

Postdigital Reflections_

Construction of the Self in the Postdigital Age: An Artistic Research Project Investigating Perception through Live-Video Enhanced Mixed Realities

Joerg Auzinger 2024

How do mirror reflection and projection alter our perception of body and mind?

What kind of self-perception is constructed in post-digital interaction?



Introduction

"Postdigital Reflections" is an artistic research project by Joerg Auzinger, focusing on the construction of the self in the post-digital age. Utilizing live video and enhanced mixed realities, it examines how digital technologies alter our self-perception and identity.

Objective

The aim is to redefine the relationship between the self and space. By digitally manipulating mirror images, the project seeks to explore how our perception and self-awareness change. "Postdigital Reflections" aspires to contribute to both art and science by introducing new forms of artistic expression and theoretical insights into the social and psychological impacts of digital technologies. The primary goal is to develop a comprehensive understanding of how digital media and technologies influence our self-image and our position in the world.

Expected Contributions

The project intends to provide new artistic forms of expression and theoretical insights into the social and psychological effects of digital technologies. It lays the groundwork for future research in this interdisciplinary field.

Methodology

The project develops digital hybrid mirror images by combining digital video techniques and live video elements. These reflect the state of a post-digital reality that emerges from the fusion of the viewer's analog body with the digital space. The goal is to explore new "constructions of reality" and understand their impact on our perception and self-awareness.

Innovative Aspects

Unlike existing works, the project focuses on the fusion of digital and physical realities to reconsider our self-perception and identity. It offers a unique perspective on human experience and self-awareness in the digital age.

Background and Philosophical Consideration

The project touches on questions of self-perception and identity through the lens of digital mirrors, inspired by theories such as Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia and Jacques Lacan's mirror stage. It investigates the role of the mirror in art, culture, and philosophy and how these can be reinterpreted through digital technologies. Abstract

Abstract

"Postdigital Reflections" offers a unique perspective on how digital media and technologies shape human experience and self-perception. By creatively linking art and science, this project aims to promote a deeper understanding of the postdigital condition and explore innovative ways to investigate the self in an increasingly digitized world.

I aim to explore the connection between the self and space by digitally manipulating reflections in mirrors. This allows me to investigate how our perception and self-perception change when we view ourselves in mirrors with artificially altered reflections. Using digital video technology and live video elements, I intend to expand the traditional function and meaning of mirrors. I develop digital hybrid mirror images that reflect a postdigital state. This state emerges from the fusion of the viewer's analog body with the digital space of the environment, which I refer to as postdigital mirrors.

By creating these postdigital mirrors and integrating viewers into the reflection using video technology, I explore new "constructions of reality" and possible changes in our perception of reality and self-perception. The confrontation with one's reflection in a digital mirror leads to altered possibilities for self-observation and expression. This altered perception of our actions, thoughts, and feelings can ultimately shift our perspectives and open up new insights into perception.

Inspired by Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, I create "other," artificially generated living spaces as virtual backgrounds for these mirrors. These spaces, which differ from the ordinary and have deeper layers of meaning or connections to other places, serve as the foundation for my artistic research. My goal through this work is to enrich, change, and adapt artistic and scientific methods.

The installations that I summarize under the term postdigital mirrors can be visualized both as projections and on monitors and other displays. I explore and expand the roles of individuals in participatory and networked societal forms by enriching these roles with additional material and visualizing them from new perspectives. The goal is to develop installations in which viewers can experience themselves as part of cinematic actions that tell narrative stories.

Through digital mirrors, I virtually place viewers in different environments and narratives, allowing them to observe themselves from a new perspective. This experience provides viewers with a temporary glimpse into a system outside their own perception. They become active participants and also passive observers of themselves in the digital reflection. This approach offers a stimulating impulse to gain a new form of self-perception and find new insights into the context of humanity within our living space.



Surface Sensorium
interactive Installation
Joerg Auzinger
2020
video projection
showing the integration of a viewer

Expose

"Am I it when I look in the mirror, or is it the image of the mirror that I see?" asks psychohistorian Rolf Haubl. In relation to mirror images and shadows, Hans Belting poses a similar question: "Is that my own body there and am I here just an image?" These questions demonstrate the complicated, almost inseparable relationship that we and our body have with external media worlds. On the one hand, we want our existence to always be located at the site of our body; on the other hand, we want to reflect ourselves and project onto something outside of us.

The mirror has significant importance in art and cultural history, but also a centuries-old tradition as a magical and symbolic object. In some ancient cultures, it was seen as an image of the soul, in the art of the European Middle Ages it stood for chastity, transience, sensuality, and the pursuit of purification; in the Baroque era, it was a symbol of vanitas, the transience of all human endeavors. The mirror is a medium of self-perception and narcissistic self-duplication, but at the same time, it is also a gateway leading to a parallel universe or a different mode of being, Alice behind the mirrors as a possibility of consciousness expansion.

The significance of the mirror has been elaborated in many philosophical and psychoanalytic texts. Sigmund Freud derives his theory of melancholia from the mirror of Narcissus, Jean-Paul Sartre sees the emergence of self-consciousness in the eyes of others. However, most far-reaching, especially in terms of art production and art theory, was Jacques Lacan's famous essay *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function*.

Lacan's mirror stage is a primary construct and a significant milestone in human self-development, and this powerful moment of self-recognition provides a conceptual premise for self-understanding and development. The mirror moment for Lacan symbolizes the transition from the real human to experiencing the imaginary self through the mirror image, abstracted from the real self. This moment is about both alienation and the consideration of the self as a commodity, extracted from the self. The mirror moment then deals with the birth of an objectified self. The mirror moment of self-recognition and realization finds a long frame of reference in the virtual environment that serves as a space for identity formation and creation.

Recognizing one's own image in standing water and in the mirror is perhaps one of the first true hallucinations that humans encountered. Reflective surfaces in contemporary art are therefore not just aesthetic artifacts but instruments of social penetration and world knowledge, testifying to a statement made by Joseph Beuys in 1972: *The brain is an organ of reflection, as hard and bright as a mirror.*

The mirror acts as a membrane between the real and a virtual world, bringing the level of transcendence and magic into play in an increasingly secularized time. Finally, the mirror is also a medium for narcissistic self-aggrandizement. "Mirror, mirror on the wall..." The look into the mirror could not confirm Snow White's stepmother's unique appearance, but she could become aware of herself and identify her own reflection. And in the story of Narcissus in Greek mythology, he was condemned to fall in love with his own mirror image in the water, as punishment for rejecting the love of the nymph Echo, and thus experienced his image as someone else. When we switch to the present day and replace the magical mirrors with the black mirrors of digital media, Grimm's fairy tales, the mythology of Narcissus, and Plato's allegory of the cave take on a completely new meaning, which is to be visualized and addressed in this artistic research.

The invention of the flat mirror marks a turning point in human self-reflection, as it faithfully represents the object in front of it, even if reversed, but in its full size. Stopping in front of a mirror, the frozen image is like a photograph; when moving, the whole special feature of the reflection is revealed: It reflects life and movement simultaneously. We have learned to use the mirror and no longer question the phenomenon of confusion.

The mirror has been an object of art since the Middle Ages, especially in the Baroque. In the 20th century, it emancipated itself from being an object to material and the philosophical center of art itself. It became both the medium and the crystallization point for theoretical and psychological arguments. The broken and blind mirrors of Heimo Zobernig strip it of its illusionary function and simply turn it into artistic material, while the mixed-media works of Michelangelo Pistoletto connect real mirrors with painting or sculpture, thus involving the respective viewer directly in the image content. "Man has always tried to split himself in order to recognize himself," writes Pistoletto in *The Famous Last Words*.

Mirror iconography received new medial charges not least through photography, video, and film. For example, Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* subject the construction of escapist pseudo-universes by the Hollywood dream factory to

an ironic and deconstructive evaluation. In his films *Le Sang d'un Poète* and *Orphée*, Jean Cocteau let reflective surfaces have people cross through and spoke of the mirror as the gate "through which death comes and goes."

And the video artist Douglas Gordon addresses the mirror in the sense of Jacques Lacan as an I-construction. He loops the famous scene from Martin Scorsese's film *Taxi Driver*, in which Robert de Niro talks to himself and builds up an alter ego as a tough killer. The mirror is a medium of the demiurgic interpretation of the world. My approach to digital mirrors is an attempt to continue the mirror idea and adapt its content and technology to the conditions of the postdigital age.

We have been experiencing, at the latest since the beginning of the media era, that the body is here and now and at the same time elsewhere. We have a relationship with images outside of ourselves, whether these are conciliatory, frustrating, surprising, or frightening. Media act collectively, they fill the gap between us and the outside world. Already at the moment when emotion becomes visible to everyone through facial expressions, poses, or gestures, I myself become a medium. Media were invented to create body images outside of ourselves, to give an external form to our inner self and worldview, to assure us of our existence, and to gain knowledge that acts on us. In principle, any surface that reflects light is already an optical medium. Thus, shadows and reflective water surfaces in the interplay of light, body, and gaze were the first medial experiences of body images. One sees oneself and creates an external, more complete image of oneself. The desire to capture, acquire, control, and reproduce this image justifies the wish to create medial self-portraits.

That mirror mechanisms also work when we deal with medial images from cinema, television, photography, and computer games, which not only represent specific sensations but also activate the affective processes of the audience. In the cinema, we immerse ourselves in foreign worlds, imagine ourselves in unknown situations, live and die with the stars. We do not just want to live in one world, we want to imagine and seem to be able to forget that we are dealing with constructions produced and reproduced by technical devices.

How does the digital reflection of the observer change when filters in the form of different video material are inserted between, i.e., virtual spaces and situations that each change the context of the image situation?

In the postdigital age, the screen fulfills a variety of functions, from self-exploration to voyeurism, encapsulating our renewed ubiquitous fascination with the mirror as a starting point for self-exploration. Our obsession with the screen must be located as a cultural artifact connected to the spectacular. In the digital age, screen and mirror become interchangeable, as they become part of the project of performing, projecting, and consuming the self. This artistic research examines the production of the self in the postdigital age through its problematic and troubling relationship with the mirror and the screen as artifacts of self-production.

The self remains a primary object of interest in the face of our increasing immersion in a ubiquitous screen culture. Today, we have an incestuous attachment to the screen as a cultural artifact that has been domesticated into our daily lives over time and used as a medium for voyeurism and the pursuit of pleasure. Where the screen once stood for the construction of another world beyond us, it is now a theater for assembling ourselves and narrating our experienced moments for others. The digital screen-self is a self made vulnerable by its performance, yet a self constantly fascinated by its own image online. It represents a powerful moment in the digital age. Where mirror and screen become one, the project of the self is on its journey of self-exploration. Historically, the mirror was closely linked to the composition of the self.

In our age of the screen, our notions of what is private and public are being redefined as we offer ourselves as goods for the consumption of others. With the convergence of technologies, we are able to constantly keep ourselves up to date and capture and record ourselves on the go, making the self both subject and object of production and consumption online. The banality of the everyday and likewise the mix of life experiences of the self combine the ordinary with the routine, intertwining both the ordinary and the extraordinary into narratives of the self online.

The screen precedes this postdigital age both historically and culturally in terms of our fascination and obsession with it. Most societies have a deep resonance with the screen for the escape modes and fantasies it offers. The screen is symbolic of worlds beyond us and likewise of locating ourselves within them. The smartphone is considered the pocket mirror of our time. In many ways, it significantly shapes our interpersonal communication today and extends existing cultural techniques of self-reflection and the production of our self-images.

My work concerns and influences the foundations of human perception, our understanding, and our relationship to the world and the people in it, thus creating a space for the unthought beyond market-oriented art production. The idea of my art is to seek new insights and knowledge in a methodical and systematic way. In my interactive installations, where the

observer is involved live through digital video technology, I explore the construction of reality and the inherent changes in our conception of reality. Therefore, I pursue interdisciplinary artistic approaches and realize my projects in an interactive and participatory manner. My artistic work raises questions; these questions are posed visually.

The observer enters into sudden interaction with the things they see on the screen and is caught by themselves as a consumer who also takes on a passive observer role. Self-observation and the observation of others subtly lead to a resonance system between subject and object, revealing that the observer becomes the observed. My installations represent the process mode of the relationship between people and their environment.

In these film scenes, certain emotions are shown in an intense way and originate from the basic emotions. Although the emotions shown in these scenes become clear, it is possible that the observer perceives their own emotions in ambivalent mixed states. The film scenes can also contradict each other. The individual can see themselves in the projection as a "virtual" mirror image in real-time. For this, I use a method that separates the recording of the foreground and background, where the foreground represents the person themselves and the background consists of previously filmed cinematic actions.

Through the video camera, the observer is directly integrated into the projection and thus into the action of the installation. The projection shows short and coherent narrative film sequences and actions with interpersonal communication. By integrating the audience into the installation, the observer thus becomes the protagonist, a main actor of the cinematic action. Each observer becomes the main character and simultaneously the narrator of the story. Both film layers, the previously filmed material and the live video material, merge into a unified video. The live recordings of the camera are cut into the film narration, so the recorded video material is precisely integrated by the observer as a live key into individual scenes.

I explore whether perceptions can be changed when experiencing scenes in which one is the participant and at the same time can observe the same scene from the outside. The change of perspective from the first to the third person has a central priority in my research. The themes of this video installation deal with perception, self-perception, emotions, and virtual communication. How does the observer perceive themselves as well as the entire situation in which they find themselves in a virtual context? It is important to find out whether there is a difference whether the observer watches a film (external/passive) or whether the observer appears as the main character of a cinematic action (internal/active) and observes themselves in this situation.

We transfer body images into other, physical forms and reintegrate them back into and within ourselves. This applies both to media used in art and to everyday media such as writing, language, and digital media. The intermediate medium of the mirror has a special function, as it is directly correlated with the body that generates the image, and we hardly ever touch the image medium (comparable to the cinema image).

Media that represent the human body with all its emotional expressions utilize a feature on the part of the receiver: the ability for empathy. Because seeing affects feeling. External impressions in the cinema, for example, push our inner projections outward and reflect in another person, even if we only meet them on the screen. We know the everyday face-to-face communication, in which mutual emotional contagions are triggered, shown through imitation or repercussions. Examples would be contagious laughter or yawning, where facial expressions and gestures serve communication functions on the one hand and express inner emotions on the other. We can decipher them (or try to) because each emotion is linked to a matching facial or gesture program in the brain. Thus, every other person is more or less a mirror of ourselves because we all have a body, wear a face, and perform gestures.

Apart from the philosophical considerations on the topic of mirrors, there is also the technical challenge that arises from redesigning the classical system of a physical mirror with digital possibilities. The goal is to create a mirror image that reflects the person unchanged but expands the reflection with additional levels of perception, where one can experience oneself from different perspectives and with additional information and thus learn more about oneself on a visual level. The goal is a highly innovative combination of depth sensors, cameras, microphones, and software that transforms your body into a multifunctional perception device, as a work of art that leads to further perception. By using a depth sensor that captures both depth and color in a three-dimensional space, people and their body characteristics, movements, and gestures can be identified.

How does my feeling change when I observe myself viewing a scene? These are not artificial realities but two different realistic narrative strands that are brought together. The difference is merely that the real situations are virtually interwoven to form a new narrative. How does this narrative react when two different situations become a new one?

Does one perceive oneself, one's sensations, and one's body more intensely or differently when one additionally sees oneself from the perspective of the third person during an action?

The virtual reflection of the participant is not only expanded by spaces and objects but especially by the appearance of additional protagonists in the film scenes, who also invite them to virtual interaction with them. The additional actors have different possibilities to intervene in the action. Passive dialogues (the observer is in the role of the viewer) and active.

These additional protagonists are people who were filmed in real life and enter into a dialogue with the participant, provoking emotionally charged situations for him/her (such as conflict situations and situations in which the basic human emotions of communication are addressed). It is clear that the stories that trigger emotional reactions in the participant are more important than the scenarios in which they find themselves. The action deals with interpersonal exchange and actions, verbal and non-verbal communication, body language, and gestures. These narrative strands are developed as part of my artistic research and in collaboration with cognitive scientists. The result is an artistic feature film in which the observer is intensively integrated and the narrative and participatory action is synchronized with the user.

The setup of the installation can be divided into layers with different levels of experience: unknown environment, observation of emotionally charged situations, and virtual interpersonal interactions with additional participants. The layers can overlap and complement each other, alternate, or be based on each other. The unknown environments contrast with the actual environment (white cube) and are only virtually available to the observer at the moment of projection use. Some examples of these environments are standing behind bars, standing on a stage, being in crowded places, or standing in front of an abyss.

Additionally, in the observation of emotionally charged situations, protagonists enter the scene who act in a non-verbal way, without the support of the main character (the participant, who is integrated into the action through the live key method), and experience different situations. These situations can trigger emotions such as fear, shame, or sadness in the observer. Therefore, mixed states of ambivalent emotions are possible because it seems difficult to separate these emotions from each other. The camera, which integrates the observer live into the projection, is equipped with a facial expression recognition system. This is important to make the emotional reactions of the participant readable, in order to provide these data for cognitive neuroscience. As another option, the observer can be invited to interpersonal interactions in the virtual layer by the additional protagonists. These invitations are presented in various emotional colors (screaming, begging, asking, or crying) and can therefore be used to change or intensify the emotions provoked in the participant. These dialogues must work without the actual verbal response or support by the user.

The previously designed film action is a coherent story that follows a script and tells a story and is a composition of all layers. The longer the participant exposes themselves to this action in the projection, the more they can learn about themselves (self-perception, self-reflection). Example: The observer finds themselves on a stage in front of a cheering crowd with standing ovations. The longer the participant stays in this situation, the more the cheering crowd begins to shout encouraging phrases.

Does the observer still feel standing in the room as well as their physical body when they are displayed in an unknown virtual environment as well as in digitally generated situations with unknown protagonists through the live key method? How intensely does the participant perceive their physical body and the space around them (white cube) as well as the relationship to this space when they are simultaneously part of the projection (film action)? How strongly is the user absorbed by this artificially created "film world" (which is based on real-life situations) and thus experiences a loss of their body sensation, such as when sitting in a cinema? Is it possible that the boundaries of their internal and external world begin to blur,

About ten years ago, I participated in a widely acclaimed exhibition that sparked great international interest, named "Postmedia Condition," conceived by Peter Weibel. This exhibition took place at the Medialab Madrid, Centro Cultural Conde Duque as part of ARCO 2006. In this exhibition, I presented an interactive video installation named "Switch Enlightenment." The main question at that time was: "What effects do new and old media have on society and what correlation exists between them?". This question was a very controversial topic in media art at that time and became a main question in my artistic work.

Since then, the postdigital discourse has shaped my visual research as a visual artist. Especially regarding what the digital or postdigital leaves behind in the non-digital realm, or rather, how the digital beyond digital devices influences our modality to think and act in our daily routine? Terms like "Post-Internet" and "Postdigital" are closely related to an artistic engagement with technology, which does not necessarily deal with the digital per se, but rather with life itself, since the digital revolution, which began more than 40 years ago, has become the digital age in which we live today. A decade

after the issue corresponding to the "Postmedia Condition," we now see, with a temporal distance, a great evolution regarding this sociocultural phenomenon through massive improvements in the hybridization of media. We become aware that in the postdigital age, terms like analog or digital are irrelevant, as it turns out that these terms merge and conquer all aspects of our lives. Pre-digital conditions are no longer tangible and imaginable. As digital devices become smaller and increasingly invisible and are integrated into our everyday lives, the digital tends to be anchored in human perception and our way of life. Therefore, the digital is no longer simply a technological cause, but rather a way of life affecting all of humanity. Neither can digital materiality be reduced to screens, nor can software be reduced to hardware.

This results in an immensely spread reality, which, on the other hand, prepares and requires the reality we perceive. By introducing crucial concepts like the postdigital, we develop ways to intervene in and influence the infrastructural composition of reality. We constantly produce vast amounts of visual material, which is stored in social media storages and made available to the user for immediate consumption.

The observers unexpectedly immerse themselves in the events of the happening and catch themselves becoming a consumer with a passive role as a spectator. Therefore, self-observation and the observation of others subtly lead to a resonance system between subject and object, leaving the observer as the observed. The live performances, in which the observer is involved as an active part of the feature film, lead to self-perception and beyond to self-reflection, where the observer can gain a temporary glimpse into a system outside of their own perception. My installations make people aware of the mechanisms and the relationship between humans and their environment.

Electronic media seem to satisfy the need for encounter and physical and emotional contact. But the desire for a collective experience in physical presence remains unfulfilled. The omnipresence of the internet as a cultural mentality has already left the net and has indeed conquered the physical world and become the attitude of the entire society. As far as possible, we live in a world where the contradictions between analog and digital begin to disappear. The current relationship between analog and digital is a complex network in this postdigital world. The multitude of data transmitted via digital media influences our way of thinking and our memory. We constantly generate data (images and texts) and share vast amounts of material on social media channels. Do we always think of the target audience or even a higher authority, as Robert Pfaller formulates? And are we aware of ourselves in the process? While we produce data such as images and texts, we outsource our memories to a technical device, so that we no longer have to deal with this information. One does not have to remember anything anymore but temporarily stores and archives this information in one's smartphone. Are these images we generate really our own, or do we produce collective material that is relevant in the bubble of my social contacts? I try to explore these questions by presenting the observer with a virtual mirror. In my artistic research project, I explore the question of what effects media presence has on the individual's perception and how it influences the user's emotions.

Through the constant use and observation of data and images on our ubiquitous screens, the imaginary becomes increasingly important and changes our view of ourselves and the world around us. We produce more photographs and selfies than ever before and post them immediately online on social media, waiting for reactions from the community. How important is self-perception when it stands in opposition to its representation and presentation to the outside world? Is it possible that self-awareness is influenced by a look into the (post-)digital mirror?

Beyond technical devices, the idea of the digital changes our way of thinking and acting. Therefore, it is no longer simply a technical cause, but a way of life affecting all of humanity. Thus, my work focuses on the role that humanity plays in a postdigital age where biological, cultural, and digital systems collide. It addresses the impact of digital technologies on cultural transformations and the resulting self-perception of humans. Therefore, the consumption of the visual becomes a reflection of the individual.

The environment in which the observer is located is important. Through technical means, I place the observer in completely unknown spaces and unexpected situations. To explore and filter out how separate spaces and situations affect the observer is the subject of my research. It is important to me to explore these studies on emotions within my installations through conversations with the observers.

As part of a presentation or exhibition, the possibility of feedback from both visitors and users is planned. This involves involving the exhibition visitor in the research process by questioning his/her perception. It will be part of my research project to work out how this process could ideally be designed. I want to conduct conversations and discussions to talk about the experiences of individuals and then incorporate these insights into my work. In collaboration with cognitive scientists, the facial expressions of the filmed persons will be analyzed.

The constant possibilities for interaction are associated with an interpassive withdrawal into a social "letting go" (the effect into the opposite) and therefore the outsourcing of participation and pleasure. The concept of interpassivity, as described by Robert Pfaller, also plays an important role in my installations. Instead of enjoying themselves, the interpassive lets others enjoy for them. My installations could therefore be described more as interpassive than interactive. One can only see but change nothing as in the classic idea of interaction. One can change, press, or influence nothing except oneself. Essentially, one can only observe oneself and the environment within the projection. Interpassivity is a reciprocal process that describes an interaction between the individual and society.

My working method generates a new perspective on media. Media are not simply a thing, but rather a process that influences its own conditions of existence. This fact allows the emergence of alternative media-cultural perspectives. The different temporalities and the spatial interfaces occupied and produced by the analog in relation to the digital contain techniques derived from the styles of a collage.

The observer thus becomes both the narrator and the seemingly passive observer in the mirror reflection of digital screens, referring to the visual universes of memories in the mind of the observer. The installations can be seen as an impulse to gather new knowledge about oneself and find new methods of perception regarding humans in the context of our embedded world. Therefore, the installations offer innovative ways to initiate an inner process visually, which can have effects on the external and the everyday. I see my work as an evolution of digital media art with a memory of the beginnings of the media age, for just as mass media significantly influenced our society at that time, we are now experiencing a similar phase of changes through the integration of digital and virtual everyday situations.

There are artistic approaches that allow observers to actively intervene in environments using virtual reality technology, augmented reality, audio control, or gesture control systems. However, there are hardly any comparable artworks that deal with the integration of the observer into the scenery as my work aims to do, most likely because they do not want to place the observer so directly in the center of attention. I often miss an engagement with current social phenomena in many of our contemporary artworks.

I consider my work as art-based research, artistic visualization as a gain of insight through transdisciplinary working methods and interdisciplinary collaboration at the interface between artistic practice and science. I pursue my artistic research in a creative manner, where the results of my research become both artistic products and methods simultaneously. I try to reflect, record, and offer these reflections to an artistic discourse and a scientific research field. My work aims to relate to the fundamentals of our perception, our insight, and our relationship to the world, thus creating a space for the unthought beyond market-oriented art production. I consider my art as a methodical and systematic search for new knowledge. I want to complement and extend my new discoveries and state of knowledge with the findings of other disciplines by using a transdisciplinary method.

My artistic approach also overlaps with performative artworks and intersects with the idea of Expanded Cinema. But above all, my work can be compared with works of early video art that used closed-circuit techniques. Right at the beginning of video art towards the end of the sixties, the new technical possibilities made it possible for the first time to display the video image of a camera in real-time on a screen. This method was often used in so-called closed-circuit installations. Some of the most relevant media artists used such techniques.

Especially in the seventies, installations and arranged situations were created that involved the observer in the representative situation. The special relationship of simultaneity between reality and representation forms a basis for so-called closed-circuit situations. Such an arrangement refers to a closed representation situation where the recording medium is directly connected to the presentation medium.

An early and important work in which the visitor is integrated into the installation is "Wipe Cycle" by Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider from 1969. In addition to its role as a mirror, video was also used in its function as a surveillance instrument. Self-perception was also mediated through a camera eye that can change the perspective in an irritating way, as in many installations by Peter Weibel, for example, "Crucifixion of Identity" from 1973 or Bruce Nauman's "Live-Taped Video Corridor" from 1970.

In his installation "Live-Taped Video Corridor," Nauman placed two monitors on top of each other at the end of an almost ten-meter-long and only 50 cm wide corridor. The lower monitor shows a videotape of the corridor. The upper monitor displays a closed-circuit recording of a camera at the entrance to the corridor, positioned at a height of about three meters. Entering the corridor and approaching the monitors, one quickly enters the area monitored by the camera. But the closer one gets to the monitor, the further one is from the camera, with the result that one's own image on the monitor becomes increasingly smaller. Another irritation: One only sees oneself from behind.

In the early phase of the medium, the commitment to individual perceptual experiences was less prominent than the interest in the general possibilities that video offered for aesthetics and communication technology. Many artists were more interested in an approach that focused on media analysis. Due to its technological proximity to television, video art was often seen as an interface between art and commercial mass communication. Especially at the beginning, the ambivalent relationship between video and television was explored by many artists.

Now, almost 50 years after the development of closed-circuit installations, my approach with live video techniques seems more relevant than ever, especially through the use of this method in view of our postdigital age, in which social and cultural conditions have changed enormously. My work differs from these media art classics, especially in that the camera image is not only connected to a monitor, but that the image is supplemented with additional or generated material, leading to a new context. The technical possibility to mask and replace image elements or areas of the video by using luminance key or alpha channel techniques offers new solutions that are artistically far from being exhausted.

Artistic Research Questions

Does mirror reflection and projection change our perception of body and mind?

How does interaction with digitally enhanced mirrors affect our perception of body and mind?

What kind of self-perception is constructed in a postdigital interaction of an analog experience in digital visibility?

To what extent does the merging of digital and physical realities shape our self-identity and self-perception?



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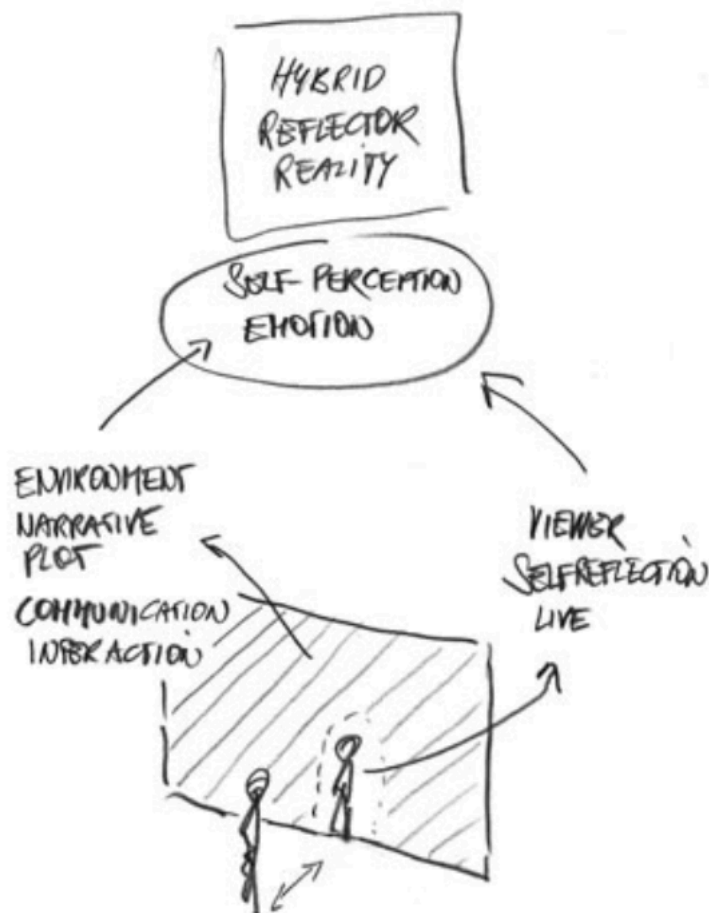
40 x 68 cm

Joerg Auzinger

Methodology

My approach combines practical artistic work with theoretical research. I develop interactive installations that extend traditional mirror functions with digital technologies to enable new forms of self-reflection. These installations serve as experimental platforms for investigating the interaction between the individual and digitally enhanced environments. Qualitative analyses and theoretical reflections complement the practical work to gain a deeper understanding of postdigital self-perception.

By utilizing and refining my discovered methods of live video technique under altered spatial conditions, I aim to develop new user-integrated installations, accompanied by the search for new insights and knowledge about the method, including effective analyses of the research process. Exhibition visitors will be involved in the research process by questioning their perception through semantic differential analyses. The camera that integrates the observer live into the projection will be equipped with a facial expression recognition system, which will be scientifically evaluated. This is important to make the emotional reactions of the participant readable, to provide these data for further research. This artistic research project can be seen as a tool to change our perspectives and observe ourselves as observers, to gain new insights into emotions and sensory perceptions from this approach.



Postopia
Installation view
including the viewer

you can see yourself
in a different context



Expected Contribution

"Postdigital Reflections" aims to contribute to both art and science by connecting these domains. Through the combination of artistic practice and theoretical research, this project intends to offer new forms of artistic expression and theoretical insights into the social and psychological impacts of digital technologies. The goal is to deepen the understanding of the complex relationships between humans, technology, and the environment and lay the groundwork for future research in this interdisciplinary field. To verify a sustainable change in self-perception through everyday use of digital networks and devices with my methods of live video technique under altered spatial conditions. To collect and share experiences to develop and adapt the work and to extend my own state of research through other areas of knowledge, to integrate it into my work, such as other sciences, and there will be close collaboration with scientists from the fields of cognitive science and cognitive neuroscience. To find ways to create an installative situation that allows for a shared experience of physical presence, including personal encounters and reflections on oneself.

The main goal of this project is to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how digital media and technologies influence our self-image and positioning in the world. I intend to enrich the discussion on the role of technology in society and open new perspectives on the construction of the self in the digital age.

Form of Reflective Documentation and Timeline

The research and development process will continue simultaneously over the next two years. The research consists equally of theory and practice. The last year of research will be spent on the elaboration of a written thesis. The results will flow into new artistic works. There will be a final presentation in the form of an interactive exhibition, including lectures and discussions in collaboration with scientists from the fields of cognitive science and cognitive neuroscience as well as philosophy.

For the PhD project "Postdigital Reflections: Reconstructing the Self at the Intersection of Art and Science," focusing on the convergence of digital technologies and self-perception through interactive mirror environments, two potential references come to mind:

Prof. Dr. Lev Manovich, A leading theorist in digital culture and media art, whose work on the language of new media and software studies could provide critical insights into the theoretical framework of your project.

Prof. Dr. N. Katherine Hayles, Her research on posthumanism and the interaction between literature, science, and technology offers a deep understanding of the digital transformation of human perception, which aligns well with the objectives of your research.

These scholars have extensive experience in the intersection of technology, art, and human experience, making them suitable references for your ambitious project.

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