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Considering Mediation

Substance and Self through Virtual Public Space

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_dedication

This work is dedicated to the web and the mesh, and
the subjectivity of machines.

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Through this investigative process that often seems solitary but is rather far from individual, there are many agents to which I owe great thanks in completing this work.

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_abstract

The present work brings together considerations about the uses and effects of media in virtual public space as the Self is more and more distributed throughout the digital environment. This research explores an ontological shift that takes place through the ubiquity of technologies serving as extensions of the body into a realm of unembodied space, and how these extensions force a reassessment of objecthood, Being, and interconnection. As lines between public and private are blurred in this territory, the idea that a person can belong solely to themselves is dissolved.

The project that materializes these considerations is carried through the perspective of the designer-participant, understanding that the field of study is inseparable from the researcher and so less suitable to be projected by the researcher-observer. It aims to visualize and embody through cross-media experimentation of analog means in physical space the friction that occurs in the multi-layered experience of Happening simultaneously in real and virtual spaces.

This post-digital condition, characterized by avatarization, lends itself to Beings of distributed consciousness and plural materialities that if ignored create a discomfort of perpetual discordant vibrations. A study that aims from a visual perspective to discuss and elaborate on the fine line of space between hand, screen, and digital server and how to mitigate the heat of friction and recognize possibilities of an interconnected ecology through distribution.

Keywords: media, post-digital, virtual space, materiality, objecthood

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fig_1 Three visitors play with the elements of an interactive installation. Further description of this event is provided in section 3.3.3 (click for larger image, or follow to page 63)

1_introduction

“Eu procurei o fim do mundo porém não pude alcançar
Nem vou gastar o meu juízo querendo o mundo explicar
Toda vez que eu dou um passo o mundo sai do lugar”¹

Siba, *Toda Vez Que Dou um Passo o Mundo Sai do Lugar* (2007)

1.1_objectives

The main objective of this research is to digest a new ontology as the Self acts ever-more in the plural virtual public space. This will be achieved by looking critically at new media technologies and how they interact with acts of communication as old as communication itself and so, how this relation alters the current conception of Self and Others. It also aims to elucidate the role of media in conditioning our communication and perception, to add to the theoretical conversation about media and the post-digital condition from the point of view of the designer through philosophical-posthumanist language. To approach these topics, both a philosophical survey and an art-contextual survey will be conducted, through both theoretical and practice-based research models. At the heart of the investigation is a search for the body and a desire toward a comprehension of Being in contemporary terms. This search is the attempt to map novel spatialities of hybrid materiality in an effort to expand and inhabit the vibrational space which lies at the border of real and virtual; a space which the Self both inhabits and crosses simultaneously. Without the pretense of conclusion or universality, the real objective of the investigation is to begin to display and describe a territory to be further questioned, discussed, and explored.

The project component proposes experimentation and exposition of these theoretical elements in visual and spatial forms to carry the ideas into a public realm. At the confluence of communication media theory and a posthumanist ontology may exist an array of visual approaches to attempt provocation of a public discourse around what it may mean to Be in connection with others in the current hybrid mesh ecology. The

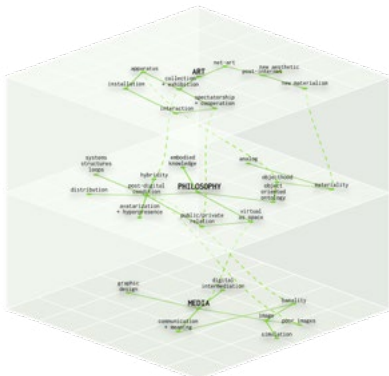
¹ Translated to english loosely reads:
I searched for the end of the world but I couldn't reach it
Nor will I waste my sanity wanting to explain the world
Every time I take a step the whole world moves

collection of these experiments may serve to visualize a singular location without Real spatial coordinates.

1.2_investigation questions

What follows are the central questions that orient this research, distilled from a series of concerns or feelings of unrest related to the state of Being and connection in contemporary culture. The first question is the guiding line of the research that follows, while the others relate to specific approaches taken in point of view and in practice, respectively. The project component of the research is then guided by further uncertainties brought through the theoretical statements herein into visualizations and experiences extrapolated from the wandering of investigation.

- i. How does media affect communication through virtual public space?
- ii. What space is left for embodied knowledge and meaning as avatarization of the Self is propagated through virtual space?
- iii. How can artistic production respond to changes in ontological perception brought on by the ubiquity of digital technologies?



fig_2 Conceptual content map depicting the research territory in three dimensions



fig_3 From above, or in two dimensional projection, the content map would appear like so

1.3_conceptual content map

The present concept map (fig_2 fig_3) intends to lay out the territory to be explored through the following investigation. It is organized in three overlapping layers, representing three areas of study, with points mapped on each. The lines that connect each layer do not define the only possible relations between topics but rather the connections laid out in the text. As the research delves in the mesh, an understanding that there can always be a line to connect any two objects, and so no strict relations are to be extrapolated from this diagram. This acts only as a visualization of territory that the investigation aims to explore. There is no proper path, no X to mark the spot, no treasure at the end of the map, but rather a wandering exploration of hybrid space which could stand as the so-called treasure in itself.

1.4_methodology

This mode of study is less interested in a chronologically or linearly ordered approach to research, just as the digital territory can be characterized as achronistic as well as aspatial. Rather, it follows something more akin to the rumination of a cow, continually chewing and attempting to digest and chewing again until enough absorption of material has occurred to mobilize the release of an output. The visceral language employed in describing the methodology is in response to the second research question, holding the body near the center of the practice. This back and forth pattern of development demonstrates how the project-practice helps to push the theoretical study just as much as the theoretical study orients the project. This overlap in investigation is a common conflict in project-based research, especially in the arts. The approaches to each are very different in form and time, and yet they are deeply intertwined, and so it is difficult to conceive of the theory and the practice as being separate in any form. The distinction that could be made is that on one hand is an institutionalized academic approach to study that has a clear semiotic form, expected to follow a sort of science in method, to then be reported and synthesized through a linear linguistic resolution. While on the other, is an experimental and diagonal approach to study that is not required to take any distinct form, and may then be abstracted or materialized in the attempt of an aesthetic resolution. However, depending on the preferences of the investigator, any of those distinctions could cross over to the other area. In the case of this research, both the written linguistic output, and the aesthetic materialization of the content of study consider that boundary line a freely inhabitable space.

As philosophical concerns are absorbed, there is a temporal space that must exist between absorption and output; a digestion period. In this period, synthesis happens slowly through conversation, mental wandering, and outputs of varied media but rarely text. When the hand is let loose, connected to a mind grappling with new ideas, it can reach for any number of tools to create motions that may aid in that rumination. Those motions do not come from a divine muse but rather constant access to contemporary art production, from

seeing forms that the body would like to reproduce in some fashion, from witnessing new approaches to artistic communication, or studying the history of artistic communication and its media. These generate the experiments that when laid together create a singularity equal in content to the following text, but freed from the expectation of asserting any objective truth about the context in which it emerged. That is the heart of art production as one of the few endeavors that can be said to exist for its own sake; to be of the utmost cultural importance without having to serve any active purpose while still maintaining existence within a social context that defines the value of things in their servility to something else. This is not to say that the written order of ideas completely lacks in aesthetic value or semantic freedom, or to diminish the impact that linguistic organization has on directing the production of these artifacts. It cannot be overstated that these approaches represent two sides of the same practice, one could not have developed without the other. This is the territory that defines one practice that is enacted through two different approaches that have radically different temporalities. At any point in the process, the new ideas brought into the Being could have the need to spill out when the words find themselves in a socially agreed upon syntax. One cannot force a sentence to mean something if the words are not there, if the ideas have not *clicked* so to speak, or rather synthesized into something that fulfills the requirements laid out at the beginning of the investigation, but one can begin just creating without knowing where that production will lead. These two processes hand in hand lead to a rich and deep comprehension of the topics of study, though it may hamper a steadiness in the temporality of that comprehension.

As the diagonal experimentation starts forming a web that meets at a central point, it may make sense to display that singularity as either a new production or a collection of those experiments. This could take myriad forms, the final of which can only be defined when the moment arises to expose that central point. A more thorough description of the form the project ultimately takes will occur in chapter three. However, the project was not executed at the moment an answer was achieved—if an answer could be said to have been

achieved at all—but rather when enough pieces were joined to hopefully produce a clearer question, or at the least, provide a satisfactory aesthetic experience comprised of parts and pieces of one idea made from differing styles and media². This process attached to the specific questions laid out previously, ultimately leads to a harmonizing with the friction of one oscillation to locate the next layer of vibration to explore.

A note on the formatting of the text: As this document was meant to be read and distributed digitally, the decision was made to place the images alongside the text, accompanying the narrative as it passes. One of the most radical aspects of images published for screens is the ability to zoom in or out at will. This complements the content explored throughout the text, embodying the everything-all-at-once aspect of a hybrid real/virtual life, acting as a sort of readily available hypertext. Each image, however, is also available in larger scale at the end of this document as part of the annex. When viewed through a PDF reader, the images that accompany the text link to their large-scale version in the annex by clicking the small image in the sidebar. Click on the full size image to return to the text. If the reader prefers to read the text in print, it is recommended to separate the annex and view it alongside the text, hypertext IRL. Project and installation images, including the ones in this text, are also available on the author's digital portfolio clarissepin.to.

² This is the only instance in this text in which media specifically means the material of artistic creation, such as paint or paper. Rather throughout the remaining text, media will refer to the shape that communication takes, the thing which carries the information.

2_mapping conceptual territory

“This is how space begins, with words only, signs traced on the blank page.”

George Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (1974)

2.1_the connected virtual

With the internet at our fingertips, there is seemingly free and open access to an object created one hundred years ago as one created one hundred seconds ago. This spans the written word, performance, visual art, music, idea, all potential matter of communication. This ease of access affects not just the receiver but the creator as well as, “culture and language are fundamentally changed by the ability for anyone to gain free access to the same image-creation tools used by mass-media workers” (Vierkant 2010), as illustrated by digital artist Artie Vierkant in the essay *The Image Object Post-Internet*. In the present moment so much varied information is accessed through the same essential medium, indifferent to the content's temporality and often also to its context. The initial experience of something like art accessed through contemporary modes of communication can ignore the originally intended experience of the object which has now been mediated through layers of abstractions and transformed at its core into a string of ones and zeroes. These are virtual objects, meaning they exist as an image or simulation of the intended real. Which isn't to say they are less valid, as cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard discussed in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), these images can often be more useful to society than the real object. There he confirms a culture in which one can no longer distinguish what is real from its simulation or rather excludes the necessity of the real as origin point. This is prophetic of the contemporary experience in which the real and virtual have reached a confluence of value. Through the attempts to make highly mediated experiences—like virtual reality or the dispersed lives of our avatars—as indistinguishable as possible from unmediated, or first hand, experiences, these overlap in importance and

occurrence through daily life, so the set of values and valuations attributed to each is evermore equal. Real and unique are characterizations of much less significance when communication and its objects can be spread through time and space across the possibilities inherent to the digital realm. Later in *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1987), the hyperreal emerges, an era characterized by, “that which was previously mentally projected, which was lived as metaphor in the terrestrial habitat is from now on projected, entirely without metaphor, into the absolute space of simulation” (Baudrillard 1987, 22-23) else a reality, or a space, that has no history, no origin, and no discernable end. The idea of the simulation is akin to what we consider the virtual, an unreal object, an unreal space or else that which is made possible through computation and so never existing physically in a way we can relate to simply with our bodies.

2.1.1_virtuality and images

In this novel virtual space, the image becomes the most central object to this communication that occurs regularly between agents across digital media. This happens as a product of the endless endeavor toward heightened efficiency that thrives off of a rapid fire attention economy, coupled with the appetite that drives technological advances. Images speak much faster than the spoken or written word, and as casual interfaces become more complex and their physical media more sophisticated, so grows the possibility for creating more nodes and levels of information digitally transferred for immediate absorption. This immediacy refers to time of access not transmission, as much of digital communication occurs passively by one entity offering something to be communicated that stays waiting in virtual space-time until it is acknowledged by another virtually extended entity. Only then is the act confirmed as communication at all, by fulfilling the necessary element of plurality of agents involved in a transference of information. What do these images consist of? And how do they serve the inhabitants of virtual space? As described by philosopher Sybille Kramer in her 2008 essay *Does the Body Disappear? A Comment on Computer Generated Spaces*, “virtuality not only produces illusory

objects, but provides real objects with illusory placings” (Kramer 2002, 29). A feeling emerges as if all sides of an object are exposed, or akin to seeing yourself through the eyes of an Other. Image here refers to a representation³ or sign of something that could not otherwise exist in that material. An image is very rarely a complete version of the original thing meant to be communicated, generally one-sided, frozen in time, and is never anything more than an image in itself though the value of the image is determined by the impacts of its contents which are essentially difficult to arrive at, hidden by the sheath of medium.

Virtual culture, though spatially networked, is dominated by the hierarchy of vision as screens are the most widely implemented physical interfaces for accessing digital information and computational programs. For conscious acting agents to participate in virtual space, they must then also create an image of themselves, their avatars, to navigate this image-space. This means that the content of those images, the information they carry, become objects in themselves. The digital image-objects of real communication are the material that make up the accessible⁴, or surface level, virtual space of common interpersonal communication. A social space of constant representation and speed, and so however mesmerizing and novel each interaction may be, banality towards not just the image-contents but also the fact of an image as merely representational, is the inescapable consequence of the daily barrage of digital imagery.

2.1.2_spectacle of banality

Digital objects and communication now constantly exist stored on a server, and yet are also in constant reduction and reproduction across time and physical space for storage and access at a whim. The ubiquity of the cell phone has quickly led to a banalization of the information consumed through this device and its interfaces, which we now can carry with us to privately continue the act of public consumption even to

³ generally visual, however this also entertains the linguistic description of those representations for analogous understanding, especially by the visually impaired

⁴ The computational code, or subface, is inaccessible by multiple layers of linguistic abstraction.

the locations in which the most intimate necessities of the body are enacted. Holding small boxes of light and sound and seemingly infinite access has allowed a new height of spectacle. In Guy Debord's terms, "the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images. The spectacle cannot be understood as a mere visual excess produced by mass-media technologies. It is a worldview that has actually been materialized" (Debord 1967, 2-3). This underscores what Baudrillard later comes to say on communication not as an act of pure exchange but rather a form of social reproduction for cultural organization (1987). While it may be simple to understand how entertainment or marketing media is favored by manifesting as spectacle, through this lateral cultural organization even the most basic of interpersonal communication has become a spectacular act.

The body might occupy similar physical territories as sixty years ago, when ideas of spectacle were first being disseminated, but now actions and interactions also take place in parallel planes that are atemporal and aspatial; constantly existing nowhere in particular but with the potential of Being anywhere or everywhere at any time. With this totality, attention becomes currency as media is endlessly networked, reproducible, and alterable in contrast to, "fixed (which is to say, physical) media once imposed an economy to the image and object, a value driven by scarcity which necessitated a one-to-many system of distribution" (Vierkant 2010). This is no longer the case in the split virtual plane which is also what allows for the full immersion with little break in an oversaturated digital image culture characterized by being both highly filtered in appearance and not filtered at all in subject. This territory of constant overload means that images last but a few moments before they are replaced with the next. Regardless of the level of communication, it can be made immediately irrelevant, past, banal as if each instance were a tile on the facade of a building only meant to be passed by as part of a whole, detached and trivial. When all is banal, what is left can be a perpetual yearning for meaning, for the conclusions of communication. However, as the contemporary post-digital context, "is made up of reader-authors who by necessity must

regard all cultural output as an idea or work in progress able to be taken up and continued by any of its viewers,” (Vierkant 2010) the users and Beings in virtual space may never truly feel a sense of conclusion. Through the act of communication, the medium—the space, the form, the ear of the listener—alters the message just by virtue of being the matter through which information passes. As it passes, information gains and absorbs, is manipulated and misconstrued like a children’s game of telephone until it is received. The reception of the information is then further subject to the plural constructions of the receiver up until the point of communication.

2.2_media and meaning

If one hundred years ago Marcel Duchamp placed a urinal in a museum inviting the public to rethink the context of the institution and to reframe the banal, today in a natural progression of consumption and communication, the museum has been taken to the urinal. This accidental reversal served as the initial spark for investigation. As the ceaseless barrage of information becomes more addiction than satisfaction, we inadvertently reprogram how we absorb and react to the greatest of beauties and atrocities to be known and all content of communication is equalized in value. It then becomes imperative to look closely at media as it in-forms communication and thus alters the perception of information and environment. Here, environment should be understood as the medium of the system. Have the limits of banality been removed by the rate at which new information is presented? and does it mean that information may no longer be the valued object of communication but rather value exists in the form taken by communication itself—the media? One of the clearest examples of this idea as *illuminated* by media theorist Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media* (1964), is through the consideration of electric light, which now could be expressed as the ever-present digital screen.

The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were ... What we are considering here, however, are the psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as

they amplify or accelerate existing processes. For the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs. (McLuhan 1964, 23-24)

This change of scale tends towards the amplification of actions performed therein, which results in a necessary numbing of the body parts that cannot easily compute the increasing multitude of happenings it receives, and so must reduce and equalize the importance of each media input. Without this numbing the body’s sensory receivers would burn out and paralyze, unfit to deal with the barrage of information to be processed. In the contemporary virtual context, this would mean that the attempt to absorb and process the simultaneous spatiality and sensory phenomena of the virtual space the data body occupies and the real space the physical body occupies would lead to insanity.

2.2.1_digital intermediation

It could be said then that any production of meaning may only be attained through or across the medium which caused this initial banalization of the information. Attached at the hip, so to speak, the media that allows access to the internet, and thus one another, has fulfilled the definition of “extension of man” described by McLuhan (1964) and helps confirm the final boundary break between human and machine as described by Donna Haraway in *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991); asserting the end of Humanist dualism as a way forward not just in human interrelationships with machines but with any object Other than the Self. As new media technology is used to extend the human to complete tasks beyond the possibilities of the body, a sort of overstimulation of the embodied Self occurs due to the amplification of disembodied actions taking place through virtual connections that are initiated by a real action. “Such amplification is bearable by the nervous system only through numbness or blocking of perception.” (McLuhan 1964, 52) This physical numbness grows as the Self now also occupies virtual space and loses grasp of the simultaneous Happening of all of its dispersed parts; a banalization of the physical information content of the Self. However, to use these technological extensions is to

embrace them, accepting them and their accompanying displacement of perceptions as parts of the personal system. This embrace, to McLuhan, is a relation of servo-mechanism.

Physiologically, man in the normal use of technology—or his variously extended body—is perpetually modified by it and in turn finds ever new ways of modifying his technology. Man becomes, as it were, the sex organs of the machine world, as the bee of the plant world, enabling it to fecundate and to evolve ever new forms. (McLuhan 1964, 55-56)⁵

However, with this example of sexual reproduction comes the need for the meeting of two complementary sex organs, one which fertilizes and the other which receives and develops. This places the human and the machine at an unequal standing of existence, a relation which has changed due to the blurring of lines between Self and technologies in the continual cyborgian dance of extension. Else to say that the meeting of human and computational machine actually creates a single structurally coupled system of autopoietic production rather than a simple propagation akin to biological sexual re-production. The result is a state of Self that does not depend on a specific location to define the limits of its-Self, but remains a singular entity collaged in its multiple recreations.

The reduction, then, of medium as message, of there being nothing to communicate but communication itself is what Baudrillard called Ecstasy, something like the vibration of the medium or the frequency of the electric light; the medium ever-happening. “Ecstasy is all functions abolished into one dimension, the dimension of communication. All events, all spaces, all memories are abolished in the sole dimension of information: this is obscene.” (Baudrillard 1987, 28) Obscene because it lays all things bare and exposed, without mystery or seduction. As the opposite of passion, obscenity eliminates desire into the world of cold fascination, of calculated spectatorship, of information divorced from embodied knowledge. This leads to what he then refers to as a Schizophrenia, “with the emergence of an immanent promiscuity and

⁵ It is pertinent to note the outdated nature of the use of the word man by McLuhan and Baudrillard through their direct quotes, in place of a genderless word like person or self which today is known to be both more accurate to intent and more useful in general effect.

the perpetual interconnection of all information and communication networks” (Baudrillard 1987, 30) characterized by proximity and instantaneousness with things to total absolutism, relinquishing the notion of any limit to Being. “No longer [able to] produce himself as mirror, he becomes a pure screen, a pure absorption and resorption surface of the influent networks” (Baudrillard 1987, 30). However, as mass media through screens becomes ever more our public forum, we can recognize that this relation is not harmful but helpful as the Self reflects their surroundings and when inhabiting the data-body is effectively the same media as its environment. The forms described by Baudrillard taken by the networked and autopoietic Self, who is in constant empty and yet transparent communication in an effort to prove its own existence, are very near to the acting of the virtual Self through constant avatarization. The creation of avatars to stand in place of whatever the original Self may be so as to take up other forms of action or representation, is not a new occurrence. The very word *person* is derived from the Greek, *persona* to mean *per-sonare* as in *to sound through*, referring to the mask ancient actors used to speak their role (Kramer 2008, 36). The very idea of personhood and personalization is rooted in avatarization, in forming and reforming versions of the Self in an attempt to better inhabit or be understood by the Other and its objects.

2.2.2_the field of visual communication

The field of graphic design is one of visual communication. This means using or manipulating or creating media for communication content to pass through. As aesthetic considerations are made about material and form in these highly mediated modes, simulacra of a Real are brought into being, and so the focus of interpretation shifts from the reality of the content to the effect of the media; to something on the surface or even the surface itself. Communication theorist Vilém Flusser when suggesting a philosophy for design and communication in *The Codified World*⁶ (1991) lays out definitions for material and form that are helpful in shaping an idea of content and Being. Material is described as, “an amorphous jelly of phenomena ...

⁶ Title translated by author, originally *O Mundo Codificado* in Portuguese

an illusion” (Flusser 1991, 21) or something akin to concept; the stuff that things are made of, so to speak. It is that which is inaccessible without a form. Form is then, “the immutable and eternal, that which is filled or covered in material” (Flusser 1991, 21). Form is what could be considered the Real. Flusser anecdotally illustrates this concept as, “if I see a table, what I see is wood in the form of a table ... which has been [formed, informed and deformed] by the designer into the idea of a table ... The fatality exists in the impossibility of creating the ideal table” (Flusser 1991, 24). From that it is clear that we cannot visualize the concept of the material of wood without it first being formed into the idea of table. In other words, content cannot exist without being mediated by a form. This asserts that all design is formal, never material. “Form is the how of the material and material is the what of the form, so design is a method for making material appear as it does” (Flusser 1991, 26) or, rather, appear at all. Communication must pass through a medium to exist, what is absorbed is made possible by the medium itself. In other words, the form may be characterized one way or another by the material which it contains, but the content can never be the central object of communication itself.

As critical focus is logically brought to formal matters in the over-designed digital context, only the container or transporter is noticed, as the content becomes easily replaceable with any and all other digitally available material that can be made to fit that form. In McLuhan’s terms, “the medium is the message because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association” (McLuhan 1964, 24). Media in this text should be understood as the substrate through which communication passes, as a space which is transporter and transformer, as meta-phor⁷. It serves to connect but also is the connection or link itself. Could it also serve as the massage? To assuage and appease, and so control? As graphic design can wield the power to define the medium, it can also serve to uphold hegemonic structures in public spaces, by shining light or

⁷ Meta-phor stylized in this way as reference to Graham Harman's deconstruction of metaphor as object (Harman 2018)

obfuscating certain forms of communication. A critical look at this process is vital for those who do not wish to propagate a culture of numbness and banality under a barrage of stylized and mediated information. Is it possible for the medium itself to have taken control, or is control hidden behind so many layers of mediation that it is highly dispersed and nearly inaccessible?

It is a peculiar bias of those who operate media for the owners that they be concerned about the program content ... The owners themselves are concerned more about the media as such, and are not inclined to go beyond *what the public wants* or some vague formula. Owners are aware of the media as power, and they know that this power has little to do with content, or the media within the media (McLuhan 1964, 60).

Is there space for the body in these modes of communication or has communication been relegated to a territory of understanding and consuming which excludes bodily sensation in this virtual space? In other words, has the virtual left behind embodied communication? Is it a purely hermeneutic space?

2.3_philosophy as reorganization

The discussion around these questions surrounding mediation of communication through virtual public spaces should here be digested through the lens of philosophical posthumanism. In the most simplistic sense, the one which will be applied here, philosophical posthumanism refers to a critique or turn against liberal Humanism that reframes thinking away from a separation between the Human and Everything Else into discrete ontological domains, toward a less hierarchical and more unified ecological context. This mode allows for reevaluation in considering what is the Self, and so its actions, derived from an awareness of the profound interconnectedness of Humans with Everything Else as technological extensions create an ever more rhizomatic understanding of relations. Through this ever extended Self spread across computational technology these networks of relation have become unignorable and require this reassessment to better make sense of how the Self acts and interacts

in complex interwoven systems. This reassessment or reorganization, is the fundamental function of philosophy as an enterprise. To philosophize is to look around and redetermine an order of things based on synthesis of new informations or across novel points of view in effort to better match the theoretical image to the real experience, to better express reality as culture naturally shifts through time. From another point of view, literary critic Katherine Hayles lays bare in *How We Became Posthuman*—as early as 1999—that the posthuman signals,

the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice. (Hayles 1999, 286)

In that analysis lies the clear illustration that this reorganization was made possible as more diverse voices and backgrounds are able to participate in the ontological conversation as part of an ongoing shift in power dynamics. Philosophical posthumanism then allows for this new ecological understanding that objects have relations within themselves when no human is present in the system, thus the Being of all objects and their relations create ripples that affect humanity in ways previously ignored by the Humanist tradition on which current foundational institutions—including political, academic, social and cultural structures—are built. It is important to highlight that posthumanism in this text should be read as distinct from transhumanism. As according to critical theorist Cary Wolfe in *What is Posthumanism* (2010) who describes transhumanism as rather an intensification of the Humanist tradition in which the human transcends the biological and all embodiment or materiality, repressing animal origins to achieve some higher form or a superhumanity through machines; such as the classic example of the immortal mind uploaded to a computational system.

Instead, the posthuman context considered here is one towards absolute immanence of the Self with surrounding systems and their objects, rejecting transcendence as a goal for humanity or even betterment of the individual Self. This departure has become

necessary as Wolfe explains in an interview with the New York Times in 2017,

The sketches of the ‘human,’ ‘the animal’ or ‘nature’ that we get from the humanist tradition are pretty obviously cartoons if we consider the multifaceted, multidisciplinary ways in which we could address these questions. Humanism provides an important cultural inheritance and legacy, no doubt, but hardly the kind of vocabulary that can describe the complex ways that human beings are intertwined with and shaped by the nonhuman world in which they live. (Wolfe 2017)

It can be seen that what is left behind in posthumanism is not the Human and all its prosthetic and embodied complexities, but rather Humanism and its rigid dichotomies. This abandonment of the autonomous liberal subject also signals a change in from where meaning is derived. Instead of being guaranteed by an object’s unique origin, meaning erupts through a natural evolution. There is Being when a pattern emerges from the chaos, free from any illusion of control or conscious agency. This consideration of pattern from randomness replacing the dualistic ideal of presence versus absence harks back to Flusser’s material concerns in design as, “chaos and gas are the same word ... material are the temporary islands of agglomeration in energy planes of possibility which cross paths” (Flusser 1991, 23).

2.3.1_post-digital condition

To understand the totality of the environment as comprised of endless nuances of structurally coupled systems also requires Wolfe’s definition of, “meaning as a specifically modern form of self-referential recursivity that is used by both psychic systems (consciousness) and social systems (communication) to handle overwhelming environmental complexity”(Wolfe 2010, 20) untethered from individual subjectivity. This view offers an opportunity to free oneself from the violent numbness via overstimulation of extensions as previously laid out by McLuhan. This self-referential recursivity is a feedback loop of the Self looking for itself in the pursuit of connection with an Other. In other words, the attempt to resolve

non-identification of the Self is what leads to exteriority, as Wolfe describes, “The very thing that separates us from the world connects us to the world, and self-referential, autopoietic closure, far from indicating a kind of solipsistic neo-Kantian idealism, actually is generative of openness to the environment” (Wolfe 2010, 31). This is Niklas Luhmann’s openness from closure principle described in *Social Systems* (1995),

The concept of a self-referentially closed system does not contradict the system’s openness to the environment. Instead, in the self-referential mode of operation, closure is a form of broadening possible environmental contacts; closure increases, by constituting elements more capable of being determined, the complexity of the environment that is possible for the system. (Luhmann 1995, 37)

Given this principle, the more virtual the world is the more real it is because internal complexity increases connection, sensitivity, and dependence on the environment by developing further instances of understanding, essentially increasing the surface area of the system through folds or fractals and thus increasing the possible nodes of outward connection. As an object aims inward in constant recreation of an image of itself—plural or fractal virtualities—the more chances it has to obtain verification of itself externally as real. This demonstrates the creation of social space through communication as, “‘being’ rests upon ‘being acknowledged’” (Kramer 2008, 35).

Baudrillard opened a similar discussion previously in *Ecstasy of Communication* (1987), when articulating the fractal self in the very early years of personal computing. He considered salacious the level of transparency with which life was portrayed on television and found a loss of communicative seduction in the ease at which the other is accessed. “Imagining others and everything which brings you closer to them is futile the instant that ‘communication’ can make their presence immediate” (Baudrillard 1987, 40). The individual he describes as the fractal subject, which endlessly reproduces itself as outward screen instead of inward mirror, is almost a direct description of a social media selfie feed which, “is diffracted into a multitude of identical miniaturized egos, multiplying in an embryonic mode as in a biological culture, and completely

saturating its environment through an infinite process of scissiparity ... [and] dreams only of resembling himself in each one of his fractions.” (Baudrillard 1987, 38-39) However similar these views of recursivity of the Self may be, Baudrillard’s pessimism lies in his attachment to liberal Humanist foundations of thought which required the Self to exist in one compact point. Unable to view the possibilities of these ecological structures, the fear of the complete dissolution of the Self mars his ideas with pessimism where, as Hayles would later reorganize, “by contrast, when the human is seen as part of a distributed system, the full expression of human capability can be seen precisely to depend on the splice rather than being imperiled by it” (Hayles 1999, 312). Distributing embodied awareness and cognition across human and nonhuman agents of the environment allows for an expansion of the Self that is at greater interplay with all ecological agents, making possible a better understanding of human articulation with intelligent machines.

2.3.2_the distributed self

In the terms provided by Hayles (1999) the Self exists as a distributed body, a dispersed assemblage of elements that takes many forms and materialities and temporalities, essentially a *Thing among Things*⁸. A body with no singular location, but a singular time, collaged of prosthetics and extensions, at certain points material or biological, at others not. Else to Wolfe, a body that is in reductions comprised of symbols and signs, “the constitution of the self by language and how it rewires the brain being the most obvious example [of distribution]. That is, if you like, the ‘truth’ of the self: that it exists nowhere as a totality” (Wolfe 2017). Social media being the most obvious example of this dispersal. Endlessly replicable representations of the Self exist scattered across screens and servers, that can be accessed, stored and manipulated, but all still hold a part of what creates the totality of the Self. This perpetual existence in space, both here and there, physical and virtual, now and yesterday, and always accessible at its most basic form through a string of binary code

⁸ This term is affectionately appropriated from the title of Jon Yau’s 2008 book on the work of Jasper Johns, in which he imbues with humanity and emotion a body of work traditionally analyzed as purely formalist and materialist.

is what will be defined as Hyperpresence⁹—a constant, atemporal, aspatial state of Being.

Many of these parts are avatars, created by the physical or Real body to exist in virtual space as a simulation and interact with other virtual and nonhuman elements. This act of self replication comes from a desire to reach out in communication to Others who are equally reaching across time and space and media to confirm themselves as Being. If the new speed of communication killed fantasy for Baudrillard, then the Hyperpresence permitted by virtual public space would be a new pornography. However, with the ability to manipulate the avatar to reflect desires beyond physical reality, it is possible that those virtual filters and veils serve to recreate a certain mystery. But is it a mystery of falsehoods or of seduction? This may depend on the intent of who controls this information and the media that it passes through. This is the act of communication that now takes place in the ever present, ever happening virtual space as a phenomenon of varied layers requiring the consideration of both human and nonhuman elements that participate in the transference of information. as Wolfe (2017) goes on to exemplify,

That's what makes email such an incendiary form of communication: all those dampening and texturing dimensions of the communication go away, and so the communication becomes all the more thin and brittle, and to try and get some of it back we start inserting emoticons, and so on. In all this, the properly 'human' is only part of the story; it's nested in a larger, and in many ways nonhuman, set of contexts and forces. (Wolfe 2017)

Despite the neutralizing power of the keyboard, it is also the physical interface that allows for the demonstration of humanity through this novel space. Without these nonhuman elements, the attempt at communication across virtual space through digital media could feel like an act of screaming into a void or banging one's head against unbreakable glass; reactions to the overstimulation that would require

⁹ The author took the liberty to invent and apply this neologism following philosophical tradition, as part of experimental play in this field. As defined above and further discussed throughout the text, Hyperpresence describes the Self that exists in two bodies, the Being in Becoming. Effectively, occupying two places at once while at the same time being a singular position occupied by two objects, defying basic rules of physics.

numbness of the Self to access or else result in total dissolution. If digital media is the singular form in which the hyperpresent Self communicates in continual self-reference to create contact with its exterior, how does media and its technology affect or shape communication through virtual public space?

This dispersal, however, is not one of disembodiment but rather the personalization of a new body, the data-body. The “‘flesh body’ and ‘sign body’ are connected by a bilaterally permeable, electronic umbilical cord” (Kramer 2008, 30). It is the physical bodily existence, sensorial perception, and movement across three-dimensional space that allows for the data-body to be active in virtual space at all; the physical body interacting with an interface so the data-body may interact with nonhuman objects in the virtual environment. When one enters virtual space, it is not the Body as a whole that is left behind but rather what occurs is a depersonalization of the physical body and a transference of that personhood to the virtually located data-body. In this way, there is never a true disembodiment except in the computational delay indiscernible by human time perception of that transference. The Self always resides in a body. It is the materiality of that body that shifts and allows access to spaces beyond the physical, as symbol-bodies relate to other symbol-bodies and the signs therein. The physical body, however, is still a required element of that distributed Self. Its motions and intentions also move the data body which is “‘corporeal’ not only because it bears a relation of mapping to the user’s body, but also because time is implemented into the symbolic structures of this representation as well as into the symbolic environment itself” (Kramer 2008, 33). This could mean that two bodies could theoretically occupy the same position. But it does affirm that virtuality is in fact a space, as the data-body is defined, and temporal language is determined, a shift occurs in the conception of space as the language of mapping and location is used to describe this other plane. It also marks a shift in the limits of extension. When the Self is transferred to the data-body, including its conception of sensory perception, it is no longer the technology serving as extension of the human, but rather the physical body serving, in that moment, as

the extension of the Self temporarily located in the data-body.

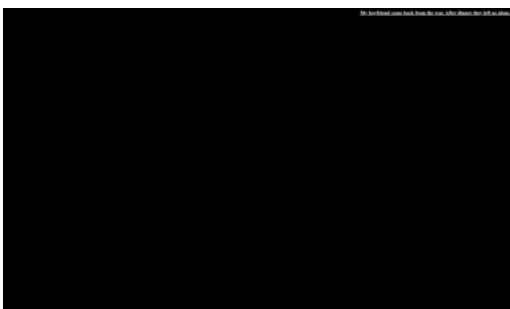
2.4_art-world response

For this research to proceed into the realm of practice, otherwise into a materialization of the less tangible theoretical discussion heretofore laid out in this text, an overview of artistic production within this context is essential. As the context here considered is specifically that of a post-digital ontology, it would be of little practical use to complete a full survey of post-industrial avant-garde movements. While it is true that a line could be traced back even from parietal art—as the earliest signs of human visual communication that could possibly be labeled art, and of course in the sixties artists were already responding to the first signs of the internet—through the domino effect of time that would lead directly to the current art environment, this diagramming would serve little purpose other than occupying more bytes of storage in a server as the conversation laid out is not an art historical one, but rather a philosophical one with an artistic approach. With that said, the following sections will cover two movements, namely net.art and Post-Internet art with accompanying examples that aim to define a general overview of how the interconnected mesh of things has affected artists within the last thirty years, and different avenues taken in response to this absolute paradigm shift in communication, connection, and what it is to Be in itself.

2.4.1_net.art

If this investigation aims to develop itself around the widespread, ordinary use of digital media and its effects for intercommunication, it makes sense to begin the overview in the mid nineteen nineties as the point from which the internet began to have an impact on mass culture. In 1993 there were one hundred and thirty websites on the World Wide Web, by 1996 that number had grown to over one hundred thousand. Likewise in 1995, Netscape Navigator had over ten million users worldwide marking it as the most popular web browser of the decade (National

Science and Media Museum). With that pin placed to locate the conversation along a linear conception of time, the discussion can begin with net.art. It is important to address here that net.art refers to the distinct artistic movement of the nineties while the separate Net Art is a more expansive term that applies to any artistic production at any time that, “acts on the network or is acted on by it” (Rhizome, 2016). At the point when net.art emerged, Web 2.0¹⁰ was just starting to take hold, characterized by a surge of virtual communities centered around user-generated content, effectively marking the web as a social and public space. A transformative opening like this also allowed artists to explore more fully the formal and navigational limits of Web 1.0. The paradigm shift in communication and interaction led to artists producing work around the question of what it could mean to be social in virtual space. Could there possibly be emotion and affection passed through the cold machinery of wiring and displayed on screens? Or is the keyboard effectively a machine of emotional neutralization as Gustavo M. Tavares describes in *Atlas of the Body and the Imagination*¹¹ (Tavares 2013, 151)? These questions, which are essentially concerned with the perceived disembodiment that occurs when accessing virtual space, led to works that exist purely on the web, turning the internet user into an art spectator behind the privacy of the home personal computer but attempting to evoke a sense of connection. We now perceive these web exclusive works as still possessing a physicality through their binary electric signals in motion from creator-computer to server to viewer-computer. These, as well as intermedia works that attempted to reconcile the physical body with a digital world to make more palatable what was considered to be a total abandonment of the physical body¹².



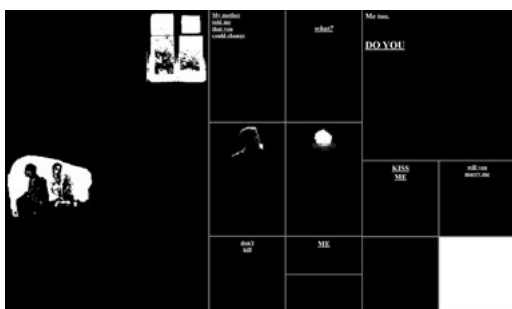
fig_4 The [initial page](#) of *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War* (1996), a seminal piece of Net Art.

An example of the former—among many working in a similar vein in the mid to late nineties—as that of

¹⁰ Web 1.0 refers to the first stage of internet access, a *read-only* web of data and documents. Web 2.0 refers to the second stage of online sharing and dialogue. Currently it is said we are entering Web 3.0, characterized by decentralization.

¹¹ Title translated by author, originally *Atlas do Corpo e da Imaginação* in portuguese.

¹² As previously discussed in 2.3.2, the discussion addressed in this research moved beyond a concern with disembodiment into the realization of depersonalization of the physical body and the particular space-moment of transference of Self to the data body.



fig_5 Near the end of the nonlinear narrative, the page finds itself fragmented.



fig_6 Promotional still of *Wolfenstein 3D* (2001) retrieved from monoskop.com



fig_7 Two participants interacting across *Telematic Dreaming* Kajaani Finland 1992 retrieved from arts.brighton.ac.uk

a work that exists solely as a website thus allowing for intimacy in the aesthetic experience, is found in Olia Lialina's *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War* (1996) (fig_4 fig_5). This piece acts as an interactive nonlinear narrative that unfolds through hyperlinks spread throughout the page. With each click the screen further fragments, revealing new images and texts that evolve the story of a couple who after reuniting cannot reconcile the time that has passed. By the end, all the sections are left black, leaving only an empty fragmentation. The text used throughout is in first person, addressing the other in second person deepening the intimacy created by the work as the user-spectator is placed in the position of the "you" character of the narrative. This seminal work was later appropriated and remixed by several other artists in the years following, replacing the images, using different formats of interactivity, even physical recreations scanned and reposted to the web, including *Wolfenstein 3D* (2001) by JODI¹³ recreating the narrative as a fully playable yet completely chaotic PC game (fig_6). This compilation, which can be accessed [here](#), further carries the post-modern principles driving much of early Net Art as the reproductions are not shunned but rather welcomed by the original creator. This helps emphasize the horizontality in artistic production and the abandonment of focus on—or even availability of—authorship, individuality, and originality made possible by rapid and rhizomatic data sharing in the virtual environment.

While in Paul Sermon's *Telematic Drawing* (1992) (fig_7) we see the latter instance of melding physical space with virtual communication made possible by the internet into a singular work. In this complex piece, that thirty years later might seem banal, a person on a bed interacts with the projected image-body of another person on another bed in another location while the recording of the first person interacting with the projection is sent back to the projected person played on screens surrounding their bed so that they may adjust their movements and react to the first person's movements. This touching without skin, bodies interacting over a distance through the extension of light and wires,

¹³ A highly influential Net Art collective which has embraced the bringing forth of the code as central to their practice, highlighting its possibility for randomness through control while not ignoring the aesthetic value and navigation patterns of the digital found forms employed as material.

brings both a closeness and a massive distance all at once. The bed as interface to the other carries the baggage of intimacy as both bodies position themselves as they might with someone they would be comfortable sharing a bed with. While the cold apparatus of hardwired digital machinery and the added surveillance of cameras and projectors and television screens completely desexualizes the interaction. As light touches skin which in turn touches a bedsheet, the overlap becomes more disconcerting with each instance, altering what it could mean to be present. The two users are present to each other, not in space but in time. *Telematic Drawing* stands as an early instance of interactive art that demonstrates just how far our Selves can be extended through virtuality.

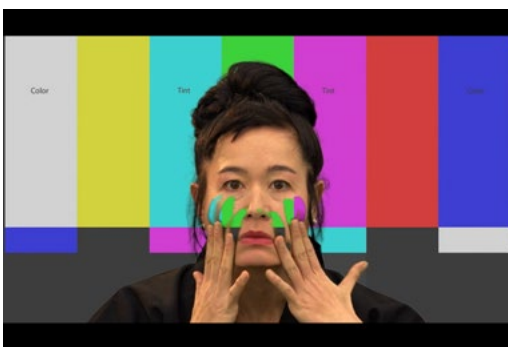
2.4.2_post-internet

The next step forward, so to speak, in surveying art around digital communications that leads to the present context is to leave web 2.0 as a novelty and approach it as a given, something completely intertwined with daily life. This is addressed by what is termed Post-Internet art, not properly a movement but a collective condition of production which can be said to have started around the mid-aughts and due to its loose definition remains an active practice—just as there remain many works produced contemporaneously to this research that are categorized as Net Art. The term refers to art production concerned with the effects of the internet on culture. As Vierkant extrapolated from Gene McHugh,

it concerns art responding to [a condition] described as 'Post Internet'—when the Internet is less a novelty and more a banality. Perhaps ... closer to what Guthrie Lonergan described as 'Internet Aware'—or when the photo of the art object is more widely dispersed [and] viewed than the object itself. (Vierkant, 2010)

With current focus on objecthood and the ecological network of Things, all aspects of what constitutes the internet are considered; physical servers, institutional structures, social interactions, digital and physical interfaces, bodily movements enacted for those interfaces, control and surveillance, constant presence,

constant absence: everything in flux, anything is anything else. This marks the true end of any traditional or Modernist notion of the medium in the arts as the single material with which a work is produced, such as paint or marble. It also marks a shift in which the artist is inseparable from both the subject and the object of the work as the mesh becomes the accepted organizational reality. Else as put by Rhizome artistic director Michael Connor in his article *Post-Internet: What it is and What it was* published in the anthology *You Are Here: Art After the Internet* (2014), “the artist, even art itself, is assumed to be fully immersed in networked culture and is no longer quite able to assume the position of an observer” (Connor 2014, 57). This is work that stems from oversaturation, compulsive scrolling and saving and downloading and bookmarking with no real goal in mind, the impossibility of fully removing your online trace, how essentially online self-portraits¹⁴ alter our perception of our physical bodies thus leading us to actually alter our physical bodies. Or else, “defined as a result of the contemporary moment inherently informed by ubiquitous authorship, the development of attention as currency, the collapse of physical space in networked culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials” (Vierkant 2010). The artist in the case of Post-Internet production is acting under the weight of this Thing that can be felt but not located, the phenomenology of something that does not exist in the same realm of our senses. That friction which is not yet quite computable by our minds has to be expressed diagonally, and so tends to be intermedia, interactive, installatory, and allegorical.



fig_8 Steyerl demonstrates one way not to be seen. Still frame taken from full video available on artforum.com

Artist and researcher Hito Steyerl’s work is a prime example of what Post-Internet art is and can be. Whether in considerations of *Bubble Vision*, the term used to describe the removal of a person from the embodied plane when they enter virtual reality (Steyerl 2018) or defining the endless self-reproduction of artificial self-image as a byproduct of hypercapitalism (Steyerl 2012), the very real phenomenon of control and surveillance are covered often through humor or immersion. Like in the short film, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013) (fig_8) which takes the form of an instructional video offering

14 Not just the selfie, but all creations and recreations of our avatars.

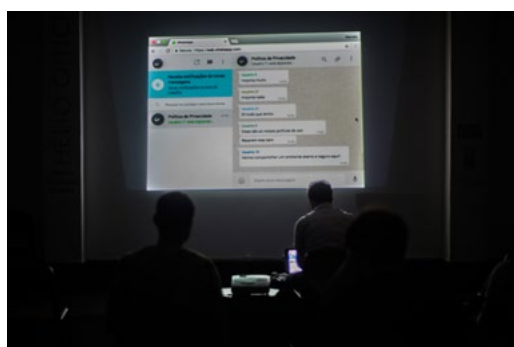
very practical ways to avoid your image being captured by a camera. While humorous in approach, the subject is anything but that, making a statement of rejection and refusal to participate in distortion and loss of ownership over personal image, of the confluence of public and private spheres. In her own words from a 2012 article in *e-flux* titled *The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation*, the virtual space is characterized by a,

regime of (mutual) self-control and visual self-disciplining, which is even harder to dislocate than earlier regimes of representation. This goes along with substantial shifts in modes of self-production. Hegemony is increasingly internalized, along with the pressure to conform and perform, as is the pressure to represent and be represented. (Steyerl, 2012)

This to say that as power structures are internalized, individual liberties and expression diminish and the community based self-surveillance of totalitarian regimes returns but now with the possibility of anonymity.



fig_9 A typical [@pixelausterity](#) post from January 12, 2022.



fig_10 Photo register of [Politica de Privacidade](#) (2017) taken by Anette Carla Alencar

These considerations are also taken into account in the pixel austerity movement, carried largely by the group acting under the instagram handle [@pixelausterity](#) (fig_9) which act as an environmental organization suggesting the use of low quality, highly dithered images online as a way to reduce server space in effort to slow the melting of global ice caps. The hybrid theater/video/participatory performance of the São Paulo based grupo cinza's *Politica de Privacidade*¹⁵ (2017) (fig_10) that blurs lines and yells its frustration. In this piece, each spectator must give their cell phone number at the entrance. The group is seated to watch a film which traces the making of glass, of attempting to break unbreakable glass, multiple videos of people running and banging their heads against glass. This is immediately followed by the projection of a WhatsApp group chat, as the audience slowly realizes they are the participants in the chat and anonymously answer increasingly private questions about death, mental health, sex, among other topics. This is directly followed by a spoken word piece read by one of the collective's members as they circle the

15 In english: *Privacy Policy*



fig_11 Image retrieved from the New Aesthetic tumblr stream, sourced from [twitter](#)



fig_12 Image retrieved from the New Aesthetic tumblr stream, sourced from [reddit](#)

seated audience. The anxiety caused by the impenetrable glass interface that keeps users from seeing the mechanics behind the program, that deems itself to replace physical interaction between humans, is brought to surface in a sort of passive violence that leaves the spectator with the words to describe their unease.

On the other end of the spectrum from these highly charged conceptual approaches, lies another area of Post-Internet practice concerned with the more formal aspects of the Post-Internet environment. [The New Aesthetic](#), as coined in 2011 by James Bridle through a tumblr feed, is a collection of instances in which forms that could not have existed before the ubiquity of digital culture permeate the physical plane in what seems to be absolutely natural progression. Started as a tumblr page just to collect these images in one space, it grew beyond that into a mode of characterizing occurrences such as home decor with pixelated patterns, glitches in Google Maps, CCTV test targets (fig_11), an image of a woman in Tibet seemingly holding flowers but upon closer inspection they are cryptocurrency mining PSUs (fig_12). These forms that only recently emerged now are so easily part of daily imagery that only compiled can the true strangeness of their acting in physical space appear. The page acts as a stream of ready-mades, as artifacts of digital culture frozen in physical space that speak so clearly to how naturally these seemingly disparate worlds come together. This act of compilation is very true to contemporary modes of creation as it speaks to the previously discussed turn in which the Being of Things is considered to occur in a pattern from randomness module rather than an absence versus presence module.

While these two examples are far from a full overview of what art production is and can be through digital media and virtual space, they are sufficient to carry the discussion from abstract theoretical constructions to more solid practical structures. The approaches taken from this process follow in the next chapter.

3_practice

“One could of course argue that this is not the real thing, but then please, anybody show me this real thing.”

Hito Steyerl, *In Defense of the Poor Image* (2009)

3.1_body

3.1.1_embodied knowledge

When conceiving a practical approach to these theoretical considerations, the itch standing left to scratch—meaning that no satisfactory ties were found in the interlines of text—is what happens to the depersonalized physical body? It is understood that the data-body remains perpetually active, as the information created by the Self in virtual space is stored on digital servers and the motions, images, and representations that perform the data-body are readily accessible through the web. Could the real body really be left staid while the sign-body runs through perceptions of infinite concurrent universes? The idea of a body sitting relatively still relegated to clicks, taps, simulated haptic feedbacks, and ocular motions leaves a bad taste in the mouth, a vertigo in the mind, a nausea in the pit of the stomach, even though those are the motions that allow for the mass habitation of virtual space. The gut feeling that one must hold tight to their embodied knowledge and actively apply the physical body and its motions whenever possible stands central in initial questioning of this virtual space. This isn't to say that the approach is a continuation in the line of a sort of William Morris revolt against some perceived loss of aesthetic or social quality due to new technologies¹⁶. Rather it comes from a deep-seated urge to embrace more fully the new technological territory which is now also social, cultural, ontological territory; a territory which forms substantial parts of the assemblage of the distributed Self. While the dispersal of Self discussed herein can be reasoned through, there can't be said to be full understanding until the physical body feels comfort.

¹⁶ William Morris, a medievalist, artist, craftsman, and literary figure of the mid to late Nineteenth century, was central to the Arts and Crafts Movement, a trend in the decorative arts that, reductively, aimed to revive traditional British production methods in reaction to the new speed of the Industrial Revolution.

What follows this unease is then varied experimentations aimed at finding bodily comfort within the friction of that electronic umbilical cord discussed in section 2.3.2.

Why, in this context, is this embodied knowledge central to practice? Because we part from the assumption that the physical body and its actions are absolutely real. Embodied knowledge refers to situations in which the body knows which actions to take in relation to its intentions and environment without consciously processing each part of that action. These include riding a bicycle, opening a door, moving through a doorway, sitting in a chair, giving a hug, the sensation of a phantom limb, or our own sense of personal space¹⁷. Else, as the concept is derived from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), knowing how to touch type,

To know how to touch type is not, then, to know the place of each letter among the keys, nor even to have acquired a conditioned reflex for each one, which is set in motion by the letter as it comes before our eye ... It is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort. (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 144)

That is to say, it covers the situations in which people act without first needing to represent the parts of that action in the mind. In embodied knowledge, there is no image but a direct pre-reflective relation between body and physical environment, led by intention and honed through familiarity. These daily behaviors that the body can know without having to first refer to a mental image or representation, exist beyond the subject-object or mind-body dualism of the Cartesian epistemology accepted in traditional Western discourse. As previously discussed, reinforcing an antiquated dichotomy between real and virtual, mind and body, self and other, is directly undesirable if this study means to look around rather than back. However, a blurring of these perceived boundaries is necessary to locate the hybrid space between seemingly opposing forces. All parts must be considered—physical body, data body, psyche, digital

¹⁷ Further information on personal space as embodied knowledge—without the use of such term—can be found in Edward T Hall's *The Hidden Dimension* (1966)

servers, digital images, encoded programming, vibration traces, movements, relations, ideas—for there to be a wholeness of understanding established within the current space-time. What does embodied knowledge mean for the data-body, a body of signs and representations? Can it be said that the totality of one's avatars might carry its own type of knowledge in its body?

3.1.2_apparatus and interaction

To achieve this hammered repetition, the collection of experiments must serve as a device or apparatus. Apparatus, as described by Giorgio Agamben in his essay *What is an Apparatus* (2009), refers to “anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings” (Agamben 2009, 14). These, “aim to face an urgent need and to obtain an effect that is more or less immediate” (Agamben 2009, 8) and further, refers to the network that exists within these elements producing signification and subjectification. The apparatus is useful in conceiving the exposition of a collection of experiments as the individual pieces do not serve to stand alone as objects but rather as nodes in a net of relations that together aim to obtain the effect of interaction and vibration. The apparatus serves to manipulate or manage in some way, even the very thoughts of the individuals that come in contact with it. Exhibition as apparatus or device, then is better thought of as installation. Something that occupies specifically, often in large scale, the space in which it is installed and so generates particular movement and inter-action in the viewer. Installations call upon the body, activating its knowledge as it changes the relation a specific space has with the body. If the pervasiveness of the internet has dispersed people through separate spheres detached from the physical body—spheres of the non-human, the more-than-human, the almost sacred through digitization—than this apparatus could participate in the profanation of the Self, confirming it as a hybrid entity capable of immanence over transcendence, “that is to say, the restitution to common use of what has been captured and separated in them [apparatuses]” (Agamben 2009,

24). This device of parts should also be a call to collaboration or cooperation in spaces where usually it does not exist, generating a type of ephemeral network not only among the exhibited experiments but also among the viewers, converting them into visitor-participants.

3.2_language

3.2.1_a case for the analog

While the initial impulse in exploration was to dive fully into the virtual, creating Things through code to be experienced by the physical body to hopefully generate or recall the friction of Hyperpresence. However, there was an immediate negative response from the physical body in that process. A feeling of disingenuity erupted from early experiments. The body did not find comfort in its positioning manipulating code, while it seemed the projects were using digital language to describe a digital condition, which was not the goal. One cannot bring forth the idea of Hyperpresence and its oscillating vibrations by just placing the subject in yet another parallel plane; the idea must meet in the same plane as the body exists, as the physical body is the origin of personhood. The aim then becomes to use readily available tools, to work directly with the surfaces digital or physical used most widely and frequently; the written word, Google Maps, black on white, instagram, the public restroom, exhaust tubing, mattress coils, an overhead projector, the human hand. The factor of recognizeability of these objects and tools means that they may be more readily accessible to a viewer, and will carry personal narratives to be transferred onto the works in completing the dialogue of the creative act¹⁸ in situ. This is why the one instance of direct programming manipulation—in the toilet sensor to be described in section 3.3.3—was hidden inside an exhaust tube, to ensure the mystery of the subface and confirm the unlocatability of the origin of the friction.

¹⁸ This term taken from Marcel Duchamp's 1957 speech of the same name, in which he claims the creative act is only completed when a work and a viewer dialogue with one another, and only in that interspace art can be said to exist.

In that way, if the master's tools cannot serve to dismantle the master's house¹⁹, neither can purely digital language be used to unwrap the virtual space. To embrace a hybrid space requires varied language, diagonal approaches from any possible angle. Using tools considered to be oppositional to the medium, as the tool moves toward the concept through free experimentation, the umbilical material of the inter-space reveals itself: that which links the subface to the surface and generates vibration. In this type of varied experimentation there is no particular end goal in mind, but rather a collection of multi-planar bursts that eventually uncover converging points of pattern manifested from the varied lateral chaos. This methodology reflects the previously discussed state of Being in the post-digital condition in chapter 2.3, where pattern emerges, there can be said to Be. It must be understood that there can no longer be such a thing as pure presence or absence because of the endless reverberations within the mesh of things. If the experimentation based on this research is said to be successful, it will be that these bursts can be found to meet in some central point. If there can be generated by some happenstance, a collection of initially seemingly unrelated experiments that in some attempt at conclusion reveal themselves to all say the same thing. As if the same line of dialogue were translated to any possible language and displayed all at once without hierarchy.

The word analog itself refers to several similar conditions. Generally in this paper it could be understood as an adjective describing the non-computational, or those things coming from signals of wave-like, continuously variable information—in opposition to digital signals that can only respond in on-off outputs. However, analog as a noun is that which is comparable to something else, like in use of the terms *analogy* or *analogous*. As Alexander Galloway discussed in his 2017 lecture *The Golden Age of Analog (It's Now)*, etymologically, the word is also deeply interesting for use in the practical materializations of this research; ana-meaning parallel and -logos referring to logic but also speech or discourse. This analog, the plane parallel to

¹⁹ Nod to Audre Lorde, writer and civil rights activist, who wrote these words in comments on her participation in the Second Sex Conference (1979), on the importance of liberation through community in the future of feminist discourse.

that which can be rationalized through language, can be understood as the hybrid space that the research is attempting to bring to light, the perception of the dispersal of a Self made of vibrations and traces. The analog is an anti-hermeneutic space of smoothness or fluidity, open to the qualitative, and carries the notion of an irreducible, and unabstractable commonality. As such it is very real, stripped of romance, nostalgia or representation thus providing a relation of fullness and immanence (Galloway 2017). There is no negation in the analog, rather it is of a continuum. How does this idea become part of visual experimentation? Through the body and physical materials that allow for a varied spectrum of eventualities. Hands tremble, pens bleed on soft paper, translucent substrates allow the viscosity of ink to be put on display even after dried thus concretizing its slippage, sounds of loops can echo, layers and shards form assemblages as a way to account for multiplicity, digital images that were never meant to become fixed meet the stasis and degradation of paper, waves, mirrors, blurs, patches, vibrations, uncertainties, swarms, gaps. These forms provide an opening to access post-digital Being in direct relation to our origin point, the body.

3.2.2_collection/collage : accumulation/assemblage

As the distributed, dispersed Self exists in collage and assemblage, experimentation about this Self can result in collection and accumulation. The resulting display then manifests as an analog of a Self, as an Object in itself, en route to the purpose of installation apparatus. There reached a point in an early stage in which computational experimentation stopped making sense, maybe not properly sense but rather did not make meaning. During experimentation, meaning was found in the analog process and their results. Something feels conceptually incongruent in purely using digital means to talk about a post-digital life. If the goal is in part to generate visualizations of concepts crossing from real to virtual and vice-versa there must also be a mutation in the media of communication from digital to analog and back again as many times as possible, as therein lies its image or simulation and in that oscillation is located the totality

of the Hyperpresent Self. The environment for each approach is the counterpart of the thing attempting to be said. To bring to light something virtual, it must be displayed through the real, and the real must be displayed as a virtuality of itself. These ideas come forth through repetition, not necessarily in making something grand or saying anything new but taking diagonal steps towards the confluence of themes through varied approaches. Saying the same thing across various media. That is, that there isn't anything that can be wholly communicated except the desire for the act of communication, reified through the materiality of the media that might locate the entity attempting to make said communication, here artistic but theoretically otherwise. The medium—at this time possibly the interface, the thing-in-between—remains the message. Is the medium the menace in communication?

How then are these experiments conceived? In a word, loosely; without any pretension of polish or conclusion, a collection of interrupted thoughts resembling the bombardment of fragmented information received through various digital communication media. The compressed attention span resulting from this condition is the perfect receiver for the ever-more circulating poor image, as described by Hito Steyerl in an article published in *e-flux* in 2009 titled *In Defense of the Poor Image*. The poor image refers to digital images—centrally in the article, video—that through sharing, pirating, endless unofficial cycles of compressing and saving and republishing, lose data and resolution becoming altered abstractions of themselves as they circulate the web and data servers in a widely uncontrolled format. They demonstrate a merging of art and life, visually “blurred, amateurish, and full of artifacts ... integrated into an information capitalism thriving on compressed attention spans, on impression rather than immersion, on intensity rather than contemplation, on previews rather than screenings” (Steyerl 2009). These poor images reveal the chaos and coincidence in the variety of links between their producers and also the dispersal of the audiences as they emerge through grassroots distribution, collective editing, open file sharing. In this way, their poor resolution and frequent absence of authorship serves more as a visual bond between those that circulate

these images in small transgressions than a degradation of pristine originality. As they are not commercial in nature, they exist in the virtual public sphere in a sort of no-man's land, rapidly changing form, size, media, as they travel and create impressions,

The poor image is no longer about the real thing, the ordinary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation. In short: it is about reality (Steyerl 2009).

As the research attempts to reify sensations stemming from virtual space, this viewpoint is very practical in understanding the types of imagery that could serve this purpose. Although here the question is what is the poor image of the analog? Or the constitution of a poor image that has been produced analogically? This could be through a changing of practices, like drawing without looking or with the opposite hand, removing mediation of the eyes or the skilled member. It could cover a misuse of materials, carving into linoleum blocks with incorrect tools to create noisy patterns, as well as the inclusion of industrial or found objects. Repurposing outdated technologies, defining the making process through default settings and saturated pre-set filters. As poor images, the objects may evoke a certain familiarity with the viewer-participant, continuing the postmodern tradition of a horizontality in the art world while not negating the contemporary modes in agglomerations of excess and collapsing of value hierarchies.

This excess that characterizes the current relation between person and media, can translate as an installation space into something that follows the tradition of the *wunderkammer* or cabinet of curiosities; private collections of oddities, objects, illustrations to highlight the eclecticism or rarity in the tastes refined by the collector. Meant to surprise and astonish, these were the precursors to museums as we understand them today. The beginning of the twentieth century saw a resurgence of this mode of exhibition through avant-garde displays of found objects and processes that now have become commonplace. These types of installations take up the exhibition space with all

manner of objects and interactions, toward a maximalist unification of initially seemingly disconnected common things; spatially representing the mesh of experience. This analogy of wunderkammer:mesh together with the singular locality or spatial temporality of this context is the line which culminated in a singular exhibition event.

3.3_action

3.3.1_project conception

The practical processes that accompany this investigation, having developed alongside the research process as described in section 1.5 on methodology, unravelled into a collection of multimedia experiments that in a way mark points in the progression of the ideas synthesized heretofore in this text. These cover a range of approaches from drawing, to found objects, sculpture, sound, projection, video, performance, type experiments, and interactive site-specific installations. They represent a sort of standing in one place and taking a single step in any possible direction and back again, intending to plot a circle around the initial point, to describe and delineate until an answer emerges. When laying them out together in one space, it was as if they were icons in an operating system's file explorer. All belonging to the same folder but with a wide range of filename extensions. What is this folder named and how can these files—some created digitally but all meant to be displayed physically—be presented to an other to confirm the dialogue and complete the step in the creative act necessary to each piece? This immediately negated the option of synthesizing the experiments into a new work, displaying them as images online, or even representations in a physical publication. Most sense was made in exhibiting them together in one physical space and in one compact moment. Not the pretention of a standing show in a gallery space, but a single day event to highlight the ephemeral quality of physical space as opposed to the difficulty of deleting a digital footprint. This approach also creates a momentary social space formed around a single focus.

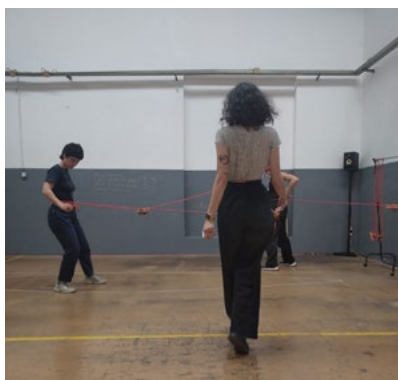
However, there was no desire to display a single voice, no matter how varied in tone the voice repeated the same phrase, it was necessary to include other points of view revolving around the same theoretical considerations, around a consideration of body and connection in the contemporary context. This then involves some amount of curation on the part of the organizer, in this case the same person who had the initial desire to create the event. There was not much doubt in choosing the exhibition space. It immediately made sense to exhibit at Túnel, a hybrid arts association occupying what used to be a mechanic workshop, that serves as the workspace for a wide range of fields, including many in the *traditional* visual arts, builders, architects, tattooists, circus performers among other practices. Having started experimenting with hosting events less than a year before the date necessary for this project to occur—due to the time constraints of institutional research—it made sense to propose an experimental event to a fresh space—not to mention the floorplan of the large bathrooms on the second floor were very well suited for the installation of two interactive pieces. Luckily for the project, it was quickly welcomed and the next step became to invite other artists to participate in the event. There were limitations on what types of work could cooperate due to time constraints, specificity of topic, the small scale of the proposal, among other social matters. These constraints, however, made the path more clear in inviting performers who use the body as their main mode of expression. This approach, of a single day, performance based event with an exhibition to visit in between acts could provide a lively flow throughout the space and invited the visitors to use their bodies but also dialogue with all of the work shown and each other as well. In the case of this research, the more participatory the project, the better suited it would be to describing through experience this bodily context. The following section will now form itself more as a report or narration of the project, including expanding on the individual experiments exhibited, their materialities, their processes, and conceptual considerations.



fig_13 Flyer for event, distributed across social media



fig_14 entrance to event, with flyer and sign giving instructions to participate in printer project, further discussed in 3.3.3 pg 49



fig_15 Gui Silvestre, Clarisse Pinto, and Maria Miguel von Hafe in performance of *Malha* (2022)



fig_16 Ana Rita Xavier in *X's Off 1* (2022)

3.3.2_event overview

The event titled `</body>` (fig_13), as if to say that what was displayed were those things not depicted on the web interface, took place on July 2 of 2022, at Túnel Associação in Campanhã in Porto, Portugal, from from 16:00 to 22:00. It took place in four main areas of the workshop, the central open atrium space on the first floor, a small room in the mezzanine, a bathroom in the mezzanine, and the hallway connecting the room and bathroom. Along with the exhibition of experiments pertaining to this research, three performances took place in the central atrium with generous breaks in between. First, *Malha* (2022) (fig_15) by Juliana Bucharechi and Fabio Riff, an interactive wearable sound/visual piece. In this work, elastics were attached to the waists of participants that connected up to eight people in a malleable web, each connection with a microcomputer in the middle that corresponded to a specific sound. The microcomputer reacted to changes in tension of the elastic altering the sound in speed or pitch, ultimately creating a bodily instrument as the moving bodies attempted to reach a harmony before entering sonic chaos to find the next harmony. Followed by *X's Off 1 and 2* (2022) (fig_16 fig_17) by Ana Rita Xavier and Maria Miguel von Hafe, respectively. Two very bodily performances that used the wheel—in one case a motorcycle, in the other in-line skates—and a narrative approach to discuss the repetitions and weights carried by the female body in the digital space, and a sort of hangover that occurs when attempting to separate oneself from that surveilled environment. To close the night was a sound performance `<footer>` (2022) (fig_18) by Gaspar Cohen, who created a noise-scape of corrupted samples played through different mixers building up to a minimalist cacophony that encouraged experimental dancing but also generated a collective relief when abruptly ended, jolting the spectators who imagined themselves in that digital space back to the physical reality.



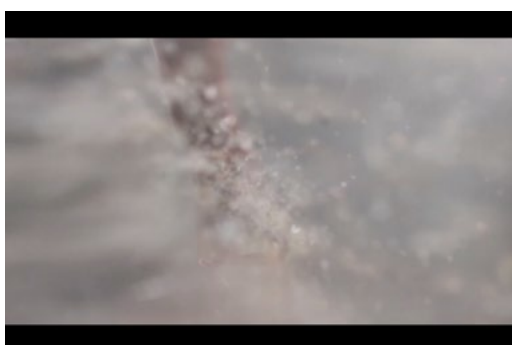
fig_17 Ana Rita Xavier and Míaria Miguel von Hafe in *X's Off 2* (2022)



fig_18 Gaspar Cohen performing <footer> (2022)



fig_19 installation view depicting mattress spring support system



fig_20 still frame of raining sand video experiment

3.3.3_project description

The pieces we displayed in the exhibition portion of the event, titled *Analog/y Object/ive*, were separated into two main spaces, connected by a collective durational project happening throughout the event in the hallway between the spaces. In the mezzanine room, about twenty square meters displayed two video works, a motion type collection, small multimedia sculptures, five different print approaches to the idea of a series, two small screenshots printed and hung, and a process based piece displaying video and print results. The inner spring structure of a mattress was placed off center on the floor of this location, in part to represent the subface or hidden structure of an intimate or private space but also serving as support for two projectors and their wires while providing visual interest of lines and curves in suspension that reflected other drawings displayed in the room.

VIDEO 1 (fig_20)

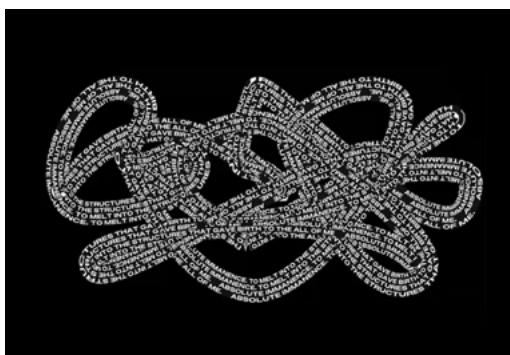
The first video conceived for this space is a simple loop of sand pouring from a hand onto the recording lens. This video was projected onto the ceiling above the mattress. The sound of the falling sand was played through speakers inside the mattress springs, adding to the sensation of pouring rain. It is the initial buzzing that began the research reflected in motion and materiality, the drive to break the glass between the physical body and the data-body, the screen interface that stands as middle man to the interactions we strive for. In essence, sand -> glass -> screen -> shards -> sand. A loop that stands for an obstacle.

VIDEO 2 (fig_21)

The second video, displayed in loop on a screen on the ground leaning against the wall also plays with the materiality of sand as analogy for the interface. In this video work, a hand from off screen is filmed from above manipulating a pile of sand on a white surface. The motions of the hand slowly become more erratic as it performs the frustrations about the same obstacle to access as the previous work described. A deep



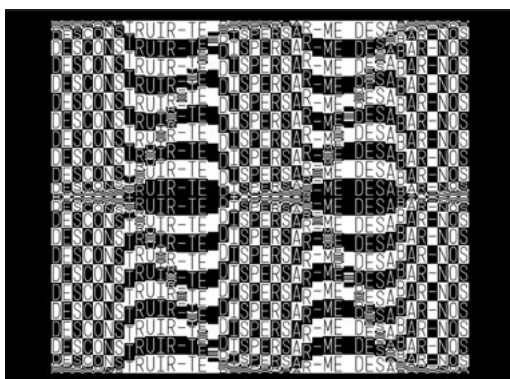
fig_21 still frame of the interfacing hand video experiment



fig_22 still frame of motion type experiment 1, reads "absolute immanence. To melt into the structures that gave birth to the all of me."



fig_23 still frame of motion type experiment 2, reads "this could be anywhere all of the time"



fig_24 still frame of motion type experiment 3, reads "desconstruir-te dispersar-me desabar-nos"

drive to reach the other side. Inside the sand is keyed the same video with a five second delay, as if to say there is nothing within the interface but its structures. A lack of content within this struggle, the medium is the only message.

MOTION TYPE (fig_22-25)

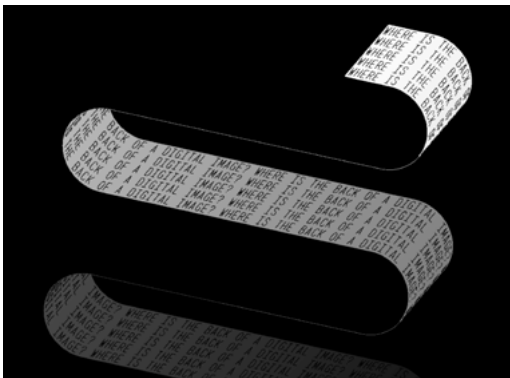
Projected onto the wall, also supported by the mattress springs, four motion type experiments played with short phrases in the black and white contrast of binary language. These were made through the Space Type Generator, an experimental website by designer Kiel D. Mutschelknaus as a way to share openly the generative type programs created in beta for anyone to access. The four moving images were projected in quadrants and shared the same rhythm despite very different visual forms. The text in each is original, but derived during the rumination process of the methodology described in the introduction 1.5. Starting from top left, clockwise, they read as the following. 1: Absolute immanence. To melt into the structures that gave birth to the all of me. 2: This could be anywhere all of the time 3: Desconstruir-te Dispersar-me Desabar-nos²⁰ 4: Where is the back of a digital image?

SCULPTURE TABLE (fig_26)

A small table that stood only forty centimeters from the ground lay against a wall as support for a mirrored space and series of three Unreadable Books, inspired by Bruno Munari's *Libri illeggibili*²¹ (1949-1984). A square mirror was laid flat on the table with the halves of three ceramic saucers placed on top, so as when viewed from above the saucers appeared whole and the viewer sees their own image reflected back. This created a sense of virtual space, as the viewers recognizes the image of themselves as the other half of themselves, just as the saucers. Here the reflection acts as the data-body while mirror is the interface (again, glass) or that electrical umbilical chord that together with the physical body settles the whole of

²⁰ In english: Deconstruct you, Disperse me, Collapse us

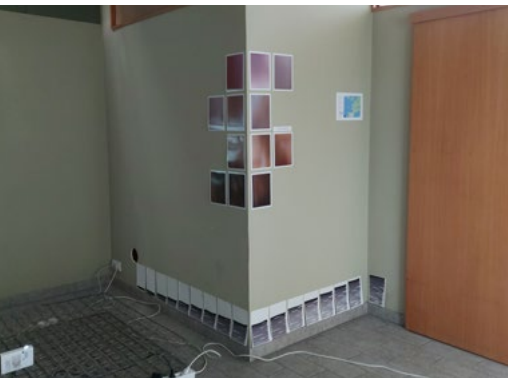
²¹ A series of experiments created over several years in bookmaking without text or images, using colored paper, string, folding and cutting techniques among other approaches to the book format.



fig_25 still frame of motion type experiment 4, reads, "Where is the back of a digital image?"



fig_26 installation image of sculpture table



fig_27 installation view depicting the skin folds photo series above, and the mark, scan, repeat experiment below along the baseboard



fig_28 installation view of form mutation experiment along baseboard, motion type projection visible to the right

Being. The three unreadable books are made in white paper and wire each in a different binding, one saddle stitched with wires tracing the arc of a books pages as the data footprint left behind, one spiral bound on both long edges creating an impenetrable object that houses information that becomes virtual by its inaccessability, and the last a hard back with small pieces of wire standing where the book block should be as the structure itself takes the place of any content.

PRINT APPROACHES

The first of the print approaches in the room was a series of sixteen photographs that appeared as soft gradient patterns (fig_27). Each photograph was taken by a camera set to automatic, aimed at different fold of the body in low light conditions. As the camera struggled to focus, colors unnatural to human skin were read and then captured. A strange meeting of computation and human body that leads to something that appears neither like photograph nor an image of a physical phenomenon.

Running along the baseboards were two separate series in black and white. This first of which was a simple experiment in reproduction through a basic home printer, through the process of mark, scan, repeat (fig_27). A line was marked quickly across the width of an a5 sheet of paper with a thick paint marker. This sheet was copied and on that copy another line was drawn above the previous one. That sheet was in turn scanned, and the process continued until the length of a sheet was covered in black ink. At each new copy, the initial marks became lighter, as well as the whole image slowly dropped lower on the page as the scanner misread the edge of the sheet. A visualization of the error in communication between hand and computational machine, how the translation of intent can never be the original. But also, the loss of importance and focus on the idea of an original at all.

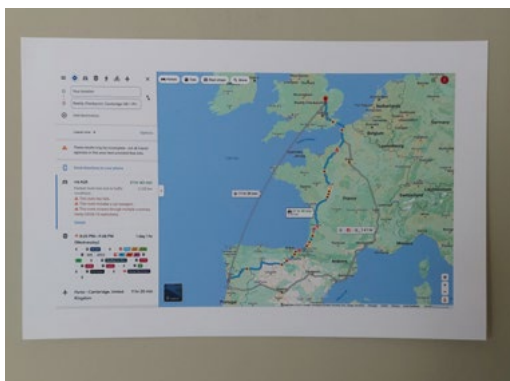
The second was a simple test in the mutation of form (fig_28). How the container, the media, can alter and shape the content, warping it into something completely unrecognizable as the original intent. A black rectangle the same proportions of a smart phone screen was printed on several sheets of paper. These



fig_29 installation view of linocut layered prints



fig_30 installation view of generative type stills turned prints



fig_31 Google Maps directions to Reality Checkpoint, printed screenshot



fig_32 DALL-E mini prompted to generate images of "The location of Clarisse Pinto's body", printed screenshot

were then folded multiple times to create new forms. Those forms were then traced onto acetate sheets and displayed above the folded sheets. The new shape, taken from the manipulations of the medium, stood as its own object floating above in a plane in a form more accessible than the folded sheet and completely divorced from the originally intended communication, the black rectangle.

Following that, three linocut prints (fig_29) were displayed in the far corner of the room. These were three layers of acetate over a sheet of cotton paper, each with a different block print. They were hung by nails, using small nuts as separators. The linocuts were simple lines along the length and width of linoleum blocks cut into different sizes of squares and rectangles. They were printed using a mix of inks and glitter to create a glinting almost-black. Some of the lines were made with a traditional carving tool, others with a sharp sanding attachment on a dremmel. The lines were composed very loosely and quickly, to remember the physical hand that made them. As the layers of acetate gently jittered with the flow of air in the room a moire effect occurs, causing the eye to lose focus. These act as the vibration of discomfort when faced with the highly stylized interfaces used in social communication. How those stylization hide countless layers of linguistic abstraction and inaccessible power structures that control that communication keeping us from reaching a clear image.

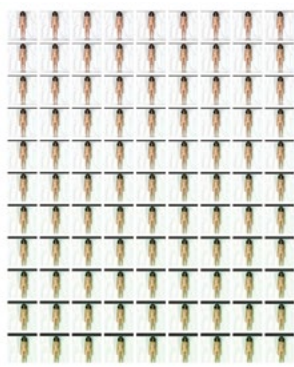
The last print series were three type experiments (fig_30) displayed across the opposite corner. Made through the same process as the generative motion type loops in both medium and content. These were taken as stills in the middle of the generation. They slowly dither and deconstruct from left to right, fleeting, more intimate thoughts lost in the abundance of images. These images that were intended to remain digital were printed on soft watercolor paper, so the ink would sink and bleed into the sheet. From top down they read as the following. 1: PLEASE HELP ME FIND MY BODY 2: THERE ARE ALREADY SO MANY THINGS 3: SO MUCH SELF SO LITTLE CONTROL



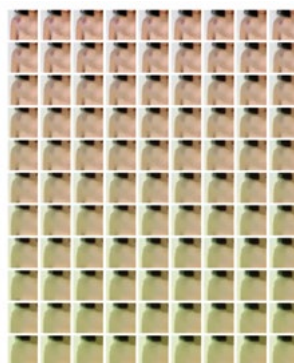
fig_33 installation of *Digital Degradation* (2022) among other installed works



fig_34 grid of forty images pulled through DreamTimeGAN



fig_35 image grid of the ninety-nine screenshots uploaded to Instagram, marking their resolution degradation with each recreation attempt



fig_36 image grid of uploaded screenshots, zoomed in on the generated breast

SCREENSHOTS

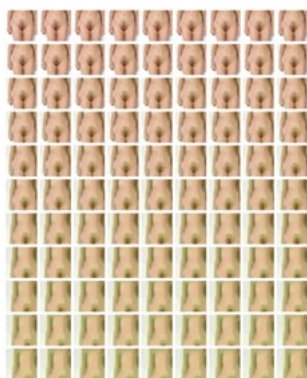
Two small prints of commonly recognizable computer interfaces were placed in odd positions, that stood as a slight comic relief on the walls. The first near the entrance a screenshot of Google Maps directions leading from Tunel to a location named Reality Checkpoint in England (fig_31). The other, near the floor next to the small sculpture table was a screenshot of DALL-E mini requesting generated images of “The location of Clarisse Pinto’s body” (fig_32). The images returned were a mix of female bodies seemingly taken from scientific drawings and what seemed like transportation maps. Nine odd mixes of representations of human bodies with representations of travel over a terrain.

AI BODY DIGITAL DEGRADATION (fig_33-37)

The last project displayed in this room is the most complex, while also generating the greatest feedback and engagement from the event goers. It is also the project that has greatest potential of unfolding into several other avenues. Along the wall opposite the entrance a vertically oriented screen stands on floor leaning against the wall. Around it are four prints comprised of grids of images. A magnifying glass lays on top the screen attached to a string. The process of this work went as follows. A full body self portrait was taken against a white backdrop, clothed in a black top and shorts. This image was given to an artificial intelligence²² program called DreamTimeGAN²³, a generative adversarial network fed with thousands of pornographic images of female bodies. Its main purpose is to remove the clothes from an image of a clothed person. Of course, the algorithm does not function as an x-ray but creates fake body parts from what it learned from the collection of images. When an image is fed to it, the user has the option to toggle a series of sliders including controls on nipple size

22 Whether to refer to these machine learning frameworks as artificial intelligence or not is up for debate as the subjectivity of the generated outputs is uncertain. Here, AI is used for practicality in distribution.

23 This program is no longer available through traditional networks. The creator attempted to remove it from all platforms as it was being used for nefarious reasons including the distribution of fake revenge porn. However, it is almost impossible to fully delete every trace of something after it becomes part of the web; the necessary files are available on GitHub.



fig_37 image grid of uploaded screenshots, zoomed in on the generated genitalia



fig_38 installation view, visitor entering bathroom



fig_39 Talking to Oneself



fig_40 Agreeing with Oneself

and amount of pubic hair. Forty of these outputs are displayed in one of the grid prints on the wall (fig_34). The most realistic of those images was chosen for the next step. This image was uploaded to an Instagram profile, *@thisbodydoesnotexist*²⁴ a screen shot taken of that upload which was in turn uploaded to the same profile, screen shot taken, uploaded and so on until there were one hundred posts on the profile (fig_35). Through this process the digital degradation of these rapidly shared, now poor, images without concern for the original becomes very apparent. By the last image, there is very little definition in the body, and a green cast covers most of the deeper hues. An auto-detecting screenshot app was used, so another algorithm determined where the image was, leading to a slowly growing black bar across the top as it missed the mark on selecting the entire image every time. This process also discusses a sort of identity crisis of these avatars, here a non-naked naked body recreated and shared so many times that it loses most of the characteristics that make it identifiable as an individual. This Self melting into the screen. Ninety nine of those images—all but the original—make up one of the grid prints. The other two are the same grid of the digitally degraded generated nudes, but one focussed in on the AI's interpretation of breasts (fig_36) and the other on the genitalia (fig_37). The video displayed below these prints was a screen capture of the process, posting and screen shotting and reposting until the thirtieth post, when Instagram detected nudity and began deleting the posts. In effort to remain online, those were all deleted and posts thirty one to one hundred were a separate thread as by that point the image was already degraded enough to pass by the censorship algorithm. One program detected the generated non-human genitalia of another program and determined those avatar exclusive bodies were too lewd for human consumption. The magnifying glass allowed viewers to zoom in to the images and see the details of these digital disfigurements.

The decision to place the works along the corners and edges of the space were in another effort to subvert the traditional exhibition space, and by bringing focus to structural parts of a built environment this

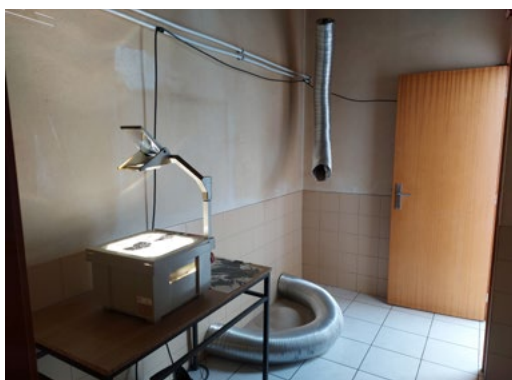
²⁴ profile since deactivated by author



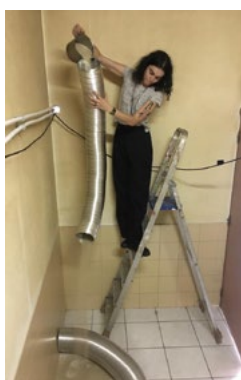
fig_41 Pleasuring Oneself



fig_42 Hugging Oneself



fig_43 installation view of bathroom



fig_44 still from installation, pouring sand down the hanging exhaust tube

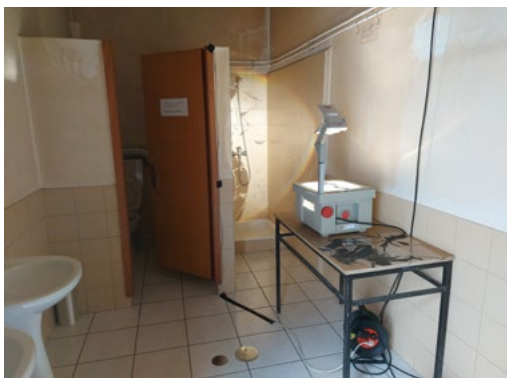
installation format acted as another layer of considering the subface.

BATHROOM

Before entering the bathroom at the end of the hall, four selfportraits of the body interacting with an exhaust tube hang on the wall (fig_38). They depict relations in feedback loops with one's Self through the virtual medium, hoping to create more opportunities to connect with others. The openness from closure principle. Each one representing an intimate act usually shared between two people. Here, using a metal object to share with oneself in loop leaves a gap between desire and process. Talking to oneself (fig_39). Agreeing with oneself (fig_40). Pleasuring oneself (fig_41). Hugging oneself (fig_42).

The bathroom held two sculptural works in found objects that intertwined by their materialities and sound emission, several drawings on acetate to be manipulated on an overhead projector aimed into a shower booth, and an installation in the toilet booth that reacts to the users movements. As these pieces all work together as a single installation, collapsing the private and public spheres into a hybrid one, deeply uncomfortable, and not serving either purpose very well.

As one enters the bathroom, a low hum can be heard. Along the floor, as if coming out of the wall is a large, aluminum exhaust tube that very subtly vibrates (fig_43). The hum is coming from the tube, which houses an analog feedback loop. Two old PC speakers with internal amplification were taken apart and attached together, facing each other and the wires reconnected so one would now act as the input for the other's output. Both speakers and microphones are essentially the same piezo mechanism. The wear over time of these speakers led them to have a slight interference, so no other sound was necessary to initiate the feedback loop created when this system was plugged in. This feedback loop, the Self's autopoietic recreation, slowly grew over the course of the event. What began as a very slight hum by the end resonated enough to vibrate through the sand that occupied the space between tube and wall.



fig_45 installation view of overhead projecting into the shower stall, with acetate sheets



fig_46 installation view of beeping toilet proximity sensor

This sand comes from another exhaust tube hanging in a gentle curve above the sonic feedback mechanism. Before the start of the event, sand was poured down the tube aimed into the empty space delineated by the other work (fig_44). As the sand falls down, the folds of the aluminum bounce the sand around creating another rain sound, and the tube slowly bends farther down until gravity wins and it bows down and spills the sand onto the floor. The limber movement of which made it appear as if the tube was vomiting the sand, adding distinct viscosity to a piece of industrial aluminum. If the tube acts as the medium and the sand is again the glass interface, as the act of communication passes through the medium information is conveyed but no content is actually transmitted but the form the content takes. Again, the medium remains the only message across these platforms.

Beyond these tubes is an overhead projector aimed into the empty shower stall (fig_45). Next to it on the table is a stack of acetate sheets, each with a different drawing of real cracked LCD screens from laptops and cell phones. However, this time it is not the broken glass that is showcased but the leaks caused by the cracks. Only the fully black sections where no light pixel information is transmitted was traced with paint marker by hand onto the acetate. This act of tracing with paint left slightly curved edges and clear signs of the hand, in recreating the cracks, the leaks, the scream. These could be handled and manipulated on the overhead projector to create any number of combinations still or in motion. This created a photo op moment, perfect to be posed in front of and shared on social media, the leaks projected onto the physical body performing what would later be another instance of their avatar, fixed in a server, readily accessible.

Next to the shower cabin is the toilet stall. In this stall a small infra-red proximity sensor was attached to the toilet tank, right above the flush mechanism, connected to an arduino and speaker hidden inside another exhaust tube attached to the top of the toilet (fig_46). On the door is a sign that reads, "Please, feel free to use this toilet. Drink water, and come again!" As the user enters the stall and approaches to use it, a beeping is emitted from the tube that increases in pitch the closer the user gets to the sensor. This was derived directly as an inversion of Duchamp's

Fountain (1917). The beeping is the disturbance, the discomfort of occupying this space in which the line between public and private are dissolved. Visitors were encouraged to use the toilet during the event, even when others were interacting with the other objects in the room. Some found this to be horrifyingly uncomfortable, while others laughed as they performed their bodily necessities for others to hear. This participatory sound installation created a temporary concert, unique to each participant as the sound of the beeping reflected the unique bodily approximation, layered on top of the low humming from the feedback loop, mixed with whatever sounds the body itself emitted interacting with the toilet bowl. Each performance had its particular duration and irreplicable arrangement, but all ended with a flush. Thus, the origin of those vibrations is determined by the participant to be their body rather than a computer, as the physical body seems to be the only real object in apparent motion. As the all parts of the mechanism except the sensor are hidden, the computer inside the exhaust tube becomes virtual by its inaccessability, regardless of the very real microcomputer receiving analog waves, transforming them, and only then emitting a sonic feedback.

The repetition of the exhaust tube, just like the sand, is in analogy to the interface that hides the subface which causes the vibrational discomfort. Just as in a home, the exhaust serves a hum that underlies all other sounds in the space. Just how uncomfortable that vibration is, is only noticeable once it is turned off and the wave of relief crashes in the absence of the noise. Also as the mattress coils, it brings up the structures of private or intimate spaces, placing an object that is generally hidden behind walls out into the active space of the bathroom.

The hallway connecting these two spaces began with blank white walls, a printer, and a poster inviting anyone to send images taken from the event directly to the printer's email to be printed throughout the event and compiled into a collective publication (fig_47). There were unidentifiable technological issues, however, and after the first five images the printer's email server did not seem to recognize any other images. This was the third instance of this collective and anonymous printer project, the first to



fig_47 installation view of collaborative printer set-up, to the right is the hallway connecting the mezzanine room to the bathroom

occur only in one live event instead of over the course of several days, and the only one to refuse to print.

The lighting in both of exhibition spaces came solely from the projectors and screens in each, creating a further intimacy and requiring the viewer body to stand closer to each piece to view detail. While the hallway ceiling was a skylight, with the summer sun radiating off of the bright white walls, acting as a sort of shock to the iris as event-goers moved between spaces.

4_conclusions

As was laid out earlier in the objectives, this research was initiated with no claims or pretense of conclusion, with the intention of a greater freedom in approach to both the material and immaterial aspects of the total process. This attitude towards the research process allowed for opening up new questions throughout, and comfort in leaving them open for continued reflection and dialogue. The methodology of wandering across territory previously unknown to the wanderer led to an organic mapping of both theoretical and practical terrain, the roads of which lead to endless subdividing paths. Which is another liberating practical aspect of digital tools, the possibility of an endless artboard, of demonstrating other dimensionalities all at once, without the physical constraints of the sheet of paper. This mapping, which took the form of text and exhibition exists in a multimedia, multi-tiered, non-hierarchical structure which is in turn reflective of the contents studied.

Experimentation and uncertainty act as the central motivators of this process, both representing a sort of vibration that underpins the restlessness leading to the project at hand. An openness to experimentation is an openness to error, to tripping on unknown territory, to a glitch in the program, and in the spaces between the errors a path can be delineated. While uncertainty is the desire for knowledge, for filling in those gaps to generate a fuller, richer image. In this effort, what was found was a fascination with the subface, with the underlying structures necessarily hidden from access to maintain their conditions of control. Essentially, an inclination towards deconstruction of all presupposed notions; to take apart the frameworks in ruin in order to rebuild something more suitable to dealing with the issues brought about by contemporary modes of relation.

This openness is both a liberation from structure and a limitation in practice. Necessarily existing within an institutional academic context, the research and its products must fulfill certain forms, timelines, and contexts that at times conflict with the organic process. In practice, this reflected in a massive and wide ranging review of literature and art that simply could not make it onto the page as particular contents did not complete their digestion period in time for compiling. Those contents remain reflected in the changing

language over the course of the text, and certainly in the creative outputs throughout and so are listed in the Works Referenced list of the bibliography, while not directly cited within the text. Some of these include more in depth considerations of the interface as an object and a function, a description of what is meant by the object in this oriented ontology, considerations and approaches around glitch feminism and New Materialism, full description of the avatar and its inception, among many other topics accessed. The absence of these discussions is not necessarily a negative, but rather act as clear opportunities for continual research and action in this field of study.

The text portion of the mapping is laid out in quasi-chronological order. Beginning with the background of virtuality, image culture, representational communication, culture of the spectacle, these set the foundation with contents from the last seventy years as a base on which the more contemporary conversation can stand on. Having touched on those allows the conversation to reach the digital, the intermediary space, and the visual approach based on previous background. Only then did it make sense to discuss novel and contemporary models of thinking, namely encompassing the post-digital condition and its ontological consequences. However, before discussing the project that stemmed from this survey a quick review of recent modes of art production, namely in what has been labeled Net Art and Post-Internet, to contextualize the practice established throughout the process.

While there was never any goal of conclusion, or in finding concrete answers to the questions that directed this process, a sort of answer emerged organically in a pattern created from the chaos of trial and error. What was in fact reached was not properly an answer but rather a better question to ask. When considering the core force of inquiry, Where is my body when I am online? A definition of Being came about which annulled that question entirely. In the post-digital context, Being is not defined by a unitary point where the mind/body duality meet, but rather a structurally coupled system in constant Becoming. This system is comprised of two bodies, and the consciousness that oscillates between them. The physical body, acting as origin point of personhood. The data-body, an agglomeration of all of an individual's avatars and

digital footprints. The Self, the thing that comprises personhood or whatever consciousness and awareness may mean, that moves back and forth between body extensions as need be to complete its acts of communication in verifying itself as Being. Those three elements together comprise the Being, the Becoming. At least, that is a satisfactory definition for the author at the point of this writing. It could then be extrapolated from this emergence that the restlessness actually put into words is not attempting to locate the body. Rather it aims to reach at what happens in that short delay, that hybrid space of passage unnoticeable by human perception, that electronic umbilical chord as the Self crosses from one body to the other. What is gained and lost during the transference from electrical signals in the brain to electrical signals stemming from the machine? When sensation becomes computation and back again. There lies the vibration of discomfort to be further examined and deconstructed.

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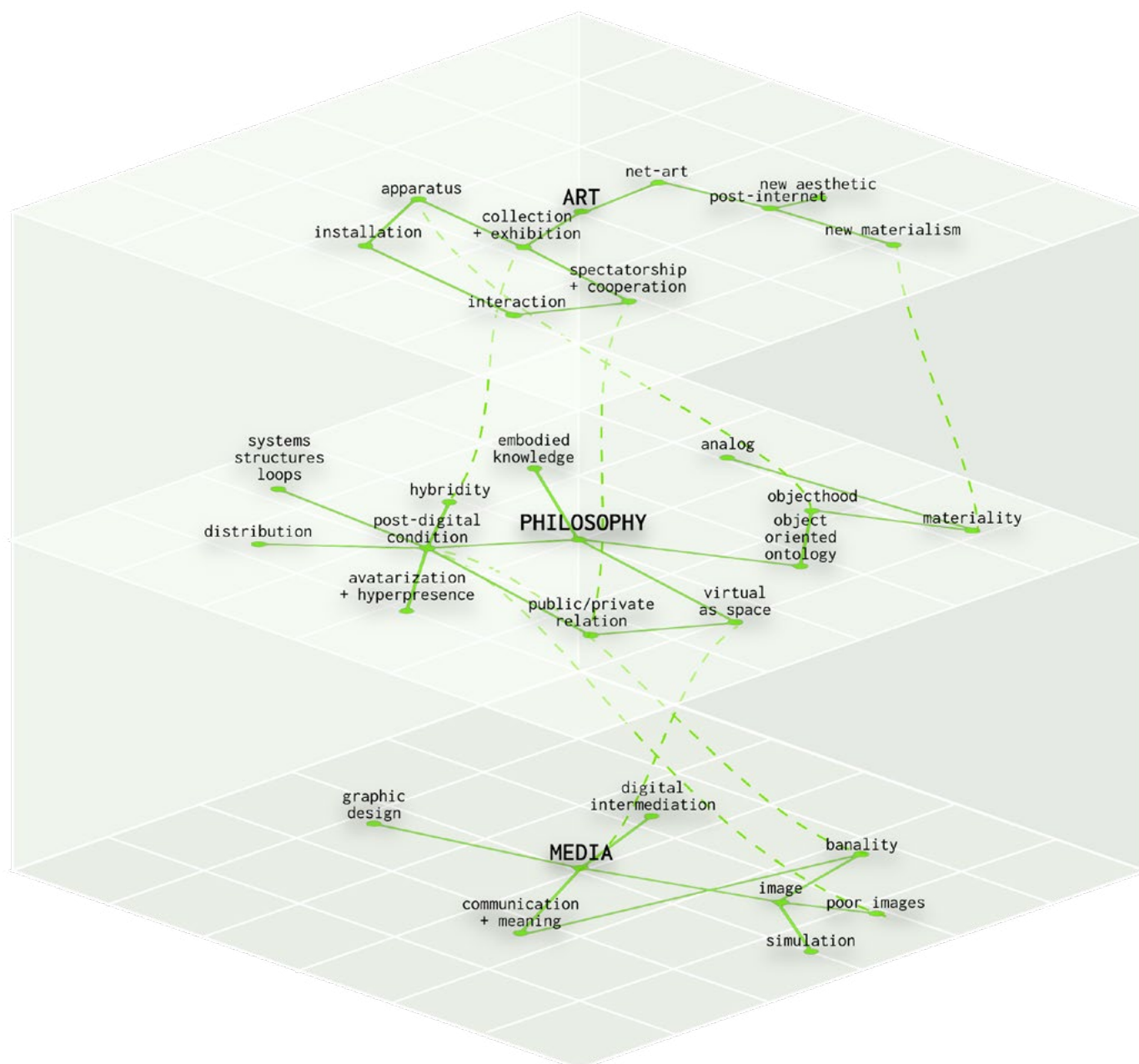
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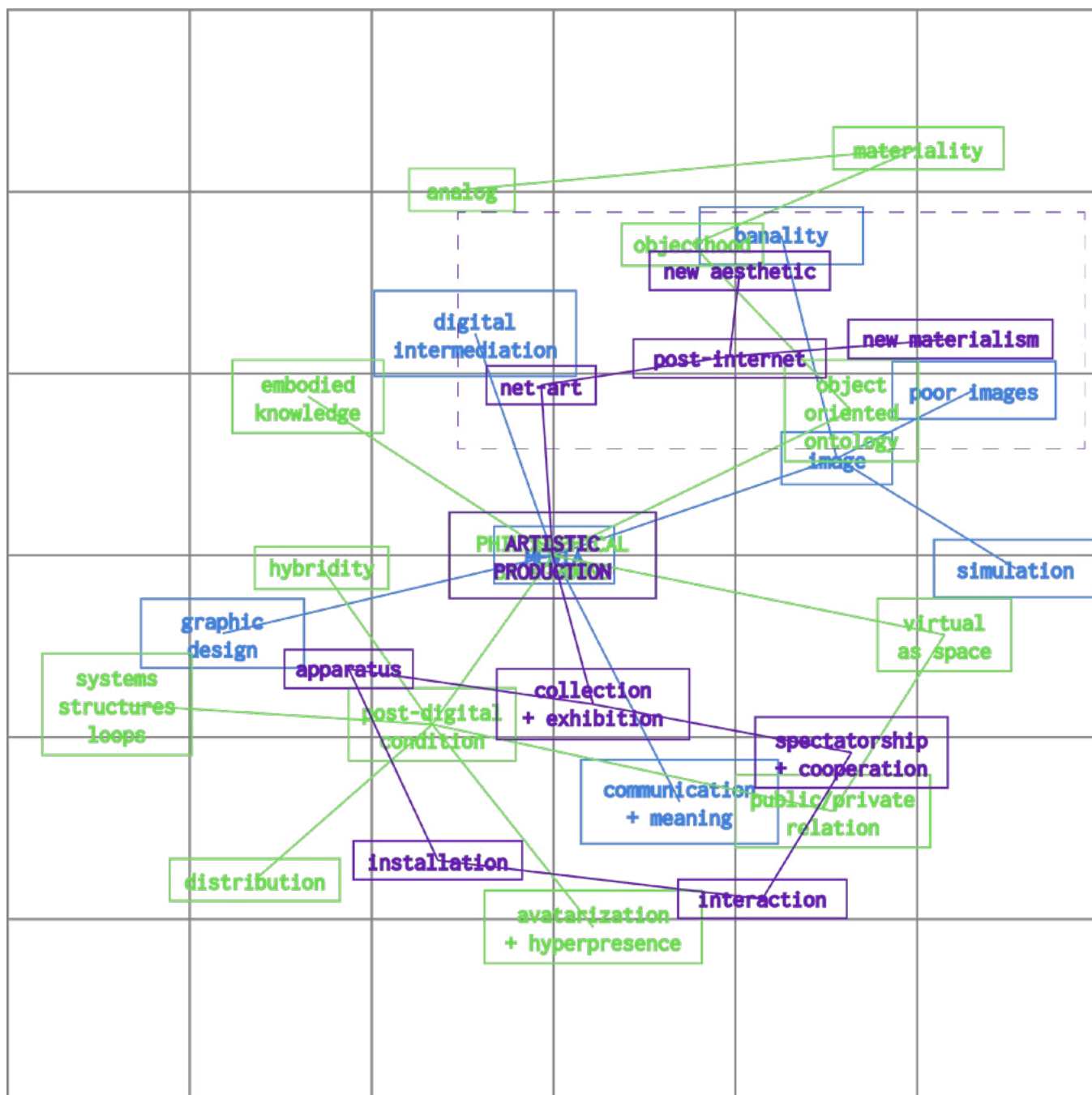
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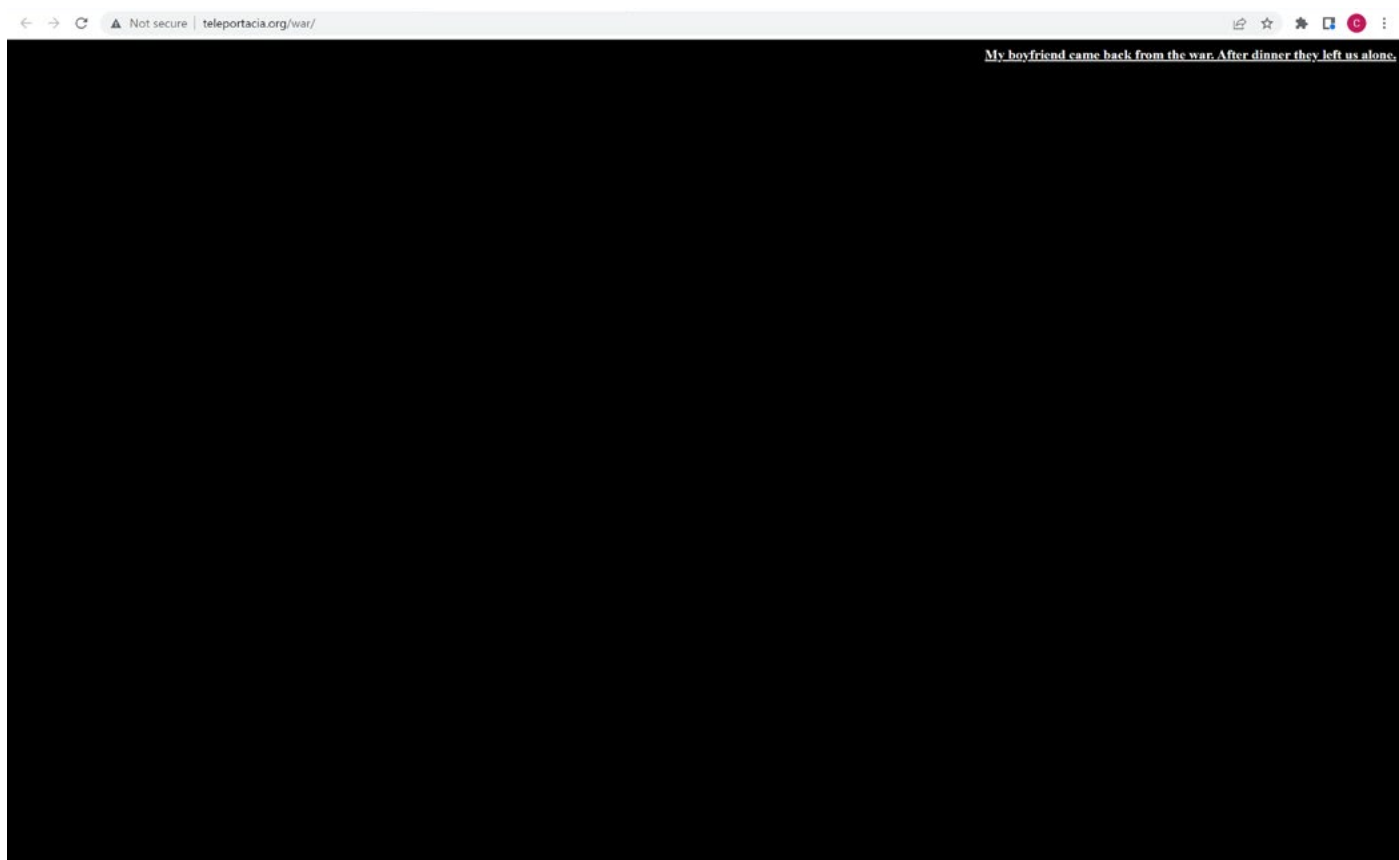
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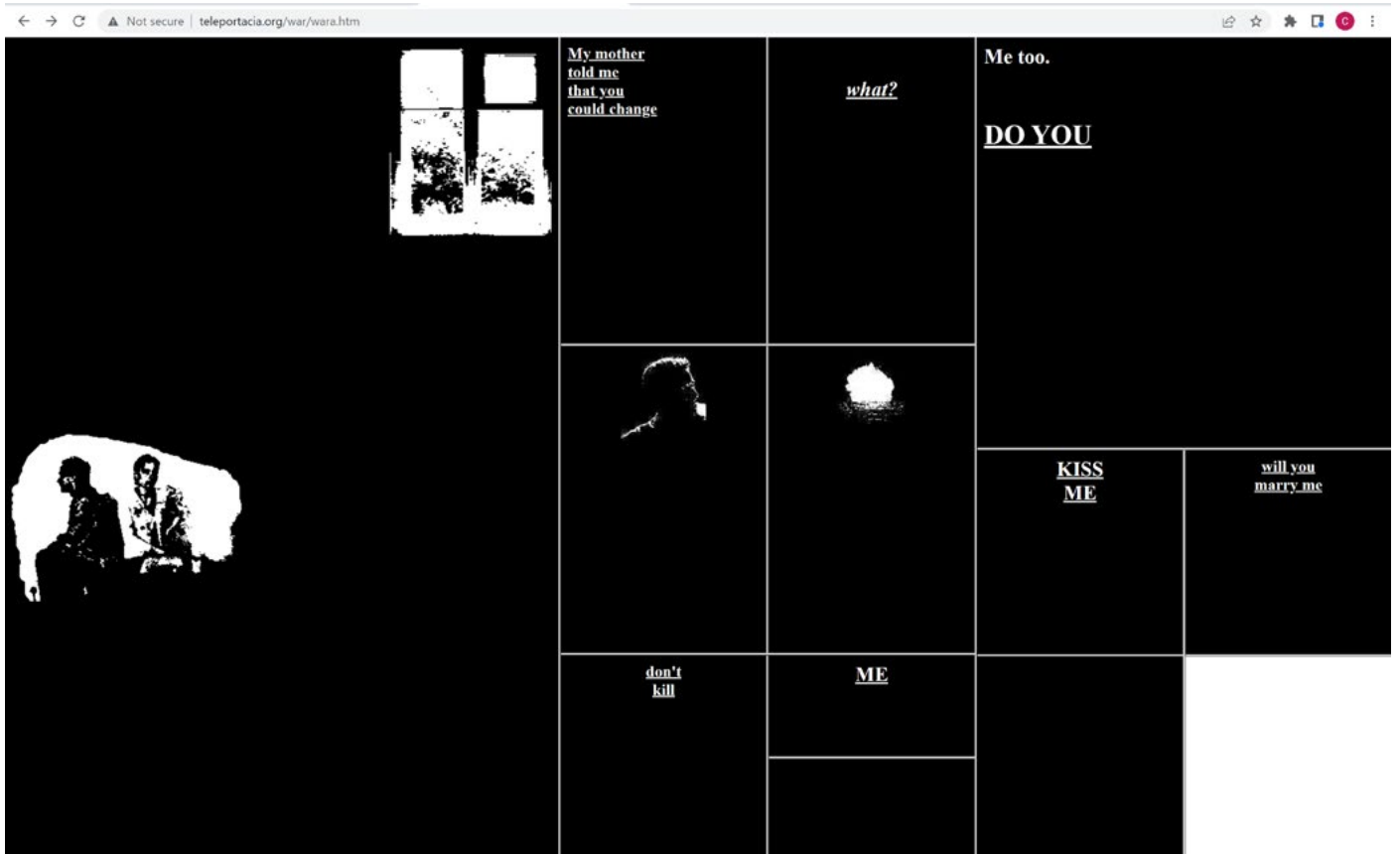
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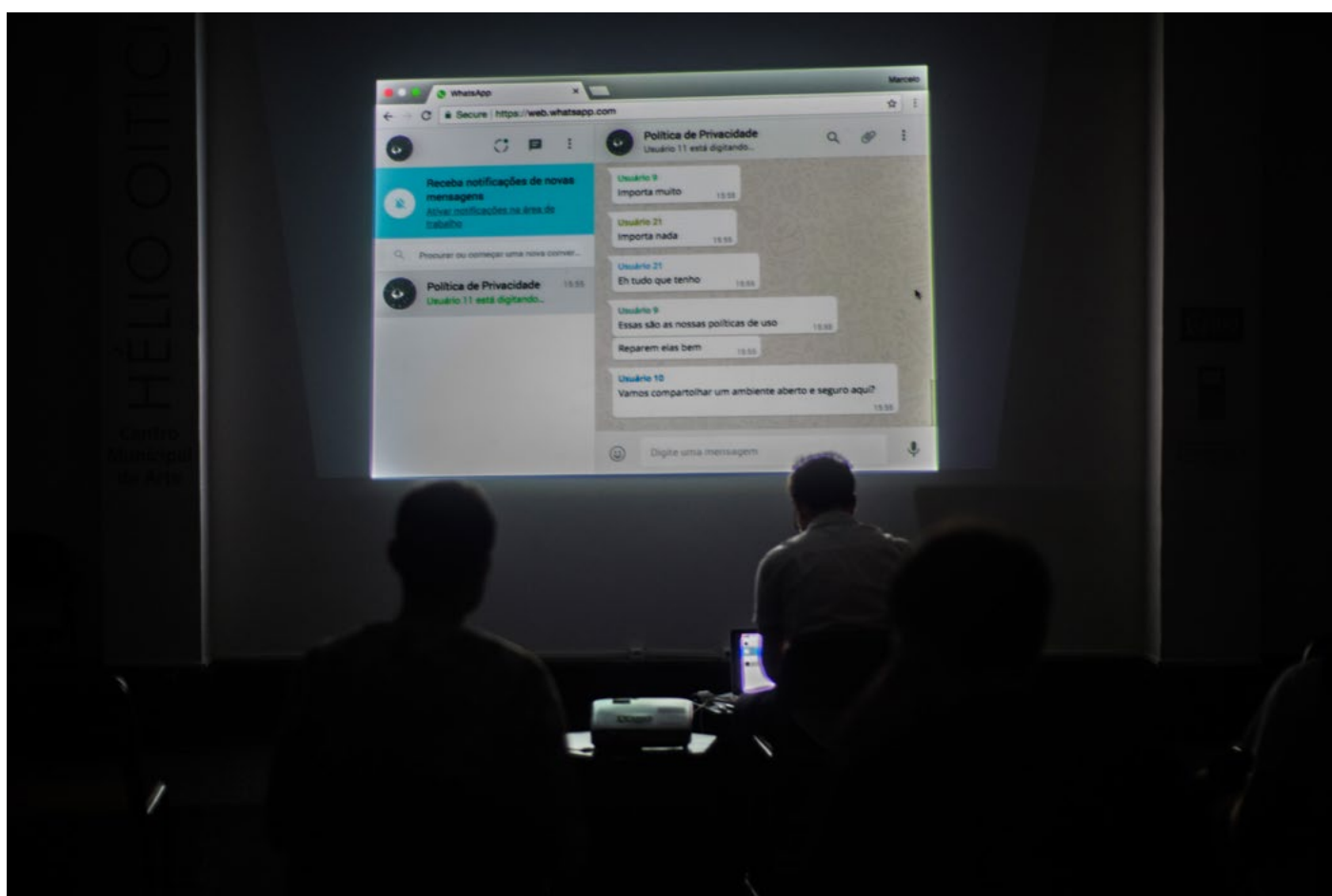
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**Streaming video burns
56 grams of CO₂
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PAV. 5

Register this event, for a collective publication. Send photos, images, documents from today as an attachment to 0003948667@print.brother.com

Those documents will be printed and hung on the walls throughout the event, creating a timeline of registrations from varied and unknowable points of view.

The attachments cannot be viewed or manipulated before printing, and will be spit out by the machine in the form it deems fit.

0003948667@print.brother.com



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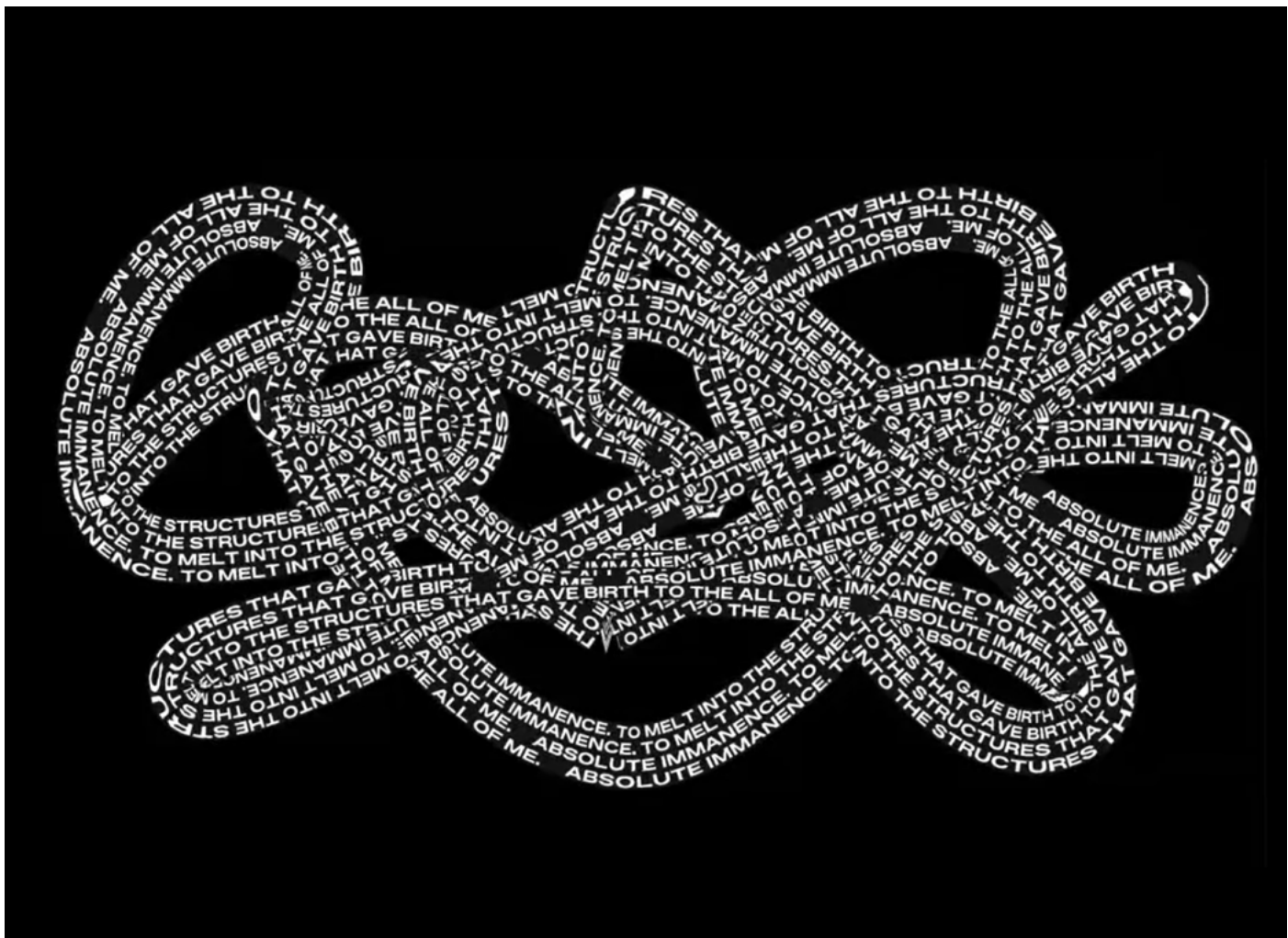
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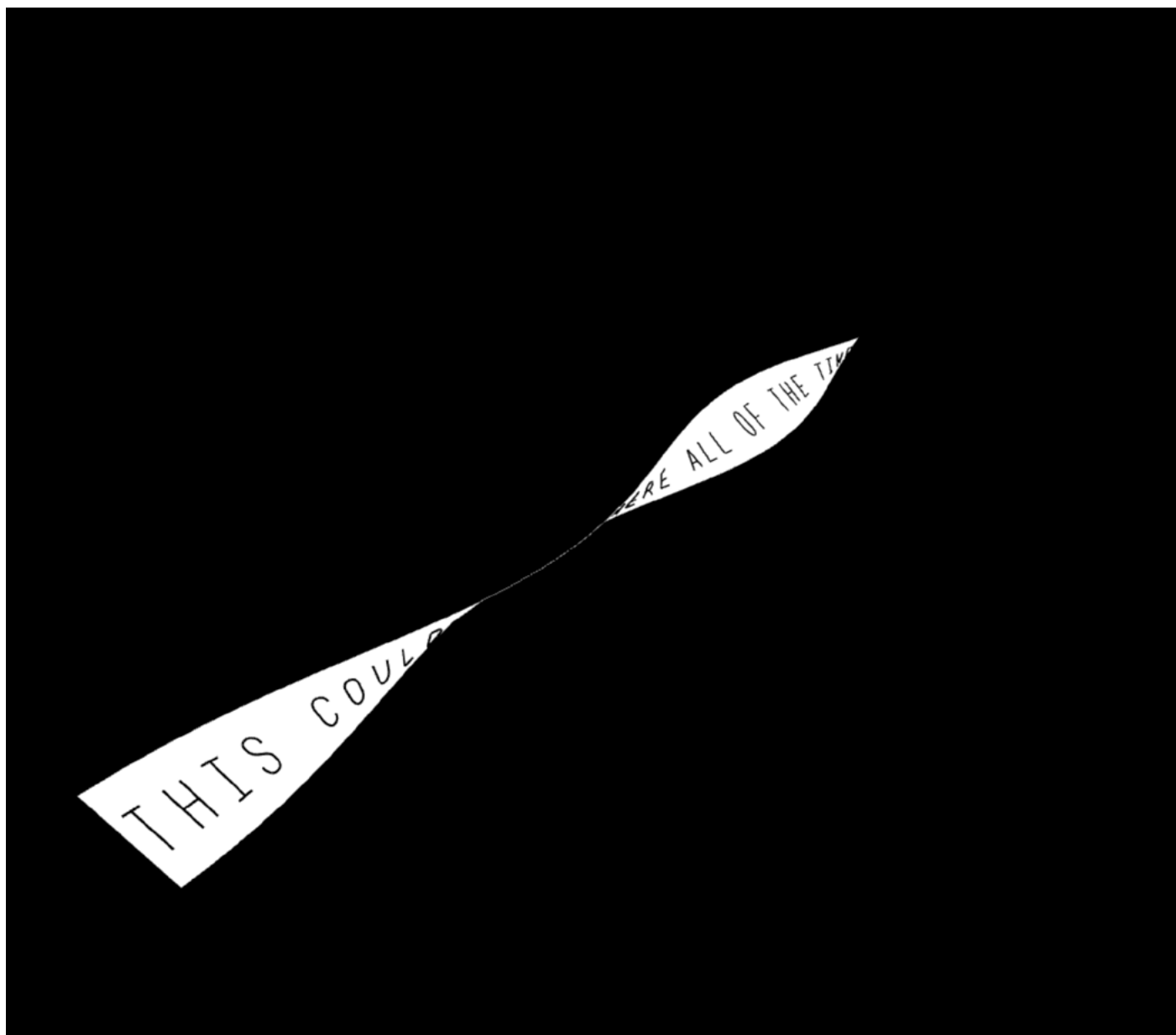
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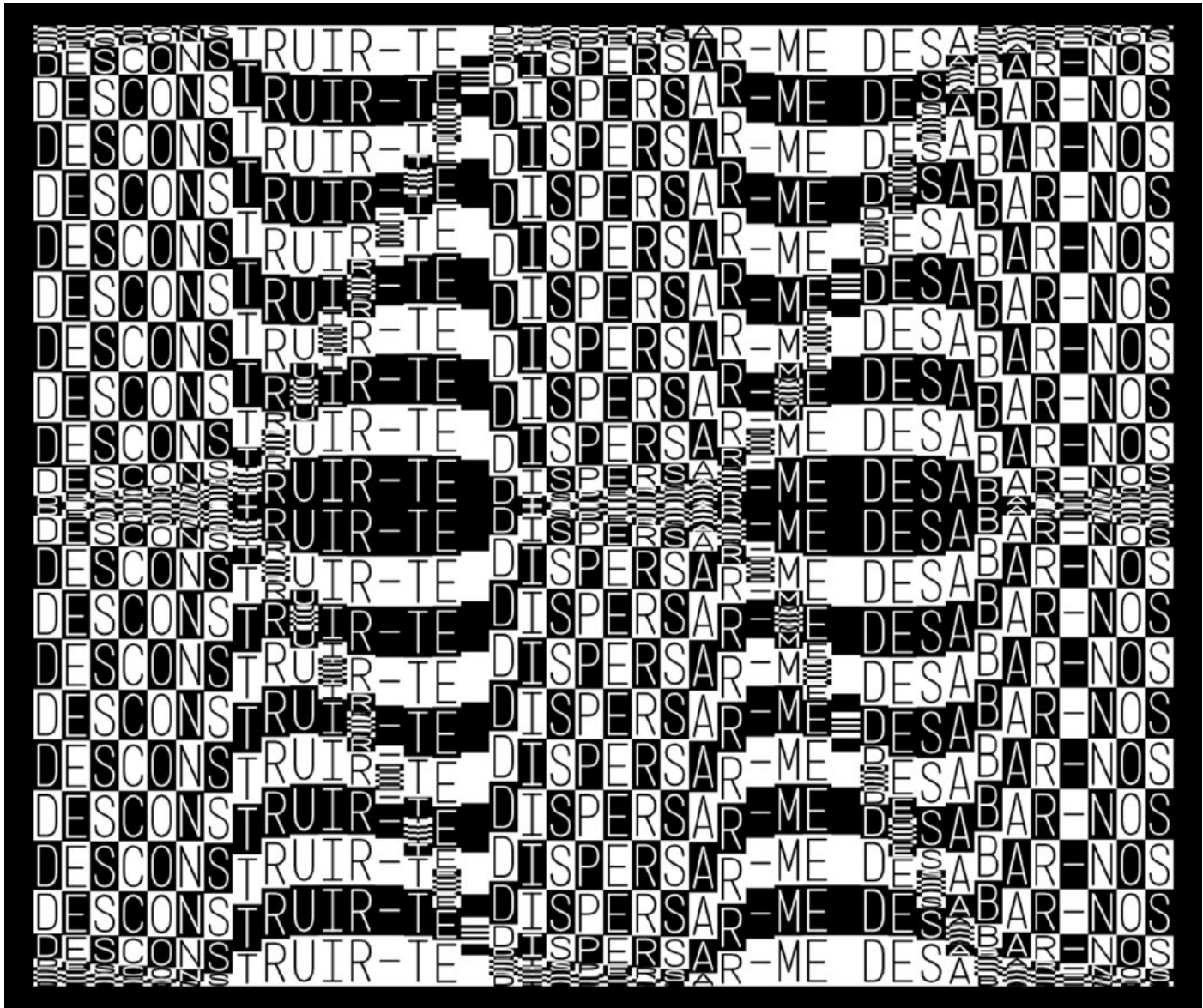
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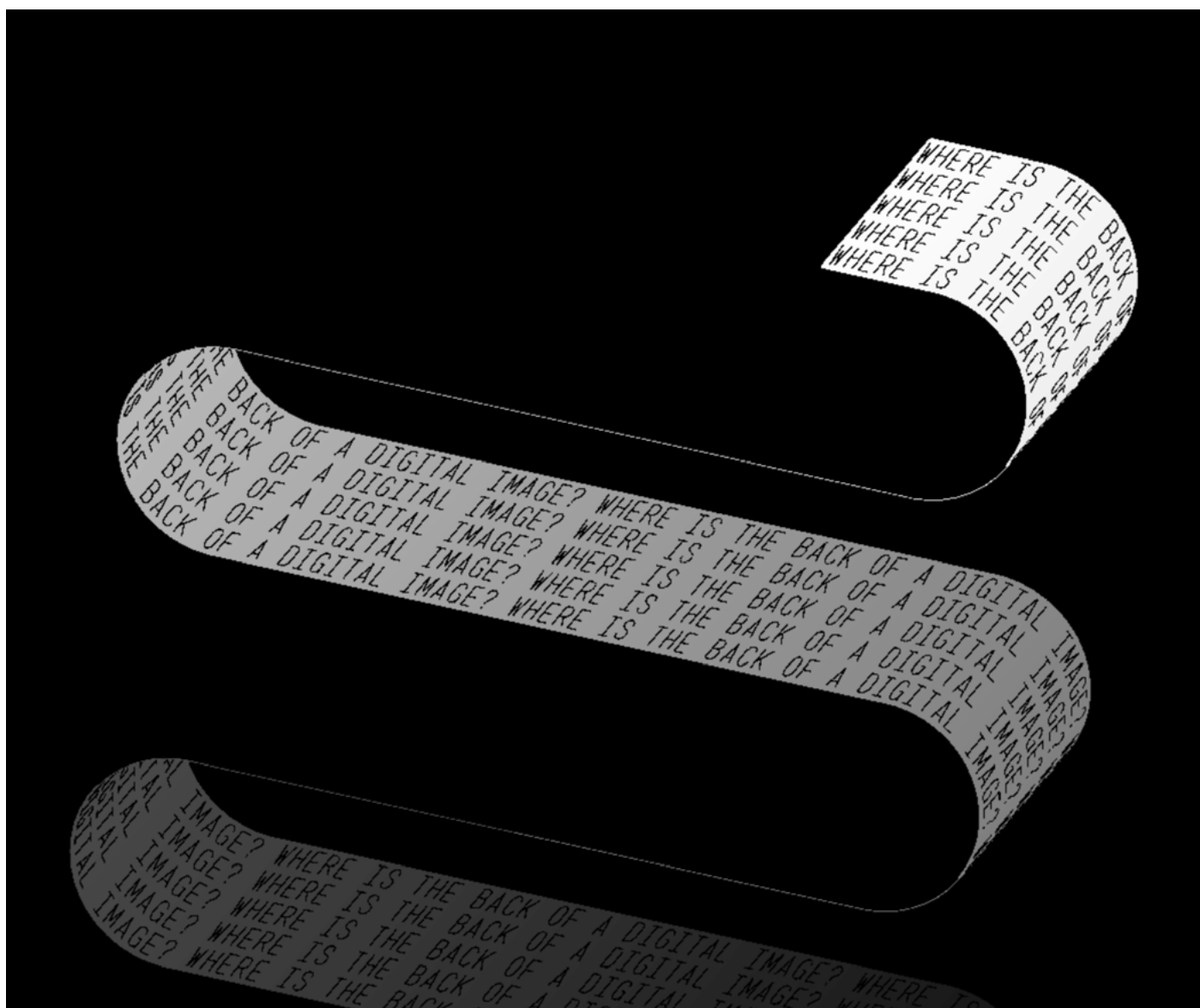
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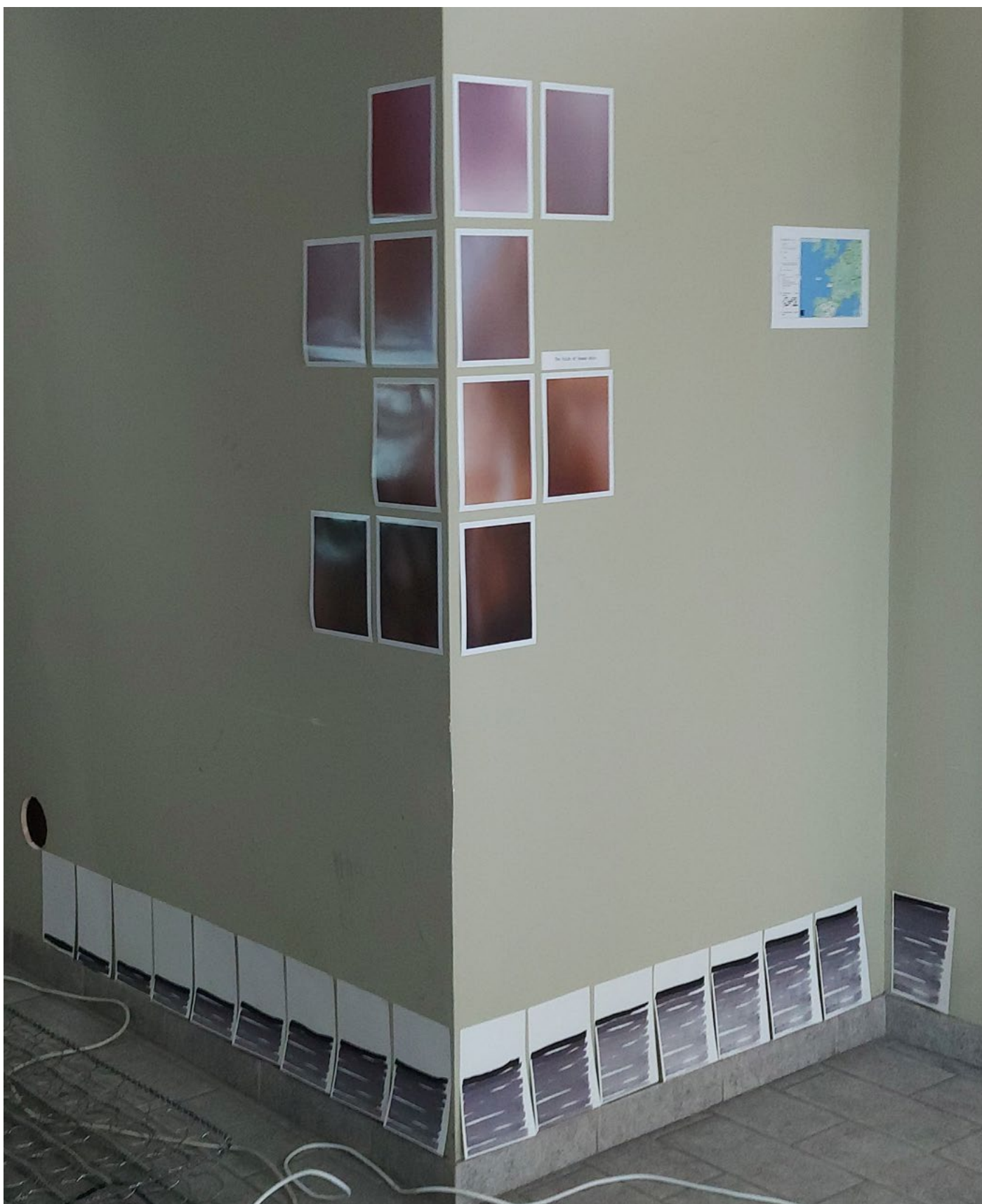
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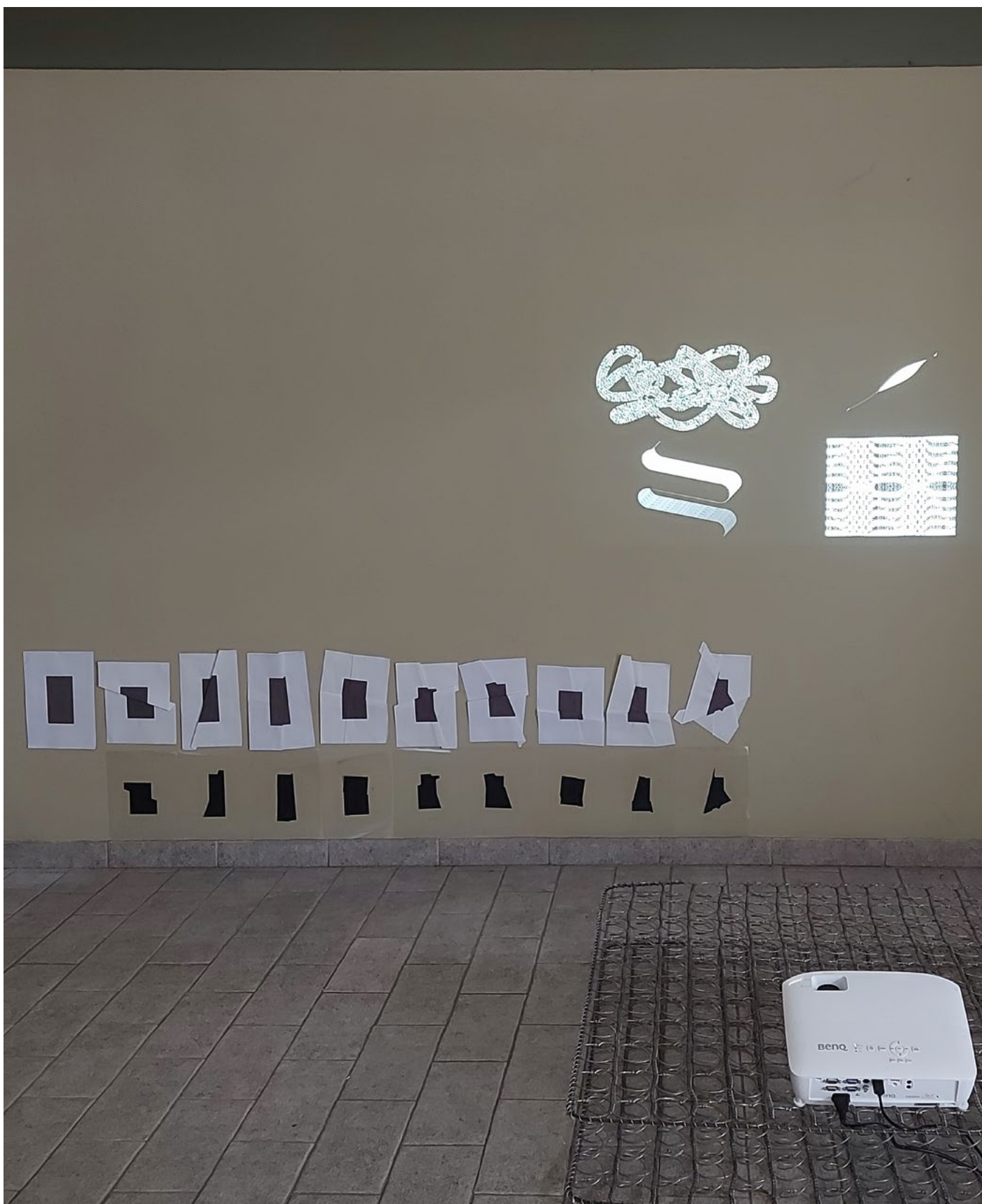
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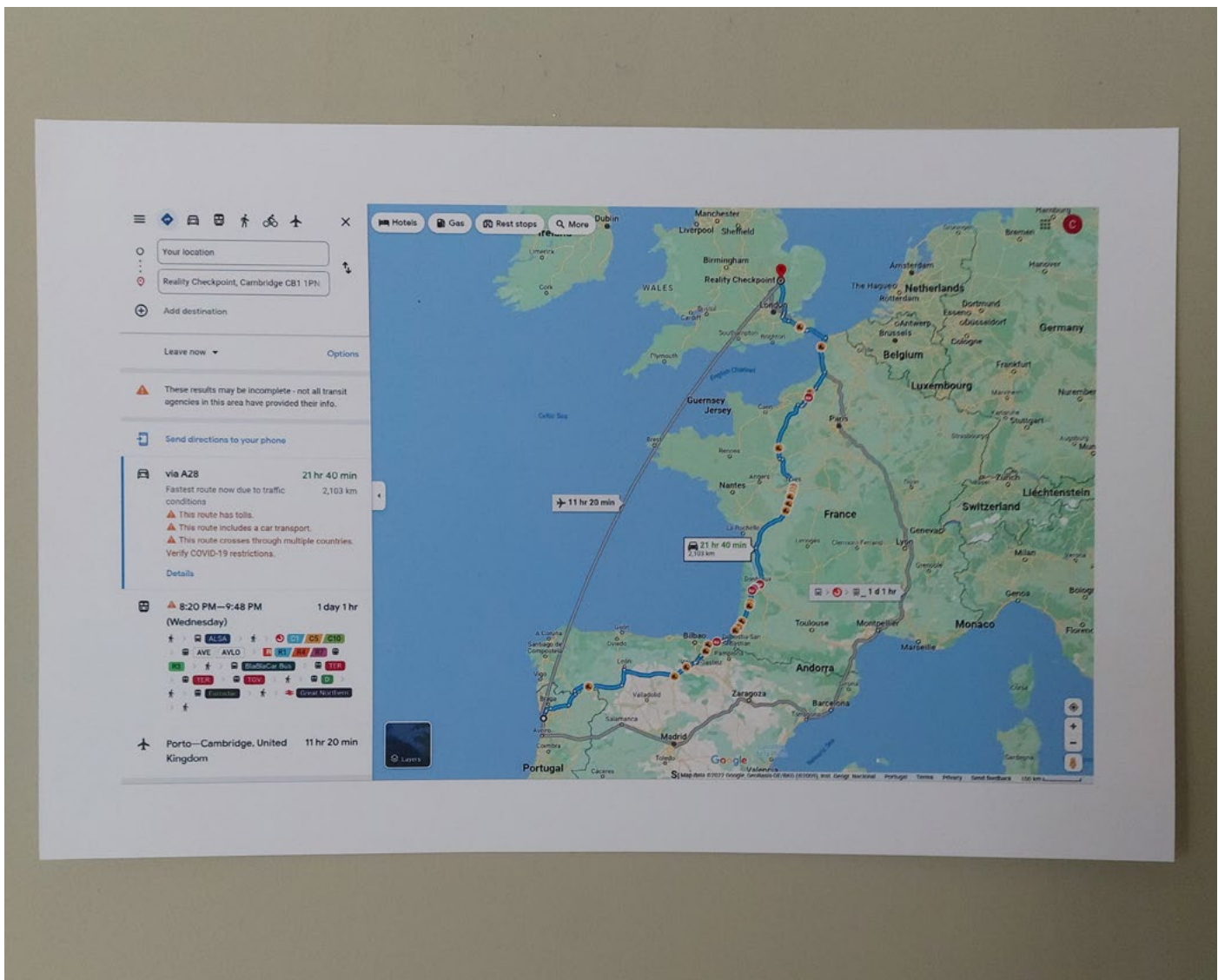
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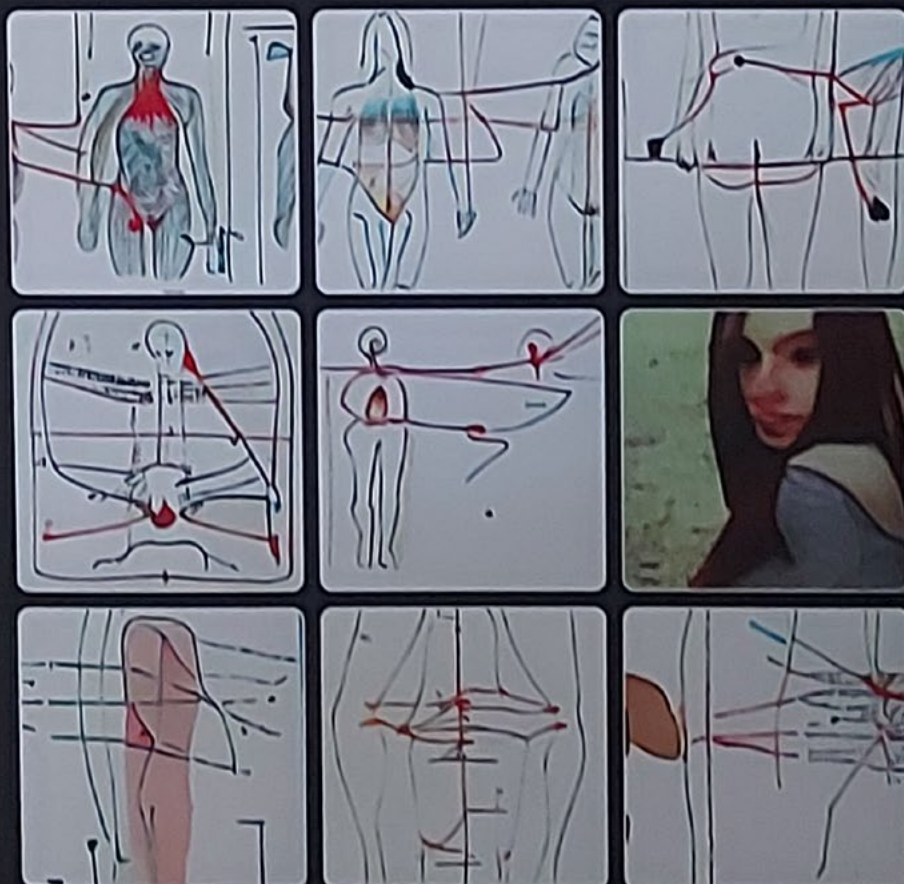
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DALL·E mini

AI model generating images from any prompt!

The location of Clarisse Pinto's body

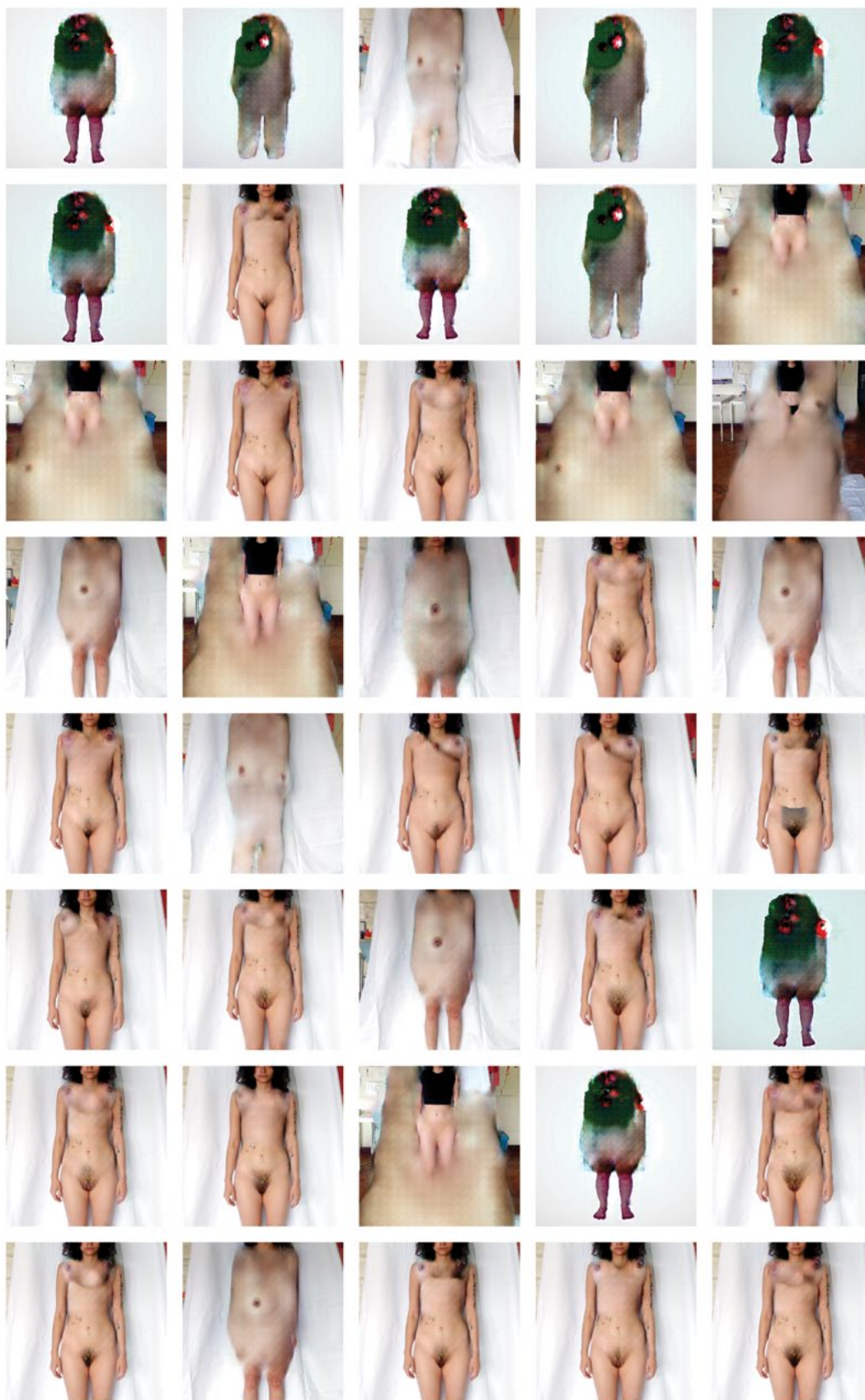
Run



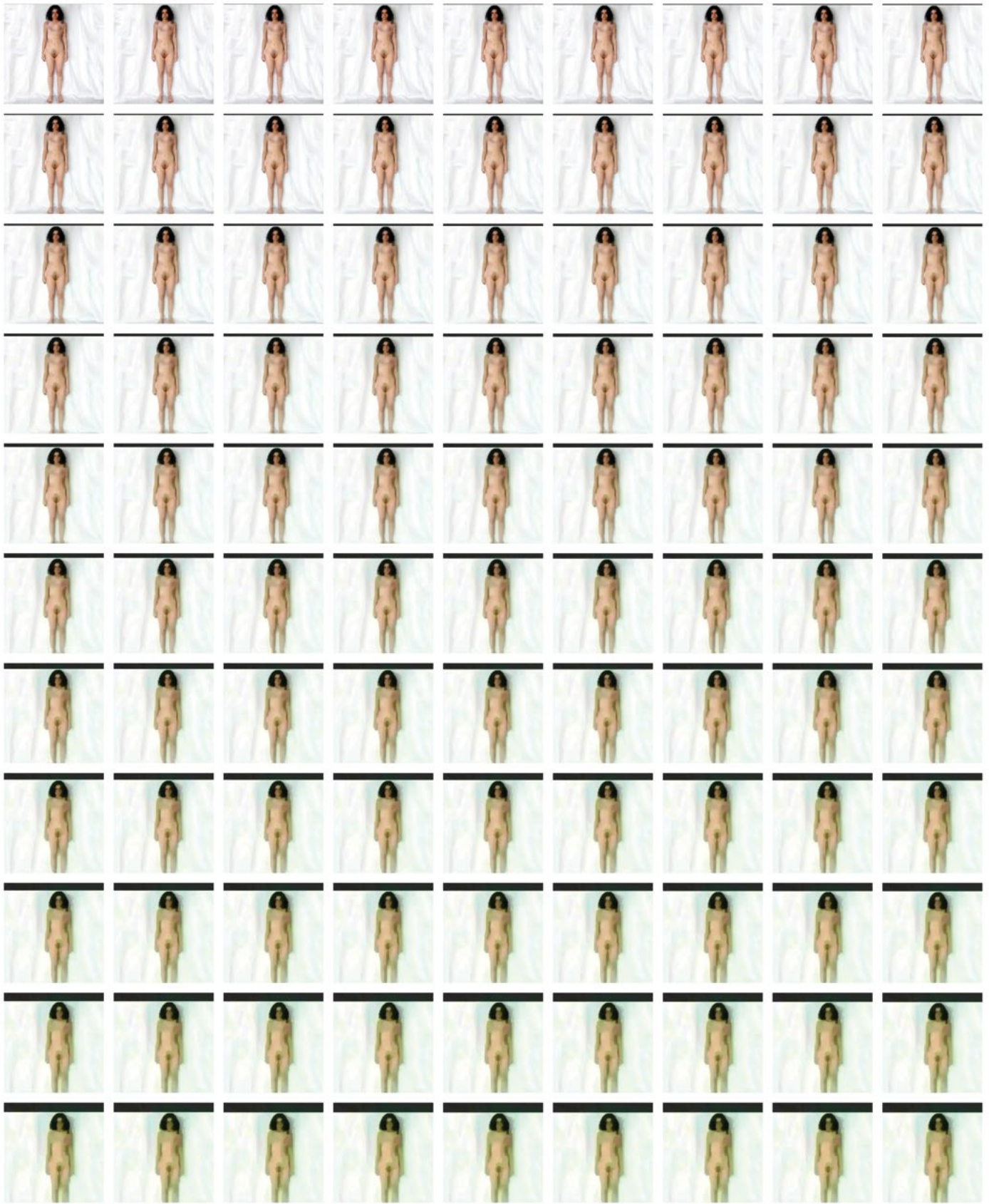
fig_32



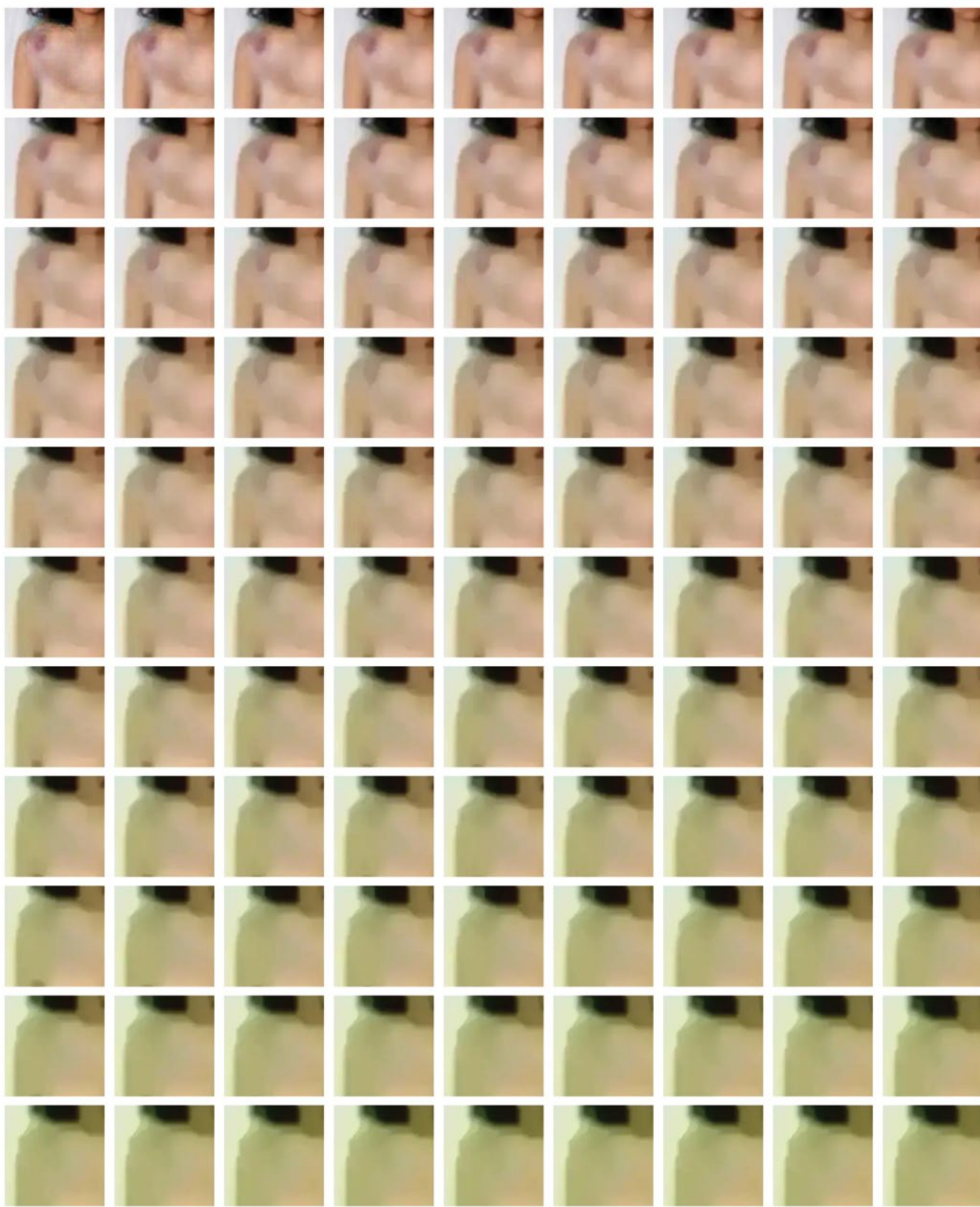
fig_33



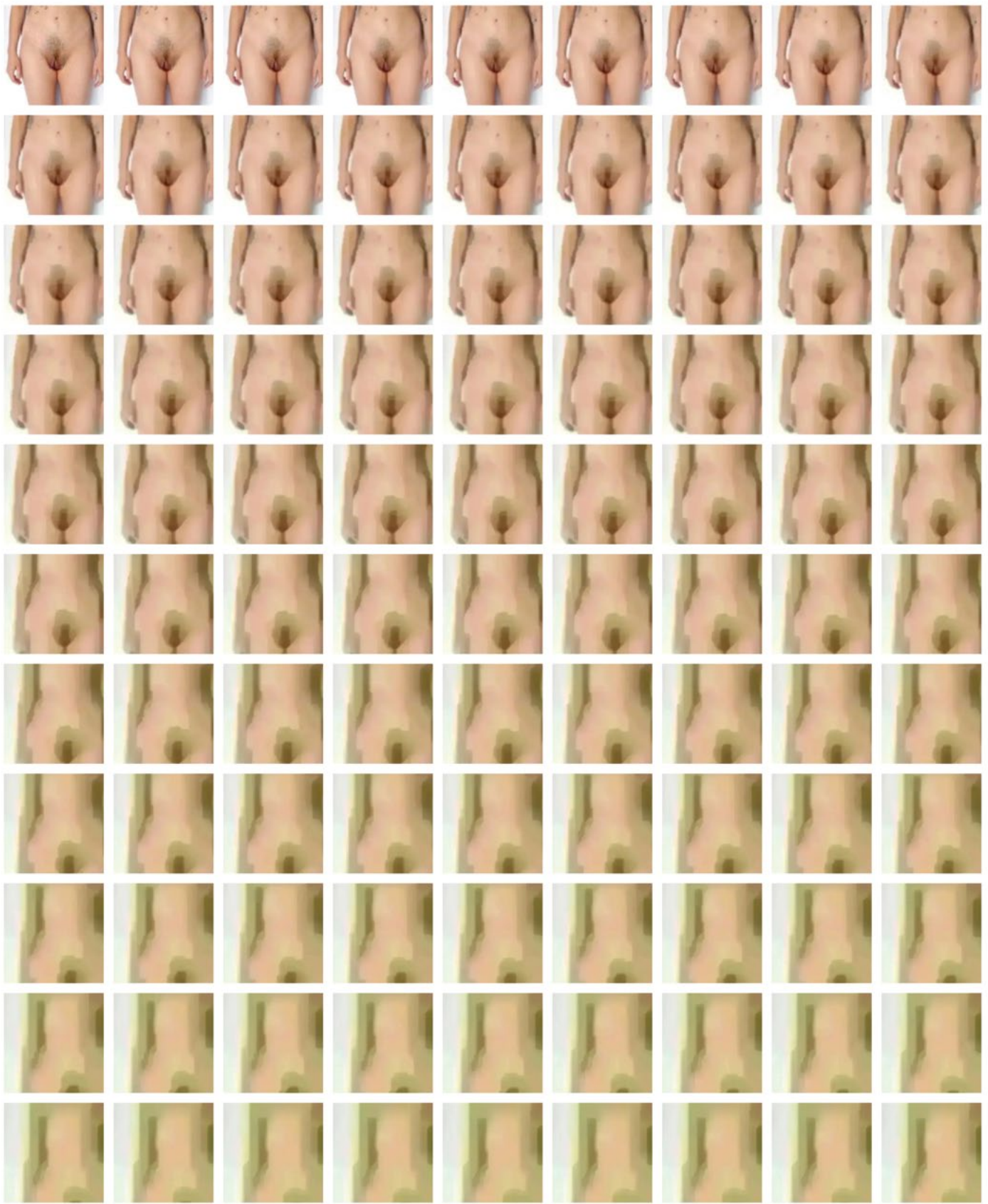
fig_34



fig_35



fig_36



fig_37



fig_38



fig_39



fig_40



fig_41



fig_42



fig_43



fig_44



fig_45



fig_46



fig_47

Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Porto

CONSIDERING MEDIATION:
substance and self through
virtual public space

PROVISIONAL VERSION FOR PUBLIC EXAM

Clarisse Baptista Coelho Pinto
Dissertation and project for the degree in
Master of Art and Design for Public Spaces

Supervisor
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