Between the Self and the Digital Self-image

In our hyper-connected age and the digital exteriorization of memory through computational extensions what happens to our physical bodies? The physiology of the body is undergoing a digital transformation via 3d scanning. The 3d scanner is a very recent technology; initial applications by Stanford University included the scanning of Michelangelo's statues in Florence. In the last two decades the data clouds produced by 3d scanners have had a wide range of uses. The technologies for re-constructing a digital re-presentation of an actual object –laser scanning, photogrammetry- have increasingly been used within the entertainment industry, for the production of films and video games. One such example can be found in the Hollywood film *The Congress* (2013) that is centered on the digital transformation of actress Robin Wright. Here, Wright plays the role of an actress who is struggling to land a role in a movie. She is less marketable due to the anathema of all actors –ageing– and agrees to sell the rights to construct and re-produce her digital image to Miramax studios. In the crucial 'scan' scene she is positioned at the center of a geodesic dome structure that is completely covered with cameras.[1] As she stretches her arms, the cameras scan, record and re-create her digital likeness. Her digital image will be used to re-create computer generated film characters. The data clouds or point clouds reproduce the contour of the actual body; this data can be constantly manipulated. Thus the 3d scanning technology in this case takes the topography of the body and projects it onto an informational field. Through the computer generated model an image of the body as simulacra proliferates in digital formats. What are the consequences of this extension for the self?

Here I propose to consider the relations between digital self-projection and actual self through a custom-made media installation, the *diplorasis*. The *diplorasis* consists of a six-meter-long mirrored corridor where the participant will walk towards a light-emitting source placed at the opposite end. The light source, a cavity in the form of a human head, has two peepholes. The participant will unexpectedly see, through these peepholes, simulated 'three-dimensional' projections of themselves from past instances inside the corridor space. This is made possible because ultrasonic sensors have been programmed to trigger hidden cameras –encased in black 'boxes'- that would then capture photographic views of the participant's body. Through software/ hardware co-ordinations and DSLR cameras encased with stereoscopic lenses, the image is split and sent to LCD monitors. The projected image [of the participant's body] is thus later (stereoscopically) re-stitched by the viewer in 'real' time. One –*unexpectedly*- sees oneself seeing oneself from various points of view.

The 3d scanner offers a useful prompt for considering how the distance between body and image changes with contemporary technologies that are co-extensive with database cultures.
However the *diplorasis* deviates from the operative nature of the 3d scanner as it attempts to explore this very slippery relation between body and image, without offering any determined readings of the body. What are the differences? The 3d scanned image applications attempt to re-construct an object – as complete, towards an end (telos). A 3d scanner as such focuses on creating depth by focusing on capturing an object in the round. The *diplorasis* uses another technology to create a depth image: the

---

[1] The scene was filmed at USC's Institute for Creative Technologies.

mirrored stereoscope. This stereoscope captures one point of view at a time and uses a mirrored arrangement to split the image. The main difference is that the mirrored stereoscope is devised from the outset to re-create an image in-depth – thus it utilizes photogrammetry: the 3d scanner must first become a point cloud. The *diplorasis* attempts to focus on select frames of the participant, and to probe the viewing body. The fragmented frames are partial and discontinuous, i.e. the skin, fabric and reflected environment overlap. There is never cohesion in the reception of images. Thus, the object viewed becomes uncannily both familiar and ambiguous. This includes shots from strange angles – a dog's point of view – where a hunched participant in relation to the lens produces an almost headless self-projection. The image is thus re-creating an im-mediate encounter with one's strange likeness. It doesn't simply reveal an image but instead it plays on the moment when the image is being framed. The participant who does not expect this type of image – is thus bound to an immediate surprise that gives way to a cognitive moment of reflection. The participant questions how they were captured. It is thus important to outline how in the *diplorasis* one's image is transformed into a projected depth image during the participant's experience. The *diplorasis* implements, and in some cases, manipulates the image by transforming it into point cloud formats. The repercussions of this image are twofold – at once it simulates a gaze that involves a nebulous control of the subject. Calling attention to new forms of digital subjugation and the control of the physiology of the body in a scenario where the viewing of the body is laid bare. Conversely the encounter provokes an open-ended realm of possibilities where the body's spatio-temporal groundedness is challenged in specific ways. Furthermore, the screens that project the images are placed on revolving drums that -between each image sequence- rotate and, through the turning motion, overlay the view of the actual space with the digital visual projections. In the *diplorasis* the unsettling moment occurs when one realizes, that through the physicality of their binocular eyes they are encountering themselves as objects of another's gaze. This momentary event, when one feels the gaze of another (not simply human, but the gaze of the machine, or of a cyborgian presence) extends as the cameras are revealed to re-project oneself in the act of looking whilst looking. The paradox is that one sees oneself seeing oneself – outside one's body, being removed both in space and time *through* a sensory act. Does this encounter trigger the 'real' as a 'originally unwelcome' (Lacan, 1964)?