

Hiding faces

A philosophical-artistic intervention

Maria Kronfeldner and Lukas Einsele

June 23 to July 6, 2020 at Atelierhaus Ludwig-Engel-Weg 1, 64287 Darmstadt

Attention: Due to the current restrictions for public events, the public presentation of the project with lectures and film evening will be held on September 4, 2020. On this occasion, the publication completed by then will also be presented.

The course of the project planned for the period from June 23 to July 6 corresponds to the current rules for social distance.

Many debates on facial recognition focus on the rapidly growing technical possibilities and how to regulate them. Our current understanding of what it means to be human, and what privacy and autonomy means for us as part of that, is usually taken as a given.

The interdisciplinary project *Hiding Faces*, will break new ground by putting the latter in focus in order to analyze the anthropological, cultural, and ethical dimensions of showing and hiding faces.

We will ask: What does it do to us and our understanding of being human when we are increasingly surrounded by automatic or even autonomous methods for facial recognition and recording? What does it do to our understanding of autonomy and privacy? How do we change not only our self-understanding, but subsequently our behavior? When (and why) do we start to hide, i.e. to mask our face? What is veiling? What is its history?

We will approach these questions in an epistemological manner, i.e. focused on seeing, the visual sense, knowledge and understanding. These four core categories of epistemology are intended to provide the foundation for tracing the history of the cultural practice of hiding faces. As part of that, what it means to be human will not be regarded as a constant, but as a historical, cultural and political variable, with its specific prospects and risks. These prospects and risks are only partly dependent on the technological change, i.e. they cannot be reduced to the prospects and risks of facial recognition technology. They are deeper – in its positive and negative side.

The project *Hiding Faces* is decisively interdisciplinary, combining philosophy and art, and will focus on the research process rather than on the research output only.

During a two-week Research Retreat in Darmstadt, Maria Kronfeldner, Professor of Philosophy at Central European University (New York – Vienna – Budapest), will make the process of research and understanding visible by a continuously growing collection of notes. This collection of notes will be accessible to the public as a living archive in the Atelier Ludwig-Engel-Weg 1.

Lukas Einsele, artist and photographer, will portray the visitors of the very same Atelier with the help of a laser scanner. In addition, he will examine the resulting three-dimensional facial images with respect to their incompleteness. To accomplish this, the images will be transformed into various media, such as AR/VR-projections and 3D-prints. Further material will emerge from a collaboration with the robot research-institute at the Technische Universität Darmstadt: Einsele will scan their Robot Elenoide and investigate the material by questioning the human-likeness of Elenoide's face and how it disguises its technical structures (the "bones") behind it. Kronfeldner will discuss with Elenoide in order to add a philosophical-artistic dimension to human-robot interaction studies. This discussion will be filmed and shared with the visitors.

The two parts of the project will merge organically and will follow the principle of 'wild', i.e. open thought. That way the simultaneity of the different levels of reflection can open up a new intellectual horizon that allows to imagine what *could* become of our self-image and our actions in response to technological change. It takes the standard frictions between human beings and technology as an opportunity to imagine positively what we can become with our technology integrated into our anthropologies. The focus on a slow but iterative process of reading, writing and sharing – research in short – is also an attempt to juxtapose two seemingly discordant processes: on the one hand, the accelerated speed in which the increasingly autonomous technology develops; on the other hand, the decelerated and deeply-seated human aspect of critical and open thinking.

Background to the project

"Hiding faces / A History of Veiling" is part of a broader research collaboration between the philosopher Prof. Dr. Maria Kronfeldner (Central European University, Budapest / Vienna) and the artist Lukas Einsele ("One Step Beyond - The Mine Revisited"). The project is centered on a historical-epistemological discourse between philosophy and art, which sees itself as an extension of an otherwise mostly politically and socially discussed phenomenon of our time. It is based on Kronfeldner's and Einseles' common interest in the human face.

Maria Kronfeldner is Professor at the Department of Philosophy at Central European University (New York/ Vienna/ Budapest). She works in the philosophy of the life sciences and the philosophy of the social sciences and has published widely in these areas. She has been awarded *The Karl Popper Essay Prize* of the British Society for the Philosophy of Science and *The Philosophical Quarterly International Essay Prize*. Earlier she held a position at Bielefeld University and several fellowships, among them at the Max Planck Institute for History of Science in Berlin; at the Fishbein Center for History of Science and Medicine of the University of Chicago; at the Center for Philosophy of Science, University of Pittsburgh; at the Sydney Centre for the Foundations of Science of the University of Sydney; and at Akademie Schloss Solitude. She regularly appears in public and considers philosophy to be the most abstract art possible.

In his long term projects **Lukas Einsele** explores and describes social, political and humanitarian issues, in which the inextricability and subjection of the individual within global structures becomes evident. In his work he applies artistic and documentary strategies mainly based on the media of photography, video and text.

He was awarded with grants from Deutsche Akademie Rom Villa Massimo, German Kunstfonds, the Hessische Kulturstiftung, the Akademie Schloss Solitude, the Kunststiftung NRW, and many others. His works were exhibited at Fotomuseum Winterthur, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Casino Luxembourg, Kunsthalle Mainz, Bildmuseet Umeå University, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art Rotterdam, Museum Haus Esters Krefeld, UN New York.