Next Level:

Dominic Hawgood

12.7.19 – 13.10.19

Casting Out The Self



CD-rauschenbach, 2019 © Dominic Hawgood

Hallucinating the Real

By Mirjam Kooiman, Foam curator

Upon googling 'Dominic Hawgood' and 'Foam', Google Images depicts a solo exhibition of the artists in Foam's front rooms, the gallery spaces on the first side of the building. The search results lead to the artist's website, dominichawgood.com, where they gather under the title *Chasing Demons in the Night*, filed under the tab 'Exhibitions'. From the cracks in the hallway's characteristic marble floor to the ceiling's historic ornaments, to the framed mirrors above the chimneys and the parquet flooring – every detail matches the reality of Foam. Yet these pictures are not real installation shots. They are hallucinations of a show that never took place.

In 2017, Hawgood meticulously photographed these exhibition rooms at Foam, from which he could manually create a 3D model of these spaces on his computer. None of the objects depicted in this digital exhibition existed physically at the time. Hawgood designed the artworks and exhibition layout freely, unencumbered by the physical and practical constraints that typically crop up when designing an exhibition. This virtual exhibition took on a digital life of its own. Online, Hawgood doesn't need the physicality of the museum to create his own reality as an artist. The simulacrum Hawgood created through a combination of photogrammetry and 3D rendering feeds into the ideas of the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), who argued that our current society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, and that human experience is a simulation of reality. What we call reality *is* the simulacrum: from watching the news to infinite scrolling online, we see a world interpreted, designated and rationalized by the screen. It's what is called hyperreality: our inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality.[1] Artist and journalist James Bridle uncovers in his BBC podcast series *New Ways of Seeing* the invisible networks behind our digital reality. Through its seeming ethereality, most of us don't understand how it works, while it deeply affects our lives in almost every aspect imaginable. It's a reality behind our screens, elusive like a "cloud", programmed in such a way that only people who speak the language of computer code can read and dissect it.[2] Constantly switching between the online and offline, the boundary between the physical and digital reality seems to dissolve. While society seems to accept this as a fact of life, an increasing use of psychedelics like Dimethyltryptamine (DMT), that is associated with ancient shaman rituals like ayahuasca ceremonies, shows an increasing tendency in western societies towards spiritual experiences. In the midst of a digitized world, surrounded by our technical devices, psychedelics seem to gain popularity as an antidote to the disconnect with our psychical environment.

In his project *Casting Out The Self*, the physical, this time very real exhibition that Dominic Hawgood is presenting at Foam (in other rooms than those in which he designed *Chasing Demons in the Night*), the artist's own experience with DMT has become a conceptual starting point to research how we experience realism through imaging technologies and light capture techniques. As such, Hawgood seems to connect the dots between two seemingly unrelated scientific fields that picked up pace in the early 1990s. A small group of scientists started to revive the research into psychedelics, after the moral panic surrounding drugs in the 1960s and its subsequent cultural and scientific denouncement. Well out of view, these researchers started testing psychedelics' potential to heal mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, trauma, and addiction, but also to explore links between brain and mind, hoping to unravel some of the mysteries of consciousness.[3] At the same time, computer graphics scientists developed 'computational photography'. Computational photography refers to digital image capture and processing techniques that use digital computation instead of optical processes. The result is imagery that looks as real as traditional photographs, but the real world, as well as the camera, has become increasingly obsolete in the process. By combining imaging and computation, it enables new and enhanced ways of capturing, representing, and interacting with the physical world.
While psychedelics like DMT hold the power to open our minds to alternate forms of consciousness and new accounts of reality, in 1999 the field of computer graphics introduced the concept of '*bullet time*' to the masses with the release of the ground-breaking science fiction film *The Matrix*. Bullet time is a visual effect of detaching the time and space of a camera (or viewer) from those of its visible subject. Its roots can be traced right back to a British photographer Tim MacMillan, who is the inventor of the so-called 'Time-Slice camera'. In the 1980s, he developed several still cameras with which he could record on one image more than a normal camera allowed: a 360-degree shot, for instance, or a shot lasting 90 seconds showing a spiral of consecutive moments.

Bullet-time computated Tim MacMillan's concept. While the *The Matrix* audience watched protagonist Neo (Keanu Reeves) throwing himself backward in slow motion as he dodges a range of bullets brushing by him, leaving shimmering traces in the air, the camera simultaneously arcs around him in real time. The vision of a second was stretched into a moment viewed from multiple angles in a spatiotemporal bubble. While it is now commonly employed in action films and video games, in 1999 it was the first time that advanced photogrammetry was applied to create cinematographic motion capture. *Bullet time* captures a moment in three sixty degrees without having the camera array filming itself; the concept implies that only a "virtual camera", often illustrated within the confines of a computer-generated environment such as a virtual world or virtual reality, would be capable of "filming" bullet-time types of moments. In fact, the location of Neo's fight was documented in 360 degrees, creating a photorealistic environment that got computer rendered in exactly the same camera path of Neo's movement. Keanu Reeves, however, was captured in the studio in a controlled setup with cameras all around him. The studio setting was replaced by the 3D-rendered environment of the actual location of the scene, wiping out any vision of the camera array. In other words, Reeves' body and movement got transferred into virtual reality. The real and the synthesized became entangled in a way indistinguishable to the human brain.

Research papers by hugely influential computer graphics researchers such as Paul Debevec, who headed the USC ICT Graphics Lab and is now a Senior Scientist at Google VR and Adjunct Research Professor of Computer Science, and Marc Levoy, VMware Founders Professor of Computer Science (Emeritus) at Stanford University and a Distinguished Engineer at Google, have inspired Dominic Hawgood to educate himself and acquire the technical skills needed to pursue his long-term research into our acknowledgment of the real, and truth-value in relation to digital reality. One of the main things to learn in order to make computational photographs as convincing as traditional photographs, is the technical abilities to mimic the effect of light and reflection onto surfaces as true to life as is possible. Around 1993, Marc Levoy started to apply his computational experiments on a Buddha statue. The object appeared in several research papers in which he shared his results, making the Buddha a standard 3D test model and render primitive. It also featured in his paper "Light Field Rendering" (1996, for SIGGRAPH[4]), which forms the basis behind many image-based rendering techniques in modern-day computer graphics. For the layman, these computational photography research papers are complete riddles. The texts consist of scientific terminology, intersected by mathematic formulas that read like a foreign script. Pictures illustrating the texts show studio setups with camera rigs, mirroring balls on sticks, surrounded by arrow-like shapes. These are the documents of digital rituals, leading to higher states of the image.

Dominic Hawgood connects society's growing quest for spiritual meaning and a renewed sense of the self with the rituals behind computational photography. In *Casting Out The Self*, the Buddha becomes an ambiguous icon. Throughout the exhibition, it keeps recurring in different states: as a lenticular print, a 3D scan, a 3D print, and as a 3D animation. It is a copy of a copy with a photographic lineage, but which would not exist in these shapes if it were not for the pioneering work of the research it references. The pink, purple and blue colour palette of the exhibition references image-based lighting techniques found in 3D computer graphics, such as 'normal mapping', which exploits colour information within photographs to compute surface detail within software. Hawgood adapts these techniques by utilising them in animation work and harnessing them in the creation of imaging elements, both employing and commenting on the computer graphics he applies.

If our analogue understanding of photography is 'drawing with light', computational photography directly feeds into this notion, albeit in completely different ways. The science behind visual computing lies in a deep understanding of the nature of light and the effect of optics, and how surface texture and reflection in different light situation enhances realism in computer-generated imagery. The Czech philosopher Vilém Flusser (1921-1990) never made any distinction between computer-generated images and photographs. In his essay *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985), he distinguishes two types of images: traditional images as depictions made by the human hand (like paintings), and technical images, which are produced by an apparatus, like a camera or a computer. All technical images are visualisations made up by particles (chemical or electronic). Both are representations of something calculated by the apparatus.[5]

The question shouldn't be so much whether what Dominic Hawgood's enigmatic images depict is photographed or computer-generated, but what they convey about our perception of reality. Vilém Flusser stated that one shouldn't ask what technical images show. It's not about whether the depicted object is really out there in the world or not, or about what's true or false. According to Flusser, one should look at what they are projected from: they signify instructional programs, about the way society should experience, perceive, evaluate and behave. The apparatus does what its operator desires, but the operator can only desire what the apparatus is capable of. Dominic Hawgood reveals the instructional program of computational photography (between lens and screen), but while doing so only leads us into an even more mystical and ethereal state on how to deal with the digital. In the ceremonial atmosphere of the exhibition, spirituality is endowed with digital features so that digital reality also appears to be idolised. In this way, Hawgood visualizes the ambivalence of the digital reality we live in: the magic of infinite possibilities contrasts sharply with our brief attention span, information overload, persistent distraction, loneliness and seclusion. Casting Out The Self is the translation of contemporary feelings, grappling with notions of the self in relation to technology that goes beyond our understanding of reality as we knew it. By now, we might have come to the awareness we are living in a *The Matrix*-like simulacrum, but we are still far removed from Buddha's true meaning: to be awakened.

[1] Baudrillard, J. (1981) *Simulacra and Simulation*.
[2] Bridle, J. *New Ways of Seeing*, Ep1: 'Invisible Networks,' BBC Radio 4, released on Wednesday 17th April 2019. For a transcript of the podcast, see: <http://jamesbridle.com/files/R4_NWOS_Episode_01_Script.pdf>
[3] Pollan, M. (2018) *How To Change Your Mind: The New Science of Psychedelics*.
[4] SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group on Computer GRAPHics and Interactive Techniques) is the annual conference on computer graphics (CG) convened by the ACM SIGGRAPH organization. The first SIGGRAPH conference was in 1974. The conference is attended by tens of thousands of computer professionals. Dozens of research papers are presented each year, and SIGGRAPH is widely considered the most prestigious forum for the publication of computer graphics research.
[5] Flusser, V. (1985) Into the *Universe of Technical Images*.

Dominic Hawgood (1980, UK) is a cross-disciplinary artist whose practice has emerged out of photography's expanded field, and progressed towards site-specific installation. His work spans both still and moving image, with an increasing use of digital media informed through an interest in visual computing, perception, and the role of the lens within VFX. Since graduating from the Royal College of Art in 2014, Dominic has had solo exhibitions at TJ Boulting, London, UK; Oonagh Young Gallery, Dublin, Ireland; and the Brighton Digital Festival X British Science Festival, Brighton, UK. He has also won the British Journal of Photography International Award in 2014 and was selected as a Foam Talent in 2015. Dominic Hawgood lives and works in London, UK.

Next Level
Since 2015, Foam presents the exhibition series *Next Level*, with the support of Ammodo. The series is aimed at introducing the wider public to innovative art by relatively young artists who are making radically new use of the medium of photography. After the first series in which four Dutch artists were presented Dominic Hawgood is the first international artist in the follow-up series of *Next Level*.

Next Level: Dominic Hawgood – Casting Out The Self is made possible by Ammodo and the Gieskes-Strijbis Fonds.

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Een hallucinatie van de werkelijkheid

Door Mirjam Kooiman, curator naar Foam

Wie 'Dominic Hawgood' en 'Foam' googelt, ziet in Google Afbeeldingen een solotentoonstelling van de kunstenaar in de voorzalen van Foam, de tentoonstellingsruimten aan de voorzijde van het gebouw. De zoekresultaten leiden naar de website van de kunstenaar, dominichawgood.com, waar ze te vinden zijn onder de tab 'Exhibitions' als *Chasing Demons in the Night*. Van de scheuren in de karakteristieke marmeren vloer van de hal tot de historische ornamenten aan het plafond, van de manshoge spiegels boven de schoorstenen en de parketvloer: elk detail komt overeen met de werkelijkheid. Toch zijn dit geen echte tentoonstellingsfoto's. Het zijn hallucinaties van een tentoonstelling die nooit heeft plaatsgevonden.

In 2017 fotografeerde Hawgood deze zalen in Foam tot in detail in de basis gedurende vijf uur zijn computer aan deze ruimten maakte. De objecten die deze digitale tentoonstelling zijn afgebeeld, bestonden destijds fysiek niet. Hawgood ontwierp de kunstwerken en de lay-out van de tentoonstelling zonder de fysieke en praktische beperkingen die zich vaak voordoen bij het ontwerpen ervan. Deze virtuele tentoonstelling is een eigen digitaal leven gaan leiden. Online heeft Hawgood geen fysiek museum nodig om als kunstenaar zijn eigen werkelijkheid te creëren.

In het simulacrum Hawgood heeft gemaakt met een combinatie van fotogrammetrie en 3D rendering, sluit aan op de ideeën van de Franse filosoof Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), die betoogde in onze huidige samenleving alle symbolen en tekens uit de menselijke ervaring een simulatie van de werkelijkheid is. Wat wij weten als nieuws kijken of eindeloos online scrollen, we kelijkheid noemen is een simulacrum: ook wij zijn om ons heen de werkelijkheid, de ervaringen van onze beurs- en journalist James Bridle ontdekt in zijn BBC-podcastserie *New Ways of Seeing* de onzichtbare netwerken achter onze digitale realiteit. Vanwege het schijnbaar ethereische karakter, terwijl de toch bijna elk denkbaar digitale begrippen de meeste mensen niet hoe zij functioneren, terwijl de toch bijna elk denkbaar aspect van ons leven sterk beïnvloedt. Het is een realiteit achter onze schermen, een ongrijpbare 'cloud,' jo gepro gramm meerd dat dilleen mensen die de taal van de computercode spreken haar kunnen lezen en ontleden.' Door het voortdurend schakelen tussen online en offline begint de grens tussen de kunstenaar, dominichawgood.com, waar ze te vinden zijn onder de tab 'Exhibitions' als *Chasing Demons in the Night*. Van de scheuren in de karakteristieke marmeren vloer van de hal tot de historische ornamenten aan het plafond, van de manshoge spiegels boven de schoorstenen en de parketvloer: elk detail komt overeen met de werkelijkheid. Toch zijn dit geen echte tentoonstellingsfoto's. Het zijn hallucinaties van een tentoonstelling die nooit heeft plaatsgevonden.

In zijn project *Casting Out The Self*, de fysieke en deze keer zeer werkelijke tentoonstelling die Hawgood presenteert in Foam (in andere zalen dan die van *Chasing Demons in the Night*), werd de eigen ervaring van de kunstenaar met DMT een conceptueel uitgangspunt om zijn beeldvormingstechnologie en lichttechnieken te onderzoeken. Hoe we realisme ervaren, Hawgood legt ons uit in zijn zesdelig essay *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985), onderscheidt hij twee soorten afbeeldingen: traditionele, door mensenhanden gemaakte afbeeldingen (zoals schilderijen) en technische afbeeldingen, die door een apparaat, zoals een camera of een computer worden gereproduceerd. Alle technische afbeeldingen zijn visualisaties die uit (deels onzichtbare) deeltjes bestaan.

Of er zaadcellen bestaan die Dominic Hawgood gefotografeerd zijn of door een computer gegenereerde zijn, is minder belangrijk dan de vraag wat de beelden zeggen over onze perceptie van de werkelijkheid. Vilém Flusser meende dat we niet moeten vragen wat technische afbeeldingen laten zien. Het gaat niet om de vraag of het gefotografeerde object of dan niet werkelijk overeenkomt met de beelden, of de vraag of iets waar of onwaar is. Volgens Flusser moeten we kijken naar waar de afbeeldingen vandaan komen: zij duiden programma's aan met instructies over de manier waarop de samenleving dingen moet ervaren, waarmee en bedienen kan alleen maar datgene wensen waar het apparaat doet wat zijn bedienar wenst, maar de apparaten zijn op hun beurt weer gebaseerd op het instructieprogramma van computertoestellen gemaakt door mensen. Hij maakt daarmee duidelijk dat de computer geen objectieve camera is, maar een instrument dat de werkelijkheid volgens een bepaald programma verbeeldt. Het apparaat doet wat het wordt opgedragen te doen, en de zin ervan ligt in de opdracht die het heeft gekregen. Dat is de reden



Cosmic Chakra, 2016 © Dominic Hawgood