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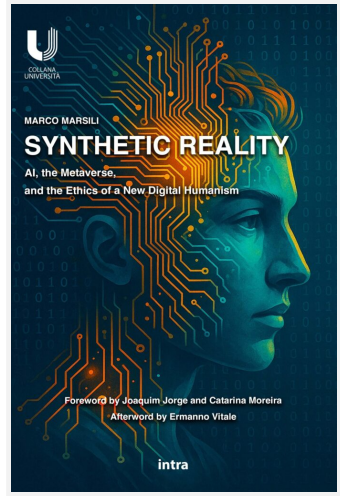
Book Review

Synthetic Reality
AI, the Metaverse, and the Ethics of a New Digital Humanism

Marco Marsili



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This review evaluates Marco Marsili's Synthetic Reality – AI, the Metaverse, and the Ethics of a New Digital Humanism from the perspective of military technology research. Although Marsili's book is fundamentally philosophical and ethical, it provides conceptual frameworks directly relevant to understanding how artificial intelligence (AI), simulation, and immersive environments influence military decision-making, autonomy, and governance. The review connects Marsili's insights with contemporary research on AI, command-and-control systems, and simulation practices used in military contexts.

Introduction

The integration of AI and advanced digital systems into military technologies has significant implications for decision-making and operational effectiveness. Research on AI in command-and-control systems highlights how machine learning can enhance situational awareness, pattern recognition, and adaptability in dynamic operational environments [1]. Marsili's Synthetic Reality, while philosophically oriented, offers a framework for understanding the broader socio-technical conditions shaping these developments [1–7].

Synthetic Reality as an Operational Condition
Marsili defines synthetic reality as a socio-technical condition in which algorithmic representations, simulations, and immersive digital environments mediate human experience and judgment. This aligns with military applications of simulation and predictive analytics in decision-support frameworks [1], where digital tools increasingly serve not merely as aids but as integral conditions of operation. The conceptualization helps explain how operational decisions are influenced by model assumptions and algorithmic prioritizations rather than solely by direct human observation [2–4].

Artificial Intelligence, Delegated Agency, and Responsibility
A central theme in Synthetic Reality is the redistribution of agency and responsibility in AI-mediated systems. Marsili critiques the framing of AI as a neutral tool, arguing that algorithmic systems shape choices by privileging certain forms of knowledge and narrowing decision spaces. This aligns with concerns in military technology about ”automation bias” and the opacity of machine reasoning [2]. Marsili emphasizes that responsibility remains a human concern, particularly in contexts involving autonomous or semi-autonomous systems [7].

Simulation, Immersion, and Cognitive Power
Marsili explores immersive digital environments and simulation technologies as spaces of co-evolution for humans and AI. In military contexts, simulations serve both as training environments and as platforms for developing and validating AI models [1, 3]. Marsili cautions that synthetic environments can create an illusion of control, stressing the need for critical scrutiny of assumptions and scenario design, especially when simulations inform strategic decisions.

Governance, Law, and Strategic Context
The book situates technological development within governance frameworks, including the European Union’s Artificial Intelligence Act and Digital Services Act [5]. Marsili interprets these initiatives as embedding ethical considerations into technological governance, shaping procurement, interoperability, and compliance standards relevant to military institutions adopting dual-use AI technologies [5].

Toward a Digital Humanism in Military Technology
Marsili’s advocacy for a digital humanism foregrounds dignity, moral agency, and responsibility within technological systems. In military technology, this aligns conceptually with debates over meaningful human control in autonomous systems. While abstract, this normative orientation offers philosophical grounding for technical and doctrinal approaches that prioritize human accountability alongside technological performance [7].

Conclusion
Synthetic Reality is not a military technology manual, but it provides conceptual and normative tools valuable to scholars and practitioners engaging with AI, simulation, and command-and-control systems. By embedding technological developments within ethical and governance contexts, Marsili contributes interdisciplinary depth to military technology

discourse, challenging readers to reconsider how synthetic environments shape decision-making, responsibility, and strategic judgment [1–4, 7].

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