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The Ontological Conviviality between Ritual and Digital Body in Afro-Yoruba-futurism

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Abstract

The body is central to the African metaphysical conception of personhood. It serves as a container for ancestral re-embodiment through reincarnation and further serves as a container for spiritual embodiment, making it sacred, relational, and a medium of continuity. This composite, relational connection can be compared to the digital body in transhumanism, where the digital body interface offers the same afterlife ideology, built through codes, patterns, and algorithms, extending beyond the biological. I argue, using a novel approach, that rather than viewing the digital body as a distinct form of reality, it can be understood as an embodiment preserving the logic of indigenous spirituality, ancestral continuity, spirit re-embodiment, and relational identity through the mediation of technology. I deploy the theory known as Vital Relational Ontology (VRO) and utilize the Yoruba ontological conception of the body to argue that the digital body, just like the ritual body, can preserve the soul or spirit beyond biological existence. According to this theory, vitality does not reside solely in individuality, nor is it static; rather, it is relational, existing in and beyond physical or biological forms. Through the heuristic implications of the theory, I aim to bridge the divide between digital frameworks and African spirituality and metaphysics. Consequently, the article expands the frontiers of the reconfiguration of human embodiment in Afrofuturism through post-biological existence.

Keywords: Afrofuturism, Body, Digital Transhumanism, Ontology, Relationality, Vitality

Introduction

Contemporary African metaphysics centers on questions such as the origin of the physical world, the relation between God and the world, the materiality-immateriality dichotomy, the naturalism-supernaturalism distinction, God's existence, the problem of evil, causality, change, and time, free will and determinism, personhood, and the meaning of human existence. African philosophers have responded to these questions with groundbreaking metaphysical theories that offer uniquely African perspectives, prompting critical inward reflection and the production of ideas that are global rather than the exoticization of traditional African worldviews (Agada et al., 2024, p. 2). This article also contributes to these ideas by bridging African metaphysics and a Western transhumanist framework for Afro-futuristic ontology, drawing on vital relational ontology (VRO). The article aims to conceptualize digital personhood as an extension of ritual embodiment through which spirit and ancestral vitality are sustained beyond biological existence. Importantly, the article engages the ontological existence of the soul or spirit within African metaphysical assumptions or speculations, rather than within the broader discourse, contention, and argument about the soul, mind, and body.

To Africans, the soul and spirits exist because humans are not merely biological beings without corresponding non-physical elements. The soul contains spiritual data that can only be interpreted through a spiritual lens, and the soul's vitality falls within this dimension. This implies that its logic might be questioned; however, just as with Chalmers' hard problem of consciousness, it would be irrational to claim that, because the soul cannot be proved, it does not exist. This is why Wariboko states, "If it does not make sense, it makes spirit," to give meaning to the

gaps that are unexplainable within the physical realm (Igboin, 2022, p. 5). Obviously, since science continues to employ naturalism and physicalism, it remains firmly focused on functionalism or the easy problem of consciousness. While trying to explain and fit into the other domains, the gap continues to exist. Only supernaturalism, a function of religion, where the spiritual intercepts and overrides the physical, can account for these remaining domains, and this is why we argue for the spirit or soul's transmigration as a plausible formulation of consciousness in the digital body. These ideas in this article might be speculative and imaginative; it is important to note, from Obregon Diaz's (2026, p.1) view, that imagination is indispensable for human survival, meaning creation, scientific discovery, artistic expression, religious experience, and institutional innovation. It is not a mere secondary cognitive faculty or a form of escapism, nor is it an aesthetic supplement to rationality, but is rooted in the fundamental ontological mechanism of the imperfect structure of existence itself.

Simply put, I take it for granted that the soul or spirit exists. This allows me not to delve into the argument against the existence of the soul. With this, I construct an idea of the ritual body in African metaphysics, which constitutes the transition of the soul into a new body and the spirit embodiment of the body, both of which manifest through the human body. The problem is that culture has emphasized material biological bodies, and the new materialism theory insists on the redefinition of matter as being generated, endlessly enacted, and reshaped (Jewitt et al., 2016, p. 2), which would include a digital body framework. Secondly, there is the ongoing challenge of how the non-material and non-biological can become conscious. All arguments from a transhumanistic point of view have been futile in their response to the probability of consciousness within the transhumanist framework. Through this new understanding of the body as argued here, it becomes easier for ancestors' souls and indigenous spirits to be re-embodied in multiple forms of reality, either a digital or biological body. The argument here reinvigorates substance dualism, the existence of the soul or spirit, and a non-material body that houses the soul; however, within Afro-futurism. Afrofuturism here refers to the African reimagination of a posthuman future, the reimagination of their past, their science and their future; what the people of African origin can become, rooted in African history, culture, religion and philosophy, while addressing the shifting dynamics of science, technology and power in the global order (Kazeem, 2018, p. 70-71; Abdul, p. 2023: 107).

Ostensibly, with the ongoing de-biologization of being, it is crucial to begin pondering reality from a non-biological perspective insofar as vitality is not lost. As traditions move beyond the rhetoric of human essentialism and humanism, contemplating the future is crucial to ensure relevance. Of course, anthropocentrism has always been the debate, putting man—biological man—at the center of discussion. Now that discussions are reshaped through technology, a new pathway is emerging to discuss what is and what is not being. Vignale (2025, p. 4) has

asked the question, “Is it valid to go down this path when the tradition of critical thought to which our work subscribes has sought to de-biologize—as one of its most relevant theoretical operations—?” We must not shy away from these new theoretical questions; rather, we must embrace them with open arms, even if we question their validity and truth. This new critical thought decentralizes reality and being, opening existence to non-biological beings, whether spiritual or physical, and thus to a relational ontological existence with being. It is imperative to note that man or the physical being is not only important, whether in the epistemic order, where the distance between subject and object gives priority to subjects over things, or in the study of human nature through autonomy, the hierarchy of persons, and dignity (and the difference regarding their bodies), within ethics and law, or in metaphysics, where singularity is conceived from the individuality and identity of the self (Vignale, 2025, p. 5).

Hence, “considering oneself a subject or a person, considering oneself an individual with a defined identity, is nothing but a certain way of being” (Vignale, 2025, p. 5), with other probable and logical ways to perceive being. This deviation and redefinition, with the advancement in science and technology, make vitality and the human body not only physical but also encompass the digital body framework. If it were not so, then what use are the arguments, discussions, and dialectics on transhumanism and artificial intelligence? This continuity of being in a non-biological form safeguards the existence of being from biological death. “In other words, the human arises thanks to the separation into different spheres that define it by its sovereignty, whether from an ontological, epistemological, or political point of view, a separation that safeguards the domain of the Man” (Vignale, 2025, p. 5). This break from the foundation of being and embodiment is the purpose of this article. As Vignale (2025, p. 5) argues,

> The challenge…perhaps that of philosophy going forward—is twofold: to question the categories with which the human is thought and defined; and a new worldview around matter. We refer to a new materialism, a new way of constructing objectivity, a new mode of thought that exercises itself outside the individual-form and the immediate certainty of the *cogito*, as well as the dualism and the separation between consciousnesses and bodies. That may account not for a world of objects, but for a world of relations.

Vignale’s thought opens the vista to a convivial and intertwined engagement between ritual and the digital body, for a nuanced posthuman future in Afro-futurism, using an analytical methodology and speculative ontology. The argument in this article follows Chimakonam's hope.[1], which is to bridge African philosophy of religion with

[1] A. E. Chimakonam, “God and Transhumanism in the Context of African Philosophy of Religion,” in *Contemporary African Philosophy of Religion: Emerging Issues and Perspectives*, ed. A. Agada, A. D. Attoe, and J. O. Chimakonam (Springer Nature, 2026), 143–155.

transhumanism. The article is therefore sectioned into four areas: The first is the theoretical framework, which analyses the theory of 'Vital Relational Ontology' as it pertains to the aim of this paper. The second focuses on the Yoruba ontology of the ritual body; the third does justice to the ontology of the digital body, while the last section focuses on the ontological conviviality of the Afro-Yoruba-futuristic body. In this way, the article contributes to the discussion of reimagining or reconfiguring the body in a way other than the usual and traditional conception of the African body.

Theoretical framework

The article draws on 'Vital Relational Ontology' (VRO) to describe how vitality is dynamic rather than static. The term "Vital Relational Ontology" or "Relational Ontology of life" was first used as a concept by Da Silva Junior (2025). According to the theory, being is not a substance but a process—a flux of differentiation and return that unfolds into four movements: life, consciousness, meaning, and vital expression (2025, p. 1). In these four movements, life is not merely a biological phenomenon but the very rhythm of reality's manifestation, transcendental and a condition of possibility for all experience. Consciousness, the second movement, is the act of embodied and situated distinction, with life differentiating itself to perceive itself. In the third movement—Meaning—life converts distinction into form and experience into narrative. This meaning arises from the intertwining of the body with the environment and history. In this movement of meaning, each culture is a modulation of the same interpretive potency, avoiding naïve realism and nihilism while recognizing that everything is in relation. The fourth movement, "emotion," is reformulated as vital expression—the synthesis and return of the ontological spiral, where life reconnects with its origin and becomes conscious and meaningful, manifesting in the world (Da Silva Junior, 2025, p. 3).

Vitality does not reside solely in individuality, nor is it static; rather, it is relational, existing in and beyond physical or biological forms. Here, vitality is replaced by life, indicating that life flows through different planes of existence and can be embodied in various relational ways. Vitality has been construed in myriad ways within African philosophical standpoints, argued to be the animating force of being, described variously as soul, spirit, vitality/vital force, among others, and permeating other inanimate things (Attoe and Chimakonam, 2025, p. 1). According to Molefe (2018, p. 23), "Vitality is considered as a sacred gift, a spiritual energy and an offshoot of God that characterizes every object." While Molefe's clarification of vitality is important to the framework as a gift that permeates all entities, his application of vitality differs from the arguments of this article. Molefe applies

it from a meta-ethical standpoint, relating vitality to the understanding of what constitutes human dignity, presenting it as a more plausible framework than Divine-Command-theory (Attoe and Chimakonam, 2025, p. 1).

Da Silva Junior (2025, p. 3) notes that "The ontology of being is the very rhythm of continuous creation." The article follows this line of thought, expanding Da Silva Junior's view that being is created and continues to exist in different rhythms through both ritual and digital means. To deny the possibility of life beyond the physical in a digital or techno-sphere is to deny the possibility of life in ritualization. If vital force can exist beyond the physical, as in reincarnation or ritual embodiment, it can also exist in digital embodiment. Importantly, in the traditional African worldview, the spirit or soul is an autonomous, non-material reality that possesses agency and intentionality. With this understanding, the soul or spirit can override or transcend ordinary human consciousness. This implies that consciousness is not exclusively generated by biological embodiment; rather, the soul or spirit embodies and expresses its form of consciousness. Further illuminating this nature of consciousness, we can reference Abdul (2023: 108), where statues in African animist culture are believed to house energies and life through ritualization. Consequently, this clarity strengthens the logic and plausibility of the soul or spirit manifesting consciousness outside a biological substrate. The nature of this consciousness goes beyond epistemic access to reality and includes ontological access, not merely simulating vitality but embodying it.

Ritual Embodiment in Yoruba Ontology

In this section, even though the research is specifically on Yoruba ontology, it draws views from similar African philosophies. Importantly, for every description of a being's ontological components, either Western or African conception, the human body's functionality remains the realization of the being's mental, cognitive, and spiritual processes. The Yoruba also perceive the body as a unique part of being. While this creates the temptation to refer to the Yoruba ontology of personhood as a central state materialism, where mental states are dependent on physical states (Balogun, 2023, p. 25), or contribute to Chalmers' easy problem—the functional state of consciousness-through Yoruba ontology. However, in the case of Yoruba ontological components, it would be wrong to simply reduce them to materialism. This has been argued by Balogun (2023), who critiques the conceptualization of the Yoruba as central state materialism. Here, this article presents two variations of the Yoruba body and its dialectical importance as a ritual body. The first is that the body is the ritual passage through which the spirit embodies a being, the process by which spirit becomes a being. In line with this thought, Grillo (2012, p.113) argues that ritual acts in the African belief system are the movement of objects and bodies in space. The second is that the body bears the mark of the dead ancestor's renewed existence through the newborn. Of course, most arguments have

always pointed out the immaterial and the material components of the African body; most literature only gives primacy to the immaterial component, and only a few have dwelt on the material component as a whole, or broken it down to sub-component structures based on their importance in relation to the spiritual implications (Ademuleya, 2007, p. 213; Okoro, 2007, p. 7; Ibigbolade, 2020).

Hence, the article defines the concept of the body as either physical or spiritual. Only the physical body can die, which amplifies the importance of the body in old age. The body here serves as a medium where the soul can inhabit. Without the body, the soul's existence becomes dicey. Thus, the body is prima facie important in conceiving of the soul. This also receives critical impetus in the burial rituals accorded to the body at physical (biological) death. Moreover, it becomes a taboo if the body is not buried or if the body is left to rot, uncared for. Theoretically, the embodiment of being in the Yoruba ontology is based on primordial mythology, which includes sections that led to the creation of being or person (Oladipupo, 2018; Balogun, 2023, p. 26). Beyond death, the body (Ara) also serves as the vessel for the reincarnated ancestor, marked by the ancestor's distinctive signs. This makes it a spiritual conduit of channelling energy or force that permeates the process of re-embodiment. When the ancestor dies and reincarnates, apart from the similarity in consciousness between the newborn and the ancestor, the ancestor continues to be embodied spiritually. This is reinforced in the dreams of people who claim to have seen the ancestor, in which the ancestor appears in the same body as when alive. The body continues to exist both physically and spiritually; the ancestor is believed to exist with a body in the ancestral world, while in the physical world, it shares part of the reincarnated body. Hence, I reckon with Willerslev (2018, p. 8) that "Soul attributes bear different degrees of their owners' personhood within them and may, at times, act as persons in their own right," which could also imply that souls can exist in their own right with a spiritual body. This suggests that the body can be either spiritual or physical, concrete or abstract, in Yoruba ontology. Wiredu (2021, p. 647) explains that it would not be out of place if one argues that spirits are immaterial since "specialists" that communicate with them have claimed to see them, talk to them in vivid and physical terms with human-figure configuration and with the ability to move around.

This analysis is amplified according to Rappaport that rituals are bodily experiences, perceived to be in immediate intertwining with abstract religious ideas (Grillo, 2012, p. 114) – a case of spirit-influenced or induced state. Ritual experiences are first-person experiences in Africa and come with the feeling of the spiritual world that is perceived through the senses, regardless of the spatial dimensions. Rituals are not just symbolic but a facilitation of the embodiment of spirits. It alters the state of man's consciousness by inhabiting and communicating through the same body. Grillo (2012, p. 114) notes that through "...multi-sensorial appeal, rituals arouse the senses and also

awaken affect-feelings and sensibilities that lend to the assertion of religion, an authority that can only be mediated through direct experiences." In this state, the human body becomes a sentient configuration of subconsciousness connecting the spirit in its transcendental state to the physical, enabling it to perceive the forces through smell, touch, and even sight. This is what Kjersti (2008, p. 2) explains when evaluating the concept of spirit according to the Zanzibaris, in East Africa: "Distinctions between the reality of spirits and the reality of human beings are manifested through the sharing of a common body. Human beings and spirits converge in their physical presence: the one is a precondition for the other." Grillo (2012, p. 119) avers that ritual experiences here are paradoxical; while the spirit is consciously inhabited in the body, it, however, renders the individual unconscious of his or her self-consciousness. The embodiment of the spirit allows for reflexive actions that enable individuals to communicate messages to the world of the living subconsciously through any part of the body. According to Grillo, Grimes argued that rituals provide direct experiences that are strongly linked with sensory meaning to awaken reflexive consciousness (Grillo, 2012, p. 115).

Kjersti (2008), in his approach to consciousness of the spirit and its materiality in the human body during rituals, uses the terms mimesis and enactment to describe this process. Mimesis refers to the process of awareness of the self in the other, the perception of the embodiment of the spirit. Enactment, on the other hand, is the inhabitation, transformation, and changing process of perception of the spirits. Kjersti (2008, p. 4) stated that, "...through such processes of enactment, a person is moved by feelings, perceptions, emotions, and evolving thoughts. The considerations involved in the enactment move the person to the extent of becoming transformed: becoming 'another' and experiencing moments of otherness." Kjersti (2008, p. 5) further avers that, "human beings become inhabited by spirits in the sense that persons for a period of time live both in altered states of body and in altered states of mind."

This experience can be further described as the unconscious existence of being, because the person's body and self-consciousness do not exist at this point, and taking charge of the body by the individual is no longer possible in this state. Only the spirit is conscious and therefore, the reflexes should not be considered as human; rather, a representation of the spirits (Kjersti, 2008, p. 6). While there is a sub-conscious interaction of the being's body with a conscious spirit during the ritual, it should be further noted that the interaction is strictly on the spirits' terms (Kjersti, 2008, p.15) and as such, the communication of the spirit is basically that of the spirit alone. Ultimately, by exploring the consciousness of spirit in being, it should be noted from the above that spirit influences both the spiritual and physical world, or the material and immaterial aspects of being and personhood, ensuring that spirits are not passive but active metaphysical agents. This further implies that they are ontologically

plural in nature, and the energy transferred in the inhabitation is strictly metaphysical. This experience can be further described as the unconscious existence of being, because the person's body and self-consciousness do not exist at this point, and taking charge of the body by the individual is no longer possible in this state.

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The Ontology of the Digital Body and the Question of Embodiment

The ontology of digital embodiment derives from the combination of the term's ontology and the digital body. It means the replication and reconfiguration of human existence in a digital form where identity, embodiment, and personhood extend beyond the biological, physiological, and metaphysical into data-driven and virtual forms. Here, we see the digital as a non-physical matter. The main question, however, is: how is the digital existence of being, embodied? Importantly, the digital is metaphysical, curating the plausibility of embodying being in a digital form and of existence. The digital form is quasi-material and empirically metaphysical. In this section, I begin by understanding the digital body and reflecting on the arguments on the plausibility of digital existence, which lay down reasons why consciousness is not possible in digital form except if it is embodied through the soul or spirit.

The digital imagination of the body should be understood as a radical post-humanist ideology (Jewitt, 2016, p. 2), rather than a transhumanist ideology. This assumes a case of Kurzweil's singularity that goes beyond the physical

understanding of the body. Jewitt (2016, p. 2) notes that "digital technology is a fundamental part of the contemporary experience and re-imagination of the body." Cregan (2005) conceptualizes the imagination in three technological means, namely through extension, abstraction, and reconstruction (as cited in Jewitt, 2016, p. 2). The digital ontology of the body, however, becomes a more radical approach to the ontology of the body as it approaches the body through abstraction. The term avatar is described as a digitally simulated body (Beaufils and Berland, 2022, p. 2). In the digital body, the mental representation of being is described as avatar immersion (Beaufils and Berland, 2022: 1) or 'avatar embodiment,' in which the sense of being is incarnated into a virtual body (as cited in Beaufils and Berland, 2022, p. 1). Ostensibly, digital avatars do not resonate with the continuity, transfer, and existence of consciousness beyond death. They appear and talk like the deceased through a generative AI informed by texts produced by the deceased, with a computerized graphics engine informed by the images of the deceased (Sparrow, 2025, p. 2).

If digital avatars have no possible consciousness, how is it plausible for them to have ontological consistency (Vigorelli et al., 2022, p. 31)? Buongiorno's (2019, p. 319) argument is worth emphasizing here, namely that because the channel of mediation in digital experiences and embodiment is our body, "a complete detachment of our mental skills from our bodily skills is not conceivable in a technological context: our real, actual being is not only assumed as a starting point, but it represents a condition of possibility for experiencing a techno-digital world." Therefore, "The body works as a bilateral point of access: it is the channel through which—with the help of digital media—reality impacts our inner experience, as well as the window through which we access external experience" (Buongiorno, 2019, p. 309). The level of immersive experience also varies with subjective and qualitative feelings and the tools through which one experiences digital reality, adding another dimension to contextualizing embodiment as simply double-embodiment within the Embodiment-Disembodiment-Re-embodiment scheme. Double-embodiment involves the subjective side, our different embodied experiences—bodily and cognitive—and the objective side, the embodied technologies of our relationship to the digital world (Buongiorno, 2019, p. 320). However, Buongiorno's theory does not consider the level and strength of the network through which immersion or embodiment is achieved. This also determines and shapes the embodiment experience.

To amplify his double-embodiment theory, as against the E-D-R scheme that assumes a real detachment between the body and mind in digital ontology, Buongiorno (2019) uses De Preester's distinction between bodily extension and the incorporation of non-bodily objects to show that this distinction is blurred in digital embodiment, since digital embodiment occurs not only through the incorporation of objects but also through bodily extension as

complementary processes. To clarify Buongiorno's point of view, reference is made to one of De Preester's adumbrated frameworks—Perceptual extensions/prostheses (Buongiorno, 2019, p. 323)—where De Preester argues that only SSDs (sensory substitution devices that re-establish a lost or damaged sense or convert stimuli of one sensory modality (light) into stimuli for another sensory modality (sound) call for changes in the feeling of body ownership and the incorporation of non-bodily objects. Only these provide a real form of re-embodiment.

Against De Preester, Buongiorno argues that not only SSDs, as incorporations of non-bodily objects, can change body ownership; virtual (a process that goes beyond the spatial and temporal limits of actual experience, a parallel world that we can enter and exist in and then exit) and augmented (a type of digital embodiment where images within applications that blend the content of real-life experiences are developed) realities are extensions that require a different body in a different environment. While the devices and tools used in mediating the virtual environment are just tools and do not extend the body, the virtual environment creates a different form of embodiment. Consequently, not only SSDs, defined as body incorporation, can change our experience and challenge our body ownership. Body extension, such as virtual and augmented reality, can also change our body ownership in a different body in a different environment while creating a new kind of experience (Buongiorno, 2019, p. 323 – 325). Through digital technologies, digital extensions (the subjective side of the body) and digital incorporations (the objective side of the tools) should be seen as complementary, as shown in what Buongiorno refers to as the double-embodiment scheme, the side of the tool and the side of subjective experience (Buongiorno, 2019, p. 327).

Utilizing his revised version of the E-D-R scheme (Embodiment-disembodiment-reembodiment), Buongiorno (2019, p. 319) further argues that there is no actual detachment from our bodies in technological (inclusive of the digital) activities, because our interactions within technology are mediated by tools (for instance, digital devices). The fullest expression of digital embodiment is mind uploading, pursued as the transfer of individual consciousness from the physical body and its upload to a digital substrate for the continuation of conscious life (Fernandez-Borsot, 2023, p. 13). In digital ontology, which serves as a more suitable term for better contextualization and grounding of this asymmetric concept (Clemens and Nash, 2019) of the body and subjectivation, we recall Boler's (2002) "New Digital Cartesianism", where digital subjectivation reinforces the cartesian epistemological framework, the splitting of the mind/soul and body. It lets us understand that we can upload our souls/mind without needing the physical body (Buongiorno, 2019, p. 318). Even though transhumanists do not believe in this ideology, their theory of digital consciousness emphasizes Cartesianism (Olson, 2022, p. 396; Sorgner, 2025, p. 120). Citing Bostrom, Olson (2022, pp. 382, 383) gave a clearer picture

of the term uploading when he states that mind uploading means we could scan our brain's synaptic matrix and simulate it on a computer, enabling the migration of ourselves from biological embodiment to a purely digital substrate. This implies that we would migrate our biological essence and being into a digital reality not confined by biological limitations. Hence, this person would have the same personality, knowledge, preferences, plans, memories, and other mental features that define our consciousness. Even if the computer or machine that houses us were damaged, we could be easily transferred to a new machine by copying the data, highlighting the continuity proposed by transhumanists against the human biological body.

The challenge here is personal identity, according to Olson (2022). The criterion presupposes psychological continuity, such that, for the same being, the human organism and the encoded being must share mental properties that are causally dependent on each other (Olson, 2022, p. 386), which is implausible. This is adduced from the idea that, except when the human organism ceases to exist, there cannot be a replica that preserves the same psychological continuity and picks up from the stage of death. Additionally, there is the issue of multiple replications, a theory known as branching, where there are multiple uploads identical to the biological organism. Another argument on the challenge of personal identity is the duplication problem—how plausible is a replica indistinguishable from the original being with the same psychological continuity if you exist? Olson (2022, p. 392) notes that, "There must be a difference between these two states of affairs." Beyond the personal identity poser, the implausibility of uploading is such that we are material objects with material continuity that cannot simply be uploaded, with continuity existing onwards. The implication here is that while the information in the brain can be scanned and uploaded digitally, the psychological continuity required for the brain's consciousness is ultimately dependent on a material entity even though the action is immaterial. This is not enough to describe us as immaterial entities, as consciousness emanates from both the material body and the immaterial soul (Olson, 2022, pp. 393, 396).

While I agree with Olson (2022, p. 396) that the soul is partly essential to consciousness, I argue against the idea that the body must be material as a joint entity for consciousness in the post-humanist future. Then, "How would one go about transferring an immaterial thing—a soul—from a human organism to a computer" (Olson, 2022, p. 396) to form continuity of existence? Using the African ritual body framework, the soul that traverses from the ancestor or the spirit that influences the physical body can influence or exist in the digital. Here, the argument does not treat the digital as having its own vitality, but rather the ancestor's soul and the spirit's vitality can evoke the life and humanity of the digital being. The challenge in Buongiorno and Olson is that they treat the detachment of embodiment as the individual's immersion, embodying the digital body. On the other hand, I treat the

immersion as external—the ancestor's soul that reanimates and re-embodies the digital body—digital reincarnation, a term used by Steinhart (2017, p. 258).

The Embodiment of Ritual Body in the Digital Afro-futuristic Body

Most arguments have revised what bodies can be, rather than the rigid conceptualization of the biological body as the only definition of personhood and humanness. This is what Mol's concept of body states, according to Blackman. In *The Body: Key Concepts*, Blackman (2021, p. 2) draws on Annie Marie Mol's concept of 'body multiple' to explain how the body is understood across the transdisciplinary field.

> The idea of the body as simply something that we both *have* and *are* is displaced as the focus shifts to what bodies *can do*, what bodies could *become*, what practices enable and coordinate the *doing* of particular kinds of bodies, and what this makes possible in terms of our approach to questions about life, humanness, culture, power, technology, agency and subjectivity, as well as how to understand specific histories of racialization, gendering and other processes and practices of differentiation and cultures of discrimination that are part of new regimes of population management**.**

Obviously, the understanding of the body hides numerous applications, explorable from several distinct or interwoven perspectives through technology which curate's certain stance of being (Wysiadecki et al., 2024, p. 3; Fernandez-Borsot, 2023, p. 10). In other words, as Johnstone (2015) avers, "embodiment 'bottles a body's kinetic dynamics into a convenient and immediately recognizable lexical container" (as Cited in Chan, 2021, p. 13). Through this new perspective, the Afro-futuristic concept of the body can be analyzed, offering a new understanding of the body that interweaves the digital and ritual conceptions. Importantly, the challenge lies in that most narratives treat the digital body as having its own consciousness, through which reality can exist. This creates a perennial issue of how consciousness can be inherent in a non-biological form. Steinhart (2017, p. 256) accentuates this theory that the digitalists define bodies, lives, souls, and minds in purely informational patterns and their abstract transformations. This question is how a body can exist in a purely informational pattern if they are built by bits and computation (Steinhart, 2017, p. 256). While uploading offers the same afterlife ideology as in traditional beliefs in eternal life, like the human soul's continuity (Olson, 2022, p. 382), the understanding of the soul as meta-biological offers more theoretical plausibility of consciousness than the existence of consciousness from nothing in a digital framework. To resolve the challenge of existence in this form, we can resort to vitality, external to both the digital and biological body, that can embody both forms, without losing its digital meaning.

Before we proceed, it is important to clarify that this understanding of embodiment is a third-person sense of embodiment, not the usual first-person sense of consciousness. Here, consciousness and embodiment are used

interchangeably to denote an existential, continuous experience of a spiritual being occupying a physical or digital body, since bodies can be defined in multiple ways. It differs from first-person experiential immersion and instead involves the transfer of consciousness between two entities within the bodies (either ritual or digital bodies), which are treated as containers for the materialization of consciousness. This means that vitality and consciousness are substrate-independent, whether ritual or digital, a term Agada refers to as proto-panpsychism.[2] If the soul or the spirit can exist in a ritual substrate, it could exist in a digital substrate, even though one is organic and the other inorganic. As argued elsewhere (Ogunnaike, 2025a, p. 57), genuineness and authenticity arise from structural ontology such that the soul cannot exist without a corresponding body that aligns with a complete physical and biological body. On the other hand, souls are non-physical entities and, given their non-physical and biological status, are not confined by spatial and temporal existence. If souls and spirits are vitally responsible for animating the body, where statues in African animist culture are believed to house energies and life through ritualization (Abdul, 2023, p. 108), the question of structural ontology and genuineness is resolved. With this understanding of the soul, we easily avoid the problem of personal identity, since the article agrees that the digital has no inherent consciousness. If it had, there would be vitality in two conscious folds, which would negate the aim and justification of the article.

Through the concept of digital animism, deduced from Richardson's (2018) technological animism, the human body is animated with vitality that allows its presence to be pronounced in the digital realm. If souls can shapeshift, metamorphose, or traverse existence (Willerslev, 2018, p. 9), it implies that the digital can be embodied with souls of ancestors, enabling them to continue to exist in digital form. One can argue that without a case in which the soul can traverse into the digital body, the Yoruba conception of the soul and spirits with such attributes is rendered dismissible, since spirits are considered apparitional beings that can inhabit objects (Ibigbolade, 2022, p. 35). This is like the concerns raised in Kazeem et al. (2025) on the dilemmas between spirituality and digital technology, specifically whether digital interfaces may devalue and distort the efficacy of spirituality. The body, either ritual or digital, becomes a vessel for the embodiment of the ancestor's soul, which can re-exist in a digital form. Willerslev (2018, p. 11) likewise identifies this same argument when he states that, "We propose that when whole

[2] Agada's proto-panpsychism refers to mood as the most fundamental principle in the universe, a unity of equally fundamental poles or aspects (consciousness and matter) of reality that manifests as a consciousness-matter event. Mood exhibits itself as a mind-matter event, which means it can underlie physical, mental, and immaterial entities. See Ada Agada, "Between Sense-Phenomenalism, Equi-Phenomenalism, Quasi-Physicalism, and Proto-Panpsychism," in *Conversations on African Philosophy of Mind, Consciousness and Artificial Intelligence*, ed. Aribiah David Attoe, Samuel T. Segun, and Victor Nweke et al. (Springer Nature, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36163-0.

epistemologies (and not just the native conceptualizations contained within them) take on lives of their own, they should—like spirits—be granted the status of 'subjects', ontologically speaking." Moreover, Okoro (2007, p. 6) emphasizes further the point of spirit and soul's ability to interpenetrate all things,

> Needless to say, in the universe of forces, things magically transform and transmute through the symbolic interaction of elements. And because it is spirit that necessitates the elemental symbolic interaction and alteration of things, it means that spirit has the power to interpenetrate and interconnect all things. It is for the foregoing reason that the operating principle of African metaphysics is variously known as "spiritual primacysm" or the principle of the "interpenetrability of soul", which we henceforth label the metaphysics of interfusion.

Beyond the soul and spirit's ability to inhabit all things, a continuous existence of the ancestor in digital form resolves the tension of the ancestor's oblivion in collective immortality, where the kindred forget the ancestor. Consequently, the spiritual embodiment could be described as the animation of being, enabling the being's aliveness and the manifestation of the spirits' metaphysical essence. Such a description of animism does not apply only to the concept of soul (*Emi*) that exists only within the biological body. Willerslev (2018, p. 15) clearly states that "Beyond the singular or transcendent soul, animistic ontologies offer alternative imaginings and configurations of agency and personhood and even of what it means to be human." Utilizing ontological pluralism (Berstein, 2018; Sijuwade, 2022) and the metaphysics of consciousness, spiritual entities can embody objects and beings due to their ontological nature, transferring consciousness into the embodied object or being. If an entity has a different kind of being, then it follows that its properties will be based or categorized according to its nature, the kind of being that it is. By ontological pluralism, we mean that spirits and souls are protean, which implies that they assume different shapes like humans, plants, animals, and other inanimate objects. The soul of an ancestor shares a spirit-like quality because it is an immaterial and incorporeal reality.

Significantly, whether souls or spirits, we could justify the plausibility of their existence in digital form by appealing to the inability to resolve Chalmers' (1995) hard problem of consciousness, which is not biologically verifiable. In furtherance of this assertion, I agree with Pereira Jr's (2024, p. 6) that consciousness of spirits is beyond the epistemic strength of science, cognition, and the physical explanation of *qualia*. Pereira Jr. (2024, p. 2) proposes the term *'Qualiomics'*, like the idea of metaphysics of consciousness, to understand *Qualia,* which remain outside the scope of empirical and formal qualitative science. As Marco (2021, p. 10) puts it, there is a third state of awareness and cognition in the evolution of consciousness that surpasses materialism and spiritualism. This third state is what Andrej (2015, p. 489) refers to as trans-individual-mental, in which the notion of trans-cosmic spirits is rational and justified by quantum mechanics, as they are cosmic observers. Andrej furthers that the role of these cosmic observers is to constantly break the holistic cosmic quantum potential represented by the common

wave function of all physical processes that exist in the universe, such as trans-chronological and trans-spatial superpositions of mutually entangled cosmic quantum states into real possibilities that are manifested as physical events.

Arora (2025, p. 2) agrees that consciousness is ontologically fundamental—a dimension of reality itself. In other words, consciousness, an aspect of vital relational ontology, is not simply a subjective state produced in the brain but rather a participatory field in which minds, bodies, and the entire world interpenetrate and co-emerge (as cited in Arora, 2025, p. 2). If the soul of the ancestor can co-emerge in the body of the newborn, or if spirits re-embody, they could also inhabit other forms of existence, biological and non-biological, and at the same time control and influence entities they inhabit. When we reframe consciousness as the foundational ground, it equally enables a radical renewal of values centered on sacredness, interconnectedness, and reverence for life itself (Arora, 2025, p. 4), whether biological or digital, which implies that we also approach and treat the digital as the relational continuity of existence. The major challenge here is that this reinforces Ryle's (1940) Ghost in the Machine framework. If an ancestor's vitality and spiritual consciousness can exist independently in digital alterity, it raises the question of the program's functionality rather than its valid spiritual influence. Tartaglia (2023, p. 14) states this more clearly, arguing that Ryle's book does not commit us to the existence of an inner life of consciousness that is pitted against an external world of objects, and that even this belief stems from a philosophical error. Even if Ryle's behaviourism theory has been considered obsolete, eliminative and reductive materialism (Tartaglia, 2023, p. 15) presents further challenges to the possibility of the hypothesis laid here.

Notwithstanding, the African sense of personhood and identity acknowledges materialism yet does not hold that materialism sums up the entire universe. Drawing on Gyekye's analysis of Akan philosophy of mind, Tartaglia (2023, p. 16) explains that while the body's behaviour can be substituted for actions of the mind, this only indicates familiarity with materialism, not what is meant by it. For instance, if I say I am tall, I can be replaced by body height, but statements such as "I am happy and hopeful" cannot be replaced by "my body is happy and hopeful." Similar to Tartaglia's explanation, when death occurs in Africa, why do Africans emphasize the body after death rather than the individual's name, for example, in the obituary, "the body leaves the morgue"? Here, the body represents the dead, while the constant mention of the name signifies the person's existence beyond the physical. This is why they offer a "sleep well" prayer in the name rather than on the body, making the vitality of the individual tantamount to the soul. However, beyond mental states, which are exemplified by actions of the mind and, to a large extent, still subsumed under them, the soul is normatively distinct through disembodiment of being and re-embodiment in a digital body. The same logic is extended to spirit in a digital body. Hence, the digital can be

embodied and re-embodied in such a way that it validates the existence of the soul through behavioural and functional continuity in identical ways of the mind. Given that our argument is situated within Afro-futurism, it is sustainable within such a worldview. We must also reiterate here that the soul and spirit are identical, especially through Gyekye's (1987) bipartite soul (cited in Tartaglia, 2023: 18). This consolidates the ritual body as either that of the ancestor or of spirits, as maintained throughout this article.

Another issue that presents a big obstacle and limitation to this argument is how the symbolism that applies to the biological body, due to distributed marks from the ancestor to the newborn, equally applies to the digital body. Hubermas (2021) clearly defines ancestral immortality as symbolic, given the moral and collective meaning it fosters among the kins and kindred. Since the digital body is a non-biological entity, even if the marks are evident, the symbolic application remains implausible given Africans' current engagement with transhumanist ideologies. However, since the ancestral soul is distributed with memory and a mind of its own, it is plausible that through the actions or words stated, identifiable only by the kin, this symbolism is still applicable to the digital body. Thus, it is agreeable that one of the ideas needed to make singularity, posthumanism, the extreme and radical version of transhumanism, is ensoulment. If this occurs, it largely defeats the implausibility of posthumanism.

A detailed understanding of this ontological framework is cited in Padilioni Jr (2022, p. 64), where the divinatory process in Africa can be understood as a ritual technology in which the diviner's human body is transformed into a living, breathing pulse-code modulator, through which the codes of the cosmos are channeled via heightened motor and sensory perception on behalf of the client. This antecedent provides a strong grounding for the body serving as a conduit, in ways analogous to a digitalized sense of the body. The ritual world equally possesses an algorithm, either through reincarnation or through diviner practice. Reincarnation as an algorithm can be described as the exchange and mediation of codes through two distinct bodies, enabling the second body to continue sustaining the code. If A dies and reincarnates into B, the transfer of A's body into B is a ritual algorithmic process understandable only to A and B. B's body continues to exist, recreating the codes and data of A's existence. Thinking this process through brings clarity to the continuation of vitality from a ritual to a digital body.

In a broader framework, the ritual serves as an algorithm, a metaphor for the patterned continuity of being and for a spiritual law or cosmological principle of continuity between the physical and the spiritual, through which the encoding and transfer of data in digital embodiment becomes embodied not just as data or information. We must reference Nyamnjoh (2020, p. 2), who states that "Fluidity, compositeness of being, and the capacity to be present in simultaneous multiplicities in whole or in fragments are a core characteristic of reality and ontology of

incompleteness." This fluid and relational vitality process of the ritual body, like the digital, is what Padilioni Jr. (2022, p. 69) refers to as the analog-digital divide, in which being is embodied through a transcendental algorithm, a non-physical, non-biological conversion. While it is dangerous to posit physical mechanisms, such as electromagnetic oscillations, which will be crucial in accounting for this transmission during the newborn's birth, such claims render the argument implausible and speculative. However, this relationality has its own spiritual algorithmic force, in which vitality is stored, embodied, and transmigrated. In the digital body, the migrated memory is stored as data, retrieved, and processed through the new definition of the digital body: data of pre-existence that is confirmed by the family or community.

As time is uninterrupted in digital reality, so also in the ritual ontology of reincarnation. Aderibigbe (2020, p. xi) makes it clear that in this existential and cosmic historical journey, time is framed as the past, the present, and the future, expressed in the living, the dead, and the unborn. In this consciousness, time is not interrupted by the notion of an everlasting cosmos. This means that embodiment in the newborn is not a new beginning. It is continuous and not affected by time, but rather a continuous process of reconfiguration. If it were affected by time, it would mean that not every person who dies would qualify to be reincarnated. The more problematic context is the disruption of the algorithmic process and the fluidity of the ontology. On the other hand, whether this continuity is a deterministic guarantee for every qualified ancestral reincarnation remains a question not considered in this article. It merely suggests the significance of existence beyond time that aligns with the concept of digital embodiment. While humans can write digital code or draw a digital algorithm, the algorithm's vitality and conscious manifestation remain in a metaphysical or quasi-physical dimension, which is only plausible through ensoulment as it exists in the ritual body.

One argument that may be raised against those who consider the possibility of independent consciousness in the digital concerns how vitality can flow in the digital independent of the metaphysical, unlike the ontological components of the ritual body. If the body is bound to exist with a vital force, such as the soul (*Emi*) in ritual ontology, what type of vitality exists in the digital body? If digital technology sees embodiment as supervenient rather than constitutive of the human being, through the withdrawal of the lived body from the physical body (Fernandez-Borsot, 2023, p. 13), how does vitality flow? One can argue in their favour that any extension of consciousness is embodied with life. Thus, life flows according to the code of existence. Unlike the soul (*Emi*), which is an algorithm for existence within the ritual body, the code that programs the digital body serves as the vital force permeating its existence, allowing the continuation of consciousness in a digital context. However, without a synergy of both concepts, a more foundational tension arises: the power asymmetry gap. Will the digital

imagination of the body not reinforce power dynamics between the West and the African ontology of the body? Here, we need to be careful with these two ontologies, the African and the Western. Even the use of words and languages of reinforcement learning, or the etymological grounding of words used in coding and programming, can reinforce colonial biases and prejudices. This implies that both the digital and the ritual body must be engaged to share the production of knowledge in a way that does not limit the language used. This becomes the major task. Language has been advocated as part of decolonization and as a vehicle of cultural communication and authentic expression (Mbembe, 2021, p. 224; Okoloye, 2026, p. 82).

As Balogun (2023) notes, caution is needed, especially to avoid the imposition of Western concepts on African worldviews and the recurring problem of 'cultural translation,' where different schemes of meaning are imposed upon the same reality, considered exterior to cultural representation (Cited in Willerslev, 2018, p. 10). Yet there is a basic level of univocality that underlies what we and others are saying (Willerslev, 2018), and this is where we hinge our argument, as a vital relational ontology that transcends the biological and the digital, either as a term in technology or metaphysics. Now, to be animated, what can be contextually referred to as animism[3] is not necessarily metaphysical (Willerslev, 2018, p. 10). Significantly, to be animated, we can argue that this applies not only to biological reincarnation, which itself is problematic because it raises questions about what happens to the ancestor's life and existence after the newborn's death. Will reincarnation end there or continue in a separate newborn's body if the reincarnated ancestor fails to fulfil his purpose? This remains underexplored in most expositions of Yoruba reincarnation, creating a gap in the literature.

Thus, we could apply the concept of digital reincarnation, in which the ancestor has a continuous existence in digital form. However, the term reincarnation seems problematic here because, in application, its materialization has only been through a biological and spiritual entity and not techno-spiritual. There is an important caveat here: I do not claim that the digital has its own soul, unlike Willerslev's terms, such as 'souls' and 'soul-like' in the digital. Introducing the term hyper-reflexivity, Willerslev (2018, p. 15) defines it as a mutually constitutive relationship between native ontologies and other traditions that share similarities, such as technoscience. I infer that there is a reflexivity of concepts and ideas inherent in the native and digital ontologies. This hyper-reflexivity lies in similarities in ideas, and not in the idea of a soul or external embodying spirit. The ideology of vitality and consciousness is unified within the African universe of material and non-material entities. Given this idea, the

[3] We refer to Animism as a process through which the body is animated. It is in this sense that animation is used as animated. "To be animated" means that there is an embodiment with vitality that enables the digital body to live and exist.

digital can be proto-pan psychic, since it shares part of the cosmic energy through which the ancestor's soul or spirit consciousness can emerge. The digital body is not merely a non-physical matter, but a new organizational medium through which proto-pan psychic consciousness, memory, relational vitality, and spiritual presence may manifest.

Conclusion

The article espoused the ritual body in two dimensions. The first is that the body is the ritual passage through which the spirit embodies a being, the process by which the spirit becomes a being. The second is that the body bears the mark of the dead ancestor's renewed existence through the newborn. The article argued that, utilizing vital relational ontology, the ancestor's soul or spirit can be housed in the digital body. I examined the algorithm of the digital body and explained that it has its own spiritual algorithm, like the ritual body. The soul in the ritual body equally has its own algorithm that enables the ancestor to exist in a digital body. Consequently, I hope this attempt to bridge the divide between digital frameworks and African spirituality and metaphysics provokes African philosophers of technology towards more innovative pathways that interweave both frameworks. This dynamic interpretation is crucial for the technological future that is undeniably realistic, regardless of race and the polemics of culture.

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