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Abstract

Aware of increasing digital surveillance and datafication, some artists are developing innovative aesthetic practices that critically engage with the politics of technology and privacy. This article examines how a group of European multimedia artists creatively question and reshape digital tools through their work. Based on a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, it shows how they explore technological opacity, encourage embodied and participatory experiences, and subvert dominant digital norms. The study focuses on how these artists negotiate, reconceptualize and make tangible such privacy issues through creative processes and play. Artists' playfulness often challenges surveillance norms or digital control, making "play" a potential conceptual hinge between postdigital aesthetics, privacy, and critical practice. Consequently, by focusing on artists' reflexive and critical engagement with digital media, the article positions postdigital art as a form of situated or contextual resistance, offering alternative forms of knowledge, perception and creation in an increasingly opaque and surveilled digital landscape.

Keywords: Postdigital Art, Surveillance, Privacy, Aesthetics,

Introduction

In recent years, artists working at the intersection of digital technologies and media practices have increasingly developed strategies for making accessible data collection infrastructures, algorithmic biases, and intrusive surveillance. This article explores how artists associated with what is increasingly referred to as postdigital art address issues of digital surveillance and transparency as well as technological dynamics. Their creative practice is characterised by being socially engaged, critically and reflexively exploring the relationship between humans and technologies (Vlavo, 2017). While its roots can be traced to earlier forms of media art, hacktivism, and tactical aesthetics, postdigital art is distinct in its attention to the entanglement of physical and digital materialities, and in its orientation toward embodied participation, hybrid environments, and open critique of technological progress narratives (Paul, 2020; Berry & Dieter, 2015). Instead of producing digital art as an autonomous aesthetic, these artists work across media to explore the political and sensory dimensions of our relationship to the digital. In this sense, this research shows that postdigital art

shares affinities with relational aesthetics and participatory art in its emphasis on interaction, embodiment, and co-creation (Bishop, 2012; Bourriaud, 1998). This research demonstrate that such aesthetics resonates with contextual theories of privacy, which argue that data sharing issues, or hyperconnectivity per example, must be understood in relation to the social norms, expectations, and power dynamics that govern specific contexts (Nissembaum, 2004; Richards, 2021). By creating works that challenge default digital behaviors and invite situated reflection, these artists offer new ways of navigating the relational boundaries of digital interactions.

On the methodology side, this article draws on interviews with twelve European artists whose work explicitly engages with digital privacy, surveillance, and data. Instead of presenting a generalized account of digital privacy, the paper focuses on how these artists experience, frame, and intervene in privacy concerns through their aesthetic and conceptual choices. In doing so, postdigital aesthetic connects the audience to broader debates in surveillance issues and privacy reflections. In addition, the research was guided by the *CreaTures* framework (Vervoort, et al. 2024), an EU-funded research project (2020–2024) that investigates how creative practices can contribute to ecological and societal transformation. Developed by a multidisciplinary team across Europe, the *CreaTures* framework *(Creative Practices for Transformational Futures)* provides tools and methods for evaluating the impact of art and design practices in fostering social, political, and environmental change. At the heart of the framework is the notion that transformative change is not only political or technological, but also cultural and experiential. The project emphasizes the unique role of creative practitioners in imagining, prefiguring, and enacting alternatives to dominant systems, a perspective that closely aligns with postdigital art.

Indeed, the framework outlines nine dimensions of practice across imagination, embodiment, care, collectivity, reframing, and sense-making, among others. These dimensions served as interpretive lenses during the analysis, helping to contextualize how artists described their process in relation to issues such as surveillance, datafication, and hyperconnectivity. Instead of applying the *CreaTures* framework as a rigid checklist, it was used as a flexible guide to interpret the interview data. This approach helped identify themes such as embodiment, participatory art, hybridity, or imagination as ways to understand how creative practices act as forms of cultural and political resistance. Three overarching dimensions of practice emerged:

> 1. Exploring the possibilities of combining scientific research with new imaginaries and hybrid environments.

2. Changing the audience's relationship with technology by creating a more human, participative and playful experience.

3. Challenging current narratives on technologies by opening and subverting the "black box".

Likewise, it is important to note that throughout these dimensions, playfulness emerged as a central and often underestimated element, both as a means of engaging audiences and as a critical tool for navigating the complexities of digital tools. Across interviews, artists frequently described their use of play, humor, and metaphor as essential to engaging audiences in complex themes such as privacy, autonomy, and algorithmic control. While often overlooked in tech-critical discourse, play has a deep history in both media studies and art theory. As Dale Leorke (2018) shows in *Location-Based Gaming*, play in public space often operates as a form of informal resistance, inviting people to reimagine systems and rules. In the context of post-digital art, playfulness functions as a design principle, a method of interpretation and a relational strategy between the public and issues of privacy. It allows artists to transform digital complexity into creative environments, to embed critique within interaction, and to foster what philosopher Miguel Sicart (2014) calls "playful subversion." Importantly, play here is an embodied means of resistance, one that leverages surprise, friction, and co-creation to surface new possibilities.

More than a single theory of post-digital art, the article offers an in-depth reflection on how artists are generating new ways of seeing, feeling and reflecting the dynamics and infrastructures that are shaping society's digital transformation.

Postdigital Art in Context

While digital media art has a long history, extending from Futurism and Constructivism to the experimental work of Nam June Paik and tactical media in the 1990s, *postdigital art* signals a shift in how artists relate to technology. More than simply using digital tools for exploring digital aesthetic landscape, postdigital artists reflexively engage with the socio-technical infrastructures that shape our lives. This create works that not only use technology but critically reveal and reconfigure it. In fact, contemporary postdigital artworks and born-digital arts such as immersions, simulations and augmented realities represent new challenges for established cultural institutions as well as for the public, as the individual's experience is transformed (Giannini and Bowen, 2019). Using immersive, interactive, sensitive, connective, and tactile technologies, postdigital art aim to create a more intimate and personal experience for the individual bodies and the audience (Langdon, 2014). Some interpret this phenomenon as contributing to the "humanization of digital

technologies" (Edmundson, 2015). This opens the door to new ways of curating and especially dealing with topics that previously could not be represented by other mediums (Zuanni, 2021). As Christiane Paul (2020) notes, postdigital practices often foreground digital materiality itself, exposing algorithms, network protocols, and sensor environments as sites of meaning, struggle, and imagination: "the *embeddedness* of the digital in the objects, images, and structures we encounter daily and the way we understand ourselves about them". This paper adopts the following working definition:

> *Postdigital art* is a socially engaged and reflexive practice that explores the material, political, and affective dimensions of human-technology relationships through hybrid, often participatory, forms.

This definition not only builds on the work of Paul (2020) but also reflects the self-understanding of the artists interviewed in this study, many of whom resist categorization and instead define themselves through process, experimentation, and critical engagement.

In addition, art has always played a crucial role in this cultural politics. The field of surveillance art, particularly, includes practices that make surveillance visible, challenge asymmetries of control, or creatively reframe data collection as a participatory or subversive act. Artists such as Hasan Elahi, Trevor Paglen, and the collective *!Mediengruppe Bitnik* have developed projects that highlight the aesthetics and affects of surveillance. Scholars like Clare Birchall (2011) have also drawn attention to the concept of "tactical opacity" in art, a way of resisting datafication not through transparency, but through ambiguity, refusal, or misdirection.

The artists in this study align with the tradition of critical media and surveillance art, which seeks to expose the mechanisms of control embedded in digital systems (Monahan, 2006). However, their work departs from earlier forms of critique that rely primarily on representing surveillance, these artists embed critique within the interactive, material, and immersive dimensions of their work. By crafting participatory installations, interactive workshops, and playful interfaces, these artists stage encounters that make users feel surveillance as embodied constraint, friction, or behavioral manipulation. Such works challenge the logics of seamless UX design, and instead foreground discomfort, ambiguity, and agency as tools of subversion (Paul, 2020; Birchall, 2011).

This shift from representation to immersion is particularly relevant in an era where surveillance is increasingly experiential, participatory, and internalized (Lyon, 2018). Beyond making surveillance visible, these artists create experiences helping participants rehearse alternative forms of agency and relationality within digital tools. Furthermore, Paul (2020) suggests three ways in which this

new aesthetic can be seen as revealing or reflecting the intersections between digital technologies and physical materiality:

> 1. Using integrated networked technologies, reflecting the human and non-human environment around them.
>
> 2. Revealing their own coded materiality as part of their form, becoming themselves a residue of digital processes.
>
> 3. Reflecting the way machines and digital processes perceive us and our world.

In these terms, the research suggests that artists act as mediators or facilitators between what is widespread and internalized as the degree of surveillance and privacy in our society and by each individual, and the openness to reflection on this situation through immersion, play and participatory art. This is what the research calls the phenomenon of reflexivity.

Surveillance, Privacy, and Creative Practice

Contemporary concerns around digital privacy are frequently framed through the lens of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), in which user data is extracted and monetized by opaque platforms and infrastructures. While Zuboff's work has helped popularize a critique of data commodification, it is just one perspective within a broader and more nuanced field of surveillance studies. Scholars such as David Lyon (2001, 2018) and Elise Morrison (2016) emphasize the cultural and spatial dimensions of surveillance, including how it is represented, normalized, and contested in everyday life.

Plus, academic research has also shown that privacy is fundamentally more akin to power than something to hide. That it is, in fact, above all a contextual and relational process, deeply dependent on how, where, and by whom information is accessed or disclosed (Nissenbaum, 2004; Richards, 2021). When digital tools ignore these contextual boundaries, blurring private and public spheres across platforms and interactions, they threaten individual autonomy.

Historically, the recognition of privacy as a right led to a complex interplay of power, technology, liberty, agency, identity, surveillance, and autonomy between the state and individuals. The focus always was on finding a balance between power and privacy in a society continuously transformed by technologies (Keulen and Kroeze, 2018). The collection of data, design of infrastructures, and creation of connective interfaces are shaped by powerful actors, including governments and technology corporations (Johnson & Acemoglu, 2023). These platforms often prioritize profit, optimization, and behavioral prediction over transparency, accountability, or user agency. The

result is described, among scholars as well as artists, as a black box in which human experience is rendered into data flows, collected, commodified, and manipulated for strategic ends.

A review of academic literature on privacy in the digital age often converges around three major concerns: the use and manipulation of human information (personal and big data), the expansion of intrusive surveillance techniques, and the social and psychological consequences of hyperconnectivity. Artists engage with these concerns as their practices address the very dynamics that undermine contextual privacy. Through speculative design, participatory and immersive installations, interactive workshops, and playful experimentation, they engage audiences in rethinking their relationships to data, surveillance, and digital agency. Thus, they render the black box visible, felt, tested, and negotiated in artistic context. In doing so, they contribute to a growing cultural effort to reclaim agency and reimagine how privacy and power are shaped and influenced each other in digital environments. The following sections explore how this critical creativity unfolds in practice, focusing on three interwoven processes: exploring new imaginaries and environments, creating a more human-centred experience, and challenging the current status quo.

Methodology

This study employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore how postdigital artists engage with issues of privacy, surveillance, and digital agency through their creative practice. In-depth interviews were chosen because they are especially suited to understanding complex, experiential, and reflexive processes, in this case, how artists conceptualize and materialize digital resistance through aesthetic strategies, design decisions, and participatory environments.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify twelve artists who met two core criteria: (1) they work primarily with digital media and have created at least one artwork that explicitly addresses themes of privacy, surveillance, or hyperconnectivity; and (2) they have exhibited or participated in at least one residency in Europe focused on the societal impacts of digital technology. While only one respondent explicitly used the term *postdigital* to describe their practice, all artists demonstrated a critical and reflexive engagement with digital tools consistent with the working definition adopted in this study. Interviews were conducted in 2024, either online or in person, and generated over ten hours of audio-recorded material. Interview questions were loosely structured around four areas: (1) the artist's relationship with digital media; (2) the conceptual development of recent works; (3) the role of participation, play, and embodiment; and (4) the political and ethical concerns motivating their practice. This format allowed artists to reflect on

both their conceptual intentions and material methods, while also leaving room for unexpected insights and divergent framings.

The data was analyzed using a combination of direct content analysis and thematic coding inspired by the CreaTures framework (Vervoort et al., 2024), which provides a set of dimensions for evaluating how creative practices contribute to societal transformation. As mentioned, this interdisciplinary tool proved useful in identifying how artistic practices move beyond critique to foster new imaginaries, relationships, and forms of engagement with technology. Initial coding was open-ended, allowing themes to emerge inductively from the transcripts. Over time, a more structured code tree was developed, revealing three recurring and interconnected processes in the artists' creative practice:

1. Exploring technological tools through coding, research, and interdisciplinary collaboration.
2. Designing embodied and participatory experiences that foreground play, friction, and human agency.
3. Challenging the technological status quo by subverting dominant narratives and creating alternatives.

These categories became the foundation for the analytical sections that follow. Importantly, they were not imposed in advance but emerged through iterative engagement with the data, a process loosely aligned with grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006). This inductive approach helped ensure that the theoretical lens remained responsive to the artists' own vocabularies, priorities, and forms of critique.

Finally, while the term *postdigital* was not universally adopted by participants, their resistance to fixed labels reflects the experimental and hybrid nature of their work. This methodological openness was crucial in allowing the study to trace shared strategies and concerns without flattening their diversity. However, several limitations remain. First, the study is geographically bound to Europe and shaped by its specific legal and cultural frameworks. Second, while the CreaTures tool helped foreground social transformation, the study did not include direct audience evaluation or long-term impact analysis, important areas for future research. Despite these limitations, the methodological approach enabled a rich exploration of how artists themselves conceptualize and enact privacy, play, and critique through aesthetic means. The next section presents the findings in detail, structured around the three central dimensions of practice identified above.

Exploring Technological Tools: Opening the Black Box

A central thread across all interviews was a commitment to *opening up* the hidden structures and logics of digital tools. tech industries design new software to gain access to more data and increase user activity, which in turn enables them to make a profit by selling this information to other companies or placing targeted ads on the platform (Hartzog, 2018; Richards, 2021). Driven by purely economic interests, the design of technologies not only puts users on the back foot but forces them to resign themselves to the opacity of what tech industries call "progress". For many artists, this situation meant engaging not only with conceptual critiques of surveillance and control, but with the technical materiality of code, software, and infrastructure. Their work reflects a sustained effort to make the "black box of technology more malleable and imaginable. Artists described their creative process as both a form of research and a creative reconfiguration of those tools. This process is deeply interdisciplinary, often combining informatics, critical theory, and participatory design. As one artist put it:

> "By avoiding licensed programs, I started using either open-source or just learning how to code, learning the technique rather than the tool. It is not something that you don't control, you can't shape or customize anymore."

For these artists, learning to code is not simply about technical skill; it is a way of reclaiming agency in a system that is often designed to obscure its own operations. Their engagement with open-source tools, self-taught programming, and collaborative experimentation reflects what Morrison (2016) calls a strategy of *critical re-mediation*: using technology against its own tendencies.

Additionally, several respondents emphasized the importance of collaboration and collective learning in this exploration. Respondents' enthusiasm of interdisciplinary approach is explained by their aiming to demystify the complexity of digital tools, which often demand a multidisciplinary knowledge. Interdisciplinary projects, studio discussions, and informal exchanges were described as key to demystifying complex systems. One artist explained:

> "It is also about collective organization, creating a space together. It gives rise to discussions with people from my studio or my collective."

This emphasis on shared learning reflects not just a practical need but an aesthetic and political orientation, one that resists the individualized, privatized experience of mainstream digital tools. It echoes earlier traditions of tactical media and open tech activism, but with a more speculative and imaginative dimension. Indeed, the act of imagining new digital environments was seen as

equally important as many artists described their use of speculative design and future scenarios as ways to provoke critical reflection. As one participant put it:

> "Imagining pessimistic futures, making it tangible or helping people imagine a future where things could go bad, that is how you can get them thinking about what is wrong with the society right now."

This combination of rigorous inquiry and playful exploration allows artists to explore alternatives to dominant techno-optimistic narratives. Importantly, their work is grounded in present conditions: in privacy regulation, algorithmic bias, platform dependency, and design asymmetries. In this context, playfulness also emerged as a significant exploratory tool. Artists described the fun of experimentation not as a superficial byproduct, but as a method for testing limits, generating surprise, and making complexity accessible. One respondent described their approach as:

> "There is a lot of playfulness for sure, as in playing, failing with the tools."

This resonates with Sicart's (2014) notion of play as subversion: a way of interacting with tools that reveals their contingencies and vulnerabilities. For post-digital artists, play enables a freer engagement with tools. Hence, by treating technological exploration as both rigorous research and artistic exploration, artists unsettle the assumption that digital tools are fixed or that their black box is inevitable. Unlike the rigour of the research process, imagining new technological avenues allows artists greater freedom when exploring technologies. As one respondent expressed:

> "Sometimes this box does not offer me enough freedom where I am happy to move to the artistic sense where I let go of things."

Their creative and critical practices do not simply expose the black box, they imagine what lies beyond it. These aspect serves as a crucial starting point for the analysis, as the position of most of the artists interviewed has developed around a relationship of curiosity, play and research around technologies. First findings show that multidisciplinary research, demystifying tools - such as learning how to code-, playfulness, and imagining new futures and environments are key insights into the artists' attitudes toward their exploration of technology.

Designing More Human-Centred Experiences

If exploring technology meant demystifying tools, imagining new environments, thus playing with the black box, the second key practice among respondents was the design of embodied, hybrid, and participatory experiences that invite users to feel and reflect on the human-technology interactions. In doing so, these artists do not just critique surveillance, hyperconnectivity, or

datafication; they create situations in which audiences can encounter and rehearse other relationships with technology. Rather than reinforcing the screen-based norms of interaction that dominate digital interaction, artists in this study consistently sought to center the body in their installations, workshops, and immersive environments. One artist described the intention behind her design in these terms:

> "It is not through a screen. It is not through your phone. It is not through text. It is not through notification. So how can we put the body in different experiences so that they can absorb, understand, or interact with information in a way that is different?

This emphasis on embodiment aligns with postdigital aesthetics that resist seamless, invisible, or frictionless tech design (Paul, 2020). Instead, these artists insert friction and imperfection into their works to foreground choice, constraint, and reflection. For most artists, offering friction within an embodied experience would even deepen the reflexive aesthetic of their art. The whole idea behind this attitude is not to control everything, but to leave the door open to unpredictability, play and randomness, as well as to increase the user's agency in their used of digital tools.

When viewed through the lens of privacy, these creative practices foster a more nuanced and engaged dialogue around surveillance and datafication. Postdigital artists confront the widespread and often dismissive attitude encapsulated in the phrase *"I have nothing to hide"*, a position that frequently leads to privacy fatigue or the belief that privacy is already lost and therefore irrelevant (Solove, 2010; Choi & Jung, 2018). Rather than accepting this resignation, their work reopens the debate by creating experiences that make surveillance personal, perceptible, and negotiable. In doing so, they resist the apathy of *"so why should we care?"* and instead frame privacy as a matter of power, context, and human agency, issues that remain deeply relevant in an age of digital abstraction and algorithmic control.

In addition, artists acknowledged the fact that design influences human behaviour, and thus, used this approach through various strategies to affect the audience relationship with technology. Therefore, this design philosophy directly challenges dominant HCI and UX paradigms that treat smoothness and efficiency as optimal. As Christian Paul would put it, postdigital art changes user's experience by contributing to reflect "the human and non-human environment around them." (Paul, 2020). More critically, drawing on what Morrison (2016) calls critical discomfort, these artists make space for hesitation, and interruption; conditions that allow audience, and thus users, to become more aware of how digital tools shape their behavior and decisions. Several artists

described these embodied experiences as a way of reclaiming agency, by giving audiences opportunities to co-create, respond, and experiment. One respondent explained:

> "How do I want agency and autonomy and how do I want it in my routine? And if there is no friction at all, then there is no way of reflecting on how it is situated in my routine."

This was especially apparent in participatory formats such as workshops, AR experiences, and interactive installations. Giving them back their power also means making them aware of the choices made without their knowledge in the privacy and default settings, as well as how, for example, cookies. This participatory impulse often takes material form in curated spaces that blend physical and digital interaction. Several artists reported designing installations where visitors are required to make decisions, perform tasks, or follow alternate rules. As one artist put it:

> "They are ways of sharing my research with the public and also inviting them into my research, my practice as well as into the discussion."

In a privacy perspective, artists create experiences that subtly mimic or expose the logic of surveillance infrastructures and behavioral design. These setups encourage what Birchall (2011) might call "tactical opacity": a form of user resistance not through transparency, but through awareness, refusal, or playful subversion. Interestingly, the works also foreground care and trust. Playful context acts as a safe environment for participants, insofar as the artists are motivated to share and create a participative and caring experience of technology. Play creates an experimental environment, a kind of safe laboratory for both artists and participants. One respondent noted:

> "Play influences the audience to feel more open to experiment, to try things that they wouldn't otherwise do."

This balance between critical engagement and emotional openness is one of the most distinctive features of the artists' practice. By designing for touch, friction, and shared experience, they make the politics of digital black box felt, and not only understood. The scientific and creative enthusiasm in their creative practice is also one of the search engines for many of the respondents to immerse themselves in new subjects. For example, one respondent was invited to take part in an exhibition on the Olympic Games 2024:

> "I didn't have a project on that at all. I had to do a new project, a project around the new algorithmic video surveillance".

For many of the artists interviewed, postdigital practice provides a space to engage with pressing issues of digital governance, including privacy, surveillance, datafication, and hyperconnectivity.

Their participatory works do not merely represent these issues; they perform alternative digital relations, characterized by friction, unpredictability, randomness, and a renewed sense of humanity. These aesthetic choices challenge the smoothness and opacity of mainstream digital design, and instead foreground vulnerability, trust, and contextual nuance. This orientation resonates with contextual theories of privacy, which emphasize that information sharing is not universally acceptable, but deeply dependent on social settings and relational boundaries (Strahilevitz, 2005; Richards, 2021). As Richards puts it, "our decision to share information in one context doesn't mean that we should share it in all contexts." By crafting intimate, tactile, or disruptive experiences, artists offer audiences new cultural reference points, or sensible landmarks, for engaging with digital tools. In doing so, they may help shift how people perceive the meaning and consequences of privacy in the networked age.

The next section describes major issues that this creative practice aims to address i.e. the social and common experience of technology by emphasising the users' autonomy, agency, and awareness, vis-a-vis the big tech and digital governance. And finally, to rebalance the current privacy, technology and power dynamics in favour of democratic process.

Challenging the Technological Status Quo

While exploring technologies and designing embodied experiences were central to the artists' practices, this research shows that their aim often extended further: to challenge the current techno-optimists' narratives and ideologies underpinning the dominant evolution of digital technology. Across the interviews, artists expressed a desire not only to reclaim agency, but to destabilize default norms, and propose alternatives to extractive, manipulative digital environments. On one hand, they contribute to creating a more open technological environment by creating open-source tools and by opening conversations on the black box and its dark patterns. On the other hand, artists are subverting the evolution of technology by creating alternative languages, exposing new rules, and raising awareness about the current status quo.

Many respondents framed their work in opposition to what one called the "relentless pursuit of efficiency" and data-driven design paradigms embedded in platforms. They criticized the economic logics of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), not simply as abstract concerns but as material realities encoded into everyday tools and interfaces. One artist explained:

> "We don't know who owns it. We don't know the impact. Everything is magnified by the distance."

This distance, from code, from governance, from big tech, was a recurring motif. Several artists described their creative work as an attempt to shorten that distance and reveal the stakes of default settings, opaque algorithms, and manipulative nudging techniques. Rather than merely critique these tools, artists often engaged in tactical subversion. Some designed artworks that mimicked or distorted surveillance logics; others rewrote user agreements or created poetic interfaces that defied optimization. These strategies reflect what Leorke (2018) and Morrison (2016) describe as aesthetic resistance through misdirection and rule-bending. Indeed, for respondents, rules are put in place to help change the participant's experience, and the gaming environment facilitate the integration of complex subjects. Play as accessibility and as rules are strongly linked. As one respondent explained:

> "This is a way of guiding a person through a complicated topic and letting them experience it. Then [the audience] can reflect on their own choices of behaviour that were, of course, influenced by me."

Therefore, the notion of playfulness remained central to this effort. Artists used it not just as an access point, but as a political design choice, to transform experiences that rely on compliance into spaces for experimentation. Here, rules and play become tools of mutual reflection, rather than unilateral control. A bridge can be made with the literature on contextual privacy (Strahilevitz 2005): play creates an extraordinary experience for experimenting and thus redefining contextual relationships between the audience and issues of privacy. By playing with the rules, artists ensure that they create a reflexive environment, moving away from opaque digital curtains. Another parallel can be made between play and Torin Monahan notion of "defamiliarization", which explain that tactics are used "to draw critical attention to everyday surveillance that has become mundane". Thus, play would seem to be an important lever for post-digital's artists: it allows embodiment of current surveillance and datafication issues, as another interviewee explained:

> "Games turn information into a pedagogical process that enables embodied knowledge."

By using metaphor, simulation, and open-ended interaction, playful experiences invite participants to question the status quo of technological development. In these contexts, play is not simply entertainment, it becomes a strategy for destabilizing norms, allowing audiences to step into unfamiliar roles, rules, and relational dynamics. Importantly, these experiences are often designed to feel intimate, experimental, or even subversive. They rely on a tacit social contract: participants must trust that what unfolds within the installation remains protected within that space. In this

way, play becomes not just a design choice, but a framing device that temporarily redefines privacy, enabling participants to explore vulnerability and agency in a safe, bounded context.

Furthermore, by revealing how systems shape choice, and how they could be otherwise, artists unsettle the default and propose alternatives. However, creating accessible, playful and open-source digital tools is essential for artists in their explorations to push their boundaries and understand them. But it is no easy task, and respondents are often, if not always, confronted with the thick and opaque digital curtains. Many suggested that opening access to digital tools should take on the form of political regulation. However, one respondent expressed his doubt in these words:

> "I don't have a lot of belief that regulations will be our answer to defining those boundaries for the use of technology. I think regulations will help but regulations can also just be swayed by money or personal interest for power."

Confronting to this situation, most of the respondent are subverting and regaining empowerment by stopping letting themselves be manipulated and dictated to by tech industries' interests. To do so, respondents pointed that technologies influence not only our behaviour but also our language. As one respondent said:

> "Suddenly our language itself is sort of shaped by the tools we use, because otherwise, the AI can't understand it."

Language is therefore not a neutral medium; it is a terrain where power is negotiated. By designing alternative scripts, gestures, and symbolic systems, they attempt to remake the grammar of human-technology interaction itself. Another respondent expressed the same feeling of being surpassed by large language models (LLM):

> "Big question mark about AI. We get emotionally dependent on AI. We are talking with sort of mirrors of ourselves".

For all these respondents, as things stand, technological advances tend to develop a design that makes us forget that the actual digital mirror in front of our eyes is nothing more than a tinted window serving as a tool for economic profit and surveillance that threatens our privacy and democracy. Our self-image, and even self-esteem, are increasingly dependent on and are made through this mirror, which may favour certain visions and values (magnification) and diminish others (narrowing). The situation is even worst, as one respondent added:

"We are intimately susceptible to its updates."

For the artists, working with alternative languages means asking what happens if we change the design and parameters of this mirror. In sum, they have placed their hope in creative action, in designing alternatives that are open, shareable and based on caring rather than capture. Their subversions are not about overturning platforms in a single act but about altering the relationship between human and technology and redistributing autonomy in digital environments that seem increasingly deterministic. In this way, post-digital art becomes not just a discourse on technology, but a field of intervention, a space where agency is reclaimed, tools are opened up and futures are democratic.

In contrast to the techno-optimistic narratives promoted by those who control the direction of technological development, postdigital artists adopt a critically engaged stance that links aesthetic decisions to social impact. Their work resists passive consumption and instead foregrounds the political dimensions of code, language, and design. Through practices such as speculative design, creative coding, and the invention of alternative languages, these artists develop forms of expression that render the social consequences of technology both visible and graspable.

This resonates with Clare Birchall's (2015) concept of the *aesthetics of the secret*, which reframes secrecy not as a problem to be solved, but as a productive space for political and aesthetic engagement. Rather than striving for total transparency, these artists, like those Birchall discusses, often embrace opacity, ambiguity, and play as forms of resistance, creating experiential encounters that challenge the logic of surveillance without reproducing its visual or epistemic control. In doing so, they help shift the conversation on privacy away from exposure alone and toward the creation of alternative relations to visibility, vulnerability, and digital power. Hence, their conceptual choices are deliberate interventions aimed at exposing how digital infrastructures shape experience, behavior, and power relations within those dynamics.

Conclusion: Postdigital Art as Situated Resistance

The research revealed that postdigital art goes beyond a merely political or activist stance on privacy issues and represents a valuable ally for the design of a more democratic and human digital environment. It has explored how postdigital artists engage with the politics of privacy, surveillance, and digital tools through creative practice. Drawing on interviews with ten multimedia artists based in Europe, the research has highlighted three interwoven dimensions of their work: exploring technological tools, designing more human-centred, embodied and participatory experiences, and challenging the technological status quo through many levers. The artists interviewed approach it

as a felt, contextual, and relational concern, rather than treating digital privacy as an abstract legal or technical issue. Through coding, speculative design, open-source practices, and playful installations, they intervene in tools that typically obscure user agency and reinforce behavioral conformity. Their creative strategies, especially the use of play, friction, participatory art and embodiment, resist the seamlessness of platform design and instead foreground complexity, ambiguity, and negotiation. One might ask what would the human-technology relationship look like if access was open and less profit-driven? If it didn't present a design asymmetrically thought out to ensure profit and perpetuate the status quo about the actual trajectory but rather increasing human sensitivity towards their environment and themselves? It is in addressing these questions and exposing them to the public that this creative practice could well be a form of postdigital artivism.

However, this practice does not offer a singular solution to surveillance capitalism or digital disempowerment. It proposes a different way of being with and thinking through technology, one that is rooted in scientific rigour, creativity, and play. In this sense, postdigital art constitutes a form of situated resistance: a way of reopening closed tools, revealing their politics, and experimenting with more democratic and humane alternatives. Therefore, these findings suggest that artists are not merely responding to technological progress, they are actively shaping public discourse, aesthetic norms, and political imaginaries. As such, postdigital art should be recognized not just as cultural production, but as a meaningful intervention into the broader landscape of digital governance.

Future Research Directions

This study focused on artists' perspectives, practices, and design intentions. Further research could extend this work in several directions. First, by examining how audiences receive and interpret postdigital artworks. Do participants leave installations or workshops with a deeper understanding of surveillance and privacy? Do these experiences lead to behavioral or attitudinal shifts? Second, a more technical study could analyze how open tools, languages, and interfaces are developed and shared across artistic communities. This would offer insight into the material infrastructures of creative resistance. Third, expanding the geographic scope beyond Europe could reveal how different cultural, legal, and technological contexts shape artistic responses to privacy and surveillance issues. Comparative research might uncover common tactics, as well as unique local strategies for engaging with the "black box" of digital patterns.

In all cases, this research underscores the value of approaching privacy not just through law or policy, but through aesthetic, design, sensory, and participatory inquiry. Postdigital artists help make visible what is hidden, negotiable what seems fixed, and creative what often feels predetermined. Their practices remind us that resistance to technological dominance is not only possible, it can be imaginative, embodied, and shared.

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