

Portal Project as a Study of Digital Sculpture in the Public Space in the 21st Century

21. Yüzyılda Kamusal Alanda Bir Dijital Heykel İncelemesi Olarak Portal Projesi

Levent Ayata, *Department of Sculpture, Dokuz Eylül University Faculty of Fine Arts, 0000-0002-4738-1926*

Özlem Demircan, *Department of Photography, Dokuz Eylül University Faculty of Fine Arts, 0000-0002-3041-7160*

Abstract

This article examines the effects of digital technologies on art in the 21st century and the transformation of art in the public sphere. After the Internet revolution, significant progress has been made in areas such as artificial intelligence, big data, the Internet of Things (IoT), blockchain, and biotechnology. These technologies have also created significant transformations in art disciplines, offering artists new forms of expression such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and interactive installations. Today, one of the main goals of public art practices, which also use these new forms of expression, is to convey social, cultural, and political messages by reaching large segments of society. Digital art, on the other hand, transforms these practices, offering viewers more interactive, participatory, and innovative experiences. The article discusses how digitalization transforms the social context of art through the discussions of Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, Henri Lefebvre, and Michel Foucault on the concept of public space. What these theorists have in common is that they emphasize that the public sphere is a central concept for understanding and transforming society's political, social, and cultural structure. While Habermas sees the public sphere as the ground for democratic debates, Arendt considers this space an arena based on the visible actions of individuals. While Lefebvre argues that the public sphere is constantly reproduced by social relations and power dynamics, Foucault, on the other hand, draws attention to how the relations of power and surveillance shape this field. With the approaches of these theorists, it has been tried to associate the redefinition of the public sphere through digitalization and the transformative role of art in this process.

In addition, Benediktas Gylys' *Portal Project*, a public artwork discussed in the axis of all these discussions, aims to strengthen cultural and social ties by combining digital sculpture and relational aesthetics. While the project aims to increase the interaction of different cultures through live video connections between cities, it also raises important ethical questions about surveillance and privacy. In addition, it has been examined that the new forms of expression and interaction methods offered by digital technologies make public spaces more dynamic and democratic and strengthen the role of art in social interactions.

Keywords: Portal project, public art, digital art, relational aesthetics, digital surveillance.

Academical Disciplines/Fields: Sculpture, photography, interdisciplinary art, public art, digital art.

Özet

Bu makale, 21. yüzyılda dijital teknolojilerin sanat üzerindeki etkilerini ve kamusal alanda sanatın dönüşümünü incelemektedir. İnternet devriminin ardından yapay zekâ, büyük veri, nesnelerin İnterneti (IoT), blokzincir ve biyoteknoloji gibi alanlarda büyük ilerlemeler kaydedilmiştir. Bu teknolojiler, sanat disiplinlerinde de önemli dönüşümler yaratmış, sanatçılara sanal gerçeklik, artırılmış gerçeklik ve interaktif enstalasyonlar gibi yeni ifade biçimleri sunmuştur. Günümüzde bu yeni ifade biçimlerini de kullanan kamusal sanat pratiklerinin ana hedefinden biri, toplumun geniş kesimlerine ulaşarak sosyal, kültürel ve politik mesajlar iletmektir. Dijital sanat ise bu pratikleri dönüştürerek izleyicilere daha etkileşimli, katılımcı ve yenilikçi deneyimler sunmaktadır. Makalede, Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, Henri Lefebvre ve Michel Foucault'nun kamusal alan kavramına dair tartışmaları üzerinden, dijitalleşmenin sanatın toplumsal bağlamını nasıl dönüştürdüğü ele alınmaktadır. Bu teorisyenlerin ortak noktası, kamusal alanın, toplumun siyasal, sosyal ve kültürel yapısını anlamak ve dönüştürmek için merkezi bir kavram olduğunu vurgulamalarıdır. Habermas, kamusal alanı demokratik tartışmaların zemini olarak görürken; Arendt, bu alanı bireylerin görünür eylemlerine dayalı bir arena olarak değerlendirmektedir. Lefebvre, kamusal alanın toplumsal ilişkiler ve güç dinamikleriyle sürekli yeniden üretildiğini savunurken; Foucault ise, bu alanın İktidar ve gözetim ilişkileriyle nasıl şekillendiğine dikkat çekmektedir. Bu teorisyenlerin yaklaşımlarıyla, dijitalleşme ile kamusal alanın yeniden tanımlandığı ve sanatın bu süreçteki dönüştürücü rolü ilişkilendirilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Yanı sıra tüm bu tartışmalar ekseninde ele alınan, kamusal bir sanat çalışması olan Benediktas Gylys'in *Portal Projesi* ile, dijital heykel ve ilişkisel estetik kavramları bir araya getirilerek kültürel ve sosyal bağları güçlendirmeyi amaçlayan çalışma analiz edilmiştir. Proje, şehirler arası canlı video bağlantıları ile farklı kültürlerin etkileşimini artırmayı hedeflerken, gözetim ve mahremiyet konularında da önemli etik sorular ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca dijital teknolojilerin sunduğu yeni ifade biçimleri ve etkileşim yöntemlerinin kamusal alanları daha dinamik ve demokratik hale getirmesi ve sanatın toplumsal etkileşimlerdeki rolünü güçlendirmesi incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Portal projesi, kamusal sanat, dijital sanat, ilişkisel estetik, dijital gözetim.

Akademik Disiplin(ler)/Alan(lar): Heykel, fotoğraf, disiplinlerarası sanat, kamusal sanat, dijital sanat.

- Corresponding Author:** Levent Ayata, Department of Sculpture, Dokuz Eylül University Faculty of Fine Arts.
- Adress:** Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi, DEÜ Tınaztepe Yerleşkesi, Adatepe Mah. Doğuş Cad. No: 209, 35390 Buca – İzmir
- E-mail:** levent.ayata@deu.edu.tr
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1. Introduction

After the Internet revolution, 21st-century technology has made significant progress in areas such as artificial intelligence, big data, the Internet of Things (IoT), blockchain, and biotechnology. While artificial intelligence and machine learning have brought revolutionary innovations in sectors such as agriculture, automation, health, finance, and transportation, intelligent systems have been created in our homes and cities with the Internet of Things and smart devices, and a structure has been built in connection with each other. Blockchain technology purports to provide data security and transparency in financial transactions, while biotechnology has enabled groundbreaking advances in genetic engineering and medicine. These developments are defined by concepts such as *Post-Information Society*, *Virtual Society*, and *Digital Culture*, a period dominated by information and technological advances.

The global spread of the Internet and its transformation into electronic public spaces has restructured social relations, ways of doing politics, daily life practices, and culture. In this context, it is seen that digital technologies have created significant transformations in art disciplines. Artists have had the opportunity to produce more interactive and experimental works through virtual reality, augmented reality, interactive installations, and other digital applications and platforms. In addition, the concept of *relational aesthetics*, which was put forward by Nicolas Bourriaud and focused on the interaction and experiences of art with the audience, has also come to the fore again in the context of public art and gained importance.

Public art is an approach that aims to ensure that art takes place in public spaces and reaches large segments of society. Such works of art often carry social, cultural, and political messages and emphasize interaction with society. Artists who incorporate digital methods into their work production practices aim to convey their social and political criticisms to large masses with their works in public spaces.

In this sense, artists shape their works in the context of relational aesthetics in the public sphere. Digital technologies are redefining how art is experienced in public spaces, providing audiences with innovative, interactive, and thought-provoking artworks. In addition, digital works of art integrate with architectural structures and urban areas, making these areas a part of the art object.

Therefore, the development of digital technologies and the internet has reshaped the concepts of public art and relational aesthetics, allowing art to become more interactive and accessible in a social context. This transformation has enabled art to be positioned as a part of social and cultural interactions rather than just an aesthetic experience. In this way, the relationship between works of art and technological developments contributes to a deeper understanding of our age's digital culture and social structure.

The *Portal Project*, initiated by Benediktas Gylys, the article's subject, has carved out a space as an innovative initiative to strengthen cultural and social ties between people in different cities by combining digital sculpture and relational aesthetics. The portal aims to create a global bridge of empathy and understanding by enabling people to interact with each other in real-time and get to know different cultures and lifestyles by providing live video connections between cities through high-definition cameras and broadband internet connections.

This article will examine the transformation of art in the digital era's public sphere and the Portal Project's social effects. In order to understand the impacts of digital technologies on art and how artistic interactions are shaped in public spaces, the proposals presented by the Portal project will be discussed, and the role of works produced by digital methods in the public sphere on cultural differences, identity and ideology and the function of the project in the context of surveillance will be evaluated.

2. Public Space, Art Practices and Digitalization

Public sphere debates intensified in the mid-20th century, leading to the development of various theoretical approaches to the definition, function, and importance of public space. These discussions examined the public sphere's social, political, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions. In Jürgen Habermas' text titled *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, which is an essential milestone in this field, the public sphere is defined as *a space where individuals discuss social issues and public opinion is formed*. In addition, Habermas stated that the concept of public space, which developed in places such as reading clubs and coffee houses in 18th-century Europe, was transformed by the media and other means of communication (1989, p. 27-56). On the other hand, Hannah Arendt defined the public sphere as "a space where people come together as equals and engage in common actions and exchange views" in her work *The Human Condition* (1958, p. 50-52). Arendt emphasized that the public sphere is an essential space for political

actions and that individuals should be visible and heard in the public sphere. In his book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre discussed the production and reshaping of the public sphere by social, economic, and political forces. Lefebvre stated that space is not only a physical place but also a concept shaped by social relations and power dynamics (1991, p. 26-27). On the other hand, Michel Foucault examined public space's different uses and functions in his article titled *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*. With the concept of *heterotopia*, Foucault defined private spaces that function differently from the norms of society and examined how these spaces produce and reflect the relations between public and private spaces (1986, p. 22-27). Therefore, discussions such as the relationship patterns created by the space and its economic, political, social, and cultural functions have shaped the concept of public space. In addition, it has been revealed that public spaces build an essential structure for democratic societies and that the interaction of individuals in these areas is an indispensable element for social cohesion and democratic participation.

In this context, the history of public art from antiquity to the present day has been shaped in parallel with societies' social, economic, cultural, religious, and political dynamics. As Rosalyn Deutsche has noted, the public sphere has been transformed into a political structure through art, and art has functioned as a tool to question power relations and social norms in the public sphere (1996, p. 28-29). Miwon Kwon (2002, p. 1-20) examined the relationship of place-oriented art with public space and the interaction of such artworks with space in his text titled *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. It has opened up a discussion on how the positions of the works of art produced for this purpose affect identity and meaning. Chantal Mouffe (2013, p. 12-17), on the other hand, defined the public sphere as a democratic field of struggle in her book *Agonistics: Thinking The World Politically* and saw art as an essential tool for expressing political views and social conflicts that are the dynamics of progress in this field.

With the above statements, it is possible to say that works of art produced in the public sphere have become not only aesthetic objects but also a part of social memory, identity, and ideology.

As in every field, the development of digital technologies has transformed the traditional understanding of public space and art production practices in this field. With the spread of the Internet in the social sphere and the rise of the *network society* (Castells, 1996, p. 380), social networks and virtual environments have replaced physical public spaces with increasing users and created new digital public spaces. Especially today, since taking part in social networks has become a way of existence and digital tools are like a limb of us, all life practices and culture have become digital. For this reason, while the physical interactions of individuals in public spaces have decreased, digital public spaces have become new forms of social interaction.

In this context, while the means of art production have been digitalized, new forms of expression and interaction methods in the public sphere have increased with digital art practices. In her book *Digital Art* (2003), Christiane Paul examined the development of digital art and its use in the public sphere, stating that "digital art enriches the artistic experience of viewers with its interactive and participatory nature in the public sphere" (2003, p. 67-69). In this sense, visual experiences in the public sphere and their social interactions have been reshaped through digital art. Therefore, while digital artworks transform the perception of the audience and their experiences in the public space, they have increased participation and interaction, enabling the audience to become active participants. However, according to Clay Shirky, who examines the effects of digital technologies on social organization and the public sphere, "digital art supports collective actions and social changes in the public sphere" (2008, p. 54-56).

In line with the above explanations and discussions, important transformations have been experienced by meeting technology with art and opening up to the public sphere. When the subject is analyzed chronologically, for example, one of the pioneers of digital art, Nam June Paik's performance work on *Magnet TV* (1965), his 1995 51-channel video installation project *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii* (Figure 1), and especially *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984) are critical. While Paik emphasizes the potential of television (McLuhan, 1964, p. 11) as an art medium, one of the media tools that acts as a public function, shapes communication processes, society and creates new types of public spaces in his works, this live broadcast performance project reached large audiences with the participation of different artists.



Figure 1. Nam June Paik, *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, 1995, fifty-one channel video installation (including one closed-circuit television feed), custom electronics, neon lighting, steel, and wood; color, sound, approx. 15x 40 x 4 ft., Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The Hearsay Project, carried out by Norman White, Laura Kikauka, and Carl Hemfelt in 1985, was designed as a telecommunications **activity-event** based on a children's game in which a secret message is whispered from person to person until it reaches its owner. In this event, the message was sent to 8 different **centers in the world geographies** within 24 hours through a global computer network (I.P. Sharp Associates). Each of the eight participating centers was tasked with translating the message into a different language¹ before sending it, and the entire process was monitored at A-Space in Toronto.

On the other hand, Jenny Holzer has created projects that convey strong social and political messages by using digital texts in the public sphere. *Protect Me From What I Want* (1982) made a political reference to the consumer society.

Between 1992 and 1997, Maurizio Bolognini created site-specific installations. He created ever-evolving images using computers and monitors while covering screen monitors with an opaque silicone layer with his work *Programmed Machines*. By showing that images are still being produced with computer-generated electronic sounds that are no longer visible to the viewer, it aims to make the audience think about the digital world and physical machines and question the line between physical forms of reality (Bolognini, 1992).

The artists given above have depicted how digital technology can transform art with their works, and they have applied technology as a means of artistic expression in the public sphere with their interactive and participatory art practices. In addition to pioneering the use of digital art as a means of social interaction, they have offered innovative experiences to the audience.

In addition, with digital art, architectural and design practices in public spaces have been transformed, and the perception of public space and environmental experiences have been reshaped. For example, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, who creates interactive digital installations in public spaces, showed the potential of digital art in public space by converting biometric data such as heartbeats into light signals and projecting them to the sky with his installation *Pulse Room* in 2006. In his project *Listening Forest* (2023), he performed an impressive art walk designed to transform the Northern Forest of Crystal Bridges at night. Eight large-scale interactive artworks were placed in the forest area, creating an interactive path that uses technology that responds to the unique physical characteristics of individuals and establishes connections between strangers and the landscape (Figure 2), making the project possible with the participation and interaction of viewers (Lozano-Hemmer, 2023).

¹ Hearsay project original text, <http://www.normill.ca/Text/Hearsay.txt>



Figure 2. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Listening Forest*, (2023).

Artist Trevor Paglen, who works on issues such as surveillance systems, privacy, secret state operations, and digital technologies, focuses on using digital maps, satellite imagery, and big data in the public sphere in his works.

Benediktas Gylys, on the other hand, has designed a platform that enables communities with different cultural structures and living in various geographies to connect and interact with the *Portal Project*.

This study, applied in the public sphere, is a striking example of how borders are removed with digitalization. Witnessing the digital gathering of people with different cultures and geographies and the positive or negative interaction they provide reminds us of Bourriaud's relational aesthetic theory: The theory of relational aesthetics was conceptualized by Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990s, revealing that art gains meaning in the social context and within the framework of social interactions. Relational aesthetics suggests that works of art should be evaluated through the dialogue and interaction they establish with the audience. In this respect, works of art are seen not only as aesthetic objects but also as a field of social and cultural interaction:

Increasingly, the artist focuses on the relationships his work will create among his audiences or on exploring socialization models. This particular production creates an ideological and practical ground and new formal areas. I want to say that, beyond this relational character inherent in the work of art, reference figures in the universe of human relations have now become artistic forms in their own right. Thus, meetings, meetings, demonstrations, the cooperation of people in various ways, games, festivals, places of gathering, in short, the forms of encountering and discovering relationships, all represent aesthetic objects that are suitable for being treated as they are today: painting and sculpture are considered here only as exceptional cases of the production of a form that is directed to a purpose other than a simple aesthetic consumption. (Bourriaud, 2018, p. 44)

In this direction, public spaces and digital art practices have become indispensable spaces for social interactions and cultural expression. The history of public spaces is intertwined with social, economic, cultural, and political dynamics, which have gained new dimensions with the digitalization process. Digital art has transformed traditional public art practices, providing interactive and participatory experiences in which audiences become active participants. This change has allowed art to go beyond being just an aesthetic object and become a part of social memory, identity, and ideology. The new forms of expression and methods of interaction offered by digital technologies have made public spaces more dynamic, accessible, and democratic. In this context, the role and impact of digital art in public spaces will continue to exist as an essential element in shaping artistic practices and social interactions in the future.

3. Portal Project

Increasingly, our natural sense organs are deprived of the use of our sensuality. We are looking for a cosmic intemperance, just like a disabled person. Our old animal body will not come into being; we are pursuing fantastic worlds and different modes in which the absolute unification between man and technology will occur.

Paul Virillo, 2003

A *portal* is often described as a fictional doorway, gateway, or transition point that provides a connection between two different places, dimensions, or times (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). However, along with digital technologies, it also means a website or platform where users can access various information resources and services in the field of information technologies and media. In addition, it is a platform that provides access to content such as portal databases or educational materials and academic resources in academic research. However, these usage areas will not be evaluated within the framework of the article's subject.

The term *portal* is often used in science fiction, fantasy, or mythological stories: in science fiction literature, C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is an example of children crossing into Narnia through a wardrobe. In this sense, the *portal* is usually depicted as a tool that allows passage to different dimensions, times, or different points in space-time, contributing to the development of the story or scenario.

Portals can be created through different fictional elements such as space-time folds, wormholes, or energy fields. These portals make it possible to move between different places, dimensions, or periods and often allow the main characters of the stories to journey to new and unknown worlds. For example, wormholes are defined as theoretical tunnels that form shortcuts between two points in space-time and are frequently featured in science fiction literature. (Live Science, n.d.; Science Museum, n.d.)

For example, according to Harlan Ellison, screenwriter of the science fiction series *Star Trek*, the episode *The City on the Edge of Forever* tells a story about the crew of the USS Enterprise, which includes themes of time travel and alternate reality. The story begins with the crew discovering the *Infinity Machine*, a time portal (Figure 3). This portal allows you to reach different time zones using time and space as a transition point. Captain Kirk and his crew get stuck in this period when Dr. McCoy accidentally travels to the 1930s. However, Dr. McCoy's intervention changes history and leads to a future event not occurring. Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock try to go back in time and restore history to correct this mistake. This chapter presents a fascinating story that includes alternate reality, time paradoxes, and profound reflections on human destiny (Ellison, 1967).

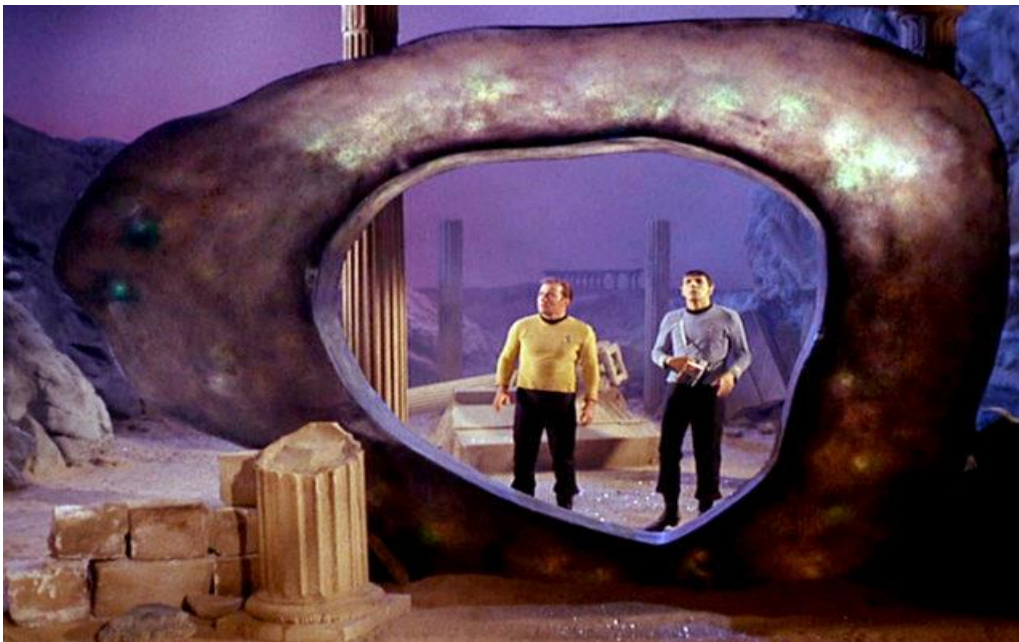


Figure 3. *Star Trek* 1. Season-28. Episode, *The City on the Edge of Forever*, Screenshot

Another example is in the movie *Stargate*, a science fiction production directed by Roland Emmerich, released in 1994. A story is told about traveling to different planets through the discovered portal. In the movie *Stargate*, an ancient expedition team in Egypt solved the mystery of a large-sized stone gate (Stargate). This gate also functions as a portal to a different dimension or planet. Our main characters, the team led by expedition team leader Dr. Daniel Jackson and military unit commander Colonel Jack O'Neil, used this portal to move to a different planet and try to solve the mysteries they encountered there (Emmerich, 1994.).

The *Portal Art Project*, designed with inspiration from science fiction movies in its physical form, was conceived in 2016 by artist and writer Benediktas Gylys and his team. Accordingly, the portal project is presented as an innovative initiative to build a physical and digital bridge between cities and cultures. The project's aim, implemented between New York and Dublin in 2022, is to increase interaction and understanding between people in different cities worldwide and strengthen cultural and social ties (Gylys, 2016; TechBuzz Ireland, 2024).

The Portal project is a digital display installed in different cities and consists of large round shapes. It provides an uninterrupted, quality image stream using high-definition cameras and broadband internet connections. In this way, people living in two cities can see and interact with each other in real-time with live video connections between cities (Figure 4).

In the context of the article's subject, Portal is also an example where the concept of relational aesthetics is embodied. The portal is considered a work of art where people interact with each other and gain meaning through these interactions. In addition, Benediktas Gylys has described this work of art as a digital sculpture (Portals, 2024). Beyond a physical structure, it claims to be a work of art created through digital technologies that enable individuals' interaction and cultural sharing.

One of the project's goals is to enable people from different cultures to share their daily life practices, activity dynamics, and social and cultural habits. Thus, it is thought that cultural understanding and empathy will increase. In addition, it aims to establish a bond between people living in different cities, deepen this bond, bring people together on a common ground with an intercultural perspective, and share common interests and values (Portals, 2024).

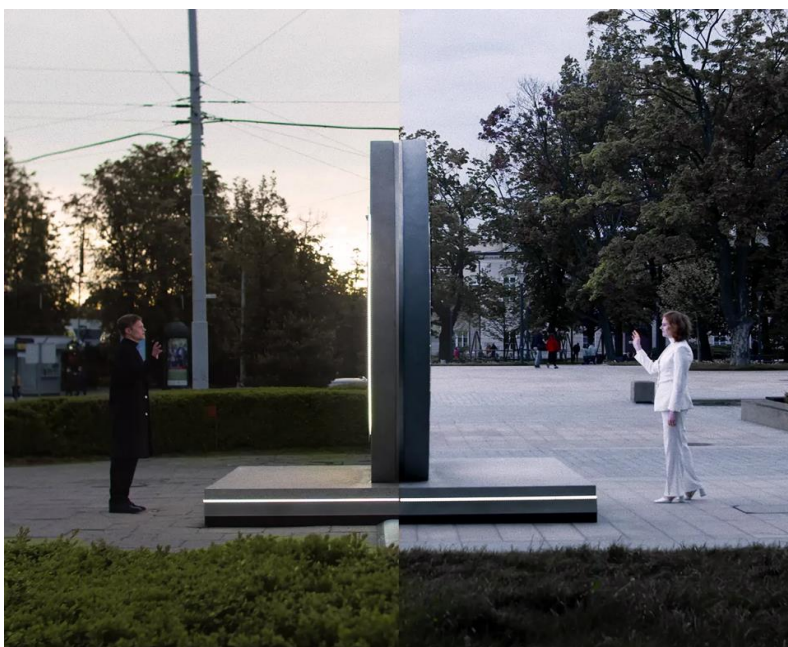


Figure 4. Portal Project Promotional Image

When the screens subject to the project are analyzed in terms of form, the fact that it has a round, pupil-like design instead of a flat, frameless structure causes them to be evaluated in the context of surveillance; on the other hand, in terms of its dimensions, it is a structure contrary to being imposing/ostentatious and overwhelming in the traditional monument logic. Since it is located on a low pedestal on an almost flat floor,

it creates a democratic space where people can easily interact. In addition, this sculpture transforms the spatial setup into a stage where a theatrical show is watched and performed in the public space (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Portal Project, New York, 2024

On the other hand, in the public space where the portal is located, with the interaction opportunities it provides beyond being a digital sculpture, there has not always been a positive interaction process in the context of the project's goal.

The negative interaction process experienced in the portal project offers important outputs in terms of the social effects and management of the project. The design, designed at the intellectual stage of the project, was aimed to create a structure that encourages cultural exchange by crossing borders and enables empathy to develop. However, in practice, the display of behaviors outside of social norms interrupted the initial purpose of the project (Figure 6-7) (Flatiron NoMad, 2024).



Figure 6. Portal Project, New York, May 2024

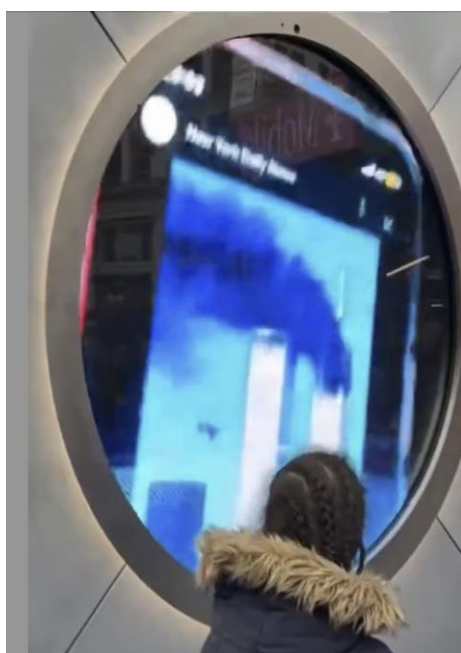


Figure 7. Portal Project, Dublin, May 2024

One of the reasons for the popularization of the project is the display of these out-of-the-norm behaviors. This process has presented a significant opportunity to evaluate societal norms and expectations. While the events led to the temporary closure of the project (Flatiron NoMad, 2024), they provided concrete indications of how the self-restructuring project could be shaped in the future.

On the other hand, when the act of interaction in the portal is analyzed, the act of surveillance in the mutual communication of communities in two different geographies is also a phenomenon that should be evaluated.

As mentioned above, the eye-like structure of the portal project bears strong traces of symbolism in the context of surveillance. This design, which deals with the modern practices of the surveillance society and the threats to the privacy of individuals, is inspired by Foucault's Panopticon model (Foucault, 1977, p. 213) and can make the audience feel the *feeling of being watched*. However, there is not only a vertical surveillance structure here. At the same time, with horizontal surveillance, individuals voluntarily expose themselves. These and similar situations are described by Byung-Chul Han in his book *The Transparency Society* as follows:

In the society of exhibitionism, each subject is its own object of advertising. Everything is measured by the exhibition value. The society of exhibitionism is a pornographic society. Everything is turned outward, exposed, naked, stripped, exposed. The excessiveness of exposure *makes everything a commodity open to immediate consumption*, free from all secrets, and the capitalist economy subordinates everything to the necessity of display. It is only the staging that serves to exhibit and create value that all kinds of idiosyncrasies of things are sacrificed. (Han, 2017, p. 28)

The addition of such projects to the network of social dynamics and relations, which are already transparent with social networks and new media tools in the surveillance society, aims to ensure intercultural communication on the one hand and increases the possibilities of surveillance applied with digital tools on the other.

4. Conclusion

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the rapid development of digital technologies has profoundly affected art and public spaces, as well as in many other fields. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, the Internet of Things (IoT), blockchain, and biotechnology have radically transformed not only economic and social life but also aesthetic experiences. This transformation manifests itself both in the artistic production processes and in the relationships that the works of art establish with the audience.

The effects of digital art practices in the public sphere, mainly when evaluated through the concepts of relational aesthetics and public art, allow for the enrichment of social interactions and cultural expressions. Unlike traditional art practices, digital art has made the artistic experience more dynamic and interactive by encouraging the audience's active participation. In this context, digital artworks function as a part of social memory, identity, and ideology rather than just an aesthetic object.

The influence of digital technologies is reshaping Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere. Habermas defines the public sphere as a space where individuals discuss social issues and form public opinion. The digitalization process has expanded this definition, allowing the creation of digital and physical public spaces. Social media and digital platforms have created new public spaces where individuals interact, exchange views, and discuss societal issues. In this context, digital artworks also play an essential role in these new public spaces.

The Portal Project, initiated by Benediktas Gylys, is an essential and contemporary example that embodies the effects of digital art in the public sphere. The portal aims to increase interaction between cultures and geographies by offering live video connections between cities through high-definition cameras and broadband internet connections. This project allows people to get to know each other in different cultural and social contexts, develop empathy, and build a global bridge of understanding. Thus, art's unifying and transformative power in the social context is revealed.

Henri Lefebvre's view that social relations and power dynamics shape space is critical to understanding the role of digital art in public spaces. Digital artworks redefine public spaces not only through physical but also through digital and social interactions. These works enable individuals to question their relations with space and social dynamics through these relations.

Michel Foucault's Panopticon model is an essential reference point in evaluating digital artworks in the context of surveillance, such as the Portal Project. With its eye-like structure, Portal conveys to viewers the feeling of being constantly watched, addressing the modern practices of the surveillance society and the threats to individuals' privacy. Especially with the spread of digital surveillance technologies in public spaces, a critical ground is emerging in terms of architecture and urban planning disciplines. In this respect, digital art should be considered not only as a means of aesthetic expression but also as a means of inquiry into how digital technologies reconstruct power relations in public spaces. The Portal Project and similar installations in cities can create a public space where individuals are kept under constant surveillance. This shows that digital art can not only offer an aesthetic experience but also bring social and political critiques.

New forms of expression and interaction methods offered by digital art practices in the public sphere make public spaces more dynamic, accessible, and democratic. In other words, while architectural structures and urban spaces become a part of digital art, public spaces turn into multidimensional spaces where art is exhibited and individuals interact. This enables art to function as a part of social interactions and cultural expressions rather than just an aesthetic object while disrupting the static structure of the space and offering a participatory and dynamic experience to the audience. The possibilities offered by digital technologies allow artists to reach wider audiences and interact with audiences more deeply. In addition, from the point of view of architecture and urban planning disciplines, digital art projects also increase the functionality of public spaces. Digital art applications are not aesthetic arrangements in public spaces or decorative architectural elements but structures that reconstruct how social relations, cultural ties, and public spaces are experienced, as seen in the portal project.

On the other hand, although the project's primary purpose, the development of empathy and understanding, has been interrupted by non-norm interactions, it offers an opportunity for a free and democratic environment when evaluated in terms of the opportunities for individuals to express themselves. However, it should be considered that behaviors contrary to universal value judgments will also have adverse outcomes.

As mentioned above, the development of digital technologies has reshaped the concepts of public art and relational aesthetics. This transformation has allowed art to become more interactive and accessible in a social context, deepening the relationship between works of art and technological developments and contributing to our understanding of our age's digital culture and social structure. Current initiatives, such as the Portal Project, concretely demonstrate the role and impact of digital art in societal interactions while raising critical ethical questions about surveillance and privacy. Such projects allow us to assess the future potential of digital art and its impact on society from a broader perspective.

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