people and avatars, for this is among the major challenges for the realization of diverse people's participation in society using CAs. Thus, we will contribute to clarification of the roadmap to a human-centered avatar symbiotic society. For this purpose, we invite and call for paper submissions from diverse researchers and practitioners including young researchers.