

alien productions

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## The Thought Projector

Of all the human instruments of perception, the eye is indisputably the most important. Thoroughly convincing confirmation of this—beyond all physiological arguments—is provided by the dramatic ascent of that industry in which image-generating machines come into use and almost completely fill the viewer's field of vision with absolute trash. Over and over again, attention has been intensively focused on the sense of sight, and not without including consideration of the act of disseminating that which is being seen. On this level, the "School of Seeing" has played a decisive role in various different connections—be that as a means of instructing an audience in the art of more conscious seeing, or of confronting students with images' functional mechanisms, their dramaturgy, and the mostly commercial messages hidden within them as was typical of the golden age of aesthetic education that dominated art instruction in the '70s. The demand of the politically committed was to make that which is there to be seen visible by everyone. What auteur photography was trying to create artistically at this time culminated in the discovering, conscious and selectively seeing eye.

In their installation entitled *The Thought Projector*, the artists' collective named "alien productions" reverses the traditional course of things: the eye that perceives images as details excerpted from reality and, by means of an apparatus—regardless of whether analog or digital—inserted into the sequence of perception, seeks over and over again to preserve that image as a motif now becomes the motif itself. A professional-grade fundus camera as used by ophthalmologists provides high-resolution images of the retina, the interior surface of the eye, and the iris. Thus, the natural instrument of observation is itself observed, whereby the organ of sight's capabilities as a data storage medium and projection surface of various types of data are shifted into the focal point of artistic consideration and occupy the spotlight in the installation the artists now stage.

alien productions' prime consideration in the conception of a project is often a recently-discovered and currently-researched point of reference. Their interest in opinion polls and research studies that usually wind up in the form of complex descriptions addresses phenomena within a broad spectrum of historical and contemporary, scientific and social facts. In going about this, their focus has very often been on technological utopias and visions whose significance could play a decisive role in the here and now.

A brainstorm sparked *The Thought Projector*. Nikola Tesla (1856–1943), a native of Croatia who received his training at the institutes of technology in Graz, Prague and Budapest, "a forgotten genius of the science of electricity," wanted to build a device that could be used to photograph thoughts. This possibility of an elaborately developed image transfer process ignited the interest of alien productions for a number of reasons—first of all, certain historical occurrences and phenomena. For instance, it's said that the last image a decedent sees is stored in his/her eyes, which, in the case of violent death, could preserve the identity of the victim's murderer. And then there's the occult world's aura photography that's said to be able to physically manifest thoughts solely via concentration on light-sensitive paper and thus even without a camera.

Transferred into the present, this is a matter of an art-immanent reflexive system for which the new photographic images made visible by the camera that has been "customized" on the basis of the idea Tesla came up with emerge. This concept is inseparably linked to a view of a situation that

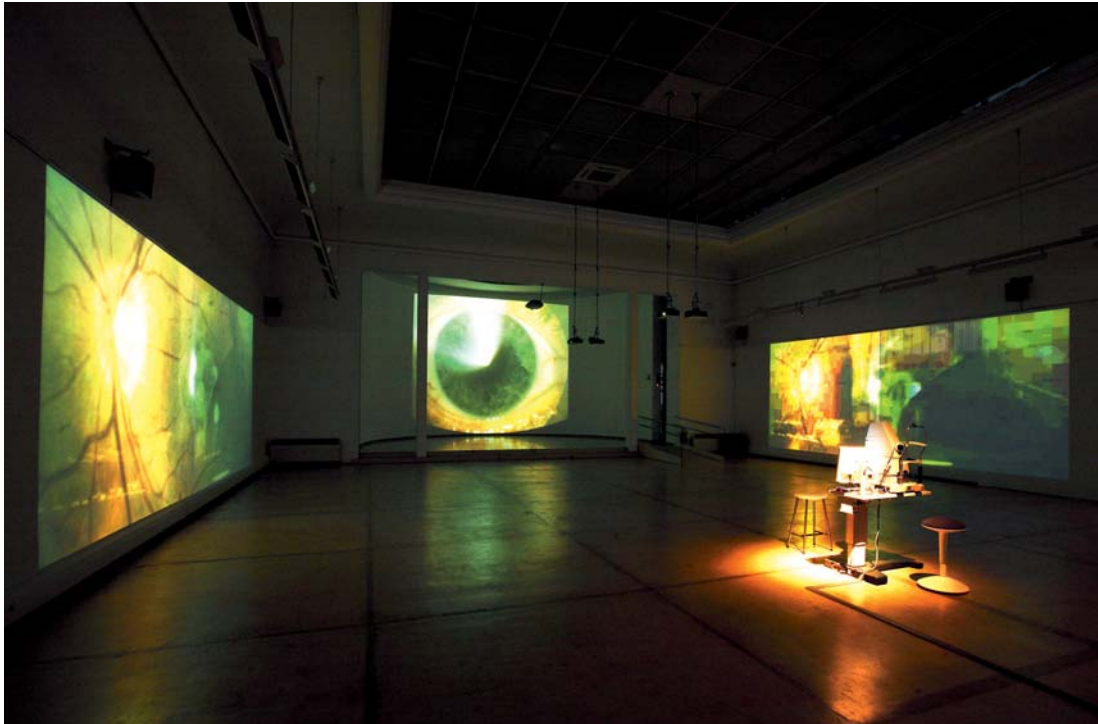


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*The Thought Projector*, 2007; Künstlerhaus Graz

## Ars Foyer

exists in the real world today: that of the Visible Human whose private sphere is an open book, the subject of surveillance cameras whose lenses no longer remain focused on private domains but rather track any person making his/her way through any part of the urban public sphere, the protagonist of the narratives winding through the transcripts of telephone calls recorded by the hierarchical system behind (and in front of) the closed doors aligned along the corridors of power, by the custodians of law and order, by elected or self-appointed monitoring bodies.

If thoughts can be photographed, are they still free? Can they truly be depicted, or, even more alarmingly, can they be interpreted? If this were the case, then surveillance would have achieved its ultimate objective. As a means of expressing this paradigmatic issue in the form of a very serious thought-game, the images generated by *The Thought Projector* are being projected in various different forms within the installation space itself and also streamed onto the Internet, thus making them available (anonymously, of course) not only to internal visitors but also to external users. All those partaking of them can, in turn, submit their commentaries on and interpretations of these “thought images,” and this input will also be displayed in the installation space. The White Cube thus becomes the interface between interior and exterior, between private and public spheres.

Text: Werner Fenz

Translated from German by Mel Greenwald.



Thoughts are read with a fundus camera manufactured by ZEISS.

*The Thought Projector* was first produced at Künstlerhaus Graz (Werner Fenz, Evelyn Kraus) in September/October 2007.

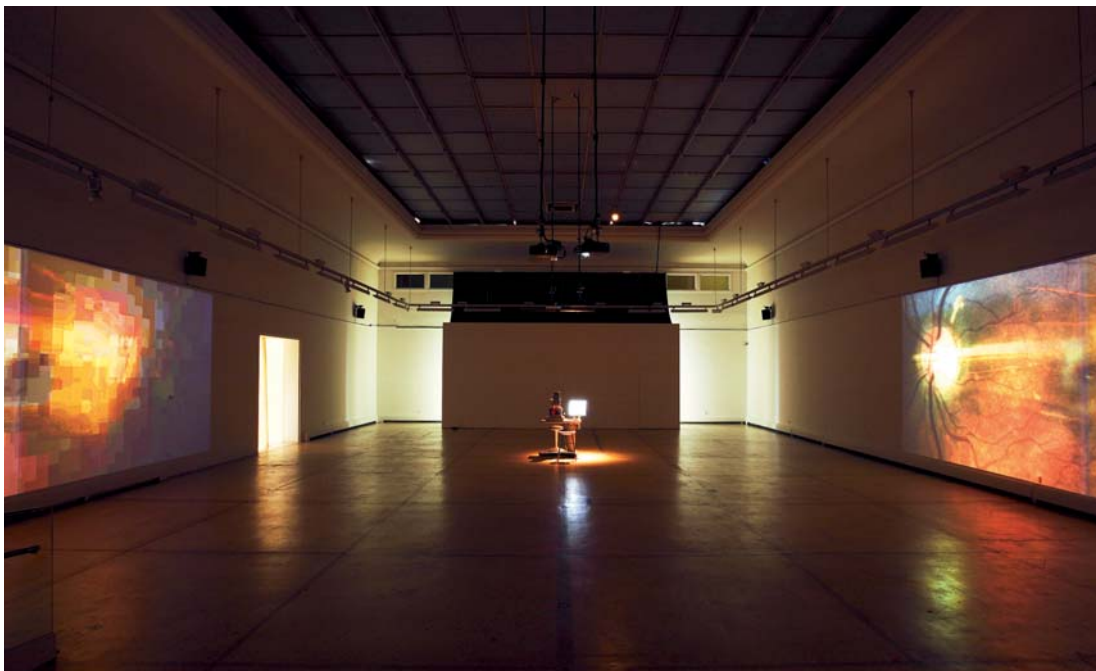


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