

**BLURRY EDGES AND EXPANDED BOUNDARIES IN INTERMEDIAL ART PRACTICE:
THE POSTHUMAN, ANAMORPHIC IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that *Blurry edges and expanded boundaries in intermedial art practice: the posthuman, anamorphic impact of digital technology* (2023) is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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January 2024

TITLE:

Blurry edges and expanded boundaries in intermedial art practice: the posthuman, anamorphic impact of digital technology

SUMMARY:

Digital technology and its associated cultures have profoundly impacted art practice, leading to the emergence of posthuman identity and artistic forms that blur the boundaries of art ontologies. Examining key posthuman concepts, this hypothesis on digital culture illustrates the multifaceted nature of posthuman identity, which is preoccupied with rituals of masking and constructs of imagined identity. These are issues investigated through notions of self-representation in digital culture; role-play; masking and ritual in performance; and the mask as a multifaceted media entity. Posthuman identity is characterised by its manifestation within a networked culture comprising entanglement, embodiment, and becoming, encompassing both human and nonhuman entities. It is argued that blurry edges and expanded boundaries in art production are associated with intermediality, scrutinised through the presence of affect and emotions in multisensory experiences of installation art and liminality (a state of in-betweenness) at the intersection of different media forms.

LIST OF KEY TERMS:

Affect; Boundaries; Digital culture; Entanglement; Intermediality; Liminality; Masking; Posthuman identity; Ritual; Self-representation.

TITEL:

Vervaagde buitelyne en uitgebreide grense in intermedialekuns-praktyk: Die posthumanistiese, anamorfiese uitwerking van digitale tegnologie

OPSOMMING:

Die diepgaande uitwerking van digitale tegnologie en die meegaande kulture op kunspraktyk het tot die verskyning van posthumanistiese identiteit en kunsvorme wat die grense van kunsontologieë vervaag, aanleiding gegee. Hierdie hipotese oor digitale kultuur illustreer by wyse van 'n ondersoek van kernbegrippe oor posthumanisme, die veelvlakkige aard van posthumanistiese identiteit, wat deur 'n vooringenomenheid met rituele van maskering en konstruksie van verbeelde identiteit gekenmerk word. Hierdie kwessies word aan die hand van begrippe rakende selfvoorstelling in digitale kultuur; rolspel; maskering en rituele in optrede (*performance*); en die masker as 'n veelvlakkige media-entiteit ondersoek. Dit is tipierend van posthumanistiese identiteit om binne 'n genetwerkte kultuur bestaande uit vervlegting, vergestaltung en wording, wat beide menslike en niemenslike entiteite insluit, te manifesteer. Daar word aangevoer dat vervaagde buitelyne en uitgebreide grense in kunsproduksie met intermedialiteit gepaardgaan, soos aangetoon deur die bestudering van die teenwoordigheid van affek en emosies in multisensoriese ervarings van installasiekuns en liminaliteit ('n tussenin-staat) by die kruispunt van verskillende mediavorme.

LYS SLEUTELTERME:

Affek; Grense; Digitale kultuur; Vervlegting; Intermedialiteit; Liminaliteit; Maskering; Posthumanistiese identiteit; Ritueel; Selfvoorstelling.

ISIHLOKO:

*Iphethelo elifiphele kanye nemingcele eyandisiwe kumkhuba wobuciko
obuphakathi: umthelela womuntu, we-anamofikhi yobuchwepheshe bedijithali*

ISIFINQO:

Ubuchwepheshe bedijithali kanye namasiko ahlobene nawo kube nomthelela omkhulu ekwenzeni ubuciko, okuholele ekuveleni kokubonakala kwangemuva lomuntu kanye nezindlela zobuciko ezifiphalisa imingcele yama-ontholoji wobuciko. Ukuhlola imiqondo eyinhloko yangemuva komuntu, le nkolelo-ze yesiko ledijithali ibonisa imvelo enezici eziningi zokuthi lingubani ingemuva lomuntu, ematasatasa ngemikhuba yokubona obala kanye nokwakhiwa kobunikazi obucatshangelwayo. Lezi yizindaba eziphenywa ngemibono yokuzimelela esikweni ledijithali; umdlalo wokulingisa; ukwebatha isikhumba semvu kanye nesiko ekusebenzeni; kanye nokwebatha isikhumba semvu njengenhlango yemidiya enezici eziningi. Ubunikazi bangemuva bomuntu bubonakala ngokuvezwa kwabo ngaphakathi kwesiko lenethiwekhi elihlanganisa ukubambelela, ukufana nomuntu nokuba, okuhlanganisa kokubili izinhlangano ezingabantu nezingezona ezomuntu. Kuphikiswana ngokuthi amaphethelo afiphele kanye nemingcele enwetshiwe ekukhiqizweni kobuciko kuhlotshaniswa nokuphakathi, kucutshungulwa ngokuba khona kokuthinta kanye nemizwa kokuhlangenwe nakho okuhlukahlukene kobuciko bokufaka nokukhawulela (isimo sokuphakathi) ezimpambanweni zamafomu ahlukene emidiya.

UHLU LWAMAGAMA ABALULEKILE:

Umthelela; Imingcele; Isiko ledijithali; Isihibe, Okuphakathi; Umkhawulo;
Ukwebatha isikhumba semvu; Ubunikazi bangemuva bomuntu; Isiko; Ukuzimela.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
ANT	Actor-Network-Theory
<i>CED</i>	<i>Collins English Dictionary</i>
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
LCD	Liquid Crystal Display
VR	Virtual Reality
LED	Light Emitting Diode

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

This study investigates the influence of digital culture on intermedial art practice, with an emphasis on the posthuman, anamorphic effect of digital technology, which results in blurry edges and extended boundaries in art. It considers the expression of digital identity in artistic forms and the consequential expansion of the boundaries of art ontologies. Digital identity is explored in terms of forms of posthuman self-representation in art production manifested as role-play and masking, necessitating an investigation of its broader networked context in society. The noticeable phenomenon of blurry edges and expanded boundaries in recent and current forms of art production is concerned with intermediality and needs to be scrutinised in different media forms.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The pervasive use of digital technology has resulted in significant changes in the fundamental principles, processes, and techniques employed in our present-day media-focused society. Correspondingly, it has exerted a posthuman, transformative impact on intermedial art practice, whereby artists increasingly incorporate and experiment with innovative technologies. Posthumanist theories, focusing on the concepts of identity and masking in digital culture and an examination of intermedial artworks produced since the introduction of new digital technologies, provide the impetus for this argument.

An examination of the concept of human existence in digital culture reveals how the posthuman is entangled, embodied, and becoming. These evolving relationships and intricate interactions between individuals and digital technology evidence its impact on intermedial art. The convergence of digital technology and art not only expands the range of artistic possibilities but also challenges the definition of art and its fundamental nature. Within this technological juncture, the phenomenon of forms and formats of masking in art production occupies a central position in this study due to its dual function in facilitating and perpetuating distortions of identity.

The comprehension of posthuman identity necessitates an acknowledgment of its interdependence with the technological milieu that sustains it, as technology

serves as a tangible expression of desire, imagination, and reality modification (Pepperell and Punt 2000:7). This study commences with an exploration of the interaction between human beings and digital technology via a user interface. Numerous mediating factors, most significantly culture, impact such interactions.

The rapid development and widespread use of digital applications, enabling swift information sharing across virtual networks, shape the dynamic nature of self-perception and identity. This constant state of change is inconspicuous due to the pervasive influence of technology. Omnipresent technology delivers highly personalised user experiences through technological objects connected to vast networks. Currently, the majority of technological devices interact with AI, which promptly responds to human intentions, inducing changes in cognition and behaviour. The most significant shift regarding identity and the self relates to the Enlightenment concept that the human being is separate and sovereign. This notion has been replaced with a novel understanding of the self as an interconnected information entity (Levin and Mamlok 2021:1). The idea that digital technology is a force capable of influencing and shaping behaviour reimagines technology as imbued with agency. The internet revolutionised the concept of space and time, facilitating instantaneous dissemination of information and remote employment, liberating individuals from the constraints of physical location.

The abovementioned changes have significantly impacted creative practice, affecting how artists market and exhibit their work. They have had to re-identify themselves by embracing new communication and digital technologies that facilitate innovative modes of creativity. In the visual arts, it is increasingly apparent that artists are actively engaging with the ongoing transformations of digital culture. This is reflected in the innovation of a vast array of creatures and organisms such as cyborgs, robots, human-animal hybrids, and transgenic beings, that have emerged as prominent motifs in a variety of art forms (Stępień 2022:3). Motivated by the growing use of digital technology in the artistic field and its ability to transform perceptions of the self and identity, a comprehensive analysis of posthuman identity is conducted. This is to determine whether new knowledge systems, ontologies, or methodologies have emerged through art practices using digital processes.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The study hypothesises that the emergence and application of digital technology and its associative cultures have a posthuman, anamorphic impact on art and artistic processes.

Primarily, the research questions the effect, scope, and proliferation of digital advances to establish how these have effectively broadened the ontological parameters of artistic expression.

The secondary concern involves posthuman identity anamorphosis, which concerns masking in digital culture. This study critically examines posthuman identity, hybrid identities, and human-machine interactions to determine the concept of a human being in a digital context.

This research questions the nature of posthuman art and identifies intermedial art practice as an expression of posthuman, transformative perspectives. Selected intermedial artworks connect with my digital artworks in pursuit of this notion, deliberately forging an argument for the presence of blurry edges and expanded boundaries in contemporary art practice.

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study is to demonstrate through theory and practice that the application of digital technology has had a posthuman, transformative impact on intermedial art practice, expanding the limits and blurring the boundaries of artistic expression.

Secondary objectives of the study are to illustrate how digital technology influences and facilitates the evolution of art practices in the digital age through the techniques embraced by artists in their creative endeavours.

- The theoretical research seeks to critically examine posthumanist theories pertaining to posthuman identity, masking and role-play in digital culture. This analysis incorporates concepts of intermediality and liminality.
- The research on posthumanism aims to critically examine and expand the comprehension of human identity with respect to digital technology and other

entities. By exploring posthumanist texts and concepts the study seeks to challenge traditional notions of identity while exploring the complex and interconnected relationships between humans, machines, animals, and their surroundings. This theoretical posthuman approach is substantiated by practical research and elucidated through the artworks under discussion.

- The research on masking in digital culture aims to challenge traditional stereotypes of the mask, demonstrating how technological progress influences the anamorphosis of masking, redefines its purpose, and alters the understanding of masking in digital culture, ultimately impacting artistic practices.
- From a practical perspective, the study investigates the concept of posthuman masking in digital culture, demonstrating how technological advancements shape concepts of identity and transform art praxis. The aim is to uncover the complex relationship between technology and creative expression through an analysis of the formation and expression of posthuman identity and masking in digital culture.
- The study aims to clarify the impact of digital technology on intermedial artworks by analysing interactive, performative, or visual artworks. It focuses particularly on instances where technological progress undermines authorship, conflates the lines between human and machine creativity, and expands the boundaries of what is considered to be creative.
- The main focus of my art practice revolves around the concept of liminality and its significance to my creative journey. I aim to demonstrate the inherent state of ambiguity and transformation that is intrinsically linked to the process and creation of my artworks. Additionally, I seek to highlight the influence of digital technology on the development and facilitation of artistic methodologies through a fusion of variable techniques and materials. For example, the new possibilities that are generated through the combination of digital technology and sculpture.

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The key conceptual and methodological perspectives guiding this research are rooted in posthumanist literature. The perspectives and identity politics of posthumanism are extensively researched. There are, however, scant resources

concerning posthuman identity and masking within digital culture at the juncture of art and intermediality.

Digital culture refers to the views, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals who engage with digital networks. These networks can replicate actual events and cultures and facilitate the creation of novel thought patterns, focusing on the dynamic interaction between humans and technology (Poepfel 2018:30). The literature supporting this study concerns several interconnected sources that reimagine the human being in terms of a posthuman identity, its entangled relationships with others, and masking in digital culture. Seminal authors include Rosi Braidotti (2011, 2013, 2018), Donna Haraway (1985, 2006, 2008, 2016), Katherine N Hayles (1999, 2005), Francesca Ferrando (2013, 2014, 2019), and Karen Barad (2007, 2012). These theorists have made valuable contributions to the field of posthumanism. Their works provide valuable insights into posthuman identity, masking in digital culture, and intermediality, which are key themes explored in this research. Significantly, their texts on agency, subjectivity, and the blurring boundaries separating human and nonhuman entities offer a critical lens for analysing the entangled self, the embodied self, and the becoming self.

Posthumanism advocates for a broader comprehension of the human being, emphasising its complex interactions with technology and illuminating the fluid evolution of identity. Braidotti (2013:89–95) underscores the importance of re-evaluating identity and the possibilities of 'becoming', urging individuals to critically reflect on who and what they are becoming in the digital era. Braidotti (2018:31) proposes that the redefinition of a human being in the context of digital culture does not signify the demise of humanity. Instead, it implies a more fluid interpretation wherein the posthuman is recognised as embodied, embedded, and interconnected with other entities without superiority. This relates to technologically facilitated interactions concerning becoming and transformation, aligning with the scope of this research. An integral aspect of this study is an investigation into how digital technology facilitates and expands the transformation of art praxis, focusing specifically on the impact of AI and pervasive technology such as algorithms. Latour's (1996:369–381) Actor-Network Theory (ANT) acknowledges the interconnected relationship between networks, humans, and nonhuman actors, recognising the existence of other sentient beings apart from humans. Latour (2005:63–86) clarifies how technologies can

direct certain behaviours, as they are afforded agency and even responsibility by ANT.

Braidotti (2013:82) proposes that the posthuman self should be regarded as a transdisciplinary entity, incorporating the human, animal, and planetary aspects within a post-anthropocentric framework of relations. These post-anthropocentric practices have drastically blurred the boundaries and expanded the edges of art practice, disrupting what and who has the potential to know (Alaimo 2016:185; Haraway 2016:18; Wolfe 2003:44). In addition to attributing agency to matter, posthuman theory ascribes 'thought', comprising intelligence and self-organisation, to nonhuman entities (Braidotti 2013:35). It implies a change in thinking that challenges the artist's autonomy and emphasises that the posthuman self is not a solitary entity but rather a component in a larger network of interconnected relationships. This emphasises how human-machine collaborations influence the creative process, effectively blurring the lines between the artist and digital technology.

An essential source underpinning this research is the work of Hayles. She explores the interactions between humans and machines, delving into the complexities of the mind-body continuum (1999:238–239) and the implications of human-machine interactions (2005:15–38). As Hayles (1999:284) asserts, advances in digital technology have become central to a contemporary understanding of the posthuman due to our symbiotic relationship with technology. Hayles (1999:18) affirms that AI perceives human consciousness as an epiphenomenon positioned at the highest level of machine-like functions conducted by distributed systems. In the field of AI, the computer serves as a model to understand human cognition, leading to a new era of posthumanism (Hayles 1999:239). The study draws on her work to challenge traditional conceptions of posthuman identity and the entangled connections between human beings and digital technology. The relevance of Hayles' research for this study resides in its contribution to the exploration of the entangled self, the embodied self, and the evolving or becoming self, which is essential to this study.

A seminal work that delves into the fundamental nature of being human within the context of digital culture is *A Cyborg Manifesto* (Haraway 1991:149–181). Haraway (2006:139) aligns the cyborg with the mind, not the body, due to its

ability to process information. Haraway (2006:145) proposes that by embracing the potential of cyborgs, transformative opportunities for identity formation can be created. Through envisioning the human as a cyborg, she rejects the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines, advancing new avenues for understanding the human subject in relation to technology. She argues that cyborg identity transcends traditional gender, race, class, and identity boundaries, moving towards fluid, partial identities. This relates to the concept of masking and self-representation in digital culture, an important aspect of this study. Posthuman identity is mutable, constituting ongoing intra-action between elements that are both human and nonhuman, including ecology, the economy, and cultural artefacts (Haraway 2008:26). According to Haraway (2006:149), the posthuman can transcend traditional human-nonhuman borders, leading to the emergence of hybrid forms that permeate the realm of self-representation in digital culture. Haraway is renowned for her contribution to the deconstruction of delineations, which are particularly relevant to this study and its emphasis on posthuman identity, masking, and intermediality.

A seminal author of this study is the American philosopher Francesca Ferrando (2019:27), who, in her understanding of posthuman identity, adopts a post-anthropocentric perspective that goes beyond human-centeredness. This notion has specific relevance to the creative component of the study concerning intermediality. It links with Ferrando's view of the integral connection between technology and ecology as an essential part of the human being. Ferrando (2013:26) highlights the significance of recognising and engaging with various forms of posthumanism, transhumanism, antihumanism, metahumanism, and new materialisms, as they provide distinctive perspectives on human interaction with digital technology. Ferrando (2019:124) is concerned with the destiny of humanity, its relationship with liminality, and the established limitations concerning the human species (Ferrando 2019:5). Masking - a fundamental construct investigated in this study - is entrenched in a transhuman state, which is associated with Ferrando's (2019:118) contention that the term 'human' no longer reflects who we are. The digital transhumanism unpacked in this study pertains to speculative future beings that might possess genetic connections to human beings (*Homo sapiens*) but would no longer be definable as such (Ferrando 2019:124). The rigid dichotomies between human-animal and human-

machine and the demarcation between technology and the self are deconstructed.

Barad is a significant academic source. Barad (2007:33) introduced intra-action,¹ a notion that recognises the interconnectedness and entanglements between humans, nonhumans, and other species, enabling the posthuman self to embrace this interdependence. Specific arguments in this study are aligned with her view on intra-action, providing insight into the entangled self and demonstrating that humans are entangled in an intra-connected network of entities and beings. Barad (2007:26) proposes agential realism to provide a framework for comprehending the way that everything is interconnected by using quantum theory to re-evaluate conceptions of subjectivity, agency, and causality. Barad's work is aligned with that of Haraway and Latour, focusing on the complex interrelationship between humans and nonhumans, of whom all have agency. Borrowing from Haraway, she challenges the use of the metaphor of 'reflection', instead advocating for the concept of 'diffraction'. Her views on posthuman identity emphasise this 'diffraction', a phenomenon where identity is multiple and 'diffracted' within itself (Barad 2012:32). This view offers a more nuanced concept, emphasising patterns of difference over restrictive notions of representation and similarity. It holds particular relevance for the creative aspects of the research pertaining to intermediality and liminality. The research establishes connections between Barad's perspective on the subject and object, the relationship between nature and culture, and their entanglement with technology.

Cary Wolfe (2009:45) argues against the prejudicial perception that animals are lesser or disabled beings compared to human beings. Wolfe (2009:89) challenges the notion of human superiority by emphasising the need to acknowledge that many humans possess some of the capabilities of animals and that, in some ways, animals are superior to humans. Among various publications on the history and development of posthumanism, Stefan Herbrechter (2021:66) credits Neil Badmington (2000:1–10) as being the first to explicitly accept posthumanism as the continual deconstruction of humanism. Similarly, Herbrechter (2013:18, 26) asserts that technological progress undermines

¹ Barad (2007:33) defines a performative, relational concept of agency in which human beings are perceived as an interactive or rather 'intra-active' part of their surroundings.

traditional humanistic reactions, influencing identity and self-perception. This perspective promotes an understanding of the human being as a heterogeneous entity, existing in relation to technological, ecological, and all other species relative to their environment (Wolfe 2009:xvi).

These theories support a broader perspective that transcends traditional human-centricity to envision alternative forms of being. Multiple disciplines are integrated to comprehend the complexities of the human-technological relationship. From this perspective, posthumanism is not only a theoretical concept but also has tangible consequences for individuals as they engage with technology in the digital age.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The epistemology of the study is primarily influenced by posthuman philosophy, theories concerning human-technological relationships, and the concept of the posthuman identity within digital culture.

The research is directed by a comprehensive review of literature concerning conceptual art and art research within posthuman identity, masking in digital culture, and intermediality. The study explores the transformative impact of digital technology and its associated cultures on intermedial art praxis, emphasising how it has expanded the edges and blurred the boundaries of creative expression.

There are ample resources on posthumanism and identity politics. Yet texts addressing the relationship between posthuman identity and masking in digital culture, within art and intermediality, are scarce. Masking in digital culture is important since it contributes to identity anamorphosis and hybridised identities, placing emphasis on human-machine interaction. Moreover, it explores the concept of what constitutes a human being in this digital environment. Intermediality is incorporated into my research since it is imperative for comprehending art in the digital age. In this context, creative expression is boundless and unconstrained, characterised by the interaction of several media without restriction.

Posthumanism proposes a novel and broadened comprehension of what constitutes a human being in interactions with digital technology (Flanagan 2014:40). The main conceptual and methodological perspectives guiding the research are posthumanist writings that explore a range of interconnected matters, seeking to re-imagine the human subject in terms of posthuman identity and its entangled relations with others. Key concepts of posthuman identity include the entangled self, the embodied self, and the becoming self. This research draws on artworks that demonstrate a range of perspectives on posthuman identity in digital culture, created through engagements with digital technology.

Masking is a complex phenomenon that significantly influences aspects of human interaction and communication. The study explores the intricate nature of masking in digital culture, focusing on three aspects: the mask as self-representation; masking and ritual in performance art; and the mask as a multifaceted media entity. These aspects illuminate the complexities of masking in digital culture and uncover the techniques, methods, and media employed by artists to express digital masking. It emphasises the boundaries that serve as rigid markers, delineating the disparity between the individual donning the mask and the area beyond (McFerrin 2019:7). Boundaries in digital culture can be both liberating and constraining since masking is a form of anonymity, enabling individuals to assume multiple personae, concealing their true selves, and challenging the authenticity of identity.

Intermediality encompasses a variety of representations, including prints, electronic devices, digital platforms, and the interactions between them (Jensen 2016:1). The creation and transmission of meaning across multiple media directs attention to the notion of affect, referring to the emotional and sensory responses evoked by these intermedial experiences. The study of affect in intermediality reveals how media shapes and influences emotions and experiences in art, and how this creates shared emotional experiences across art forms. Intermediality is defined as a state of being in-between, characterised by liminality and perpetual insecurity. Deleuze and Guattari (2004:28) view it as a transitional space where activities accelerate by prioritising difference, dynamic multiplicity, and hierarchy. Their perspective challenges traditional notions of meaning-making, determining that meaning emerges through the interactions and connections between

different media forms. Intermedial experiences advance innovation, generating new meanings and reconfiguring existing ones, thereby creating potential spaces for creativity and innovation.

Visual research is essential to this study since it enhances components of research and the language inherent in creative activity. The combination of purposeful practice and research ensures an elevated level of rigour, adding meaning through a process of planning, documentation, interpretation, analysis, and narrative explanation. This practice-led research project draws on the works of various intermedial artists, my own practice, the continuous exchange between praxis and theory, and the interplay between process and the final outcome.

1.6 VISUAL RESOURCES

The creative components substantiate the hypothesis of the study, which posits that the advancement of digital technology has engendered a posthuman transformation in intermedial art praxis. The visual analysis includes selected intermedial artworks and my own work.

As pertains to posthuman identity, I include intermedial artists Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, Matthew Barney, and Siebren Versteeg. These artists work with posthuman identity, embodiment, and becoming through complex, non-linear visual narratives. Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau are innovative artists who employ new media to create digitally-based multimodal interactive installations. They create artworks that respond to user input in real time, using genetic programming and AI to create open-ended installations that evolve and mature through user involvement (www.interface.ufg.ac.at/christa-laurent/WORKS). Matthew Barney, renowned for his large-scale multimedia projects, effectively uses the embodied self as a tool for creative transformation. Barney's work challenges the humanist notion of superiority and the entanglements of the human body through machines and technology, rethinking species and interrogating human-nonhuman relations. Siebren Versteeg, a New York-based artist, creates art through algorithmic code that manipulates and displays data or images on a liquid crystal display (LCD) screen (LaGrandeur 2018:380). Versteeg acknowledges the interdependence between human beings and technology, since they operate as a symbiotic creative entity. This notion

supports the essence of the study, which proposes that digital technology has fundamentally transformed art praxis.

The visual research on masking in digital culture includes the works of Amalia Ulman, Lynn Hershman Leeson, and Matthew Mohr. Amalia Ulman's Instagram performance explores how women create online personae through role-play and masking, revealing the intricate dynamics between emotions and personal encounters. Ulman's performance questions the authenticity of online personae and the ways women navigate and express themselves in the digital realm. The process reveals the intricate dynamics of social media. Hershman Leeson, a pioneer of new media art since the late 1960s, has established herself in performance, film, and multimedia. She employs performance and video to explore the process of creating her alter ego through visual representations and imagination, focusing on the complex and ambiguous nature of identity (Held 2005:xii). Matthew Mohr, an intermedial artist specialising in advertising and design, contributes to the study of the mask as a multifaceted media entity. His work explores the connection between the face and the self, where the face acts as the foundation for self-representation. Xu, Zhang and Xue (2022:357) assert that the media mask serves multiple functions, substituting the face as a source of bodily information, functioning as a self-extension, a reflective surface, a source of critique, and a means of expressing collective identity.

The visual research on intermediality is centred on a multisensory experience analysis of installation artist Pipilotti Rist and my own artworks as related to the concept of liminality. Rist's work examines themes of femininity, nature, and the human condition through multimedia. She incorporates multi-sensory modalities to effectively engage her audience. Viewers briefly transition from passive observers to active participants in immersive, affective experiences. Multisensory experiences improve adaptability and flexibility through a wider range of interpretations, which may define the specific effects and affects of modern intermedia.

My body of work includes paintings, sculpture, embossing, and a video projection. The paintings blur the lines between figurative and abstract art, redefining the relationship between digital technology, identity, and art practice. I explore my creative journey through the notion of liminality, creating Plexiglas®

sculptures. This emphasises the dynamic relationship between form, material, and spatial arrangements, effectively demonstrating how various media interact and impact one another. Blank embossing techniques create a subtle, ethereal texture, symbolising the fleeting nature of memories and the blurred boundaries between the past and present. This transitional state is liminal: borders become indistinct, and ambiguity dominates. A digital video projection alludes to the liminal phases fundamental to my artistic development. The combination of different media in my artworks not only evidences the impact of digital technology but also emphasises the transformative nature of intermedial art. By pushing the boundaries and expanding the edges, my work challenges traditional artistic practices and embraces the possibilities offered by the digital age.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study comprises a practice-led theoretical approach. The research methodology focuses on art practice as the foundational approach, primarily within its conceptual aspects. The theoretical, philosophical, and creative facets of posthuman identity, masking in digital culture, and intermediality inform the methodological focus. The revolutionary effect of digital technology concerning expanding and blurring boundaries on intermedial art practice is a core concept. The study leans towards an empirical epistemology since it is founded on the premise that the most effective way to acquire knowledge is through practical and visual research. This methodology relies on observation, with a specific focus on a comprehensive visual investigation of intermedial artworks. Selected artists' works are analysed through their statements, interviews, press releases, exhibition catalogues, and information published on their websites and the internet. While their texts and various journal articles provide explications, the images and videos facilitate individual interpretation.

My creative component explores the posthuman concept of 'becoming', which is linked to a process of transformation, existing in a phase of liminality or in-betweenness. Using the concept of masking, I employ digital design in conjunction with the material and conceptual attributes of Plexiglas® to articulate my experiences of liminality. The diversity of my practice, in terms of intermediality, materiality, and form, stresses the interplay between digital technology, sculpture, and imagination. The methodological components of my

research include a visual journal documenting contextual reviews, experiments, notes, and observations. I use software packages for digital drawing, image manipulation, and video editing. Photoshop, PhotoScape, Illustrator, Adobe After Effects, and Blender enable me to produce artwork that transcends media boundaries, creating a state of being in-between or liminal. Aligned with the primary contention of the study, my artwork explores how digital technology has transformed intermedial art by challenging conventional norms and blurring the boundaries between new and old media.

1.8 ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

I understand and adhere to the relevant procedures as per Unisa's *Policy on Research Ethics* (2016), agreeing to comply with Unisa's internationally approved principles, moral values, and ethical standards. This study attempts to benefit society and contribute to critical thought in the field of intermedial art praxis through posthuman philosophy and digital technology. My practical artwork accompanying this dissertation has not been compelled to conform with the theoretical position of the research. In accordance with Unisa's research prerequisites, my values are based on autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. My research is based on published articles, artists' statements, websites, and accredited online sources. The Unisa Research Ethics Committee has approved this research due to the inherent nature of my research application.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its objective to provide a valuable addition to the existing literature regarding the concept of masking in digital culture and the development of hybrid or multiple identities. It provides insight into online self-representation, authenticity, role-play, and the media mask as a multifaceted media entity. The research contributes to knowledge pertaining to the concept of posthuman identity and the complex interactions between human beings and digital technology in an increasingly interconnected digital culture. It further contributes to current research on the transformative impact of digital technology on intermedial art, concerning how technological developments will revolutionise future art praxis, including advancements in the field of artificial intelligence (AI).

1.10 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter one introduces the study and presents a concise overview of the problem statement, hypothesis, main goals, and aims of the research. An overview of foundational concepts including posthumanism, posthuman identity, digital technology, masking, and intermediality is provided. This chapter presents seminal ideas regarding posthumanism, the concept of masks and masking, and the blurry edges and expanded boundaries in intermedial art. It introduces the most prominent theorists in posthumanism and their respective approaches. The creative component outlines the practical output of selected artists and my work in support of the hypothesis. This section concludes by explaining the significance of the study, clarifying the ethical implications, and outlining the chapters.

Chapter 2 explores the concepts of posthumanism and posthuman identity. Theorists present novel perspectives on the definition of being a human in the digital era, setting the tone for discussions on posthuman identity. Posthuman theory explores and reimagines a range of interdisciplinary issues, including human-machine interactions, meaning-matter entanglements, and human-animal relationships. Key posthumanist ideas concerning blurry edges and expanded boundaries are explicated through my work and that of selected intermedial artists.

Chapter 3 explores masks, focusing on the prevailing notions of masking and role-play in digital culture. Posthuman perspectives and theories concerning masks and masking inform an investigation of the anamorphic effect of digital technology on art practice. Digital culture is used to examine aspects of self-representation, multiple identities, masking, and ritual in performance, concluding with the mask as a media entity. The chapter includes an analysis of selected intermedial artworks, with a specific focus on how masking impacts digital culture.

Chapter 4 delves into the concept of intermediality and the transformative impact of digital technology on art and its processes. Using the conception of affect, the study examines the potential of intermediality to subvert aesthetic norms, expanding the definition and boundaries of art. Art theory discloses the origins of intermediality and explains the basic tenets related to the concepts of liminality.

The relationship between spatial and sensory perception, an inherent aspect of intermedial art, is explored through the multisensory experience of an immersive art installation. The chapter concludes by examining the intersection of borders between various media and the notion of transitional liminality, illustrated through a selection of my artworks, including sculpture.

Chapter 5 summarises the findings of the research and briefly outlines the assumptions informed by the theoretical discourse, validated by the visual analysis of selected artworks. The conclusion demonstrates how the emergence and application of digital technology and its associative cultures have had a posthuman and anamorphic impact on art practice and processes, and how intermedial art has expanded the boundaries of art.

CHAPTER 2 **Posthuman identity**

Digital technology enables the creation of different multiple and hybrid online identities where certain aspects of the physical or offline self may be revealed, hidden, or enhanced. This does not drastically depart from Goffman's (1959:4) performative concept, which characterises identity as theatrical. He proposes that social interaction can be understood dramatically, emphasising that individuals present several versions of themselves depending on the situation. Therefore, it is useful to explore the notion of masking, since obscuring one identity to embody another fundamentally constitutes a masked identity that can be altered at any time.

The concept of posthuman identity necessitates a re-examination of the fundamental notions of the embodied self, the entangled self, and the process of becoming in the context of an increasingly digitally interconnected society. The first part of this chapter evaluates the entangled self through a framework of relationality, which considers the entanglements of human beings, nonhumans, and other species within intra-actions and material contexts. The notion of relationality recognises the existence of multiple entanglements that alter conventional forms of creative expression and extends the potential for art to conceptualise the physical limitations and behaviours of entangled entities. Secondly, the embodied self is examined in terms of its capacity for transformation through interactions with nonhuman entities and technology. The performative aspect of the embodied self holds significant importance, functioning as both the site and the tool for artistic expression and demonstrating the body's limitless, affective capacity to exceed its human limitations.

The chapter concludes with an investigation of the posthuman self as a dynamic entity that is fluid and constantly becoming. The becoming self is investigated as it becomes intricately entangled with technology, resulting in the emergence of a cyborg. This hybrid entity is characterised by being part-human and part-technology. This demonstrates the growing resemblance of human beings to machines, as well as the humanisation of technology through digital progress. The posthuman self has reached a stage where it is considered inseparable from the physical realm and digital technology, emphasising that it is an interconnected, interdependent, and entangled part of both. From a critical

posthumanist perspective, it is argued that the concept of identity extends beyond the confines of human beings, since it is entangled and interwoven in all living entities.

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE TERM 'POSTHUMAN'

In the canon of literature on digital culture, the term 'posthuman' identity is in common use. Posthuman identity refers to the evolving understanding of identity within the framework of technological progress and the increasing dependence on digital technology, leading to a new definition of being a human in the digital era. Advances in digital technology have facilitated the expansion of social networks, allowing individuals to connect instantly and globally. Consequently, the notion of identity has undergone a transformation from one primarily influenced by internal factors to one that is predominantly shaped by external influences (Flanagan 2014:72).

The notion of posthuman identity is examined from a critical posthumanist perspective, highlighting its complex, multifaceted, and hybrid nature. According to Herbrechter (2022:2), critical posthumanism expands upon post-anthropocentrism by emphasising the interconnectedness of human beings with nonhuman entities. This approach enables a more complex understanding of posthuman identity, exposing novel and varied interpretations. As a consequence, the study investigates various manifestations of posthuman identity in digital culture through the lens of three interrelated concepts: the entangled self, the embodied self, and the becoming self. The main focus is on artworks demonstrating diverse approaches related to posthuman identity in digital culture through varied interactions with digital technology.

When the notion of posthuman identity is re-evaluated as being collectively shared and networked, the entanglement of human beings and technology, or the entangled self, becomes more evident. A collective and networked posthuman identity, based on computation and networks rather than individualism, allows for seamless assimilation with intelligent machines (Hayles 1999:34). The subsequent integration expands the human-machine boundary, distributing identity across technological systems rather than confining it to a single individual. This dynamic fosters a symbiotic association wherein both systems

enhance the capabilities of one another. While acknowledging the possibilities of collective and networked posthuman identity, it is important to consider its impact on individuality and autonomy, since it may restrict creative thinking and hinder uniqueness. It is imperative to recognise that a collective, interconnected posthuman identity does not negate individuality. Instead, it cultivates a sense of belonging and collaboration among individuals, promoting greater inclusivity and diversity of perspectives.

The perpetual development of digital technology further shapes the conception of posthuman identity, increasingly blurring the boundaries between organic and artificial entities. The means by which individuals engage with digital information has evolved to encompass more than physical screens, prioritising the domains of experience and perception (Lepage-Richer 2017:19). In digital contexts, embodiment enables the embodied self to interact with digital spaces and objects as if they were physically present. Embodiment recognises that experiences and perceptions are influenced not only by the physical body but also by the surroundings and the cultural context in which individuals exist. This concept recognises the many ways in which digital embodiment transcends the limitations of the physical body, expressing itself through interaction.

Braidotti (2013:12) argues that posthuman identity is always in a state of 'becoming' or prospective becoming, since it is a dynamic and fluid construct evolving over time. Her position challenges traditional notions of identity, promoting the idea that individuals can surpass their predetermined identities, embracing new possibilities for self-expression and self-creation. Digital culture engenders a more flexible identity, enabling individuals to redefine themselves according to their desires, challenging societal norms and expectations. To establish a digital self, individuals may engage in the exploration and creation of specific or contrived identities, expressed through images, texts, emails, and various other interactions. The digital self is not merely a reflection of physical identity, since the nature of online interactions suggests that the digital self is performative, even theatrical. Social media platforms offer individuals the ability to curate their online personae, presenting themselves in varying ways to different audiences. Braidotti (2013:89–95) emphasises the importance of re-evaluating identity and the possibilities of the becoming self, encouraging us to carefully consider who and what we are becoming. Individuals have to critically

reflect on their choices and actions to ensure that their identity aligns with their true selves.

2.2 THE ENTANGLED SELF

The rapid advancement of technology has resulted in an increased focus on the definition of a human being in the context of digital culture. Assuming responsibility for others is inherent in the concept of entanglement, albeit not consciously, but certainly due to the numerous existential entanglements of materiality (Barad 2007:393). Critical posthumanism and the digital humanities share a common focus on the need to critically analyse the concept of human existence in a society characterised by the growing prevalence and easy accessibility of digital technologies. Herbrechter (2013:36) posits that part of being posthuman means leaving the human being behind, enabling suppressed 'mirror' aspects of who we are to resurface. Posthuman identity is hybrid since it encompasses a broader universe of beings, including human beings, animals, and related beings such as ghosts, gods, angels, demons, monsters, cyborgs, AI, and extra-terrestrial beings that are typically regarded as quasi-human, parahuman, or nonhuman (Herbrechter 2013:9). Recognising our entanglement with digital technology prompts a reassessment of the divisions between humans and other beings, blurring the lines between what is synthetic and organic. This entails a shift in thinking, challenging traditional notions of individuality by focusing on aspects of embodiment, hybridity, and becoming in a networked culture where all entities are interconnected. It encourages us to consider the complex web of relationships where humans are entangled in intra-actions with all entities, including nonhuman actors such as technology and the environment (Herbrechter, Callus, Rossini, Grech, de Bruin-Molé, and Müller 2022:4). Intra-action with technology implies that there are no fundamental distinctions or rigid delineations between technological and physical existence or between cybernetics and living organisms (Hayles 1999:3). It is imperative to adopt a broader perspective when comprehending the subjective perception of physical encounters in order to acknowledge that information is dynamically entangled with the posthuman self (Hayles in Cechetto 2013:64).

Entanglement implies that neither subjects nor objects are pre-existent but rather formed via intra-action (Barad 2007:33). Laurent Mignonneau and Christa

Sommerer's works exhibit unique characteristics of intra-action and the entanglement of nonhuman and posthuman elements. Their installation *Life Writer* (2006) (Figure 1) is an open-ended, interactive artwork that consists of a modified vintage typewriter dating back to the era of analogue text processing, using a standard sheet of paper as the projection screen (www.interface.ufg.ac.at/christa-laurent/WORKS).



Fig 1. Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, *Life Writer* (2006).

Christopher Sholes invented the typewriter in the late 19th century, thereby revolutionising communication by mechanising the process of legible writing. The typewriter evolved into the computer keyboard through a succession of technological advancements (Dorit 2009:376). *Life Writer* exposes technological advancements by revealing how outdated methods are frequently applied to novel resources availed by digital technologies (Kluszczyński 2012:26). Sommerer and Mignonneau use a media archaeological interface to connect two distinct worlds, integrating technologies developed a century apart into a single artwork (Kluszczyński 2012:157).

Life Writer assigns a posthuman identity to a nonhuman entity, embracing the posthuman perspective by acknowledging the agency of digital technology that challenges the tenets of conventional traditional art. Throughout the history of art and aesthetics, art has been regarded as exclusively a human endeavour, centred on human ideas, concepts, viewpoints, agency, symbolic transformation, and a human audience (Herbrechter *et al* 2022:1). Recent developments in technology and the widespread application of digital technology in the creative process challenge this notion. It further negates the Enlightenment² notion of artistic ‘genius’ and that the artist is ‘born’ an artist (Kant 1987:174).

Hillis (2016:2) asserts that human beings, particularly artists, are evolving into entangled beings wherein they are becoming interconnected entities possessing enhanced capabilities through the use of instruments associated with the Enlightenment era. According to Barad (2007:23), human beings are part of an assemblage of entities within a network of other assemblages. In addition, network connections facilitate the exchange of ideas and information that links them together. Kant defines the Enlightenment as the deliberate choice made by individuals to apply their intellect and capacity for reason to determine their beliefs and behaviours (Bristow 2017). Hillis (2016:3) argues that just as the cathedrals of the Enlightenment were seen as remarkable accomplishments of human ingenuity, digital technology has become the modern-day marvel that surpasses our own cognitive abilities. Stricot (2022) implies that the Enlightenment ideal of emancipation through education and knowledge was emphasised by one of the most prominent publications of the time, the *Encyclopédie*,³ which profoundly impacted societal thought. In the knowledge-based society of the 21st century, online tutorials for self-education and digital ‘encyclopédias’ are available to everyone. These online resources have democratised access to information and empowered individuals to pursue self-

² The Enlightenment is regarded as a period of significant technological and scientific advancement in Europe, with the core concepts of autonomy, universalism, and humanism, but it also contributed to shaping the world as it is today (Todorov 2010:48). These concepts can be equated to modern notions of freedom, justice, and progress. Without them, scientific and technological progress would have been significantly slower or even halted.

³ The *Encyclopédie* is commonly referred to as Diderot’s encyclopaedia, authored by a collective of philosophers in the 18th century. It is regarded as a major work of the Enlightenment and was extremely influential in shaping progressive thinking, the progress of scientific knowledge and rational thinking, tolerance, and being open-minded. The *Encyclopédie* explicitly included the arts, which in the 18th century meant technology and the mechanical arts (Britannica, 2021. Sv “Encyclopédie”).

directed learning. As a result, the Enlightenment ideal of emancipation through education continues to thrive in the digital age.

De la Motte (2020:17429) highlights the significant transformation of the world in the past 20-30 years, primarily driven by science, engineering, and digitisation within a single generation. This transformation is primarily attributed to rapid technological advancements and the widespread use of the internet, described by O'Hara (2012:170) as the "Digital Enlightenment". She draws a parallel between the internet, which has evolved into a public domain, and the historic significance of Diderot's *Encyclopédie* during the Enlightenment. This comparison highlights the internet's ability to gather and disseminate knowledge from various sources worldwide, making it accessible to a diverse audience and ensuring its preservation for future generations.

Human inventions and technology are increasingly interconnected, with the information age requiring rapid access to data, making digital society more dependent on data access than ever before. Digital technology has revolutionised our ability to control and manipulate information, allowing us to access knowledge beyond our own mental abilities. The distinction between digital technology and humans is becoming progressively blurred as individuals increasingly depend on algorithms to manage and interpret vast amounts of data. It has become increasingly challenging to differentiate between technological influence and human intention as artists increasingly depend on digital tools and algorithms to create their artwork. The boundaries between the creator and creation are becoming increasingly blurred as this heightened interdependence renders them inseparable. This ambiguity questions the place of technology in the creative process, undermining established ideas of authorship.

The intricate interaction between human beings and technology redefines what it means to create, promoting a re-evaluation of creative agency in the digital age. Conceptually, *Life Writer* (Figure 2) explores the notion that nonhuman abilities can emerge through digital technology, comparing the act of typing with the process of generating life. The intra-action between users and digital creatures, as well as creature-creature intra-action, is crucial to the creation of digital life in the dynamic between the digital and the analogue (www.interface.ufg.ac.at/christa-laurent/WORKS).



Fig 2. Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, *Life Writer* (2006).

Philosophical and ethical questions raised by *Life Writer* prompt contemplation regarding the accountability for the results produced by artificial, digitally programmed, or nonhuman entities (Kluszczyński 2012:92). The typed letters morph into creatures using algorithms, interacting with users and each other on a projection screen. According to Kluszczyński (2012:93–94), the text functions as a genetic blueprint directing their actions, and based on their genetic makeup and body type, the creatures appear quickly or slowly. The animated letter creatures are derived from Hayles's (1999:29) conceptualisation of informatics, both in terms of their material composition and their semiotic characteristics, which specifically pertain to code-based models of signification (Figure 3). *Life Writer* serves as an illustration of how interactive art is progressing towards a 'living art' in and of itself (Kluszczyński 2012:157).

Post-structuralists understand signifiers as markers (Hayles 1999:31), but in the age of information technology, a signifier is more complex than a single mark on paper. A signifier is a variable sequence of markers connected by arbitrary interactions, defined by the applicable code (Hayles 1999:46).



Fig 3. Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, *Life Writer* (2006).

Life Writer exemplifies how a coding arrangement governs the dynamic interaction between the typewriter and the programming language, as well as between the programming language and user commands, as described by Hayles (1999:30, 33). This interplay between code, logic, and randomness enables the creation of dynamic and interactive experiences for users. As a letter is pressed on the typewriter, the software programme translates it into binary digits linked to higher-level commands, dictating how these symbols will be manipulated. The processing software serves as an intermediary between source code commands and instructions received from the typewriter, working to give creatures 'life' (Hayles 1999:31).

Life Writer (Figure 4) demonstrates the increasing significance of interactive art due to advances in digital technology. Viewers interact with the artwork using the typewriter's scroll to push the creatures around or back inside the machine, either eliminating them entirely from the screen or crushing them, making room for new creatures (www.interface.ufg.ac.at/christa-laurent/WORKS). The creatures

display a certain level of autonomy since they must consume text to survive and perceive other creatures as procreational partners to generate offspring, resulting in a packed screen (Kluszczynski 2012:96). The idea that the creatures are in control is significant since viewers connect with their bodies virtually, giving them a creative experience of virtual reality.

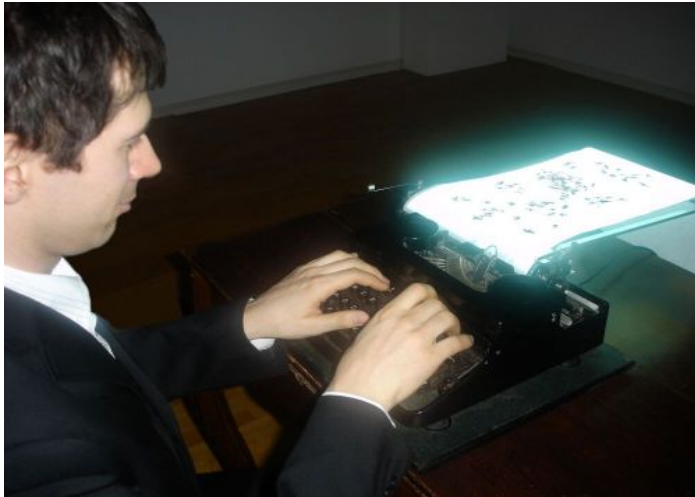


Fig 4. Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, *Life Writer* (2006).

Artists using interactive technology focus on creating experiences that actively involve an audience, blurring the boundaries between the artwork and the viewer. This emphasis on active engagement allows for a more immersive and participatory encounter, whereby viewers become co-creators of the artwork. By contrast, painters typically create static pieces to be observed from a distance, emphasising visual aesthetics over direct interaction. The artwork is no longer regarded as a physical creation by the artist but rather as an uncertain shape, where chance and the structure of the creative process play vital roles (Kluszczynski 2012:30). Traditional notions of authorship are challenged, inviting a more dynamic and collaborative approach to art-making. The emphasis is transferred to the conceptual and performative aspects of the creative process, allowing for unexpected outcomes and a greater exploration of artistic possibilities.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a rise in the inclusion of art forms that were previously disregarded or criticised by the art world. The proliferation of artworks based on pre-existing works and ready-mades has eroded the significance of the material, obscuring the lines between production and consumption (Bourriaud 2002:13). The internet is essential for information exchange, interaction, and artistic creation but is subject to ongoing changes and upgrades due to rapid technological progress. In the context of digital culture, also known as a culture of use or an intra-active culture, an artwork acts as a transitory hub in a system of interconnected parts (Bourriaud 2005:19). *Life Writer* demonstrates that the culture of intra-action has dramatically altered the status of an artwork. Instead of merely acting as a vehicle for the artist's vision, it functions as an agent or assumes a life of its own (Bourriaud 2005:20).

The status of nonhuman agency has significantly altered attitudes, leading to new and innovative interpretations. In the intra-active digital world, where individuals actively engage in processes of creating and manipulating, concerns arise about the potential loss of control and autonomy as machines become more integrated into our daily lives. These concerns invite deliberation over the ethical implications of these interactions, raising concerns about privacy, autonomy, and control in the digital age. *Life Writer* reflects this intra-action between humans and technology, supporting the perspective that artworks are not pre-existing or independent objects but rather entities generated by intra-actions and entanglements. As Stępień (2022:6) concedes, these entanglements indicate that the nonhuman is already a part of the human and vice versa.

2.3 THE EMBODIED SELF

Braidotti (2018:31) proposes that the posthuman is interconnected, embodied, emotionally responsive, and responsible, rather than a higher consciousness. Moreover, she contends that the notion of posthuman identity should be considered conceptual rather than practical. Since the beginning of recorded civilisation, alternative embodiments such as the sphinx, chimera, minotaur, Hindu deities, and the devil incarnated as a snake in the Garden of Eden have been found in symbolic and cultural history (Ferrando 2014:219).

Ihab Hassan (1977:831) initially introduced the word 'posthumanism' in an article, using the mythological figure of Prometheus to signify the advent of a 'posthumanist culture'. Franssen (2014:75) suggests that, just as Prometheus bridged the gap between humans and gods in Greek mythology, today's human beings surpass their limits through art and digital technology. Franssen's assertion highlights the transformative power of art and digital technology within contemporary digital culture, since both art and technology are agents of change, embodying ideas, ways of representation, and transformation. Leonardo da Vinci's inventions further exemplify this convergence of science, imagination, digital technology, and art, demonstrating how these disciplines can intertwine to create ground-breaking innovations (Hassan 1977:837-838).

Similarly, Latour (2008:5) references the mythological image of Prometheus as an analogy for the inherent evaluative nature of design or art, where its outcomes are deemed either desirable or undesirable. Prometheus, as a symbol of art or design, represents the ability to challenge established norms by creating something from nothing. Latour's argument highlights the significance of Prometheus in bridging the gap between different entities to foster collaboration. Embodying self-confidence, competence, and defiance, Prometheus encourages individuals to challenge norms and explore new possibilities in their creative endeavours (Latour 2008:13). This unifying force not only brings together gods, human beings, and the nonhuman but also promotes innovation and impels creative boundaries.

The embodied self is investigated through Matthew Barney's experimental film *Drawing Restraint 9*⁴ (2005), which emphasises how art has always already imagined the embodied self in response to cultural and social transformations. Barney's earlier work, *The Cremaster Cycle* (1994–2002), explores the spectral, monstrous figures of the posthuman through sculptural installations that include performance and video (Zapperi 2014:7). Barney's *Drawing Restraint* series, initiated in the late 1980s, is significant for this study because it demonstrates how the embodied posthuman self is used as a tool and a site of transformation

⁴ The film, set on a Japanese whaling ship, was inspired by an invitation to produce a new work for Japan's 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art. Barney and his partner, Björk, combined Japanese practices such as whaling and the tea ceremony with his ideas about the radical transformation of his body (Stępień 2018:102).

in the creative process. Barney uses his own body in the execution of experimental activities, resulting in a collection of work that blurs the boundaries between disciplines such as performance art, drawings, sculptural installations, photography, and video presentations. These acts of experimentation have evolved into an extensive body of work (Stępień 2018:102). *Drawing Restraint 9* (2005) is the continuation of the series in which Barney performs experimental actions with his body as both the subject and object of the work (Figure 5).



Fig 5. Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 6* (1989).

A late 20th-century artist, Barney pushes boundaries and contributes to the transformation of art praxis. The artist sets a precedent by introducing visceral materials as expressive media, using his body as a creative vehicle, and capturing these events on video (Delaporte 2012:1). Since his early works, Barney has been inspired by sports imagery, which he presents in sculptural form. The sculptures reference gym equipment, while materials such as wax, tapioca, glucose, and Vaseline allude to the embodiment of the machine (Zapperi 2014:2). Barney investigates creative possibilities through a variety of techniques,

diverse materials, settings, and personae. He assembles a complex scenario of obstacles and impediments for his performances in the *Drawing Restraint* series, as observed in Figure 6 below.



Fig 6. Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 2* (1988).

The underlying concept of *Drawing Restraint 9* concerns self-imposed constraint and creativity, symbolised by an enormous sculpture made of melted petroleum jelly, built and reshaped on the deck of the *Nisshin Maru*, a Japanese whaling ship (Figure 7) (Stalker 2012:1194). *Drawing Restraint 9* expresses a conflict between two states of being. It explores the boundaries where artistic expression and self-restraint intersect, challenging the reasoning behind the process of representation (Delaporte 2012:4). The film delves into the transformative power of restraint, which can be equated to ritualistic procedures. These rituals or procedures often involve physical and psychological constraints, pushing the limits of physical and mental capacity. Typically, most rituals involve a conflict between two opposing states of existence. Although rituals have long been examined from broad societal viewpoints, psychologists have only recently begun to focus on the underlying causal mechanisms. As Hobson, Schroeder, Risen, Xygalatas and Inzlicht (2017:1-4) concur, rituals may regulate multiple functions

concurrently, including emotion, the attainment of performance goals, and social interaction.

Barney's aim is to build a body that is receptive to the possibility of transformation through a series of tests that assess physical endurance and resilience. Zapperi (2014:5) highlights how the artist views the embodied self as raw material capable of being manipulated and altered to assume a creative manifestation. Barney makes a specific allusion to the athletic figure, previously regarded as the perfect masculine form and a symbol of ideal beauty during the ancient and modern periods. He associates the metaphor of an athletic figure with self-mastery, challenging cultural norms, and transforming himself into an ideal image. Barney demonstrates the body's ability to form intimate connections with hostile environments when pushed to its limits (Zapperi 2014:3).



Fig 7. Matthew Barney, *Nisshin Maru* (2007).

Drawing a parallel between the act of creating art and engaging in physical exercise, Barney highlights the similarity in the way that the body is strengthened via resistance training and through the ritualistic, repetitive acts undertaken

during the artistic process. This perspective centres on the notion of restraint and control as a means to surpass the natural constraints of the body and tap into a deeper realm of creativity. The film suggests that by embracing restraint, individuals can access a heightened state of consciousness where art becomes a vessel for spiritual and emotional transcendence. During the creative process or athletic performance, negative emotions such as elevated anxiety, insecurity, and tension may be experienced, leading to ritualised behaviour. Accordingly, Boyer and Liénard (2006:635–641) contend that a ritual can serve as a form of distraction since the physical action it requires causes a temporary reduction in anxiety, blocking intrusive thoughts. This relates to the creative process, as participating in rituals may create a sense of control and familiarity, making the artist feel more confident and focused on the creative endeavour.

Barney perceives the body as a closed circuit, where the body disregards its human nature and transforms into an entity with internal mechanisms that function like a machine (Delaporte 2012:4). The body generates fluids as it confronts the duality of balancing internal and external conflicts. The transformation of the artist's body into a creative organism makes the embodied self a powerful metaphor for the creative process (Delaporte 2018:2). It is evident that, despite the physical and emotional challenges, the process can be rewarding for those enthusiastic about their creative or athletic pursuits, as the satisfaction and fulfilment from completing a drawing or achieving a personal best outweigh the discomfort. This is exemplified in Figure 8, where the primary focus concerns the ritual performed to attain the artwork rather than the artwork itself, which is often manifested as a sketch or diagram.

Barney has created a diagram⁵ illustrating how restrictions can be efficiently utilised in artistic processes, depicting the internal art process within the artist's body. The diagram is divided into three distinct stages: situation, condition, and production (www.drawingrestraint.net). Barney compares hypertrophy to the creative process, affirming that an artist's effort and dedication to their work directly affect the impact and meaning of the final outcome, similar to how muscles develop through weightlifting in hypertrophy (Delaporte 2012:5).

⁵ The diagram can be accessed from the website (www.drawingrestraint.net).



Fig 8. Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 5* (1988).

Additionally, this principle highlights the importance of perseverance and continuous improvement in creative endeavours. Barney's commitment to his craft is evident in the way he pushes his body to its limits, reflecting his determination to constantly evolve and improve as an artist. The line between athlete and artist blurs, highlighting his unique approach and adding depth to his work. As the embodied posthuman self, Barney serves as both the location and the tool of artistic expression. The performativity of the embodied self is crucial to the limitless, affective capability of the body to transcend the limits of the human being (Stępień 2018:101). This concept undermines conventional perceptions of the human body as stable and fixed, emphasising instead its potential for constant transformation and expansion.

The performance of *Drawing Restraint 9* involves acts that explore the bodies of both humans and nonhumans. The scenes set below deck prior to the traditional tea ceremony relate to rites in traditional Japanese culture. Fluid exchange is emphasised through a range of ritual procedures, which include bathing, grooming, and using squid ink to blacken Björk's teeth (Stępień 2018:108). Barney and Björk dress in heavy, ornate outfits of skin and fur worn at traditional Shinto wedding ceremonies. They experience conflict between natural resistance and physical restraint by overloading their bodies and the possibility of evolving

into hybrids (Stępień 2018:103). This conflict arises as they push their bodies to the limit, challenging their natural limitations. The potential transformation into hybrids adds another layer of complexity to their struggle, blurring the boundaries between what is human and what is not. After the formal ceremony, the artists carefully cut flesh from each other's legs to expose whale-like tails. With control and authority over the body, this act initiates the process of transforming into a nonhuman.

In the final scenes, the artists' metamorphosis into half-whale, half-human hybrids symbolises their desire to break free from societal constraints and explore new possibilities of embodiment. This exploration of hybridity not only challenges the traditional definition of being human but also highlights the limitless possibilities of artistic expression. The performance of an alternative physical form emphasises the transformative and malleable nature of identity, exposing the fragility of the embodied self and unveiling alternative potentialities. By blurring the lines between human, animal, and machine, the performance presents innovative possibilities for redefining the concept of self-identity.

According to Karen Barad (2003:823), all bodies, human and nonhuman, acquire agency via intra-action or performativity. The embodied self emerges as malleable, becoming and transforming through intra-action with the nonhuman and technological other. This attests to the infinite possibilities for rethinking the posthuman self, accepting the other's uniqueness, and envisioning ways to surpass the body. Buongiorno (2019:327) posits that the proliferation of many forms of representation in the digital realm is a consequence of how digital culture has redefined the desire to transcend physical constraints. Therefore, it is useful to investigate the concept of the becoming self.

2.4 THE BECOMING SELF

Posthumanist discourse challenges the traditional fixed identity concept, emphasising the fluidity and malleability of the posthuman self, which is constantly evolving and becoming. This viewpoint recognises the substantial influence that technological progress and interactions with the digital environment have on the formation of identity. The posthuman self is evolving into a cyborg, an ontologically indistinguishable hybrid entity intertwined with technology,

challenging traditional notions of identity and consciousness (Lepage 2008:138). It is crucial to consider that the posthuman self is situated,⁶ never complete, and constantly evolving. Ferrando (2014:220) asserts that the posthuman self is associated with unconventional forms of embodiment, embracing otherness, alterity, and various extensions. This perspective emphasises the intricate connection between humans and nonhumans, animals, gods, demons, and monsters, as outlined by Herbrechter (2013:36). He observes that repressed identities can lead to unexpected resurgences in spectral forms. This notion highlights the need to examine how these identities are embodied in posthuman identity, as it uncovers the complex intra-actions among various forms of existence that pose a challenge to the concept of being human. In digital culture, these alternative forms of embodiment recognise and embrace the unique attributes of human beings while surpassing their limitations.

By incorporating advanced technologies, they enable experiences and interactions that go beyond what human beings alone can achieve. Philbeck (2014:178) asserts that the posthuman self and digital technology are inextricably linked, inherently rendering the posthuman a technological structure.⁷ Digital technology is making human beings more like machines and humanising machines. This posthuman structure is grounded in technologically mediated relationships and is concerned with becoming and transformation (Braidotti 2013:67). The intra-action with various others enables the relational posthuman self to recognise the interdependence between human beings and technological others.

Cyberspace blurs the symbolic line between the figurative and the real by presenting an ever-more-accurate representation of life as it is (Gillis 2015:209). This pertains to the notion of the cyborg as a distributed consciousness that is dispersed via extensive virtual networks that are assimilating human beings and blurring the distinction between machine and human consciousness (Levin and Mamlok 2021:2). According to LaGrandeur (2018:378), minds and bodies are no longer diametrically opposed in the digital realm since they are assimilated as

⁶ Situated means: born from a certain female body, in a specific era and geopolitical space, and one of many species on the planet (Ferrando 2014:223).

⁷ A prime example concerns the archaeological system, which classifies human history using artefacts from the past (Philbeck 2014:178).

system components within a distributed network that transcends the human being. Similarly, Braidotti (2020:2, 7) highlights how technological advancement makes it possible for human beings to surpass their inherent limitations to explore new possibilities. Everyone who uses digital tools is a cyborg, or a cybernetic organism with superhuman abilities (Haraway 1991:149). This is particularly relevant in the digital era since artificial retinas, inner ears (cochleae), pacemakers, and automatic defibrillators have already rendered human beings a transitional species (LaGrandeur 2018:378). Human capabilities have expanded beyond physical limitations, resulting in a re-evaluation of the notion of being human. However, this progress also raises ethical and philosophical questions regarding its impact on consciousness and identity.

People have never been more reliant, linked, connected, or bound to digital technology and the internet, to the extent that they are unable to function without them. Pervasive technologies such as algorithms, can provide answers to questions, recommend actions, and return personalised results in response to internet searches. Philbeck (2014:174) asserts that the true complexity of digital technology is revealed when it makes decisions for human beings, implying that cognitive processing has been transferred to a device or machine. Braidotti (2013:89) explains this as a consequence of the relationship between the posthuman self and digital technology, which has reached unprecedented degrees of intimacy and intrusion, blurring the boundaries between structural differences. She explains how tablets, mobile phones, and other electronic devices, ubiquitous in digital culture, captivate users through microelectronic digital seduction that produces explicit information patterns and transmits specific instructions (Braidotti 2013:90). The primary objective of micro-electronic seduction is the integration of diverse online platforms with human consciousness. According to Braidotti (2013:89), information and communication technologies (ICT)⁸ not only enable the digitisation and replication of the human nervous system, but visual forms of representation replace multisensory simulation modes, altering people's perspectives.

Advanced technologies are transforming human beings both mentally and physically, enabling them to transcend their biological limitations. The

⁸ Information and communication technologies refer to a broad spectrum of technological devices that transmit, store, create, share, or exchange information (www.learningportal.iiep.unesco.org).

convergence of humans and digital technology and the acceptance of cyborg identities are reshaping our understanding of human capabilities, limitations, and the potential for enhancement through technology. Braidotti (2013:89) refers to this state as "becoming-machine".

Two of my artworks are used to examine the becoming self and how digital technology influences the creative process. *Amorphous Terrain* (2021) (Figure 9) and *Tech-Transcendence* (2020) (Figure 10) explore the emergent and becoming forms of the posthuman self. Digital technology is intricately involved in my creative process, both as a tool that transforms the image through various techniques and as a medium to communicate aspects related to the artwork.



Fig 9. Alicia Hindson, *Amorphous Terrain* (2021).

The title *Amorphous Terrain* was selected to align with the concepts portrayed in the artwork. The word 'amorphous' means formless, shapeless, or fluid, tying in with posthuman identity as incomplete and constantly evolving (CED 1994).

'Terrain' refers to the spatial context in which this identity is situated, specifically within the digital environment where the posthuman self is located. The process entails digitally altering and subsequently painting photographs of my daughter, captured some years ago. Despite being hand-painted, the artworks include digital techniques. The glitches, blurring, pixilation, gradients, and doubling techniques serve as a reflection of the digital age we live in yet maintain the authenticity of a hand-painted portrait. Flesh colour functions as a sophisticated veneer, forming a physiological barrier against technology, which is perpetually present in the posthuman self.

Amorphous Terrain explores the concept of the cyborg as a symbol of our symbiotic relationship with technology. The visage displays a state of becoming and transformation through a blend of figurative elements, abstract forms, vibrant colours, and fluid shapes. It challenges the notion of a fixed identity by portraying the cyborg as a sinuous, evolving entity. This relates to the cyborg theory (Haraway 1991:149), which asserts that the cyborg exists in a world where entities are not classified but rather defined by their technological integration and the hybridity of machine and organism. This highlights the ways in which digital technology affects individuals, questioning the increasingly blurry boundaries between human beings and digital technology. Furthermore, the becoming self underscores the notion of seamless transmission between human beings and digital technology and the fusion of reality and imagination.

The digitised face in *Amorphous Terrain* alludes to virtual identities created by individuals on digital platforms. The distorted, expressionless portrait represents the posthuman self, where digital technology becomes a necessary part of daily existence. This is evidenced by the younger generation, who, when using their devices, are disinterested, robotic, and emotionless. The technology that controls their very existence has replaced their expressions and feelings. This opinion is founded on the notion that identity can be reconstructed with the use of digital technology, since it enables users to disconnect their minds from their bodies, facilitating freedom of form. Once this occurs, individuals choose an alternative form or persona while retaining their inherent personality.

In *Tech-Transcendence*, the flesh colour has been replaced with colours often found in digital technology. In an age where images and smartphones rule, the

use of paint as a tool for examination and investigation denotes the demise of the traditional portrait.



Fig 10. Alicia Hindson, *Tech-Transcendence* (2020).

Here, the portrait has undergone a metamorphosis, taking on a more nonhuman appearance. It now resembles a body contained within a face, indicating the integration of technology into the posthuman self. In *Tech-Transcendence*, the lines move over and across the face, almost becoming ribs, alluding to a collection of networks constantly transmitting data back and forth. It depicts the posthuman self as an intra-dependent network of entities and as a fortuitous being in terms of what it could become. This acknowledges the widespread influence of digital technology on the posthuman self as it subtly transforms and

distorts its nature. In *Nomadic Theory*, Braidotti (2011:66) argues that human beings are always emergent, evolving, and in a state of perpetual becoming. She emphasises that this constant state of becoming is not limited to human beings but encompasses all living organisms and entities. Moreover, it affirms the concept that human beings are gradually evolving into cyborg hybrids, amalgamating both human and mechanical components (Lepage 2008:138).

Hayles (1999:3) contends that from a posthuman perspective, there are no fundamental distinctions between biological beings and computers, robotic goals and human desires, or cybernetic systems and living things. Similar to intelligent technology, the becoming self is evolving into an information-processing device that can communicate data across many platforms (Hayles 1999:246). It emphasises the blurry boundaries between what is considered human and what is considered machine, generating new possibilities for the posthuman to transcend biological limitations. These open-ended artworks allude to an incomplete posthuman self that is evolving and mutating in a time when the boundaries between humans and digital technology are becoming more indistinct.

Humans have used tools such as hammers and axes since the Stone Age, contributing to the evolution of the human body over time (Mazlish 1993:61). Changes made possible by new media technologies have impacted the evolution of art praxis. Posthuman tools and agencies are distinct from their predecessors since their design makes it difficult to distinguish between the tool and the human (LaGrandeur 2018:378). Digital technologies have evolved from being mere tools to being autonomous agents capable of prescribing specific behaviours (Beaulieu, Boucher and Heppner 2018:5). The rapid expansion of digital technology and the networked environment has led to new artistic practices and opportunities, influencing artists to develop innovative production methods using new media. Recent concepts drawn from cybernetics,⁹ AI, and the internet may be useful for evaluating these issues (Bollmer 2018:83).

⁹ Cybernetics is a scientific discipline concerned with the development of digital technology, acting or thinking like human beings. This is done by studying how electrical devices, machines, and the human brain function (CED 1994. Sv "cybernetics").

Artist Siebren Versteeg creates artwork with intelligent and transformative digital tools. Versteeg creates art by programming digital algorithms that manipulate and display data or images. This evidences that the artist's involvement in the artwork is limited to its initial and final stages since the algorithms execute the remainder (LaGrandeur 2018:379). Versteeg frequently works with software and real-time data feeds, so his medium is constantly changing and difficult to control. The artist initiates the artwork by writing algorithmic code, which he monitors as it progresses, allowing for intervention or termination at any given time (LaGrandeur 2018:379). In *Permanent Vacation* (2016) (Figure 11), Versteeg created algorithms that operate on a general principle using Google's image search technology. A webcam eye constantly feeds back the images that it 'sees' on the LCD screen, creating an endless slideshow (www.siebrenversteeg.com). The design is based on algorithms that iteratively¹⁰ feed images obtained from the internet back into the Google search engine, which generates even more images, analogous to the ones that preceded them. This results in a constant flow of new and varied compositions on the screen (LaGrandeur 2018:380). The iterative feedback loop is a fundamental aspect of digital technology and is commonly used in many programming languages. In *Permanent Vacation*, Versteeg allows the algorithm to work without intervention, enabling the image to constantly develop in an experiential viewer installation (LaGrandeur 2018:380).

Versteeg's image streams are reminiscent of daily web browsing in several ways: the short duration of display of each image emphasises the browsing speed, while the random sequences and combinations of images frequently yield unexpected associations (www.risdmuseum.org). The flow of images is not entirely random, however, since the AI software selects the images based on the artist's instructions. When the artist is satisfied that the image has reached a satisfactory level of development, he is able to pause the programme and print it. According to LaGrandeur (2018:380), Versteeg not only creates art with a posthuman concept in mind, but he also critiques the concept through his artwork. The artist's assembly of smart technology, including the web camera, the software that controls it, and the algorithms of the Google search engine, creates the images that comprise the artwork.

¹⁰ Iterative refers to the repetition of a series of instructions or code until a desired result is achieved (www.techtarget.com).



Fig 11. Siebren Versteeg, *Permanent Vacation* (2016).

Versteeg makes an ironic comment in *Permanent Vacation* (2016) since he intentionally situated the webcam exactly where the eyes would typically be on a full-sized, metal stick figure wearing a hat. The stick figure appears to look at the LCD screen with its hand at its eye, as if operating the webcam and capturing the images that are fed back into the Google search engine. Versteeg acknowledges the human being's dependence on technology while commenting on the artist's diminution (to a mere stick figure) in the creative process (LaGrandeur 2018:380). The artist and intelligent technology collaborate as a single creative entity, functioning symbiotically as a single process, fostering a harmonious and collaborative environment for artistic expression.

Versteeg's work inspired me to experiment with algorithmic code, collaborating on the creation of artworks that balance chance and choice. Although still in an experimental phase, *Test Image I* (2022) (Figure 12) and *Test Image II* (2022) (Figure 13) serve as examples of this symbiotic collaboration.

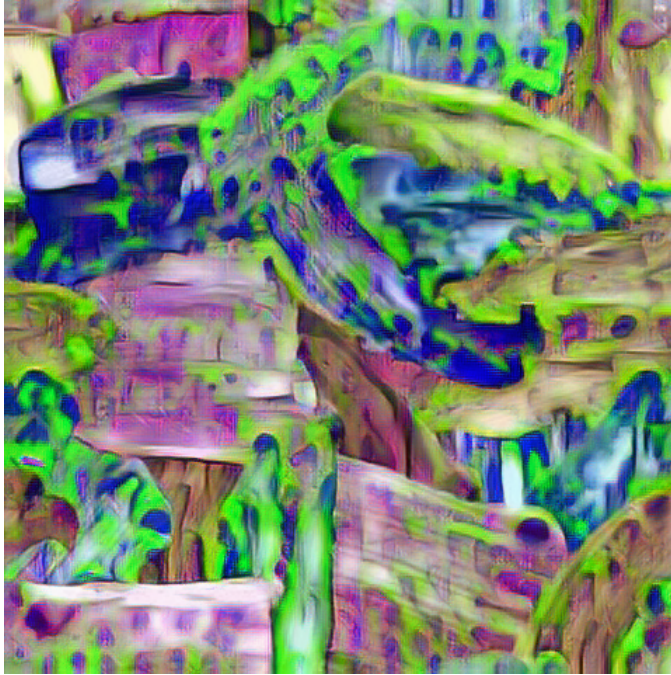


Fig 12. Alicia Hindson, *Test Image I* (2022).

My art is produced in collaboration with an intelligent machine, where the machine is not merely a tool or a passive participant but an active agent with its own agency. It functions as an extension of me, enhancing my creative abilities and facilitating the exploration of new artistic possibilities beyond the boundaries of traditional art practice. The artwork is a critical exploration of digital culture's image dissemination systems and the digital technology used to create them. I use algorithmic code to randomly select images from a designated folder on my hard drive. This experimental method generates random screen compositions each time the generation script is executed. The goal is to improve outputs due to the algorithm's ability to learn and adapt to given information, which can either be printed or 'recycled' back into the code, forming a new image.



Fig 13. Alicia Hindson, *Test Image II* (2022).

Test Image I and *Test Image II* are the result of intra-action between a human being and a machine, in which the human being is enhanced by intelligent technology and the machine is given agency by the human being (LaGrandeur 2018:379). These images consist of several different images, overwritten by iterative code in a process of continual becoming. This process evidences the transformative influence of digital technology on artistic practice in the era of digitalisation, where the boundaries between works of art created by AI and those created by humans are becoming increasingly blurry. The symbiotic collaboration between individuals and intelligent technology has profound implications for the field of art. It challenges traditional notions of authorship as the line between human and machine contributions becomes blurred. It also expands the possibilities of creativity, allowing artists to tap into the inexhaustible capacity of human beings to differ among and between themselves and to co-create various platforms for artistic expression. This collaboration redefines the role of technology in art, transforming machines from mere tools into active collaborators and co-creators. While the advancement of digital technology has undoubtedly revolutionised the artistic landscape, some concerns arise over its increasing

dominance, which may compromise the authenticity and intuitive touch that define traditional art forms. As AI becomes more sophisticated in replicating artistic techniques, there is a growing fear that it could diminish the uniqueness and emotional depth that artists bring to their work.

Digital technology has transformed our understanding and interaction with the world, fostering co-evolution and breaking down perceived boundaries. Munster (2006:5) explores the connection between digital culture and the baroque movement. The baroque movement, known for its ornate and intricate style, provides a unique aesthetic genealogy for understanding the relationship between the posthuman self and technology. Munster (2006:5) examined the algorithmic coding of artworks, establishing that digital culture generates a sequence of aesthetic experiences and sensations that are shaped by differentials of degree, intensity, and speed. This concept challenges traditional binary thinking and presents technology as an ongoing process of reconstruction and evolution wherein individuals adapt to the integration of intelligent technology, robots, and AI. This co-evolution involves the rapid progress of different posthuman forms in conjunction with intelligent machines, albeit within the limits of human capabilities (Hayles 1999:284).

In conclusion, this chapter presents an evaluation of posthuman identity, contending that it necessitates overcoming preconceived notions about the differences between humans, nonhumans, technology, and all other living entities. Posthumanism dehumanises the human being by depicting it as an assemblage of entities, thereby shifting the focus away from its perceived centrality in the cosmos. The entangled self reveals that human beings are intricately entangled with technology in an intra-connected network of entities and beings. In an era characterised by the increasing convergence of humans and technology, the embodied self undergoes a profound transformation. By reimagining posthuman identity as constantly becoming rather than static, it reveals an understanding of the becoming self as a hybrid and indeterminate entity. Realising that posthuman identity is entangled with digital technology, where the self is a cyborg dispersed among networks, blurs the distinction between humans and digital technology, presenting a novel posthuman configuration of becoming with intelligent machines.

CHAPTER 3 Masking

Posthumanist thought evidences the pursuit of alternative ways of thinking and novel approaches to self-representation. This chapter explores masking as a method of digital self-representation, emphasising its importance in contemporary interface culture,¹¹ which includes role-play and disguise. It underscores the blurred line between offline and online identities that perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards and gender stereotypes. Masking further enables anonymity, underscoring the performative nature of online self-presentation. The chapter postulates that the concept of masking has evolved significantly in the digital era, encompassing self-representation, doppelgängers, and the mask as a multifaceted media entity. Masking is important to contemporary digital and visual culture since it demonstrates posthuman multiplicity.

In the interrogation of masking in digital artmaking the term ‘anamorphic’ stands central.¹² It is used as a theoretical construct to examine the influence of digital technology on intermedial art practice and distortive processes that are evident in several forms of digital artmaking. The term ‘anamorphic’ is employed in this study as a derivative of ‘anamorphosis’, which can also be interpreted as transformation, metamorphosis or reform.

Masking and ritual are investigated in performance art and digital culture, focusing on the role of ritual, rites of passage, and the motif of the doppelgänger. Digital culture embraces selfies as digital surrogates or duplicates, while shadow doppelgängers are generated through data mining, which involves gathering digital footprints. The documentation of a performance serves as a metaphorical doppelgänger, guaranteeing its enduring presence, which may be revisited through its archives and recordings.

The chapter concludes by exploring the mask as a multifaceted media entity in digital culture, examining its role as an interactive data entity, an interactive communication tool, and as a mediated and mediating entity. The media mask

¹¹ Digital interfaces have shifted from being screen-based to incorporating user experience and perception as the digital world becomes more realistic (Ferrando 2014:149).

¹² The term ‘anamorphosis’ and its related forms are derived from the Greek word *αναμορφών* (‘anamorphon’) which translates as to transform or re-form (CED 1994. Sv “anamorphosis”).

redefines the ideal image, replacing the face as the locus of bodily information, challenging traditional stereotypes of the mask, and redefining the media entity's role in digital culture. The work of intermedial artists Amalia Ulman, Lynn Hershman Leeson, and Matthew Mohr are investigated in this context.

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE TERM 'ANAMORPHIC'

Anamorphism in art, often referred to as anamorphic art, is a perspectival technique used to create distorted images that appear normal only when viewed from a specific angle or through a specific device, such as a cylindrical mirror. It is not new or specific to digital art processes but already appeared after the 1400s in the Renaissance period when the Italian architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) introduced the knowhow and means of rendering the recession of space, called linear perspective. Artists and mathematicians subsequently explored various perspectives and optical illusions; one of the most famous early examples is *The Ambassadors* (1533) by Hans Holbein the Younger (Figure 14), which includes a distorted skull that appears correctly proportioned when viewed from a specific angle.



Fig 14. Hans Holbein The Younger, *The Ambassadors* (1533).

In digital artmaking, anamorphism allows for the exploration of the intricate relations among various disparate forms of art. Using anamorphosis in their processes, artists engage in limitless experimentation and intricate editing without the constraints of physical media, which were previously unattainable. The techniques and tools used in anamorphic digital artmaking include 3D modelling software (such as Blender and Maya), which allow artists to create anamorphic sculptures or scenes that can be rendered from multiple perspectives. Tools like Photoshop and Corel Painter enable artists to paint anamorphic images by manipulating perspective grids and layers. Augmented reality applications can bring anamorphic art into real-world environments, allowing viewers to see the transformation through their devices. With projection mapping techniques digital images are projected onto physical surfaces, aligning them to create an anamorphic effect (Cf. 3.2 and 3.3 for examples of anamorphic digital artworks).¹³

Such experimentation includes a play with anamorphosis which allows for conceptual comment on volatile posthuman identity under the influence of the very transformative impact of virtual reality in digital culture. In a virtual context, identity can be manipulated and even hidden, resulting in a kind of masking of identity. Connected to anamorphosis as process, the various dimensions of masking are interrogated to provide a deeper understanding of the intricacies of anamorphic masking in digital culture.

3.2 THE MASK AS SELF-REPRESENTATION

The relationship between masking and identity has long been acknowledged, yet in the digital age, the concept of masking engenders new connotations and applications that diverge significantly from its prior manifestations. Masking in digital culture expands the concept far beyond the concealment of identity.¹⁴ Masking is a multifaceted phenomenon that fulfils a crucial function in various aspects of human interaction and communication. Consequently, this study is

¹³ More digital applications in digital art include interactive Installations where viewers move around the space to find the correct viewing angle, often involving AR or VR elements. Anamorphic murals on streets or buildings can create a sense of wonder and engagement in public spaces. Virtual reality (VR) allows for the creation of 3D anamorphic sculptures that viewers can explore from different angles. Animated anamorphic art can change dynamically based on the viewer's perspective or interaction.

¹⁴ Early masking activities placed masks within a social context where concealment, role-play, and identity form the main aspects of masking (Edson 2005:9–13).

limited to three distinct aspects of digital masking: the mask as digital self-representation; the role of masking and ritual in performance; and the complex nature of the mask as a multifaceted media entity.

Masks predate written records and are recognised in most cultures around the world (Edson 2005:5). Ancient communities, particularly those in Africa, have a long history of mask-making that is intricately intertwined with animistic spiritual practices, beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies. This endures to the present in multiple contemporary African cultures. Masks have profoundly influenced Western modern art. For example, the Colonialist appropriation of African artefacts by the Fauvists and Cubists (Edson 2005:9–13). Although the concept of masks is rooted in Africa, this study excludes African masks and mask-making in the traditional context.

Understanding masking as a component of semiotics is a way to construct and represent posthuman identity, expanding traditional notions of masking (Pollock 1995:582). This perspective acknowledges that masks in the digital age extend beyond the physical to include online avatars and social media profiles. Masking as self-representation in digital culture is adapted to individual requirements and the digital platforms subscribed to. Masking allows individuals to create and curate multiple identities through the rise of social media and online personae.

Masks function as a metaphor and a significant source of imagery in the construction of the digital self. In digital culture, masking serves a psychological function, fulfilling the needs of individuals to anonymously explore various facets of their personality under the protective veil of anonymity. Individuals who engage in digital masking often become so immersed in the role-play of the character that they are transported to another dimension, assuming the persona of another person or being.¹⁵ This raises concerns about authenticity and role-play, as individuals who assume a masked identity often present a carefully crafted image rather than their true selves. The issue arises as the true identity becomes complicated by the fact that it is intertwined with the desired identity. This underscores the importance of understanding that personal identity encompasses

¹⁵ In many cultures, masks were used in a dramatic way with the purpose of transforming the wearer into the being that the mask represented, thereby assigning them another persona that viewers instantly identified with (Mack 1996:110).

both reality and imagination (Durante 2011:595). The profound influence of masking on the creation of the digital self and the complex dynamics involved in digital self-representation is evident. Additionally, this semiotic approach recognises that masks not only serve as physical coverings but also as symbolic representations of the complex relationship between humans and technology.

Ritual,¹⁶ typically associated with the transformation from one state to another, is intricately connected with masking. There are similarities between enduring belief systems, common rituals or rites, and the activities that occur on digital platforms. Digital culture employs selfies as digital surrogates, creating a duplicated doppelgänger (divided self) or alter ego as an identical double. Shadow doppelgängers are created through data mining, leaving residual data and digital footprints from the use of digital devices or online activities. Kapferer (2004:47) contends that digital culture incorporates diverse human experiences through rituals,¹⁷ allowing individuals to liberate themselves from daily life constraints in the digital space. This dynamic environment resembles fractals, constantly evolving and shifting, allowing individuals to adapt and change their perspectives. It relates to the shape-shifting acts occurring in certain rites when the masked person succumbs to spiritual possession.¹⁸ Digital rituals provide a sense of familiarity, inclusion, and the celebration of individual accomplishments or significant moments, reflecting the importance of these events in real life. This is a critical quality of the digital ritual: in digital culture the ritual is absolutely real, even part of the reality of actuality (Kapferer 2004:48).

Masks convey symbolic meanings and facilitate communication through physical and spiritual features. The two-faced Janus element represents the seen and unseen, a key element of Roman mythology. In digital culture, this concept refers

¹⁶ Ritual masks vary substantially between cultures, but most African cultures share certain characteristics. Traditional African weddings, funerals, initiation rites, and cleansing rituals include masked performances (www.contemporary-african-art.com). Ritual masks typically have a spiritual and religious significance, where the wearer becomes what the mask represents, affording the wearer a sense of power (Mato 1978:88).

¹⁷ The ritual mask is a tangible mechanism for initiating transformation in which the wearer assumes a new identity. The purpose of the ritual mask is not to conceal identity but to create a new one, that of the spirit (www.contemporary-african-art.com).

¹⁸ In African culture, masks usually reflect a spirit, whereby a dancer is conceptually transformed into a spiritual being thought to be possessed by the spirit, losing human form in the process (www.contemporary-african-art.com).

to hybrid identities and the extended self, involving re-embodiment, dematerialisation, and co-constructing (Belk 2013:478–483). In this way, the mask serves as an extension of the self in digital culture, where the “medium is the message” (McLuhan 1994:7). The aforementioned notion suggests that the medium through which content is communicated contains equal or greater significance than the message itself. Therefore, the medium constitutes an essential part of its reception and interpretation.

An analysis of the complex characteristics of the mask as a multifaceted media entity in digital culture enables one to comprehend how it assumes and replaces facial features with digital information. It simultaneously animates the virtual existence of a physically absent individual through digital technology. And sets up anamorphosis The mask’s role in digital culture evidences the transformative power of technology, blurring the boundaries between reality and virtuality. In digital culture, masks serve the purpose of visually creating a separation between the wearer and the physical form while also distancing the wearer from reality (Rolfe 2014:107). As a disembodied entity, the value of information surpasses that of material objects (Hayles 1999:19). Paradoxically, the virtual self is gradually replacing the physical self, indicating a transformation from one state to another. This emphasises the requirement for individuals to carefully navigate and manage their digital identities. The growing integration of digital technology into individuals’ daily lives makes it imperative to understand the implications of online identities on real-life interactions and self-expression.

Similar to masks, digital technology acts as catalyst for transformation, characterised by abundant possibilities for creative expression. The analysis of intermediality offers a structure for exploring the interaction between different media and how artists challenge boundaries, exploring new possibilities in the digital age. This interdisciplinary approach enables a more profound comprehension of its transformative potential and impact on artistic expression. In a technologically mediated world, digital platforms have revolutionised how people communicate, enabling individuals to interact without the requirement of a physical presence. Moreover, they provide a sense of convenience and accessibility, as people can interact at any time and from any location.

Magalhães and Martins (2023:10) argue that masks are essential in daily social communication and media interactions, as people perform various roles and self-representations, wearing a variety of masks to suit the situation. Digital masks are shaped by context and the desire to play a specific role in communication, unlike physical masks. The digitalisation of interpersonal relationships has accelerated in recent years as a consequence of the availability of digital devices, including smartphones, tablets, and personal computers (Magalhães and Martins 2023:11). These devices have become essential communication tools, encouraging the use of digital masks. Digital masks have evolved into instruments for improving relationships, changing meanings, creating happiness illusions, and devising more effective ways to live. Digital masks afford individuals the ability to adopt various personae that align with their desired roles or identities, including engaging in role-play.

3.2.1 Role-play in social media

The unique perspective and engagement that anamorphic digital art offers can be particularly effective on social media, where visual impact and viewer interaction are crucial.¹⁹ Kinsey (2018:23) highlights the tension between archetypes and authentic individuals in gendered identity constructs on social media. Thiher (1995:95) emphasises the potential for social media to be deceptive because once anything is turned into an image, it becomes fiction. Both these viewpoints are evident in Amalia Ulman's artworks, mainly performed utilising the anamorphic potential of social media environments.

Ulman's performance work, *Excellences & Perfections* (2014) (Figure 15), explores the role of masking and its anamorphic effect in self-representation on social media. The performance, spanning five months, consists of a series of posts on her Instagram account. The work features images, text messages and hashtags, gaining widespread admiration (Giannachi 2023:126). *Excellences & Perfections* explores the creation of multiple masked identities on digital platforms and their influence in disseminating information. This is aligned with the visual

¹⁹ Using Instagram stories, reels, or TikTok videos, artists can manipulate interactive contexts where viewers can change perspectives by tilting their phones or moving around. AR filters on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat can be used to allow users to experience anamorphic effects in real-time through their cameras.

language of images and their influence on perceptions of reality, as evidenced by the significance of visual persuasion in modern consumer society.

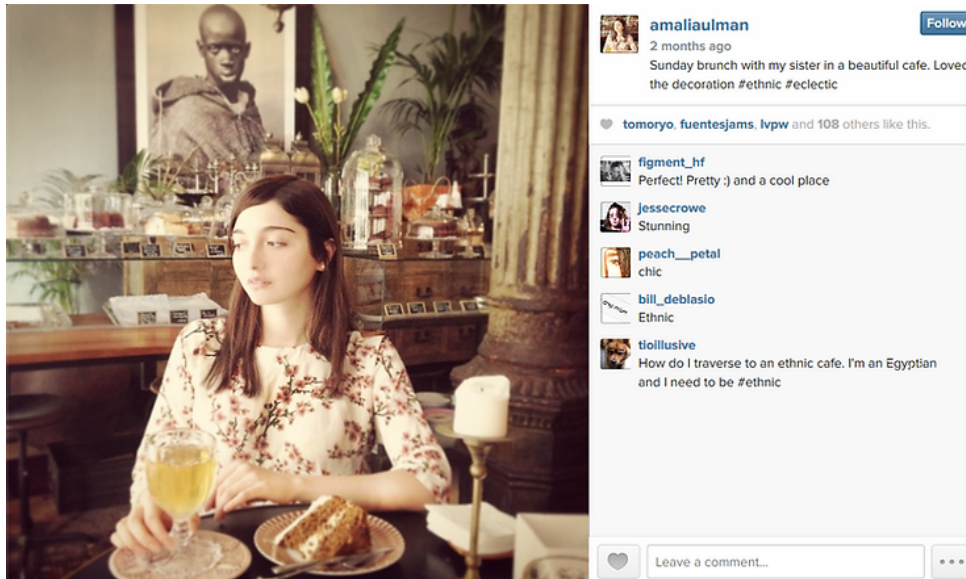


Fig 15. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences & Perfections* (2014).

Ulman explores the intricate portrayal of women on social media platforms, highlighting how these images perpetuate gender stereotypes and dictate femininity. Ulman's narrative outlines the personal transformations experienced by many young women. It commences with the life of a naïve young girl, transitioning from a hedonist who enjoys wild parties and money to a woman who advocates a healthy lifestyle, embracing nutrition and fitness (Colner 2018:2).

Excellences & Perfections is divided into three sections, namely *Innocence*, *Sin*, and *Redemption*. For each section, Ulman devised a fictional persona called *Cute Girl*, *Sugar Babe*, and *Life Goddess* (Giannachi 2023:126). These personae serve as masks for her different authentic selves, aligning with her perspective that masks are an integral part of daily interaction. According to Crutzen (2013:86), the wearer and the mask engage in a reciprocal anamorphic relationship in which the wearer animates the mask and, in turn, the mask influences the wearer. Here, the mask becomes an extension of Ulman's emotions and intentions, while her actions bring the mask to life, conveying a

powerful visual narrative. This dynamic interaction between mask and wearer creates a unique form of expression and communication. Although role-play is distinct from masking, it can reveal distinct aspects of an individual's identity, challenging traditional understandings of masks as mere disguises. Ulman's performance defies traditional notions of identity, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. By embodying different personae, her anamorphic approach highlights the selective acceptance of certain aspects of identity, while others are disdained.

In the first part of the performance, *Cute Girl* (2014) (Figure 16), Ulman transforms into a charming blonde, highlighting her ability to create and alter appearances through various means. Ulman commences by employing a visual style reflecting her personal taste, affording her the credibility to appropriate the most popular beauty ideals trending on Instagram (Black, Shield and Ulman 2014). She presents her interpretation of the character by publishing selfies featuring her painted nails, wearing ballerina tights, lace dresses, make-up, and featuring kittens (Smith 2017:83). These images validate the insatiable human desire to construct meaning and modify outward appearances. Tateo (2021:3) asserts that the body serves as the interface between self and environment; therefore, decorations and alterations such as cosmetics and clothing function as semiotic layers of concealment. It is important to note that Ulman regards isolating a colour palette as one of the most important steps in the process of constructing a fictional microcosm. She presents herself as the stereotypical naïve, inexperienced young girl in the first performance, using a dominantly pastel pink and white palette. Each of the three characterisations has a distinctive palette, with colours ranging from pastel pink and white to black and gold, and finally featuring a neutral colour palette (Giannachi 2023:126). These changes are akin to scene changes during a theatrical performance.



Fig 16. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences & Perfections* (2014).

The second section of *Excellences & Perfections* features a darker aesthetic reliant on a gold and black palette. The artist, originally from Argentina, leaves her boyfriend to relocate to Los Angeles, where she wishes to pursue a modelling career (Giannachi 2023:126). In her performance of *Sugar Babe* (2014), Ulman explores the obsession that many young women have with extravagance and unattainable beauty standards. The spotlight gives them a sense of power and importance while they aspire to beauty standards detached from reality (Magalhães and Martins 2023:11). Ulman's alter ego transforms into an escort with a wealthy benefactor who finances her extravagant lifestyle and luxury spending sprees (Smith 2017:83). In reality, Ulman took selfies in Los Angeles hotels and restaurants, sharing them on Instagram as a record of her daily life. Ulman creates the perfect consumerist lifestyle for *Excellences & Perfections* using sets, props, and well-chosen locations. On social online platforms, privilege is built on adopting and enacting the audience's desires. The aesthetic is deliberately generic, with hotel rooms, lobbies, terminals, airports, and spas portrayed as liminal spaces of leisure and transience. These spaces are often perceived as unwelcoming and bland, resembling non-sites like the city of Los

Angeles. According to Smith (2017: 83–84), the significant aspect in this context is conceptual continuity rather than a formal similarity, because hotels, transportation centres, and aircraft all exhibit a poetics of perpetual duplication and circulation.

This connects to the feedback Ulman elicits through her performance as she deliberately develops her online identity and narrative to elicit comments and likes, demonstrating how easily visual representations influence users. Ulman uses well-established techniques for online promotion, which are similar to those employed by fashion influencers to elicit predictable responses from their followers (Giannachi 2023:126). Her objective is to demonstrate the effect of societal ideals and illusions on the self-perception of a young woman (Smith 2017:81). Ulman’s followers serve as an example of the predictability and repetitious nature of online commentary when she adopts the persona of a young woman suffering from depression due to her unease regarding her appearance (Figure 17). The girl resorts to drugs, has a breakdown, and ends up in a rehabilitation clinic (Giannachi 2023:126).

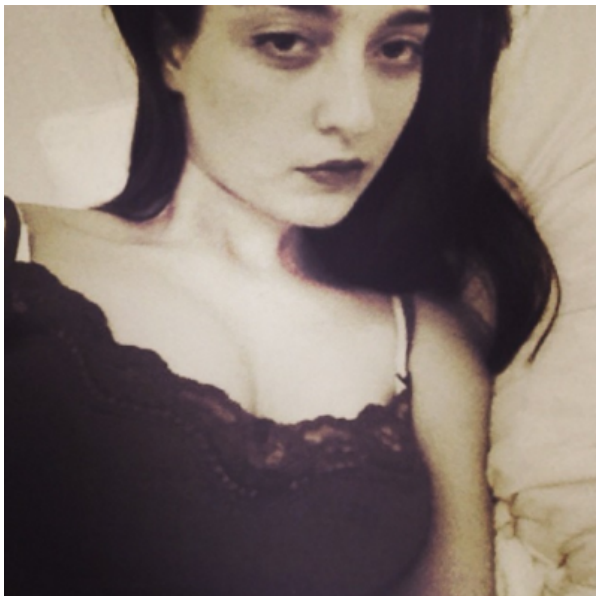


Fig 17. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences & Perfections* (2014).

Ulman allegedly has breast augmentation surgery, and she shares images of herself wearing a hospital robe before the procedure (Figure 18), and afterwards with her chest wrapped in bandages (Figure 19) (www.newmuseum.org).



Fig 18. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences & Perfections* (2014).



Fig 19. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences & Perfections* (2014).

Amalia Ulman uses Photoshop and a padded bra to modify her appearance while documenting her daily activities and emotional state with trending hashtags. According to Vivienne (2017:134), by leveraging visual contrast, photos taken before and after a change in appearance encourage viewers to instantly compare the 'old' and 'new' selves. As illustrated by Ulman's use of her body, the purpose of these modifications reveals the pervasive influence of society's female beauty standards. Ulman's work bears resemblance to that of other female artists who have gone to extraordinary lengths to interrogate social perceptions of women. Performance artist ORLAN has endured multiple plastic procedures to alter her facial and bodily features, creating various imagined selves to question conventional notions of beauty (Brand 2012:306). The utilisation of staged self-portraits by Cindy Sherman in a variety of disguises representing invented characters is similar to Ulman's creative approach (Auslander 2007:2). Sherman's work unveils the illusory and superficial nature of feminine beauty by exposing various aspects of the female experience, including a woman's organs, fluids, fears, and fantasies (Knafo 1996:160). Through her art, Sherman challenges social norms and traditional media portrayals of women. By exposing the raw, unfiltered reality of the female experience, she provokes conversations about identity, self-perception, and the social expectations demanded of women.

Magalhães and Martins (2023:243) imply that visual display, irrespective of whether it is basic or complex, is essential for acceptance and understanding in the digital environment. Miccoli (2010:9) suggests that, through communication and the sharing of experiences, humans can fully explore the possibilities of their physical existence. He underscores the significance of embracing technology to enhance this communication process, since it enables a wider reach and a more efficient exchange of ideas and experiences (Miccoli 2010:x). The Instagram page of Ulman serves as an example of how she created a collage of meticulously organised florals, costly lingerie, immaculately decorated interiors, and perfectly plated meals to communicate her lifestyle. Despite their ostentatiousness, the images are credible because they are so familiar. Ulman's work investigates how each of these components combines to form a system that, using templates, encourages self-representations to commercialise identity on social media (Maguire 2018:15). Ulman's endeavour to appropriate the

prevailing trends of the highly popular 'It Girl'²⁰ tendencies on Instagram reveals the symbolic monetisation of an identity on social media platforms (Maguire 2018:14). By mimicking these tendencies, Ulman taps into the desire for recognition and validation that is deeply ingrained in social media culture. This deliberate appropriation highlights the power dynamics at play and exposes how individuals are willing to commodify themselves for social capital.

In the third portion of the performance, Ulman adopts the persona of *Life Goddess* (2014) (Figure 20), a woman who is mellowing, reaching emotional equilibrium as she heals and evolves (Smith 2017:84). Ulman returns as a brunette after pretending to be on vacation with her new boyfriend, concealing her breast augmentation with a flowery shirt (Smith 2017:84). The artist incorporates *Life Goddess* by posting selfies of yoga positions and associated standards of perfection within her narrative. Although Ulman did not undergo any surgery, she made the point that feigned changes piqued interest and caused people to question the veracity of her transformation.



Fig 20. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences & Perfections* (2014).

²⁰ Girls whose Instagram accounts are as aesthetically pleasing and as carefully curated as glossy magazine pages and whose personal brands are as successful as their filter selections (Maguire 2018:14).

Demonstrating to her followers that her life has improved, the colour scheme of Ulman's photographs changes drastically. The selfies feature calming scenes comprising furniture, flowers, optimistic texts, and nutritious food (Smith 2017:84). Ulman acknowledges that several well-known social media personalities prioritise health and wellness, or the appearance of it. She acknowledges that several well-known social media personalities prioritise health and wellness, or the appearance of it. She cites Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop²¹, Miranda Kerr's organic cosmetics, posting her yoga selfies on social media (Smith 2017:84). Despite the rise of virtuality, the body's function remains unchanged. On the contrary, there has been an increased emphasis on the physical body in relation to diet, exercise, and fashion. Puzio (2021:14) highlights the evolving function of social media in shaping and presenting the body, thereby promoting a culture of discussion and biography.

Ulman makes extensive use of hashtags such as "#simple" and "#cutegasm" to market her lifestyle and build brands on social media, imitating the storytelling techniques of affluent account holders (www.newmuseum.org). By assuming distinct personae for the performance of *Excellences & Perfections*, Ulman critiques beauty standards, body modification, and authenticity versus pretence (Salazar 2019:76). In her anamorphic approach to her work she blurs the boundaries between artist and artwork, between herself and the character, and between the real and imagined. Her self-representations assess the portrayal of young women on social media platforms, but she expresses her own perspective through anamorphic means. Ulman follows a clear script with a distinct beginning, middle, and conclusion.

In the end, Ulman revealed that *Excellences & Perfections* was an art project where she pre-planned every status update for her performance on Facebook and Instagram. After five months of obsessive role-playing, the artist declared the campaign complete, intentionally leaving the final image blank. Ulman exhibited the collected material in traditional gallery settings (Colner 2018:2). The comments from followers indicated that many were aware of having witnessed or

²¹ Goop is a renowned lifestyle blog and contemporary pillar of Los Angeles's entrenched veneration of the body, created by actress turned wellness expert Gwyneth Paltrow. Following Paltrow's frequent advice to eat 'raw' and sleep 'clean' comes the next set of instructions in a broader campaign aimed at promoting physical perfection (Smith 2017:84).

participated in a performance of some kind. Nevertheless, the majority of Ulman's followers were unaware that the content had been prewritten and that they were following a script.

The greatest part of Ulman's work was created via the internet, which remains the dominant source of perpetual digital pictures (Colner 2018:2). Ulman's notable contribution lies in her adept utilisation of the internet, surpassing its role as a search engine or information retrieval tool when she conceived of *Excellences & Perfections*. By encouraging feedback from the audience, Ulman transformed *Excellences & Perfections* into an index of prevailing taste. The artist successfully used a relational approach to actively involve the public in her work, making them participants in the creative process, albeit unknowingly (Colner 2018:2). This interactive engagement blurs the lines between artist and audience, challenging traditional notions concerning the authorship of a performance. The inclusion of viewers in the creative process enables Ulman to transform them into active collaborators, emphasising the impact of collective creativity and the power of shared experiences in shaping artistic expression.

3.2.2 The issue of (in)authenticity

An unexpected aspect of Ulman's work is its superficial basis, since every situation in *Excellences & Perfections* is an imitation (Smith 2017:82). Ulman states that it was her goal throughout the performance to control and destroy her online reputation. The advent of social media is significant as it has revolutionised image-making, enabling a larger number of individuals to engage in self-publishing, contributing to the heightened aestheticisation of mundane experiences. Ulman adeptly employs photography and video to explore the process of assuming multiple fictional identities by strategically disseminating images on social media platforms, extending her reach to a global audience. The physical exhibition of *Excellences & Perfections* opened at the Rhizome Gallery in New York to immediate success. The positive reception was repeated at other international galleries, highlighting the interest in self-representation on social media platforms. This suggests that in digital environments like Instagram, authenticity may be equated to a well-made fake (Salazar 2020:77, 78), distorting the 'real' physical self-image and producing anamorphosis.

Los Angeles, the home of Hollywood and Disney, is a fitting, albeit exaggerated, example of Ulman's view that reality consists entirely of pretences and fabrication. Smith (2017:82) argues that Los Angeles, as a non-site, offers a unique opportunity for individuals to construct and curate their own identities without the constraints of traditional social structures. Ulman's choice to live in Los Angeles reflects her desire to immerse herself in a culture where reality and illusion blur, allowing her to explore the boundaries between authenticity and fabrication. This is consistent with the discourse on authenticity and identity in the digital age, as social media platforms allows individuals to present themselves in ways that may not be possible in person. Ulman's interpretation of the city reflects a well-established literary convention that presents *Los Angeles* as the epitome of a place filled with illusions and reflections. Davis (1990:50) describes the city as the international capital of "counterfeit urbanity". More recently, Los Angeles was portrayed as an imaginary construct in a film titled *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003) by Thomas Andersen (Smith 2017:82). *Excellences & Perfections* enabled Ulman to investigate the perpetuation of pretences and fabrications that are deeply embedded in online interactions, because of her understanding of the significance of social networking in digital culture. It can be seen as a significant contribution to the enduring discourse surrounding authenticity and identity in the digital age.

Ulman's online narrative was largely accepted as factual by many of her followers without the need for more evidence, owing to her aesthetic choices and well-crafted narrative construction (Salazar 2020:78). Ulman's photographs are similar to those of other women with comparable profiles, demonstrating her adeptness in seamlessly blending her online persona with Instagram's ever-changing image culture. Baudrillard argues that art has ceased to exist because reality is saturated with a visual language that has become so entangled with its own image that it is now impossible to separate them (Baudrillard 1983:152). This conflation of reality and image is particularly evident in Ulman's performance, where she blurs the lines between her true self and her online persona. Ulman's work raises important concerns regarding the essence of truth and authenticity in an era dominated by mediated experiences.

3.3 RITUAL IN PERFORMANCE

Rituals are integral to the human experience, deeply rooted in myth and spirituality, as evidenced in every culture. Masks, as artistic representations of these beliefs, are connected to both secular and religious events (Merrill 2004:16). Similarly, performance and ritual have been intertwined since the dawn of human culture. Grimes (1992:21) asserts that the significance of a ritual is not contingent upon its age or widespread practice since it can be invented. Recognising the significance of ritual in daily life is essential for creating effective digital rituals. In the digital age, rituals are crucial for interpreting and navigating daily events. Digital rituals are often invented to mark significant life milestones, such as receiving a new phone or computer, setting up a new social media account, or joining a new community (Samuel 2016). These rituals set expectations and encourage positive digital relationships, as rituals serve to mitigate and reduce online disruptions when things go amiss.

Self-representation through selfies²² is a digital ritual that everyone on social media uses as a strategy to safeguard their online presence. This form of photographic self-portrait implies that sharing and viewing the image and the associated rituals are part of the overall meaning. However, the shared experience is the essence of the self-portrait (Gramigna 2022:114). The practice of self-portraiture and the notion of adopting numerous identities is not novel. Lynn Hershman Leeson has been exploring self-portraiture long before the internet's widespread availability, evidencing its enduring relevance as a means of artistic expression. Hershman Leeson has gained recognition for her pioneering contributions across multiple disciplines, including performance, photography, video, film, interactive art, and digital media, since the 1960's. The artist often constructs surrogate personae to explore technology and body issues, creating reimagined body forms devoid of gender classifications. These include digital immortal entities, cyborgs, and constantly evolving self-images. Her exploration of self-portraiture and multiple identities has paved the way for contemporary artists to explore these concepts in the digital age.

²² Selfie refers to a photograph of oneself taken with a computer or smartphone camera, typically for social profiles online (CED. 1994. Sv "selfie").

Hershman Leeson constructed the fictitious persona *Roberta Breitmore* (1974–1978) (Figure 21) as an alter ego. At the time, this persona was believed to be a real person (Smith 2017:84). Through the creation of a convincingly real persona, she blurs the boundaries between performance and reality. Although *Roberta Breitmore* was perceived as a performance by outside observers, those who experienced her presence in the world were unable to differentiate between the performance and reality (Doran 2015). Hershman Leeson characterised *Roberta Breitmore* as her physical opposite or inverse ‘effigy’ but, in contrast to self-presentation, they shared the same body (Fiske 2015). Hershman Leeson embodied *Roberta Breitmore*, a fictional character, enabling her to explore different facets of her identity through a shared physicality. This differentiates Hershman Leeson’s work from her contemporaries because she did not adopt the persona of someone else or live through the experiences of another individual (Doran 2015). While Hershman Leeson and *Roberta* may have differed in their outward appearances, their interconnectedness reveals the complex correlation between self-perception and external presentation.



Fig 21. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Roberta Construction Chart #1* (1975).

The performance of *Roberta Breitmore* exemplifies the blurry boundaries between real life and acting, the self and digital technology, the artist and the artwork, the material and the immaterial. Via the role of *Roberta Breitmore*, Hershman Leeson simultaneously immersed herself in art and reality, living a dual existence as herself and her alternate persona, *Roberta* (Garrett 2016). *Roberta Breitmore* became so real that she took on a life of her own. *Roberta* participated in real-world activities, including booking a hotel room, acquiring a driving licence, bank account, and credit card, renting an apartment, and advertising for a roommate in a newspaper (Held 2005:xii). Consequently, *Roberta* materialised as an individual with her own routines, preferences, and living arrangements, and in so doing, she assumed the role of an autonomous subject, distinct from those who performed her. Hershman Leeson's creation blurs the lines between reality and fiction, emphasising how art influences perceptions and challenges the comprehension of identity.

Examined through the prismatic lens of the ritual, or more specifically, rites of passage, the performance of *Roberta Breitmore* reveals novel conceptual insights. Rites of passage are a part of daily existence in which everyone actively participates. Pickering (1974:72) claims that rites of passage frequently emphasise the importance of what happens to the character and other participants, following a similar pattern of separation, transformation, and reintegration. Pickering (1974:72) contends that rites of passage are fundamentally rituals of change, in which participants transition into new positions in society. Rites of passage define social reality since they frequently involve personal crises, particularly times of birth, death, or divorce. Hershman Leeson was undergoing a divorce during the *Roberta* period and had to support her child (Tromble 2005:53). Hershman Leeson gained a better understanding of the difficulties encountered by *Roberta* by adopting her identity and engaging in her daily routines, personally experiencing the rites of passage. This immersive experience allowed her to gain a deeper empathy and connection with the character, aiding her in finding resolution for her own personal struggles.

3.3.1 Introducing doppelgängers

Hershman Leeson used *Roberta Breitmore* to reflect on women's perpetual struggle with partial identities dispersed across multiple roles. This division of

identity intensified when she introduced three additional Robertas as doppelgängers²³ (Figure 22). Performers and organisers of rituals are usually compensated, as was the case with the *Roberta* doppelgängers.



Fig 22. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Roberta multiples* (1977).

Stiles (2001:13) asserts that when Hershman Leeson cast these actresses as Roberta, she simultaneously ceded and reclaimed creative control of her artwork. Rituals strengthen belief through repetition. The more frequently they are performed, the more the performer dramatises the intricacies of the character (Vallee 2022:917). Three actresses were hired as doppelgängers, starting with Kristine Stiles as *Roberta Breitmore*. Through their embodiments, the actresses

²³ A doppelgänger is the identical, ghostly double of a living individual, even down to the manner in which they walk, behave, communicate, and dress (CED. 1994. Sv "doppelganger"). The doppelgänger is a representation of the ego that may take on different forms, such as shadow, reflection, portrait, duplicate, or identical second self (Rank 1971:21).

brought forth distinct aspects of Roberta's character, underscoring the complexity and depth of her identity.

It is important to remember that the mask does not need to be physically donned, as its comprehension transcends the visual perspective and its meaning expands to encompass both the material and the immaterial (Belting 2017:38). This is evident in the role Hershman Leeson plays as herself and her alter ego, *Roberta*, and later through different doppelgängers. The doppelgängers wear the same clothes, wigs, and make-up as the original *Roberta*, go on dates as *Roberta*, and reply to people who answered the advertisement (Held 2005:xiii). Each doppelgänger underwent a series of transformations, including two residences and two workplaces. Their actions and communications as *Roberta* were scrupulously recorded and photographed (Tromble 2005:xiii).

3.3.2 The duplicated doppelgänger

The motif of the doppelgänger explores the dual nature of a character, presenting them either as an identical second self or two contrasting selves. Faurholt (2009) differentiates between two modes of doubling: the duplicated doppelgänger (divided self), which is the alter ego as an identical double, and the shadow doppelgänger (split shadow). As an identical double, *Roberta Breitmore* represents the duplicated doppelgänger and the artist's initial gestures towards a divided self. In digital culture, doppelgängers can be expanded to include selfies as online versions of the self, functioning as surrogates that act on behalf of their representatives (Du Preez 2022:109). This blurring of boundaries between the physical and digital realms raises questions about the authenticity and permanence of online identities. Although the selfie may suggest human involvement, its distribution, display, and tracking are actually performed by nonhuman entities. This implies that its digital existence tends to outlast the specific place and time when it was created (Senft and Baym 2015:1589). In this way, the digital presence created through selfies becomes a complex reflection of both the individual and the larger digital network in which they exist.

Roberta became Hershman Leeson's alternative personality, a simulacrum or virtual self. Anyone could visit *Roberta's* room at any time by obtaining the key from the front desk of the Dante Hotel and perusing the cultural artefacts and

objects that defined her reality (Parker 2014). These experiments in artificial identity were ground-breaking since they came before online profiles, social network user accounts, virtual selves, and avatars. There is a similarity between the digital and physical worlds in that they both develop and promote fractured identities. Ward (2022:122) asserts that a person may feel dispersed in cyberspace due to having several (constantly evolving) online personae, but their IP addresses will always remain a means of identification in cyberspace. Ward (2022:135) points out that, whether we accept it or not, a whole but incomplete version of each of us exists in online environments. Representations and images in Hershman Leeson's work increasingly resemble reality, comparable to the push towards immediacy in videogames and virtual reality. These visuals are designed to be lifelike simulations, imitating reality so convincingly that people forget that they are representations, as with the performance of *Roberta Breitmore*.

3.3.3 The shadow doppelgänger

It is believed that the shadow doppelgänger is summoned online by mining data about the self, knowingly or unknowingly accumulated, to construct what is referred to as the 'data' doppelgänger (Du Preez 2022:108). This relates to the residual personal digital data remaining after the performances of *Roberta Breitmore*. Personal digital data encompasses images created and shared on online social platforms, privately stored in online albums or websites, and digital footprints left behind by using digital devices, mobile phones, applications, or online activities (Lupton, Clark and Southerton 2022:2). Performance art is inherently transient, which is problematised by a society that is obsessed with materialism and success.

Hershman Leeson carefully documented the performances in sketches, surveillance photos, and other artefacts, including a driver's licence, cheques, letters, and credit cards (www.lynnhershman.com). The existence of performance art is inherently reliant on its accompanying evidence, as the inability to recreate a performance in the absence of proper documentation renders it impossible to verify the occurrence of the performance. *Roberta Breitmore's* adventures were chronicled in a graphic novel in collaboration with Zap Comix artist Spain Rodriguez (www.lynnhershman.com). Rodriguez based his illustrations on the

meticulously reconstructed collages, photographic documentation, and surveillance photographs documented by Hershman Leeson (www.lynnhershman.com). Documenting a performance adds a layer of complexity and depth to the work, allowing viewers to visualise what they have not seen. Although the original performance cannot be recreated, it provides a physical link to the past performance, which can be examined, assessed, reinterpreted, re-imagined, recalled, and re-performed (Manzella and Watkins 2011:31). Thus, the performance lives on through its records.

3.3.4 The exorcism ritual of Roberta Breitmore

Roberta Breitmore's performance concluded in 1978 in an exorcism ritual performed at Lucrezia Borgia's tomb, at the *Palazzo dei Diamanti*, the Museum of Modern Art in Ferrara, Italy (www.lynnhershman.com). The exorcism ritual was initiated when one of the *Roberta* doppelgängers, Kristine Stiles, entered the museum in Ferrara. According to Tromble (2005:31), she used *Roberta's* movements and body language to perform a nuanced emotional dance to the rhythm of pre-recorded synthetic tones created from the sounds of her walk. Vallee (2022:904) claims that in order for a performance to be meaningful, the performer's body must be positioned between tangible items and virtual entities because performances frequently combine ritual and entertainment. For this reason, Hershman Leeson partitioned the exhibition space by positioning two stands on opposing sides of the archway, each holding two glass vases, one with real and one with artificial flowers. As a result, a dichotomy emerged between reality and artifice, wherein each entity mirrored the other (Tromble 2005:53). The doppelgänger took the vase with artificial flowers and carried it to a photograph of *Roberta*. While writhing as if under the influence of an evil spirit, she ignited the photograph (Tromble 2005:31). The room gradually became enveloped by a thick cloud of grey smoke emanating from the smouldering picture, flooding the air with intense, overwhelming colour. *Roberta's* doppelgänger extended her prosthetic body (Figure 23) next to a case containing her life's relics and resembling a coffin, where she lay in state for 24 hours (Tromble 2005:31). After retrieving the ashes of *Roberta's* past, they were placed in vases, turning them into a funeral urn. As the original *Roberta*, Hershman Leeson abandoned the role towards the end of the performance, allowing the three doppelgängers to continue until the exorcism ritual ended the character(s) of *Roberta Breitmore*.

Rites of passage are characterised by the distinct phases of disparity, transformation, and reconnection (Pickering 1974:72). Hershman Leeson separates from her old identity by creating *Roberta Breitmore*, transforming *Roberta* into multiple doppelgängers, and in the final stage, sacrificing *Roberta* and acquiring a new identity that is symbolically incorporated into a new community.



Fig 23. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Roberta Multiple in Exorcism Ritual* (1978).

Tromble (2005:31) asserts that *Roberta Breitmore* was a live performance and a socio-psychological portrait prior to the ritual, but she had to reappear since the artist believed that *Roberta* was like the mythical phoenix. This alludes to sacrifice, an element associated with masking. In the context of this performance, it is imperative to recognise the significance of individual sacrifice in order to acknowledge the simultaneous existence of several identities. Subsequently, *Roberta Breitmore* was rebranded as *Roberta Ware* (2007) in an online exhibition held on the virtual platform *Second Life* (2007) (www.lynnhershman.com). Hershman Leeson believes that *Roberta Breitmore's* realism demonstrates her as a work of fiction that grew into reality.

The performance of *Roberta Breitmore* highlights the challenges faced by women in modern society and the dynamic relationship between artists and their creative

output. Hershman Leeson concealed her own identity by assuming the identity of *Roberta Breitmore*, challenging identity constructs and blurring the lines between art and life. This allowed Hershman Leeson to deal with her own crisis, although the character simultaneously liberated and incarcerated her creator. Hershman Leeson created a replica of herself in *Roberta Breitmore*, who seized her life and had to be terminated through a symbolic act of exorcism in order for the artist to resume her own life (Tromble 2005:51). Roberta Breitmore serves as a thought-provoking example of the transformative potential of technological advancements in shaping representation, expanding the limits of creative practice through methods that preceded the digital era. The effects of these factors remain residual and impact the understanding of new media today. The following section examines how the idea of masks has changed in the digital age, where media arbitrates every aspect of human experience.

3.4 THE MASK AS MULTIFACETED MEDIA ENTITY

In digital culture, masks can be perceived as media entities, characterised by their mediated nature and their role in mediating various interpretations and values. These interpretations emerge from an intricate network of interrelated factors, including the transmission of messages and symbols. Masks serve the dual purpose of concealing physical features and communicating cultural, social, and personal emotions. This multi-dimensional aspect of masks contributes to their complex axiology, encompassing both tangible and intangible dimensions. Examining the intricate layers of meaning embedded within masks facilitates a deeper understanding of their significance as media entities. Since human existence is reliant on informational processes, Hayles (1999:4) asserts that being a posthuman represents a form of media existence. This emphasises the significance of a media existence, suggesting that being posthuman involves a profound engagement with technological progress and its impact on our lives. In this context, masks are a powerful form of media transcending traditional definitions, transforming not only information but also shaping perceptions of reality.

Exploring the relationship between masks and media further reveals the ways in which they contribute to the posthuman experience and understanding of the world. Digital technology has influenced language evolution through computer-

mediated communication that relies on computer code for language construction (Hayles 2010:1). Online content is subsequently displayed as signs and visual representations, not only binary code (Xu *et al* 2022:359). Moreover, all online information and content, including self-representations, are known as media entities.²⁴ The mask's introduction through social media further redefines it as a multifaceted media entity, one that absorbs many assumptions while creating novel meanings in varied situations.

Masks play a crucial role in digital communication, facilitating dialogue and interaction. They both mediate and function as mediators, influencing all parties involved (Leone 2021:143). Digital platforms such as websites and social media enable interactive communication, characterised by immediacy and a lack of physical boundaries. This reflects the illusion of a changeable, fluid, and infinite identity in digital communication, impacting all parties. Social media often masks the true identities of both the sender and receiver. Communication focuses on maintaining or updating the relevant roles, obscuring the true identity (Magalhães and Martins 2023:245).

The concept of the mask as a media entity is investigated through the creative endeavours of intermedial artist Matthew Mohr, who specialises in interactive technology. Mohr gained recognition for his artwork entitled *As we are* (2017) (Figure 24), an immense interactive sculpture located in Columbus, Ohio. The three-dimensional, head-shaped structure has been featured in various international publications. To comprehend the magnitude of the sculpture, which is four metres in height, a detailed description of its features is provided. The installation comprises a total of 3,000 LED display screens, along with an array of 850,000 ultra-bright lights and integrated cameras (matthew-mohr-studios.squarespace.com).

²⁴ Media entities are items of content data, including images, audio files, online videos and movies, pdf documents, text, and items such as Instagram or X accounts, which may not technically be considered media (www.drupalize.me).



Fig 24. Matthew Mohr, *As we are* (2017).

A photo booth situated behind the sculpture encloses 32 digital cameras able to capture a head from any angle (Figure 25). Individuals may enter and capture photographs until they obtain one that meets their satisfaction. In approximately three minutes, the system analyses the 3D doppelgänger and displays it on the installation (Xu *et al* 2022:360). Utilising imaging technology, a software programme rotates through a database of 3D photographs captured by site visitors, which are stored indefinitely in the Cloud (www.ccad.edu).

The relationship between masks and the face emphasises the function of mediation in self-representation, where digital technology and online platforms act as intermediaries between individuals and their self-representations. *As We Are* explores the connection between self and self-representation, focusing on the face as the foundation of self-representation. Masks function as both representations of the face and symbols of it, highlighting their dual nature and implying their significance in communication and cultural expression. As observed by Xu *et al* (2022:356), this implies that masks function as symbols of the face while simultaneously existing as pictures of the face.



Fig 25. Matthew Mohr, *As we are* (2017).

The media mask, a new form of identity or 'code', replaces the face as the locus of corporeal information. Instead, it serves as an extension, mirror, critic, object or anamorphosis of self-reflection, and an expression of collective identity in the digital age (Xu *et al* 2022:357). In digital culture, human beings become unified individuals, encompassing both real and virtual aspects (Herbrechter 2013:94). The media mask blurs the boundaries between reality and virtuality, shaping how individuals present themselves and interact with others in digital culture. *As we are* contemplates how image-based media masks contribute to the formation of an individual's ideal self-image by reflecting their personal style and visual preferences. Ideal image masks enable individuals to project a self-approved, favourable impression of themselves to others in digital culture, facilitating the construction of their idealised selves. This is evident as the most common trend in social media and digital culture since every online account requires a picture of the user's face as the primary means of identification (Xu *et al* 2022:360). However, profile pictures are not always true pictures of the user's face but may be depictions of fictional characters, animals, or even abstract designs. These ideal image masks allow individuals to reveal or conceal their true selves behind media masks (Xu *et al* 2022:360). The media

industry thrives on faces that originated as masks, particularly those that have been constructed or assembled (Belting 2017:176).



Fig 26. Matthew Mohr, *As we are* (2017).

During the planning phase of *As we are*, the ideal head model was determined by analysing over 5,000 3D features that match the image data of most human faces (Xu *et al* 2022:360) (Figure 26). The magnified image on display prompts participants to reflect on both their outward appearance and their physical superiority over their surroundings. Employing a statistical median and applying data correction for facial proportion, the device finally displays an ideal visage (Figure 27). The artwork reveals that media masks not only contribute to the creation of idealised images of faces but also promote equality through imaging technology. This emphasises the problematic relationship between face, identity, and mask. Masks act as liminal mediators, allowing them to be public and private, near and distant. Tateo (2021:135) proposes that masking can unite or divide people since it is part of the individual and the social environment. Masking can

amplify the discernibility of political sensitivities under specific circumstances, but it can also uncover and rekindle societal divisions (Theophanidis 2020:33).

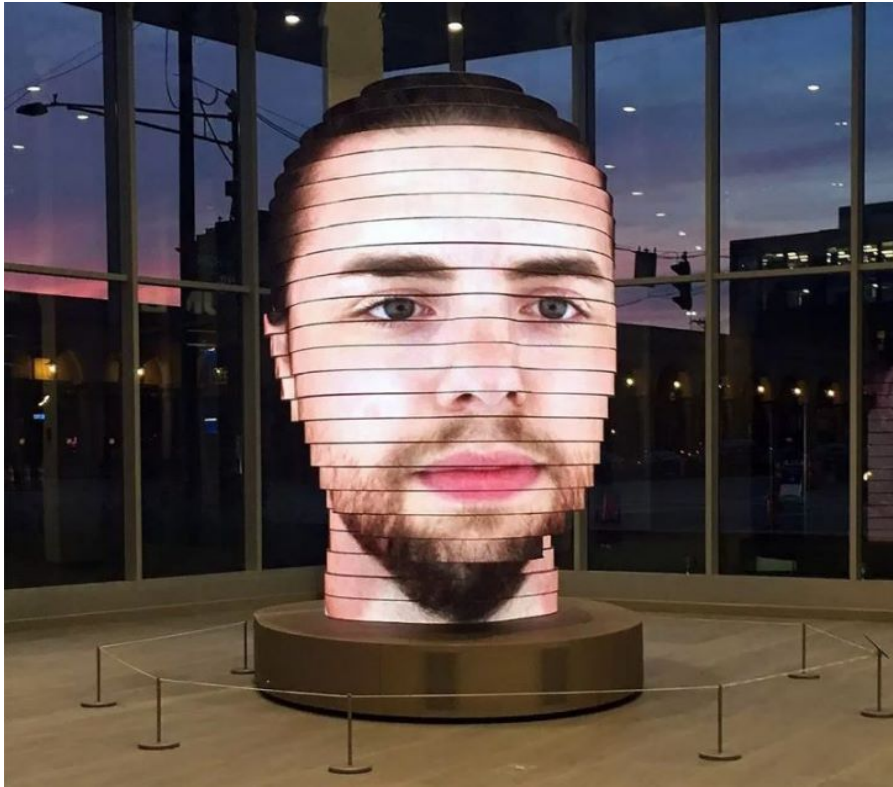


Fig 27. Matthew Mohr, *As we are* (2017).

As we are illustrates how the natural face is replaced by the media mask, a visage that is practised as a mask in front of the camera and then broadcast to the screen. The result is an artificial face, no longer connected to a body, denoting the rejection of genuine resemblance (Belting 2017:175). The media mask blurs the boundaries between the physical body and digital technology, creating a coordinated presence of image, individual, and awareness. This blurred relationship is attributed to technology acting as an extension of the body, reshaping experiences, and human interaction (Xu *et al* 2022:360). According to Hayles (1999:3), living entities are fundamentally analogous to machines or technological devices, while the human body is merely a rudimentary prosthesis that can be replaced by simulation technologies and electronic devices. This

perspective challenges the widespread belief that the human body is a separate, autonomous entity and downplays its significance by arguing that machines and computer software can take its place. It suggests that advancements in simulation technologies and electronic devices may blur the lines between humans and machines, posing questions about embodiment and identity and potentially enabling a disembodied existence. Xu *et al* (2022:356) argue that the communicative and representational capacity of a mask is not impacted by disembodiment, regardless of its disconnection from the physical body. The media masks in *As we are* metaphorically represent disembodied individuals, remotely resurrected via digital technology, subsequently converted to static, archival images stored in a database or the Cloud.

In closing: The notion of masking has been highlighted as a multidimensional and versatile concept with many different applications throughout this chapter. Masking in digital culture focuses on its anamorphic role in self-representation and as multiple identities on social media. It highlights the blurred lines between offline and online personae, gender roles and narrative tropes in online representations of women. The importance of rituals and rites of passage in digital culture evidences the emergence of duplicated and shadow doppelgängers. The mask functions as a media entity, assuming and substituting the face for body information, enlivening the digital presence of the absent body through digital technology, while constructing composite realities in the liminal space between real and artificial. Assessing every aspect of masking in digital culture is an ongoing challenge due to the escalating prevalence and evolution of digital technology.

CHAPTER 4 **Intermediality**

Intermediality is crucial to the analysis and comprehension of digital art, enabling interminable and unhindered creative expression. It is characterised by the interplay between various art media, unconstrained by clearly defined boundaries. The inherent malleability and dynamic nature of intermediality is enhanced by the infinite potential of digital technology.

In this chapter, an alternative perspective on intermediality is proposed, primarily concerned with affective states, emotional responses, and multimodal perceptions. Affect is investigated within the framework of a multisensory experience in an exhibition space, combining multi-channel projection and tangible artefacts to create a rich, immersive sensorial experience. It is argued that atmosphere and mood are essential to an affective connection with art. An investigation of how intermedial artworks facilitate atmospheric encounters evidences the significance of ambiance in the overall affective experience. This is demonstrated by the integration of spatial arrangement, colour, sound, and material objects. An affective multisensory engagement encourages active viewer participation, fostering diverse art interpretations. Renowned intermedial artist Pipilotti Rist's work affirms the significance of affect and emotion for a sensory immersion in intermedial art.

4.1 INTRODUCING THE TERM 'INTERMEDIALITY'

Intermediality refers to multiple deliberations, modes of expression, and interactions at once, as seen in visual and other means of communication (Klein, Paech, and Schröter 2008:412). Artist Dick Higgins (2001:50) first introduced intermedia as a theoretical construct in the avant-garde artistic practices of the Fluxus movement. Intermedia studies, originally referred to as interarts studies, has undergone substantial expansion as a multidisciplinary field within the humanities (Clüver 2007:20). Interarts studies originally explored the relationship between literature and the arts. Intertextuality,²⁵ a concept that preceded intermediality, suggests that texts are brief expressions of general textuality where all signs can be understood in relation to each other. Clüver (2007:20)

²⁵ Intertextuality was first defined by Julia Kristeva and Roudiez (1980:66) and refers to the relationship between texts, wherein one text refers to another by reusing some of its ideas and meaning.

proposes that intertextuality always involves intermediality, as intermediality acknowledges the interconnectedness of different forms of media and how they interact with one another.

Lars Elleström (2010:35) points out the transformative impact of intermediality on art, focusing on the media involved. Since there are similarities and differences among all media formats, the concept of multimodality can be used to distinguish between them (Schröter 2011:2). This study adopts the perspective that media are intrinsically related to other media and that the intermedial realm itself shapes and influences the definitions of media. Intermediality in art practice proposes the potential of artworks to break the rules and blur the boundaries, simultaneously articulating their message through different images and media forms, denoting the interplay and fusion of different interactions, for example, installation, sound and video, performance, or events. It is possible to deduce that all forms of media are multimodal and integrated, given the premise that they are all heterogeneous and blended (Bruhn and Schirmacher 2022:3).

The creation and transmission of meaning across multiple media directs attention to the notion of affect, which refers to the emotional and sensory responses arising from an engagement with an artwork that augments and enhances the overall experience. Affect facilitates a more in-depth comprehension of intermedial works since it encompasses multisensory perception, providing a window into the dynamics of intermediality. These intermedial experiences create a fluid space where the interpretation of meaning is subjective and open to individual interpretation. Intermedial experiences encourage viewers to actively engage with the artwork, stimulating a more immersive, interactive encounter.

Intermediality can be defined as the state of being in-between, liminality, or occupying an interstitial space (Krtilova 2012:37–38). Deleuze and Guattari (2004:28) perceive the in-between as perpetually unstable, where activities gain momentum by prioritising differences above similarities, preferring dynamic complexity to linearity, and favouring rhizomic structures over hierarchical systems. Their theoretical framework facilitates the understanding of intermediality as a transitional space that gives rise to remarkable differentiation. This perspective opposes previously accepted notions of meaning-making. Meaning is neither fixed nor predetermined, but rather emerges as a

consequence of the interactions between diverse media forms. In this view, intermedial encounters become sites of potent creativity and innovation, reconfiguring existing meanings and generating new ones.

Considering the inherent ambiguity of being in-between, I employed a multimodal strategy towards various creative methods in the production of my own creative work. This methodology exposes ways in which atypical art forms and media interact and influence each other, blurring the lines between them. The methodology reveals new ways of thinking about intermedial art practice, while its mutability illustrates its dynamic nature and how meaning is made within these intermedial encounters.

Integral to intermediality is the pivotal juncture where various media intersect, converge, and interact, influencing each other. Exploring the interplay between digital technology, analogue media, and the imagination uncovers how this convergence influences perceptions of reality in a digitally-driven society. The notion of liminality interrogates the state of in-betweenness in the creative journey of artistic transition. I rely on memory and imagination in my work to delve into transitional states between physical and digital realities, blurring their boundaries through the liminality and ambiguity inherent in the creative process.

4.2 INTERMEDIALITY AS A MULTISENSORY EXPERIENCE

Since the onset of digital culture, the concept of affect has experienced a significant resurgence in the visual arts, prompting a critical reevaluation and reengagement (Clough and Halley 2007:1). Although art and affect have been the subject of study and discourse since the dawn of anthropology, this relationship has been reassessed and reestablished as the foundation for various physiological reactions, especially those that are automatic and beyond conscious awareness (Kipnis, Ferme, Costa and Kaur 2021:895). The significance of affect and its central position in art necessitate attention, since an emotional response delineates the fundamental nature of art as a compilation of affective experiences.

Deleuze and Guattari (1994:164) describe the notion of affect as a cohesive collection of sensations that remains dormant until reawakened by an observer or participant, signifying that emotions are immanent within experience and

intricately intertwined with lived reality. Art acts as a mediator of affect, eliciting a range of emotional responses through its ability to tap into shared human emotions (Kipnis *et al* 2021:895). Art has the power to evince communal emotions, establishing shared understandings and connections among individuals. These collective emotional experiences can influence social norms and values, highlighting the potential of art to shape collective perceptions and behaviours.

Massumi (1995:85) expands this viewpoint, arguing that intensity and experience are interconnected, as affect is an unfiltered experience that cannot be easily classified or interpreted through language or symbols. Accordingly, affect operates on a visceral, prelinguistic level, bypassing traditional communication and comprehension. Massumi (1995:85) further distinguishes between affect,²⁶ and emotion,²⁷ as they pertain to distinct realms of signification. For clarification, feeling²⁸ is added to this explication. Despite their distinct meanings, affect and emotion significantly sway the influence of media on emotions, viewpoints, and experiences (Nelson 2016). This study uses both affect and emotion in conjunction and interchangeably.

Affect is a complex concept that involves the interaction between subjective sensations and the physical surroundings. Atmosphere²⁹ has an impact on emotions and perception, acting as the basis that materialises an affective response (Bille, Bjerregaard and Sorensen 2015:18). When several media formats are combined, new perceptual environments are created.³⁰ These environments require personal experience to inspire an emotional response.

²⁶ Affect refers to a subconscious state characterised by its intensity, representing a fleeting moment of uncontrolled and undeveloped potential (Shouse 2005).

²⁷ Emotion can be defined as expressing or displaying a feeling (Shouse 2005).

²⁸ Feeling refers to a sensory experience that is often compared to previous encounters, categorised, and subjectively interpreted (Shouse 2005).

²⁹ Atmosphere refers to the distinct ambiance, sense, or overall impression of a place, situation, or creative work (CED. 1994. Sv "atmosphere"). Heidegger defined atmosphere as "Stimmung" (mood) or 'attunement' (Heidegger 1962:134). However, atmosphere can also be interpreted as a stimulus that elicits physiological reactions in the observer (Schmitz, Müllan and Slaby 2011:257).

³⁰ Perceptual environments can be understood from a variety of viewpoints, as perception always occurs in context. Consequently, it includes the examination of physical features, formal information, and sensory input from viewers (Boothe 2002:55).

Spatial perception in art is inextricably linked to sensory perception, which refers to an immediate cognitive or emotional response elicited by a particular setting (O'Sullivan 2001:130). An analysis of intermedial multisensory experiences, such as Pipilotti Rist's immersive installations, evidences the importance of this consideration.

4.2.1 Atmospheres of affect and emotion

Pipilotti Rist is an accomplished installation artist, renowned for the multisensory aspects of her work. Her installations are sensory encounters that evoke emotive responses, subsuming spectators in atmospheric effects. Rist created a site-specific installation for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, entitled *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* (2008) (Figure 28). The name of the installation alludes to the enormous size of the space, filling the entire 7354 cubic metres of the museum (Lavin 2009:9). Rist's work in this instance serves as an example to examine the concepts of immersion and atmosphere. It involves an installation in a museum, but the gist of the argumentation is equally applicable to a gallery context or other exhibition venues.



Fig 28. Pipilotti Rist, *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)*, 2008.

Staging and presentation are often emphasised as essential components of the artistic endeavour in installation art (Potts 2001:19). The concept of a museum is widely understood, but its definition remains fluid and is subject to ongoing revision. The period between 2007 and 2017 witnessed a notable change in axiology, which prompted the need for a revision in 2022 to align the definition of museum³¹ with its current form and function (Brown and Mairesse 2018:11). The historical context of Rist's installation is significant due to its inception in 2008, which positions the artist as an early innovator in her field. Moreover, the definition offers contextual awareness, which is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the work.

According to Sloterdijk (2011:245), atmospheres have always been a way for people to interact and connect with each other, irrespective of whether they are spontaneous or planned. Initially, the act of creating an atmosphere in a museum may appear absurd since it is an elusive, ethereal, and indeterminate conception (Böhme, 2013:1-2). However, Rist successfully staged an immersive atmosphere within a museum, specifically the MoMA. She deliberately staged and directed the viewer's interaction with the physical surroundings through a meticulous consideration of space, architecture, surfaces, tactile objects, and colour, and how these would affect viewer emotions. Rist transformed the museum's linear white walls into a dynamic, visually captivating environment, blurring the lines between art and utility to engage the viewer on a multisensory level.

Böhme (2013:4) posits that atmosphere plays an important part in connecting objective experiences and environments, emphasising the way in which objects create meaning through their ability to generate an atmosphere. Rist embraces this capacity, creating an ambiance through the manipulation of sensory components that elicit viewer emotions to generate an engrossing encounter. Rist increases the emotive sensory effect of the experience, encouraging visitors to interact closely with the exhibits, transforming the museum into an accessible space. The exhibition enables visitors to interact with it at their own pace, and the change in time perception evokes emotions while also inducing a sense of calmness. The underlying concepts and theories of modern art and aesthetics, which were developed by Enlightenment thinkers, have gradually evolved into

³¹ Museums are fixed, non-profit institutions that conduct research, accumulate, preserve, explain, and exhibit physical and non-physical cultural artefacts for the benefit of society (ICOM 2022: museum definition).

widely accepted conventions in museums of contemporary art (Zwiebel 2015:9). Rist effectively engages viewers in her work through the incorporation of multi-sensory modalities. Consequently, viewers briefly transition from passive observers to active participants within the confines of a museum (Zwiebel 2015:11).

Rist perceives museums as spaces that facilitate social interaction, enjoyment, and entertainment, all of which are affective experiences. The artist identifies the museum as a space for self-expression, encouraging viewers to remove their shoes, perform spontaneous singing and dancing, and relax on a circular couch in the middle of the exhibition space (Figure 29). Couches in museums are uncommon since spectators are not encouraged to slow down. Rist's immersive visual displays and alluring ambiance engender a sense of temporal disorientation, offering a unique museum experience (Zwiebel 2015:23).



Fig 29. Pipilotti Rist, *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)*, 2008.

Normally, theatre and stage design are more suited to investigating affect and emotion. Bille *et al* (2015:37) argue that, as with theatrical staging, the staging of a particular atmosphere in different situations raises the question of how

individuals perceive this environment as being synonymous with reality. Theatrical staging creates ambiguity by separating reality from emotion, compelling audiences to recognise the artificiality of the staged atmosphere while experiencing genuine emotions.

Rist creates a palpable feeling of movement in the space. She combines video, sound, images, and sculptural objects into a coherent whole, immersing the viewer in an experience that evokes strong emotions through sensorial engagement. The circular couch functions as a speaker, playing music, while the video projectors are installed in bubble-shaped enclosures high above the floor (Stigh 2008). Sound adds a further dimension to the immersion, stimulating the auditory sense, which works in tandem with the other senses to create a complete synaesthetic experience. The lines between reality and fiction blur as viewers transcend the confines of the museum, immersing themselves fully in the artwork and perceiving it as if it were reality. A vision of theatre in which the spectator is immersed in the reality of the narrative inspired Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or fusion of the arts (Wagner 2001:4). Viewers use their sight and hearing to transport themselves onto the screen, experiencing every emotion and twist alongside the on-screen characters. The integration of the characters transcends their fictional existence, capturing the collective spirit of the audience and solidifying their status as true screen artists (Wagner 2001:5). Through this engagement with the audience, the characters on screen become vessels for the viewers' own thoughts, desires, and dreams.

Clough and Halley (2007:2-3) suggest that affect extends beyond the body's physiological limits. While it may be difficult to fully comprehend or articulate these inner experiences, they are deeply intertwined with our conscious and lived reality. The temporal nature of an experience makes any present moment a passing one, rendering the past eternal and irreversible, as it is inextricably linked to the present and the future (De Man 1989:148-149). The incident remains beyond the reach of consciousness, leaving only its residual imprint as an echo, representing the affect that is inherent to experience (O'Sullivan 2001:126). As the audience connects with the characters on a personal level, they become co-creators of the artistic experience, elevating both the art and the viewer in the process. The combination of visual and auidial elements in the immersive

sensorial experience is aligned with Rist's objective, the act of 'pouring one's body out'.

4.2.2 The intensity and affect of colour

The intricate relationship between colour and affect reveals innovative ways of perceiving and interacting with the surroundings. Rist's use of colour in *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* effectively adapts Deleuze's colour theories to the digital era. Rist expands on it by harmonising the haptic³² and optic³³ aspects of colour, presenting a spectrum of natural and synthetic hues (Kane 2011:488). Deleuze (2003:118-121) posits that colour is intricately linked to the formation of affect and meaning, including its deliberate modulation and command. Colour stimulates vision's haptic or sensory capacity, converting vision from a passive light sensor to an actively involved participant in its surroundings, affecting visual perception, touch, and sensation (Craig 2010:181). Deleuze emphasises the dynamic, subjective nature of perception, arguing that colours are not fixed entities but are constantly changing and interacting with one another (Deleuze 2003:145). Haptic vision expands the perception of colour by eliciting emotions and desires that transcend traditional understandings of colour as purely visual, adding an extra layer of immersion and a more holistic affective experience.

While *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* primarily explores corporeal elements, it also includes other elements such as large pink tulips, colourful depictions of fields, plants, and bodily fluids (Figure 30). Colourful drapes, blue and fuchsia cushions on the circular couch and the carpeted floor adds warmth and elegance to the overall atmosphere (Kane 2011:491). Rist skilfully juxtaposes the visual and tactile elements, physically engaging viewers while the video projection is screened at a drastically reduced speed. This deliberate contrast between the slow-moving visuals and the tactile components results in a uniquely stimulating experience.

³² Haptic vision confers a tactile capability to the eye, which allows individuals to not only visually perceive objects but also gain a sense of their texture, shape, and even temperature (Deleuze 2003:122,138).

³³ Optic vision provides a framework for organising and comprehending visual information received by the eye, creating a harmonious relationship between what is seen and how it is understood (Kane 2011:481).



Fig 30. Pipilotti Rist, *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)*, 2008.

Rist's bold colour choices encourage a sense of playfulness and energy, immersing the audience in a world of boundless imaginative creativity. The artist combines natural and synthetic colour fields consisting of hot pink and purple hues, resulting in the dispersion of fuchsia bubbles and splatters on all three walls (Figure 31) (Kane 2011:491).



Fig 31. Pipilotti Rist, *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)*, 2008.

Digital technologies that enable a form of perception that transcends the human body are also regarded as forms of affect (Clough and Halley 2007:2-3). Rist employs vivid hues and stylised visuals to provoke joyful sentiments associated with the fragile and transitory nature of human existence (Drake 2012:402). Her use of colour illustrates the interdependence of the digital and physical realms while blurring the boundaries between them.

Rist combines fantasy with reality in a humorous and thought-provoking way by breaking down the physical limitations of the screen. The artist's seamless blending of synthetic and natural colours creates a striking contrast, contesting perceptions of reality. The merging of boundaries between the artificial and the organic promotes a more profound bond with the artwork through the use of colour (Kane 2011:490). Rist rejects traditional ideas of artistic expression, blurring the distinctions between the physical and virtual realms. Her use of vibrant colours enhances the immersive experience, creating a sensory overload that challenges viewers to confront their own dilemmas as technology disconnects them from their physical selves while simultaneously reconnecting them through their senses. This prompts viewers to consider the equilibrium between physical presence and digital immersion, reflecting on the balance between the two. Digital culture has significantly influenced the way meaning is transmitted through images, altering the dynamics between artwork, artist, and audience. This shift towards a more interactive, immersive experience contests conventional notions of space, evidencing that digitisation has irrevocably altered spatial perceptions and understandings in art (Tomšič Amon 2023:14–15). Rist's installation exemplifies the transformative influence of digital technology on our perception and appreciation of art.

Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters) encourages active viewer participation and challenges established norms of museum conduct. It exemplifies the capacity of intermedial art to surpass physical boundaries, transporting viewers to a realm of limitless possibility. This transformation in the art world disputes passive observation, blurring the boundaries between the viewer and the artwork. This multi-sensory engagement of intermedial art encourages a deeper connection with creative expression, engendering a unique viewer experience. Ultimately, art has the power to elicit emotions, inspire critical thinking, and foster a more profound comprehension of the world.

4.3 LIMINALITY AND THE IN-BETWEEN OF INTERMEDIALITY

Intermediality allows access to a psychological realm that is best described as liminal or “in-between realities” (Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006:11). This liminal space refers to an intermediary phase between two states, or former and future selves. The concept of liminality, renowned for its challenges, is essential to the artist’s creative process since art production is inherently unpredictable and transitional. It encompasses the sensation that an artwork may perpetually remain incomplete or that one’s trajectory may never fully manifest itself. The certainty of an artwork’s outcome is not guaranteed. A career as an artist is inherently arduous, and the precarious state of existing in a liminal space at the threshold further compounds this difficulty.

Van Gennep’s *Rites of Passage* (1960) provides insight into how an individual’s existence can be regarded as a series of transitional phases, irrespective of the culture. Van Gennep’s (1960:34) observations outline a range of stages transitioning from one social setting to another, including an ambiguous period of liminality prior to reintegration into a new state of being. His work illustrates the enduring relevance of these timeless concepts in comprehending the social, political, professional, and personal transformations experienced by individuals. In theoretical discourses on liminality, Graburn (2012:21-36) explores tourism as a sacred pilgrimage; Shields (1991:108-109) investigates marginalised places; and Turner (1986:33-44) examines liminal spaces in travel, tourism, and journeys. These scholars consider liminal experiences, wherein individuals temporarily suspend their social roles and identities to embark on a journey. They emphasise the transformative potential of these personal and collective journeys, encouraging self-reflection, explorations of alternative ways of being, and personal growth.

4.3.1 Being in-between or liminal states

Intermediality involves the synthesis of media, allowing for new ways to convey ideas and emotions by crossing borders (Sluijs and Smelik 2009:178). This relationship is precarious and uncertain, demonstrating how intermediality challenges interpretations of art. Visual culture, ubiquitous and yet elusive, is constantly evolving and adapting to modern technologies and societal shifts. The

notion of a single visual medium is non-existent in visual culture, as all forms incorporate a combination of elements (Toikkanen 2013:32).

Plexiglas^{®34} is a material suited to conveying the notion of liminality or in-betweenness, both literally and metaphorically. We are inundated with an abundance of screens, images, and objects on a daily basis, and we interact with diverse materials, recognising that we are also composed of matter (Coole and Frost 2010:2). Barad (2007:3) reminds us that matter and meaning are intertwined and impossible to separate. Matter provides physicality and substance, while meaning gives it purpose and significance. Together, they shape experiences and perceptions, making them inextricable aspects of our existence. Understanding the interconnected relationship between humans and nonhumans and how digital technology and matter interact underscores the significance of materiality in art.

I have experienced the transition from a society without digital technology to a post-digital society, finding myself in a transitional phase of liminality between the past era and the present one. The concept of liminality is pertinent in this scenario due to its association with marginality and its connection to my journey of self-discovery through my artistic identity. After a three-decade tenure in the corporate sector, returning to academia to pursue a degree in visual art was the defining moment. I have become a transitional being, launched into a completely different stage of life where my previous identity and way of life no longer apply, although the future has yet to materialise. This new stage has led to novel connotations through the integration of art, design, and digital technology, as evidenced in my artwork. This symbiotic relationship reflects my tenacity and resilience. I am constantly aware that every person is on a unique journey requiring fortitude and courage.

A multimodal approach allows me to explore uncharted creative territories, fostering growth and adaptability in response to new circumstances. The integration of materials, textures, and spatial arrangements in sculpture enhances comprehension of the dynamics between various media and their interconnected influences, blurring their boundaries (Eilittä and Louvel 2011:viii). This exploration

³⁴ Plexiglas[®] is a registered trade name for a thermoplastic material known as acrylic or polymethyl methacrylate, which becomes mouldable at high temperatures and solidifies upon cooling (Mattern 2020).

not only highlights the dynamic nature of intermediality but also emphasises the importance of considering the physicality and spatiality of artworks in relation to their components. Intermediality facilitates a comprehension of the shifting dynamics within the arts, influencing the perception and interpretation of lived experiences. I rely on memory and employ the physical and conceptual attributes of Plexiglas® to scrutinise my encounter with liminality. Simultaneously, I investigate the influence of these components on my artistic progression and how they manifest themselves in my creative pursuits. My quest concerns self-acceptance, transforming, and refining my identity as an artist.

My work, *Meta-Dreamer* (2023), is a suspended sculptural installation comprising six Plexiglas® sculptures of varying proportions (Figure 32). Stylistically, the sculptures are positioned in a liminal space, transversing representation and abstraction. *Meta-Dreamer* connects digital technology, sculpture, and imagination, creating a symbiotic relationship between its tangible and intangible aspects.



Fig 32. Alicia Hindson, *Meta-Dreamer* (2023).

Meta-Dreamer explores the concept of identity from a posthuman perspective by using digitally altered representations of faces or masks. The mask-like quality of *Meta-Dreamer* suggests that identity is fluid and ever-changing, reflecting the complexity of human identity. This amalgamation of elements references a composite assemblage of elements as described by Hayles (1999:3), resulting in a hybrid entity composed of both information and material. This implies that our connection to technology is dynamic and perpetually evolving, whereby we embrace constant transformation as aligned with my creative progression.

Two methodologies were employed for the creation of *Meta-Dreamer*, which serves as a metaphor for personal transformation. The first involves a formal process of sketching ideas, creating digital designs, and then materialising the sculptures using Plexiglas[®]. The ability to visualise an abstract concept, translate and implement it in a physical form is the essence of a sculptural work. The working process is a tangible example of how creativity develops through a formal approach of repetition. The second strategy is conceptual, referencing memories and exploring the adoption of different personae.³⁵ My creative journey questions identity, resulting in upheaval, surprise, and personal transformation. By exploring my roles as a mother, wife, designer, businesswoman, and artist, I establish a hypothetical connection between the past and present that aids in my understanding of these events. The amalgamation of past and present memories creates a discourse between materiality, structure, and abstract concepts, establishing a link between my identity and time and dimensions of space.

The abstract design of *Meta-Dreamer* references both a mask and a skull and consists of three layers. These allude to aspects of my identity, whereby I adapt my persona to perform distinct roles. The mask-like quality of *Meta-Dreamer* allows me to embody and conceal these various selves, blurring the lines between reality and imagination. The skull motif suggests the transience of life and mortality, adding an introspective layer to the artwork. The *Meta-Dreamer* sculptures comprise three layers: a background, foreground, and top layer, engendering a sense of depth and complexity. Interstices between layers create a sense of ambiguity, suggesting that transitions between times past, present, or

³⁵ Persona is a term originating from Latin and specifically references the masks that Etruscan mimes donned (Britannica 2008. Sv “persona”). According to Jung (2003:7), persona is an archetype that enables people to interact with their environment by mirroring the social roles they play.

future are not distinct, yet they still contribute to the cohesive sense of self. The design of the *Meta-Dreamer* sculptures is repeated throughout, with the only variable provided by colour. This interplay enhances the sense of liminality and strangeness, alluding to transitions and boundaries. A multi-dimensional approach, repetition, and colour variables allow for diverse interpretations of a curious visual experience.

During times of transition, the connection between thought and creativity is heightened through the fusion of experience and interaction with technology. Digital technology, a nonhuman entity, becomes an extension of my body, entangled with lived experience. The sculptures traverse states of existence, obscuring the posthuman self from its nonhuman counterpart. This perception highlights the recognition that technology is not just a tool but a complex and dynamic force that shapes our understanding of the world and ourselves.

Using digital technology in the creation of my sculptures provides insight into the interconnected narratives associated with the various identities I assume through my creative journey. *Meta-Dreamer* merge digital technology and sculpture, blurring the lines between the physical and digital realms. By intertwining technology with an exploration of the self, hybrid narratives emerge, reflecting the complex, transitional nature of human existence. These hybrid narratives reject conventional conceptions of identity, instead acknowledging the existence of increasingly intertwined multiple selves. Human beings and digital technology coexist in an in-between space that symbolises hybridity or interdependence. The *Meta-Dreamer* sculptures depict the dynamic connection between individuals and digital technology, blurring the lines between natural and synthetic entities. The sculptures offer a distinct viewpoint on the intricacies of identity, demonstrating the importance of shared material entanglements and the human-technology relationship. Digital technology challenges the humanist system of categorisation and exclusion, especially in a future where humans are no longer the dominant species, entangled with various organisms and nonhuman entities. Digital technology is transforming into an extension of the self, challenging outdated liberal humanist ideas and introducing a more radical state beyond the current form of the human being (Miller 2012:164).

My creative journey has been characterised by constant experimentation, discovery, and transformation. I use a posthumanist perspective to challenge the traditional view of matter as inert and lifeless, highlighting its vibrancy and agency. This disrupts the prevailing belief that agents are exclusively human beings, establishing material agency that emphasises the interdependence of human and nonhuman entities. From this perspective, matter is reinterpreted as a fluid substance that constantly changes and adapts to various conditions. I concur with Coole and Frost (2010:10), who propose that all entities, including matter, impact our experiences. The ability of matter to transition between states, which suggests an intermediate state, emphasises its dynamic nature. I readily accept and welcome change, adjust to new forms of artistic expression, and challenge artistic boundaries to produce my artwork. I use Plexiglas[®], a transparent and durable material, to convey the ambiguity of a liminal state. Its inherent transparency blurs the lines between what is visible and beyond, creating a visual language that challenges conventional notions of materiality. Plexiglas[®] can simultaneously reveal and obscure objects or spaces, creating a sense of uncertainty and transition, capturing the essence of being in-between structures of place and identity.

4.3.2 Navigating the in-between

My creative journey has been marked by various stages of liminality, including role ambiguity, shifts in society, uncertainty, and my transition towards becoming a full-time artist. I have experienced role ambiguity as a result of the concurrent expectations of my position in the business sector and the necessity to pursue my studies while engaging in part-time artistic endeavours. Consequently, I have not yet fully assimilated the idea of being a professional artist into my self-concept. I find myself in a liminal period of transformation and growth as I navigate the unknown, embracing opportunities amidst social changes and economic uncertainty. I am in-between worlds. The concluding stage entails wholeheartedly accepting my artistic identity and assuming a different social role, ignited after my integration into a new artistic community. I navigate across borders, oscillating between states, until I reach a sense of equilibrium. I have effectively balanced the past with the present to advance my creative journey. While the nature of this integration has fluctuated over time, it is conceivable that

the state of uncertainty may persist indefinitely due to the nature of the art profession.

Procession, Progression (2023) (Figure 33) is a video projection that visually represents the phases in my transformative journey. It explores the connection between traditional media and technological advancements such as the smart phone, merging photography and telephony. The video is created by assembling fragments obtained from the *Meta-Dreamer* sculptures, captured with a cell phone camera, and then reinterpreted digitally. This symbolises the act of repurposing and integrating the past into the present. Smart phones not only capture images and facilitate communication but also record and monitor time-related information such as the user's location. I use a smart phone as a tool to capture the fleeting nature of time in my creative journey.



Fig 33. Alicia Hindson, *Procession, Progression* (2023).

Procession, Progression (2023) is depicted in a sequential manner, resembling a chronological progression. The images may be interpreted either as a cohesive whole or as individual components. Depicted as silhouette figures, the fragments juxtapose positive and negative space, light and darkness, alluding to a fading past. They reference the relationship between analogue media and digital technology. The projection symbolises my challenges and lessons learned,

evoking a sense of transition from a prior world order to the present. *Procession*, *Progression* is presented in a continuous loop, amplifying the pervasiveness of technology. The fragments occupy a non-place, symbolising the liminality of being in-between and demonstrating the intangible, elusive moments in time. Techniques such as image repetition and segment overlap emphasise the interconnectedness of past, present, and future experiences. Neither art nor artefacts, the fragments represent relics of the past, serving as reminders of my origins and the person I am evolving into. I regard these visual allusions as slivers of time resurfacing in my work as memories or past influences.

4.3.3 Traces of liminality

The perception of light through vision facilitates the understanding of spatial relationships and relates to the concept of aura. Aura suggests that even when objects are physically close, their aura creates a sense of separation and distinctiveness. Benjamin (1973:222, 224) argues that this phenomenon allows distance to manifest in a distinct and captivating manner, creating a sense of otherworldliness. Aura is often described as an emission of energy from a person or object that surrounds and emanates from them, denoting a mystical quality that is inherent in all entities (Giblett 2019:69).

LED lights with motion sensors illuminate the *Meta-Dreamer* sculptures, creating an enfolding aura. The sculptures act autonomously with agency as they can 'feel' or 'sense' the presence of humans, thereby humanising technology. The combination of the LED lights and motion sensors captivates and engages viewers on a sensory level. The interaction between the LED lights and the ambient gallery lighting casts intricate patterns and shadows on the surrounding surfaces. The juxtaposition of opacity and transparency adds an element of mystery, prompting reflection on the boundaries between reality and imagination. The LED lights add a modern, technological element to the traditional medium of sculpture, blurring the boundaries between art forms, which further emphasises liminality. The sculptures, despite not being designed for dual-sided viewing, evoke a re-evaluation of space and in-betweenness as their radiant aura encourages observers to explore them.

The aura highlights our ability to tap into the subconscious and confront suppressed emotions and memories (Giblett 2019:69). The aura highlights our ability to tap into the subconscious and confront suppressed emotions and memories (Giblett 2019:69). In this context, my creative journey has become a valuable tool for self-reflection and personal growth, allowing me to gain a deeper understanding of myself, and uncover hidden aspects of my identity. Although memories recede over time, they persist as vestigial, sometimes repressed elements that unexpectedly surface in the form of sculptures or visual depictions. *Vestige* (2023) (Figure 34) and *Remnant* (2023) (Figure 35) are abstracted, evolved images that function as traces of memories, existing in a faint, diminished state.



Fig 34. Alicia Hindson, *Vestige* (2023).



Fig 35. Alicia Hindson, *Remnant* (2023).

Liminality explores the transitional space where boundaries blur and uncertainty prevail. Digital culture is rooted in the concepts of impermanence and erasure, providing the option to delete and restart since it renders every image or document temporary. Unintentional erasure, which is equivalent to amnesia, is a constant threat (Nelson 2008:39). The hazard of deletion demonstrates both the transient nature of media evolution and its adaptability. In contrast to digital technology, human beings are unable to delete and start anew. This contrast between the fleeting nature of digital technology and the permanence of human existence reminds us to consider the balance between perpetual technological progress and the timeless human journey.

In closing: This chapter reveals the importance of atmosphere in intermedial artworks, specifically in museum settings, and the interplay between affective elements such as colour, sound, and tactile components. Interactive art creates a multisensory experience, engaging viewers as active participants, thereby establishing a unique experience. By breaking the bounds of passive

observation, immersive art installations blur the line between creator and audience, challenging conventional conceptions of art and encouraging new creative expressions. Connecting liminality to the creative journey illuminates transitional states inherent in the art-making process and the connection between liminality and materiality. The use of elements on the threshold between different states and forms refers to liminality, cultivating a perception of in-betweenness and ambiguity. Digital technology has transformed the aura, introducing agency and autonomy and fostering new forms of awareness and modes of being in the digital era.

CHAPTER 5 **Conclusion**

In the preceding chapters, posthumanist beliefs concerning posthuman identity, masking in digital culture, and the concepts of intermediality and liminality were analysed and interpreted, both theoretically and conceptually. The hypothesis of this study was validated by creative research, which demonstrates how the emergence and application of digital technology and its associative cultures have significantly impacted intermedial art, blurring boundaries and expanding creative possibilities. This is exemplified by the selected artists' innovative use of digital technology to create new art forms and expand the parameters of established art praxis.

5.1 CORE FINDINGS

The investigation of posthuman identity argued that the boundaries between the physical and digital realms are dissolving within digital culture, challenging traditional notions of human identity. The study demonstrated that the posthuman self is intricately entangled with digital technology, other nonhuman entities and various organisms. Additionally, it evidences the importance of surpassing traditional conceptions of identity and adopting a broader, more flexible understanding of the self, which facilitates a more nuanced comprehension of the interdependence of living entities with technology. The concept of relationality demonstrates the intricate interconnectedness and reciprocal influence of such entangled entities, revealing the intra-action between the posthuman and nonhuman components of the entangled self.

The study reveals how the posthuman self becomes malleable through interaction with nonhuman and technological entities, transforming it into a cyborg hybrid. It shows that the becoming self, which combines human and machine elements, is integrating with AI, which not only enhances individual capabilities but also contests outdated conceptions of identity and redefines the concept of a human being in digital culture. These findings demonstrate the significance of examining the effects of digital technology on artistic practice in the digital era of human-machine interaction, which provides limitless possibilities for creative expression.

The study finds that the emergence of digital technology had a transformative effect on the concept of masking, distorting its traditional understanding. Aspects such as digital self-representation, doppelgängerism and multifaceted forms of masking featured seminally in the investigative process, demonstrated as extending beyond physical form into digital selves and social media profiles. Such investigation discloses the prevalence of masking in digital and visual culture, where online and offline identities become blurred and non-normatively hybridised. Digital culture is demonstrated as diverse and constantly evolving.

Masking in digital culture is argued as related to anamorphism in art due to their shared characteristic of concealment through altered perspective, whether through physical masking, simulation or manipulation of perspective. The anamorphic impact of masking on social interactions and communication dynamics is argued, as enabling self-expression and discovery but raising cautionary ethical concerns about deception and trust in digital spaces.

The investigation of masking and ritual in performance art argued the importance of rituals and rites of passage in digital culture. The research findings uncover how selfies can function as copies or duplicated doppelgängers and how data mining generates shadow doppelgängers. This reveals how masks have evolved beyond their established role. They are capable of gathering information and communicating in digital spaces, encouraging individuals using digital devices or participating in online activities to unknowingly contribute to data generation and transmission. The research findings expose the transformative power of ritual in both the physical and digital realms and demonstrates how performance documentation serves as a symbolic doppelgänger, preserving its essence through archives and recordings for wider dissemination and appreciation.

The study argues furthermore that the mask as a multifaceted media entity functions as a communication tool and mediated entity in digital culture. It is demonstrated how masking redefines the ideal image and replaces the face as information on the body. The importance of information over material form is evidenced since the digital self replaces the material self. Again this supports the study's hypothesis on anamorphic masking in digital culture, challenging traditional stereotypes of the mask, redefining its role, and reshaping the understanding of identity in the digital era.

The examination of intermediality discloses the interaction of media and how artists push creative boundaries in the digital era, embracing the transformative and anamorphic potential of intermediality to disrupt established aesthetic norms. It is revealed how interactive art subverts the notion of art as a passive act of observation by involving viewers as active participants. Using the notion of affect, the study demonstrates how combining different objects and media forms into a coherent whole can evoke emotions, engrossing the viewer in a multisensory experience. This finding highlights the transformative potential of intermediality in redefining the relationship between artist and audience, resulting in a more immersive and engaging encounter with the artwork.

The study aimed to establish a correlation between liminality and the creative journey, emphasising the intermediary stages in the creative process and the connection between liminality and materiality. The findings reveal such importance of materiality in art, emphasising the interconnected relationship between humans and nonhumans, and how digital technology and matter interact. This heightened emphasis on the material context stresses its importance in relation to cultural dynamics, while intermedial artworks stylistically occupy an intermediate or liminal space between representation and abstraction.

The way in which technological advancements are used to blur boundaries and expand the edges of art is demonstrated through the artworks investigated in this study. In relation to posthuman identity, Sommerer and Mignonneau expanded the limits of traditional art by giving nonhuman beings the ability to act through the use of sensors and computer algorithms in their installation. The work also demonstrates how the idea of posthuman species creates novel artistic links between humans and nonhumans. Additionally, this posthuman approach questions the idea of a solitary artistic genius and emphasises the collaborative aspect of art production in the digital age, in which humans and machines collaborate to create innovative works of art.

Similarly, Barney's digital techniques in his multimedia projects become tools for creative transformation, expanding the boundaries of the embodied self by integrating technology, consequently blurring the line separating humans and machines. His work emphasises the interdependence of individuals and digital

technology, redefining identity and contesting the notion that humans are separate from their technological creations.

Versteeg challenges traditional views of what constitutes art and his work illustrate the posthuman, transformative impact of digital technology on intermedial art praxis. Versteeg's presentation of the self as a cyborg dispersed among networks, links the concept of the becoming self to digital technology, which raises concerns over the originality and proprietorship of artwork in the digital era. The artist introduces a novel posthuman configuration of becoming with intelligent machines, in which humans and machines collaborate and co-create through distinctive visual compositions that anamorphically distort and blur the distinction between humans and digital technology. This profoundly redefines the concept of creation and promotes a reevaluation of artistic agency in the digital era.

The research findings elucidate the significance of masking in the realm of digital culture and its anamorphic effect in self-representation on social media. Ulman's anamorphic approach to her work obscures the distinctions between the artist and the artwork, herself and the figure she portrays, and between the actual and fictional elements. She critiques social media portrayals of young women using anamorphic means, utilising Instagram as a platform to challenge traditional methods of creating and sharing artwork. This transformation in artistic practices has created opportunities for collaboration and experimentation, redefining the very definition of art.

Hershman Leeson's performance of Roberta Breitmore illustrates the blurry boundaries between real life and acting, self and others, artist and artwork, material and immaterial, impacting art praxis and expanding the boundaries of art. This experiment in artificial identity is ground-breaking since it predates online profiles, social networks, virtual selves, and avatars, expanding the limits of creative practice by using methods that predate the digital era.

Mohr's art demonstrates how digital technology has transformed traditional art forms and expanded creative expression, pushing the boundaries of conventional media and introducing new avenues for artistic practice. The artist employs imaging technology, LED display screens, and cameras to transform a human

face into a media mask, challenging the notion of a static self-image and blurring the boundaries between physical and digital realms by removing a natural face from its context. This suggests a move towards superficial traits over authenticity, challenging traditional artistic principles and perspectives in portraiture.

Rist's installation art reveals the importance of staging an immersive atmosphere in multisensory art experiences by combining video, sound, and tactile elements. The artist challenges the traditional notion that art is a passive object for observation, by blurring the lines between creator and audience, fostering an inclusive and accessible experience. Rist's work not only engages the senses but also challenges conventional ideas about art and its limitations, pushing the boundaries of what is possible in the realm of intermedial art.

My work challenges traditional sculpture definitions by blurring the lines between two-dimensional and three-dimensional art forms. By employing digital design approaches with conventional sculpting processes, my artwork merges digital technology, sculpture, and imagination, thereby pushing the boundaries the very essence of art. Aligned with the main aim of the study, my artwork explores how digital technology has transformed intermedial art by challenging conventional norms and blurring the boundaries between new and old media.

The theory and practice supporting this study demonstrate that digital technology enables and enhances a transformation of artistic praxis. As a consequence, it blurs the boundaries and expands the limits of creative expression. This is further evidenced through a critical analysis of specific intermedial artworks. These interactive, performative, or visual artworks illustrate how digital technology impacts intermedial artworks, specifically those where technological progress defies established ideas of authorship, blurring the lines between human and computerised creativity and extending the parameters of creativity.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

Posthumanism and perspectives on posthuman identity politics were extensively researched. The study limited posthuman identity to the concepts of the entangled self, the embodied self, and the becoming self and how these relate to the research questions.

Similarly, although masking in digital culture is a diverse topic, the extent of the research was limited to three distinct aspects of digital masking: the mask as self-representation in digital culture, masking and ritual in performance, and the mask as a multifaceted media entity.

Despite the fact that masks have their origins in Africa, an in-depth investigation of the African mask and mask-making in the traditional setting was not undertaken since it was viewed as distracting from the delineated focus of the study.

In the digital age, the concept of intermediality is fundamental to understanding and analysing art. However, this study limits the focus of intermediality to examine it from a standpoint centred on affective states, emotion, and multimodal perception. Liminality is a fundamental aspect of intermediality, but its analysis has been limited to my creative journey and artistic transition.

5.3 FUTURE RESEARCH

The study identified certain limitations in the scope of the study that could be addressed through further research.

Firstly, it highlighted a concern about overreliance on digital technology and the potential for it to overshadow the artistic process itself, especially in light of advancements in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). Future research could focus on exploring the impact of AI and robotics on art processes and other creative pursuits.

Secondly, the study has not examined the ethical implications of intermedial art, particularly regarding authorship and ownership in the digital domain. It leaves artists and creators navigating uncharted territory concerning their intellectual property rights in the digital domain. Consequently, further research in this field could be valuable.

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