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Widok. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture

title:
Digital Entanglements
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source:
Widok. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture 38 (2024)
URL:
https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2024/38-digital-entanglements/digital-entanglements
doi:
https://doi.org/10.36854/widok/2024.38.2891
publisher:
Widok. Foundation for Visual Culture
affiliation:
SWPS University
University of Warsaw

keywords:

entanglement; digital; VR; technology; agency; contemporary art; immersion

abstract:

Introduction to the thematic issue on digital entanglements. The point of departure is the project by Ben Joseph Andrews and Emma Roberts entitled Turbulence that renders the experience of jamais vu: "the sudden appearance of reality no longer being real."

Krzysztof Pijarski - Visual artist, researcher, educator, curator, and producer. Associate professor at the Faculty of Design / SWPS University, where he is chair of artistic and design research; member of the Visual Narratives Laboratory (which co-founded and co-directed in 2019-2024) at the Film School in Lodz (https://vnLab.org), where he taught in 2009-2025. The vnLab is a media lab focused on the evolution of visual storytelling into such areas as XR, stereoscopic 3D, interactive web-based pieces, or the film essay. A big part of his work at the vnLab was focused on the Interactive Narratives Studio, where he worked on developing webdocs and other narrative and archival interactive pieces, especially in the transmedial space. His interests lie above all in exploring convincing visual forms of thinking by way of visual essays, atlases, analogies. He likes working between fact and fiction, with visual intelligence, distance, and the ability of going beyond the established uses and conventions of photography. Out of his engagement with bound content, he initiated the PubLab Collective around his vision for web publications as an evolution of the printed book. Recipient of a Fulbright Junior Research Grant at Hohns Hopkins University (2009-2010), and grants, among others, from the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, and the Shpilman Institute of Photography. Headed and partcipated in grants from the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education, the National Science Centre, and the National Programme for the Development of Humanities. Authored a monograph on modernism as seen through the the dual prism of the figure of Michael Fried

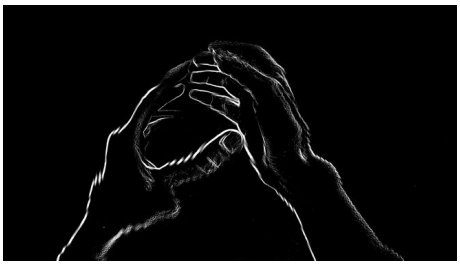
and photography as a technology that changed our understanding of art (Archeologia modernizmu. Michael Fried i nowoczesne doświadczenie sztuki [An Archeology of Modernism. Michael Fried, Photography, and the Modern Experience of Art], 2017), as well as (Post)Modern Fate of Images: Allan Sekula / Thomas Struth (2013). Edited the volumes Ludzie i rzeczy: „Zapis socjologiczny" Zofii Rydet (2022), Object Lessons: Zofia Rydet's „Sociological Record" (2017), and The Archive as Project (2011). A collection of his translations of essays by Allan Sekula was published by the Warsaw University Press in 2010.

Digital Entanglements



Ben Joseph Andrews, Emma Roberts, *Turbulence: Jamais Vu*, 2023. VR experience, 10 min., installation shot. Courtesy of the artists

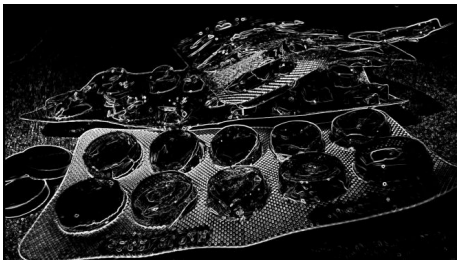
The setup is simple: a desk cluttered with objects like paper trays, a ruler, a plastic caddy with pill blisters, a desk organizer replete with pens, pencils, highlighters, a cup, a notebook, a paper clip holder, various stones, a few books, a picture, a coaster, etc. We are invited to sit at the desk and put on a modified VR headset fitted with an additional camera that allows one to see the environment, but made strange: the image is black and white and inverted. All the objects on the desk appear as stark, white contours against a black background, and so do our own hands. Guiding us through the experience, the author's voice first demands that we look at our hands and feel them, and then explore the space, touch, and look at the nearby objects. Ostensibly, Ben Joseph Andrews and Emma Roberts's *Turbulence* presents the experience of *jamais vu*: "the sudden appearance of reality no longer being real," as Andrews-the-narrator explains.



Ben Joseph Andrews, Emma Roberts, *Turbulence: Jamais Vu*, 2023. VR experience, 10 min. Courtesy of the artists

Jamais vu is the way in which vestibular migraine, a neurological condition that he lives with, manifests, defamiliarizing "even my relationship to myself." He recounts that when an attack starts, he always finds himself looking at his hands: "I know that they're mine, but I'm struck by how different they appear." In the experience, flipping the video feed so that right becomes left and left becomes right reflects this sudden shift in embodiment.

This simple gesture has the effect that finding our way to a pill blister becomes a complicated exercise in motor coordination and spatial cognition. "My body suddenly feels new, foreign, like some kind of avatar," the narrator utters. Everything needs renegotiation, "like you're in two places at once, yet somehow in neither at all," while the distortions continue to develop and bloom. Soon, your relationship to the visible world proves tenuous at best: "the more I try to push through it," he continues, "the more reality stretches at the seams, the more this elasticity feels like it is merging with me , and like I'm bending into it, like it's dissolving me."



Ben Joseph Andrews, Emma Roberts, *Turbulence: Jamais Vu*, 2023. VR experience, 10 min. Courtesy of the artists

The narrator's admonitions to "remember the ground beneath your feet," and that "outside this headset the ground is stable, and solid" suggest that we can read the piece as an attempt at practicing VR in the "empathy machine" paradigm, which may help us "understand" what it means to have vestibular migraine. While the discussion continues on VR's potential to facilitate, or even induce, empathetic responses (and the pitfalls of such a position, and so-intentioned practices)[1], this is not why Andrews and Roberts' experience strikes us as a great introduction into the field of inquiry of *View*'s current issue that we herewith present to you. In a most opportune gesture, the authors close *Turbulence* with an opening:

> for so long I've only associated *jamais vu* with what it takes away, but look at your hands in front of you, your tangible virtual hands. When was the last time you experienced the world in you? Just being here, re-discovering yourself as yourself? Perhaps *jamais vu* is an opening rather than a separating? A crack in our conditioning that reveals the multiplicity lying

beneath the surface of things.

Here, *Turbulence* seems to construct an apt metaphor for some of Karen Barad's claims submitted in her philosophical framework of agential realism, built on Niels Bohr's interpretation of quantum physics. One of his most important postulates was the need to let go "of the belief that the world is populated with individual things with their own independent sets of determinate properties,"[2] a foundational tenet for Western metaphysics, strongly bound up with representationalism, namely the "belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing."[3] If "things" no longer constitute ontologically basic entities, they cannot have "inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings."[4] This entails putting an end to the Cartesian cut between the subject and the object, because "differences are made, not found,"[5] brought into being by intra-actions (not interactions, which presuppose the pre-existence of discrete objects or individuals). As Barad claims, "there are no inherently bounded and propertied things that precede their intra-action with particular apparatuses,"[6] understood not so much as measuring or observational devices as "open-ended practices."[7] What that means is that seeing, knowing, or being is not defined by distance—distinction, discreteness, a setting apart—but by entanglement.

Thinking in these terms about *Turbulence*, we could infer that instead of being an excursion into the experiential world of a single person or a point about the relativity of perception and how our senses can betray us, the work puts forth a claim about the structure of reality itself. As experienced in the "crack in our *conditioning,*" this reality does not seem stable or solid at all. It is not that the headset introduces a distortion into our perception, but that it shows the entangled nature of intra-

action, meaning that distinct agencies (i.e., the subject and the object) do not exist as individual elements, but they emerge, or are performed, through what Barad calls agential cuts in the process of intra-relating:[8]

So, in an important sense there are no anchors here, not in the sense of fixity. No fixed ground or place or even time, space, or matter. Rather, agential cuts are perhaps more akin to touchstones, as in something solid and tangible in their particularity, rather than anything as immobile/immobilizing as an anchor.[9]

We can see the sheer difficulty of experiencing *Turbulence* physiologically as analogous to the difficulty of coming to terms with the consequences of Barad's agential realism—especially with a strong sense of vertigo introduced in the experience's finale. It is quite difficult to accept that there is no ontological bedrock for us to fall back on, only becoming: the incessant performativity of matter in entangled intra-actions.

At the same time, in some contexts it seems to make things a lot easier, as in thinking about the digital sphere. From this perspective, the whole question of being "in two places at once, yet somehow in neither at all" appears as much less problematic. A strange coincidence: Barad's chief work, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, was published in the same year, 2007, that the iPhone premiered, ushering in a new era in human sociality and subjectivity, something we are still trying to wrap our heads around.

Digital dualism, a conviction that the online and offline are "largely distinct,"[10] to the extent of being mutually exclusive, belonged to the most pertinent beliefs regarding the digital sphere in its development phase. This led to considering digital life and relations as something less real, virtual in the sense of "fake," inconsequential. We now know it is anything but. As Nathan Jurgenson reminds us, "one is never entirely connected or disconnected but always deeply both."[11] Trying to think more

about the consequences of this "deeply both," this complementarity of being, lies at the heart of this issue.

Simultaneously, online does not constitute a place to inhabit, but a stream to jack into, not so much directly as via screens. As Stephane Vial pointed out, the fear of screens—whose representationalist structure could be seen as the main source of digital dualism—is "a normal and inevitable phenomenological anxiety owing to the slow acculturation of our perceptual structures,"[12] because technologies serve not only as tools, but above all as structures of perception. We are not distinct from, but entangled with, the technologies we develop.

Understood as the new condition of the image "under capitalist, computational reproduction," the rise of the networked image intervened in said perceptual structures. This closely relates to the topic of entanglement, prompting Andrew Dewdney to postulate the need to "forget photography." For Dewdney, photography "is a ruined territory populated by archaic knowledge practices bounded by a computational network of relations between images, humans and machines,"[13] throwing into relief the need to look at the relationship between data and matter, between discursive practices and material phenomena, including both human and nonhuman forms of agency.

As one of the contributions opening this issue, an essay by Felix Stalder advocates for an aesthetics of immersion that acknowledges planetary-scale agency and employs technology to extend human senses, which allows for a deeper understanding of our entanglement with the world rather than indulging in its simulation in a representationalist (nostalgic, longtermist) vein. The development and deepening of such an understanding of immersion—undoubtedly already at work in many artistic and academic endeavors—can foster renewed connections between humans and their more-than-human

environment.

The **Viewpoint** section, focusing on contemporary art practices, especially those informed by artistic research methodologies, presents two ambitious projects, both of which pose questions about our entanglement with the digital sphere and its consequences. "Object 452" by Letta Shtohryn and Julie-Michèle Morin is a visual essay based on Shtohryn's ????p????ct that investigates disinformation and online personas in the context of extended reality (XR). It centers around a story from the 1930s about a woman who encountered giants in the Hypogeum, a Maltese temple. The story has become an urban legend in Malta and spread through online channels alongside disinformation. However, ?????e???t simply retell this story. Instead, it uses it as a starting point to examine how narratives are manipulated and how these manipulations mirror modern disinformation tactics. The authors achieve it through various means, including AI-generated voices that present altered versions of the narrative and the intentional use of technological imperfections in motion capture technology to symbolize the disconnect between digital personas and their physical counterparts. The project also incorporates live performance elements, further blurring the lines between reality and digital representation and prompting reflection on identity, embodiment, and the nature of truth in the post-digital age.

"All Hardware Sucks, All Software Sucks" by the artist duo Xtreme Girl (Laura Radzewicz and Lena Peplińska) is a rhizomatic essay, departing from Jorge Luis Borges's well-known short story. The essay explores the evolution of digital technology, hacker culture, and cryptocurrency, tracing how early visions of free information sharing, and decentralized networks gave way to commodification, intellectual property restrictions, and corporate control. It then analyzes cryptocurrency and blockchain as attempts to return to decentralized ideals, demonstrating how these, too, have become co-opted by profit-

seeking and centralized power. “It might not seem the right solution for my sorrow, but I look for cracks in the reality, which can bring a sense of temporary relief,” the narrator declares at some point. The essay’s nonlinear structure and dense references reflect the labyrinthine nature of digital culture itself.

Opening the **“Close-up”** section, Joanna Zylinska further explores the question of our intra-relating with technology. She emphasizes the importance of recognizing human creativity as inherently entangled with nonhuman elements, challenging traditional notions of artistic authorship. She states that the distinction between AI art and art in general may become less relevant, as AI becomes increasingly integrated into both human identity and artistic practice. On the other hand, what proves more and more important are ethical considerations, as well as questions regarding the societal and environmental impact of AI technologies.

Jan Waligórski returns to the issues regarding immersion, arguing for a posthumanist approach to the anthropology of virtual reality (VR), one that moves beyond digital dualism and conceptualizes VR users as hybrid “cyborg assemblages.” The author contends that VR technology significantly engages users’ physical bodies in virtual environments, reducing the gap between physical and virtual embodiments that exists when using desktop devices. While users can still construct alternative virtual selves in VR, this process actively involves their physical bodies rather than shutting them out. In this posthumanist framework, the VR user is a temporary entanglement of the human, technology, and digital body, blurring the boundaries between physical/virtual and human/machine.

The next contribution, by Miłosz Wojtyna, looks at the complex relationship between digital labor, visual representation, and the nature of work in contemporary capitalism. It critically examines how digital interfaces, screens, and visual discourses obscure the realities of labor exploitation, cognitive control, and the erosion of

work-life boundaries. The author argues that contemporary capitalism is "a digital narcissist, who, underneath his manically displayed semiospheres of appearances, hides a yawning existential wound—the consciousness of collapse, the yoke of cognitive exploitation, the fragility of 'staged authenticity,'"[14] calling for a critical study of labor practices in the digital age, as well as for a consideration of alternative models of work beyond capitalist structures.

Mirek Filiciak and Paweł Starzec's collaborative essay addresses another form of entanglement, exploring the complex interplay between smartphones understood as infrastructure and human social practices. The authors highlight the tension between the promise of user empowerment and the reality of surveillance and manipulation in digital spaces. The research employs an innovative methodological approach, combining traditional ethnographic techniques with visual methods to capture the often-invisible influence of digital infrastructure on daily life. By focusing on visual aspects of smartphone use, from selfies to fitness tracking, the authors reveal how these devices reshape personal identity, social relationships, and perceptions of reality. Their essay is a perfect example of how photography can be rethought in the age of the networked image.

The Polish translation of a contemporary work we deem important for the topic at hand also tackles questions of infrastructural entanglement. In her essay, Nicole Starosielski unpacks the concept of "pipeline ecologies" in Delaware County, New York, examining how various infrastructural systems—fiber-optic cables, electrical networks, water supply, and potential gas pipelines—are deeply entangled with local environments, social structures, and the history of local development. These pipelines function as not merely technical conduits but as ecological forms that shape and are shaped by their surroundings. The author suggests that while pipelines can be technologies of exploitation, they can also become leveraged toward more sustainable ends

through infrastructural reuse, cooperative governance, and strategic positioning against harmful developments.

The last contribution in this section, by Olympia Contopidis, returns to questions of gamification and precarization, especially in the gig economy, closing the set of contributions to the topic of "digital entanglement." The author discusses how labor platforms, such as Uber or Lyft, have increasingly gamified work entangling it with leisure, to enhance motivation and align worker behavior with corporate profitability without formally employing them. The paper analyzes the implications of algorithmic management in this context, revealing how it contributes to the precarious nature of gig work. Further, Contopidis examines how contemporary artworks leverage elements from cyberpunk and video games to critique these phenomena, thereby highlighting the artistic response to the commodification of labor in digital economies.

This issue's **"Panorama"** section is dedicated to theater, more precisely, to the complex interplay between performance, documentation, and archival practices in Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dividing Line* (1965–1972). In his article, Mischa Twitchin examines how the act of "drawing a line" becomes both a literal and metaphorical gesture, challenging traditional notions of avant-garde art and the relationship between event and documentation. He analyzes how memory, photography, and textual accounts interact to create multiple versions of the "original" event, problematizing concepts of authorship, participation, and historical accuracy. By exploring the tensions between the ephemeral nature of performance and the enduring quality of documentation, the text raises important questions about the nature of artistic creation, the role of the archive in shaping historical narratives, and the complex relationship between art and politics in the context of Cold War Poland.

Last but not least, in the **"Snapshot"** section, we have responses to two books: first, Ewa Drygalska's contextualization

of Kate Crawford's hugely influential *Atlas of AI* that has recently been translated into Polish, underscoring the complexity of analyzing AI's societal impact and the need for nuanced, context-specific approaches to understanding and regulating this disruptive technology; and second, a critical assessment of Agnieszka Pajączkowska's *Nieprzezroczyste. Historie chłopskiej fotografii* (*Opaque: Histories of Peasant Photography*), emphasizing the importance of rigorous methodology and ethical considerations in oral history projects, particularly when dealing with sensitive historical topics.



Ben Joseph Andrews, Emma Roberts, *Turbulence: Jamais Vu*, 2023. VR experience, 10 min. Courtesy of the artists

While we can hardly regard the above summarized contributions and perspectives as exhausting the question of digital entanglement, we hope that they will at least perform some practicable agential cuts in intra-action with this field to make visible a number of phenomena that might be seen as worthwhile to think with. As the narrator in *Turbulence* states, "Even though the world feels different, the everyday goes on. Even simple things become strangely difficult." However, while in some respects things might still seem more difficult for a while, and even more so if we do not act, in other ones this instability or indeterminacy can become "the condition for taking a stand," as Karen Barad states. "What if the very ground, the 'foundation' for judging right from wrong, is a flaming queen, a faggot, a lesbo, a tranny, or gender-queer?"[15]

Let us remember that.

Editorial Team

1 See: Domna Banakou and Christos Hadjipanayi, "Being Somebody Else: The Future of Narrative Storytelling," *Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej* 33 (2022), https://doi.org/10.36854/widok/2022.33.2570, and arguments against this: Michał Matuszewski, "Czy można być krową? Dlaczego VR nie jest maszyną empatii," *Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej* 33 (2022), https://doi.org/10.36854/widok/2022.33.2548.

2 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 19.

3 Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 804, https://doi.org/10.1086/345321.

4 Ibid., 813.

5 Karen Barad, "Intra-Actions: Interview by Adam Kleinmann," *Mousse: Contemporary Art Magazine* 34 (2012): 77.

6 Ibid., 80.

7 Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 817.

8 "It is important to note that the 'distinct' agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements." Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.

9 Barad, "Intra-Actions: Interview by Adam Kleinmann": 80.

10 Nathan Jurgenson, *The Social Photo: On Photography and Social Media*, 1st ed. (New York: Verso, 2019), 75/141.

11 Ibid., 80/141.

12 Stéphane Vial, *Being and the Screen: How the Digital Changes Perception. Published in One Volume with* A Short Treatise on Design, trans. Patsy Baudoin (The MIT Press, 2019), 15/327, https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10305.001.0001.

13 Andrew Dewdney, *Forget Photography* (Goldsmiths Press, 2021), 24/299.

14 See in this issue: Miłosz Wojtyna, *'Sitting In Front of My PC'. Working in Front of the Screen in the Era of Digital Capitalism,* https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2024/38-digital-entanglements/siedze-przed-kompem

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15 Barad, “Intra-Actions: Interview by Adam Kleinmann”: 80.