

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 eben unnd gantzen corporen](#) (1525)
- Enlightenment (1600-1800)
 - Science 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 Painting [Harmony of Nothingness](#)
- Arabic Painting [Mantiq 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_evand.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
- [GE YULU's Eye Contact](#), 2016, single-channel video: 2 hr 14 min 52 sec.
- [Dragonfly Eyes](#), Directed by Xu Bing. China, 2017, DCP, color, 81 min

Reading:

Rubinstein, Daniel. 2018. "Posthuman Photography." In *The Evolution of the Image: Political Action and the Digital Self*, edited by Marco Bohr and Basia Sliwiska, 100–112. Routledge.

<https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/13420/1/DR%20-%20posthuman%20photography.pdf>

- Kenta Kobayashi. *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.

Trans-animal [Zoo](#) TV Series 2015-2017

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, Leipzig, 2019

[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 Grünenstrasse 44 + 45 CH-8400 Winterthur Meet at entrance 14:30

Wednesday

Evidentiary Realism and Forensics

Evidentiary Realism. GROUP SHOW. FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 31, 2017

<https://nometagallery.com/exhibitions/evidentiary-realism/>

Exhibition Catalogue, https://nometagallery.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:

- 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)
- Weizman, Eyal: [Forensic Architecture – Lecture](#), Haus der Kunst, Munich, Nov. 2018 (start at 11:40)
- [Investigative Aesthetics. Pierre D'Alancaizez 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

“The term “operational image”, or “operative image” was coined by the Czechoslovakian-born filmmaker Harun Farocki around 2000. ... Operational images are images that do not depict or represent, entertain or inform but rather track, navigate, activate, oversee, control, visualise, detect and identify. Operational images are instruments that perform tasks and carry out functions as part of an operation.” [Operational Images and Visual Culture: Media Archaeological Investigations \(2019-2023\)](#)

Trevor Paglen: [Is Photography over?](#) Four-Part Series, 01.03. – 15.04.2014

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

Feedback and Level

[Questionnaire](#)

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