Art & Post-Human Photography. How to account for the real?

Week 22: 26. - 30.05.2024

Abstract

For over one hundred years, photography was one of the most important ways to document and account for our external reality, extending a visual regime that started with the development of the central perspective in the 15th century. Its claim to veracity lied in the technical replication of the visual experience of a single human being.

Today, digital image-making has unsettled the relationship between images and human experience more than ever. On the one hand, ubiquitous pre- and post-processing, widely used AI programs, trained on billions of images, blur the dividing line between recording and generation. On the other hand, more and more images are never to be seen by humans but used for automated processes. But not only machines are “sensing”, increasingly a whole range of “more-than-human” actors are understood as “sensing” the world in different ways, revealing layers and dynamics not directly accessible via the human senses.

But it’s not just technologies that have changed. Contemporary realities have become so complex, abstract, and stretched out over time and space, that the individual experience is less and less able to make sense of it. After all, how much can documentary photography, particularly a single image, reveal about data-centers or climate change?

In response to all these challenges, artists and researchers are developing a new visual language that is able to account for the new contours of the real in the 21st century. We are, among others, focusing on works by Trevor Paglen, or Forensic Architecture and exploring the notion of “investigative aesthetics” and “operational images”.

Course requirements:

Attendance (80%)

Participation in reading, discussions, and group presentations

Pad for course notes:

https://pad.vmk.zhdk.ch/posthuman-real

Monday

Humanism & Post-Humanism and the depiction of the real

Human(ism)

- Renaissance (1400 - 1600)
  - Linear Perspective, 5 Min.

    - Jan Van Eyck: Adolfini Portrait (1434)
    - Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man (1490) and the Measure of All Things, Antigone Journal, 2021
    - Dürer, Albrecht: Underweysung der messung mit dem zirckel un[d] richtscheyt, in Linien ebnen unnd gantzen corporen (1525)
- Enlightenment (1600-1800)
    - Sciene and rationality
    - Drawing Machines
- Modernism
    - Invention of Photography, Duaguerre: Boulevard du Temple (1837)
    - View from the Window at Le Gras (1829)

Not centered on the individual (pre-human)

- European Middle Ages: God sees everything. Paradiesgärtlein (Garden of Paradise) Upper Rhenish Master, ca 1410
- Traditional Chinese PaintingHarmony of Nothingness
- Arabic PaintingMantiq al-tair (Language of the Birds), Herat, 1487

Photography as indexing the real

- Valley of the Shadow of Death Roger Fenton, 1855, publicdomainreview.org
- Walker Evans (1903–1975), https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/evan/hd_evan.htm
- Robert Capa (1913 – 1954): "If your photographs aren't good enough, you're not close enough." Legacy BBC Culture
- Robert Frank (1924-2019): Americans, 1959, https://www.lensculture.com/articles/robert-frank-the-americans
- Nan Goldin (1953-), http://www.artnet.com/artists/nan-goldin

Photo Realism:

- https://www.museum-franzgertsch.ch/de/franz-gertsch Franz Gertsch (*1930)

Post-Human Realism: Machines

Proletarian Machine Vision

- Dziga Vertov. Man With a Movie Camera, 1929

Surveillance Machine Visions

- Surveillance Camera Players, 1995- (Medienkunstnetz, Work: 1984)
- CTRL [Space]. Rhetorics of Surveillance, 2001
- Manu Luksch: Faceless, 2007
- Bitnik, Surveillance Chess, 2012

Reading:

Rubinstein, Daniel. 2018. "Posthuman Photography." In The Evolution of the Image: Political Action and the Digital Self, edited by Marco Bohr and Basia Sliwinska, 100–112. Routledge. https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/13420/1/DR%20-%20posthuman%20photography.pdf

- Kenta Cobayashi. REM (2016)
- (In)visible and (In)audible Temporalities in the Work of Daisuke Yokota. exposure magazine. Sep 12, 2018

Foster, Hal. 2017. “Real Fictions. Alternatives to Alternative Facts.” Artforum International, https://www.artforum.com/print/201704/real-fictions-alternatives-to-alternative-facts-67192.

Wolfe, Cary. “Posthumanism.” In Posthuman Glossary, edited by Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova, 356-358. Theory. London Oxford New York New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Tuesday

Machine Vision of Space & Time

- Michael Aschauer:
  - River Studies https://m.ash.to/projects/riverstudies
  - 7C-Days
- David Claerbout. Olympia (The real-time disintegration into ruins of the Berlin Olympic Stadium over the course of a thousand years). since 2016 https://davidclaerbout.com/Olympia-The-real-time-disintegration-into-ruins-of-the-Berlin-Olympic
- Talk at HBK, Leizpig, 2019

Trevor Paglen: Is Photography over? Four-Part Series, 01.03. – 15.04.2014

Marco De Mutiis, Gwendolyn Fässler, Doris Gassert, Alessandra Nappo

The Lure of the Image. Intro Catalogue

Afternoon:

Exhibition visit: The Lure of the Image

https://www.permanentbeta.network

- Fotomuseum Winterthur Grüzenstrasse 44 + 45 CH-8400 WinterthurMeet at entrance 14:30

Reading for Wednesday

Fuller, Matthew, and Eyal Weizman. Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth. Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2021. (Read:

Aesthetics beyond Perception

, pp. 33-41)

Wednesday

Evidentiary Realism and Forensis

Evidentiary Realism. GROUP SHOW. FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 31, 2017
https://nomegallery.com/exhibitions/evidentiary-realism/

Exhibition Catalogue, https://nomegallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/ER_Catalog.pdf

Read

Introduction by Paolo Cirio

- The Other Nefertiti, by Nora Al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles
- Seamless Transitions, by James Bridle
- Reconnaissance, by Ingrid Burrington
- 2 Works, by Mark Lombardi.

https://forensic-architecture.org

Works:

- The Killing of Nadeem Nawara and Mohammed Abu Daher, https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-killing-of-nadeem-nawara-and-mohammed-abu-daher
- Triple Chaser: https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/triple-chaser
- Intentional Fires in Papua https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/intentional-fires-in-papua
- The Murder of Halit Yozgat; https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-murder-of-halit-yozgat, https://www.nsu-tribunal.de/en/
    - Lawrence Abu Hamdan: 77sqm_9:26min at Documenta 14 https://forensic-architecture.org/programme/exhibitions/77sqm_926min-documenta-14
    - https://news.artnet.com/art-world/documenta-14-kassel-forensic-nsu-trial-984701

Additional references:

- Weizman, Eyal: Forensic Architecture – Lecture, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Nov. 2018 (start at 11:40)
- Investigative Aesthetics. Pierre D'Alancaisez in Conversation with Mattehw Fuller and Eyal Weizmann, Oct, 10.2021, Audio, 74 Min.
- Weizman, Eyal. 2017. Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books. Introduction p. 13-33
- Weizman, Eyal. 2019. “Open Verification.” E-Flux Architecture (June 2019), 2019. https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/becoming-digital/248062/open-verification

Thursday

no course

Friday

09:00 - 12:00

Operational Images

Harun Farocki: War at a Distance, 58min, 2003

Farocki, Harun. “Phantom Images.” Public, no. 29, Localities (2004): 10–24.

Mischka Henner, Feedlots, 2013

Parikka, Jussi. Operational Images: From the Visual to the Invisual. Minneapolis [Minnesota]: University of Minnesota Press, 2023. (read: Platform Operations, p. 66-73)

PDF

Deep Dive into the operations of machine Vision

Trevor Paglen & Cate Crawford Datafication of Science Lecture at HKW, Jan 12, 2019. 32 Min

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