GENERATION IMAGE

A conference on digital realism

**ZKM Karlsruhe
July 13—14th, 2023**

„Generation Image" explores social dimensions of contemporary digital image-production and application. Hosted by the University of Arts and Design (HfG) Karlsruhe, this conference kicks off a new research project within the DFG priority program „The Digital Image", while tapping into HfG Karlsruhe's research history: Between 2000 and 2009, our university had been home to „Image Body Medium", a prolific graduate program informed by Hans Belting's anthropological approach to Bildwissenschaft. Given the omnipresence and social importance of digital media, its key question of where the image actually ‚takes place' seems more relevant than ever.

In order to grasp the ‚place' and shifting status of digital image practices, our conference will consider them with regard to technological affordances (smartphone screens, apps, interfaces), and locate them within social and physiological feedback loops. In response to most recent debates, we are hosting a dedicated panel discussion on the synthetic nature of AI generated photorealistic images.

Organizers: Matthias Bruhn & Katharina Weinstock, Department of Art Research & Media Philosophy, HfG Karlsruhe.

Program

JULY 13, THURSDAY

17.30—18.00   INTRO
Matthias Bruhn & Katharina Weinstock

18.00—19.00   The digital image as application
Elisa Linseisen: „Queer Image App(lication)s.
A User's Manual"

19.00—20.00   The digital image as social practice
Katrin Tiidenberg: „Visual social media. Meanings
and affordances"

20.00—20.15   Discussion

JULY 14, FRIDAY

09.30—10.30   The digital image as artifact
Introduction by Arif Kornweitz

Inge Hinterwaldner: „A Thousand Screenshots are
Better than One. But Do they Suffice? How to Build
and Condense Knowledge"

10.30—11.05   AI generated images
Introduction by Alexander Estorick

Roland Meyer: „Image Derivatives. On the Visual
Economy of Synthetic Media"

11.05—11.20   Coffee Break

11.20—12.00   AI generated images
Charlotte Kent: : „Art by Fiat: Discourse as Critical
to Text-to-Image Generated Production"

12.00—13.00   Lunch Break at Mint, ZKM Karlsruhe

13.00—14.00   AI generated images
Roundtable with Alexander Estorick, Charlotte Kent,
and Roland Meyer

14.00—15.00   Final Discussion and Conclusion

Speakers

HINTERWALDNER, INGE

Paper: A Thousand Screenshots are Better than One. But Do they Suffice? How to Build and Condense Knowledge.

Abstract: Hans Belting asked what humans need and use images for. Visualizations are present in virtually every discipline for heuristic, epistemic, or communicative ends. Thus, one major field where imagery gets employed is knowledge production. When artifacts reach a certain complexity, some scholars in humanities help themselves with sketches or diagrams to get a step ahead in their thinking process. This is not something they could skip. Furthermore, such images often build on top of each other reaching cascades as described for model theory (Winsberg 1999). They are visual tools of condensed insight that could be pre-destined to pass down the knowledge they encapsulate. However, the archives documenting our digital heritage, mainly rely on other means such as screenshots and short documentary video clips. Can they achieve what is hoped for?

Bio: In 2009 Inge Hinterwaldner received her Ph.D in art history from the University of Basel with a thesis on interactive computer simulations (The Systemic Image, German: Fink 2010, English: MIT Press 2017). Fellowships and grants allowed her to pursue her research at MECS in Lueneburg (2014), Duke University in Durham (2015), and MIT in Cambridge/MA (2016). 2016-2018 she was professor for modern and contemporary art in the Department of Art and Visual History at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Since October 2018 Hinterwaldner holds a professorship for art history at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in Karlsruhe. Her research focuses on interactivity and temporality in the arts, computer-based art and architecture, model theory, and the interdependence between the arts and the sciences since the 19th century. She is PI of the research groups „Browser Art: Navigating with Style" and „Coded Secrets", both dealing with net-based artworks. Currently she is writing a book on Fluid Form Conceptions in the kinetic art since the 1960s. She co-edited several volumes, including those addressing medical and scientific visualizations as composites (2006), the relation between image production and modelling practices (2011, 2017), disposable images (2016), political aspects in contemporary art (2020) and methodological challenges in documenting digital art (2022).

KENT, CHARLOTTE

Paper: Art by Fiat. Discourse as Critical to Text-to-Image Generated Production.

Abstract: Following an overview with art-context examples of the five current critical discourses around large-language model text-to-image generated works, I want to posit two less recognized features—the use of series and accompanying text (often produced using ChatGPT)— to establish the significance of narrative for these automatic images, and the consequent insignificance of the image as such. (I will not discuss images that are manipulated and designed post being generated.) As examples of these features, I will focus on the work of Holly Herndon, Sterling Crispin, Patrick Lichty but may mention others in passing. When countless images exist within the latent space of a large-language model text-to-image generator, the individual image becomes a point of interest for something beyond its uniqueness, authorship, or aesthetics. The image is a transparency, or emblematic. The image itself matters less than its discourse, proposed by the artist or culture, concerning its story or critique. This is a culture post-print (authoritative facts like the fact of authorship), and post-image (the realm of aesthetics).

Bio: Charlotte Kent, PhD, is Associate Professor of Visual Culture at Montclair State University and an arts writer, with research that contextualizes contemporary art, digital culture, and the absurd while addressing the theoretical implications of their current productions. Contributing to numerous arts and culture magazines and academic journals, she is also an Editor at Large for The Brooklyn Rail, and co-editor with Katherine Guinness of Contemporary Absurdities, Existential Crises, and Visual Art (forthcoming, Intellect Books). She is a graduate of the CUNY Graduate Center, St. John's College, Phillips Academy Andover, and the Writer's Institute.

LINSEISEN, ELISA

Paper: Queer Image App(lication)s. A User's Manual.

Abstract: The title of my talk refers to the essay „Queer OS: A User's Manual" (2016) by Fiona Barnett et al. The essay advocates for an analysis of the constitutive interdependence of technology and cultural factors such as gender,

Speakers

race, class, disability, and more. With reference to Tara McPherson and Kara Keeling, the concept of „Queer OS" invites us to imagine a queer operating system on which culture is running. Following Barnett et al. in their undertaking, my talk not only explores the evolving landscape of queer representation within digital spaces, but treats queerness as technology in order to gain equity, tolerance, consent, and collectivism under the constraints of platform capitalism. In this context, I am interested in an idea of computing beyond the purpose of function and invention. While focusing on apps, I want to show how queerness, activism, aesthetics, and computing come together and propose to think about queer computing as a theory of app(lied) knowledge.

Bio: Elisa Linseisen is a professor of digital and audiovisual media at the Institute for Media and Communication at the University of Hamburg. She is currently working on two book-length projects, the first on queer computing and applications and the second on queer health apptivism. Linseisen worked and teached at media departments in Germany (Bochum, Munich, Paderborn, Weimar) and Austria (Vienna). 12/2019: Doctorate (Dr. phil.) with a dissertation on high definition | digital imagery at the Ruhr-University Bochum. 2014–2019: Research assistant at the Institute for Media Studies at the Ruhr-University Bochum. 2016–2019: Research Assistant at the DFG Research Group Media and Mimesis. 2008–2013: Master's Degree in Modern German Literature, Political Science and German Linguistics at the LMU Munich. Research interests, among others: Digital imagery, media philosophy, video essayism, format theory. Selection of publications: High Definition. Medienphilosophisches Image Processing (meson.press, 2020), „Wissen transferieren, Wissen applizieren. Für eine Mikropolitik des Anwendens und Zueignens," in: Wissenstransfer in und mit kulturwissenschaftlicher Forschung. Ed. by Harmening/Leinfellner/Meier (wbg academic, 2022), „Mi(s)mesis, rassifizierende Apophänie und Black (W)holes. Vom Produzieren digitaler Ähnlichkeiten," in: Mimesis Expanded. Ed. with Friedrich Balke. (Brill-Fink, 2022).

MEYER, ROLAND

Paper: Image Derivatives. On the Visual Economy of Synthetic Media.

Abstract: AI-generated images are derivative by design: a product of statistical correlations extracted from billions of image-text pairs scraped from online sources. AI models such as Dall-E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion thus transform the virtual archive of past images into an exploitable resource of patterns that inform the production of future images. By treating images as resources rather than assets, and selling options on potential images rather than licenses to existing images, the business model of these AI companies fundamentally threatens and disrupts older forms of monetization of visual content based on intellectual property rights, creating both legal and economic conflicts that remain largely unresolved. Ultimately, these conflicts revolve around the extraction of value from human labor and raise fundamental questions about how we understand both individual and collective creativity. Taking these conflicts and questions as a starting point, this talk will explore some of the implications of the rise of synthetic media for our notions of what an image is, how it is valued, and how it is supposed to generate value.

Bio: Roland Meyer is a media and visual culture scholar with a research focus on the history and theory of networked image cultures. After studying art history and media theory at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (HfG), he completed his doctorate in 2017 with a thesis on the media history of facial images, which was published in 2019 by Konstanz University Press under the title Operative Porträts. His most recent book, Gesichtserkennung (Wagenbach 2021), explores the cultural and social implications of automated facial recognition. In his current research, he focuses on digital image archives, operative images, image forensics, synthetic media, and the media archeology of augmented spaces. Currently, he is a researcher in the CRC 1567 »Virtual Lifeworlds« at the Ruhr University Bochum and lives in Berlin. More: linktr.ee/bildoperationen

TIIDENBERG, KATRIN

Paper: Visual social media: Meanings and Affordances.

Abstract: Both the global society as such and the internet have been described as increasingly, intensively, perhaps even overwhelmingly or ubiquitously visual by scholars. While the visual web is a fairly recent phenomenon, we, humans, have been using (self-representational) visuals to stake claims, make points, contemplate god, or our own place in the world for the past 39 000 years. Visuals have always helped us make memories, create and maintain

Speakers

relationships, tell stories, persuade and manipulate. Social media visuals do all that as well, but their socio-technical affordances also allow their use as social and political currency, tools of impression management and interaction. This presentation addresses why visual social media matters, explores some recent trends in visual social media practices and cultures, discusses how visuality and multimodality operate within their meaning making and offers a set of key affordances that social media visuals have.

Bio: Katrin Tiidenberg is Professor of Participatory Culture at the Baltic Film, Media and Arts School of Tallinn University, Estonia. She is the author of multiple books on social media, digital visual cultures and digital research methods, including, most recently "Tumblr" (2021, co-authored by Natalie Ann Hendry and Crystal Abidin) and "Sex and Social Media" (2020, co-authored by Emily van der Nagel), "Selfies, why we love (and hate) them." As well as the co-editor of award-winning "Making sense of the Datafied World: a Methodological Guide" (2020, in Estonian, co-edited with Anu Masso and Andra Siibak) and "Metaphors of Internet: Ways of Being in the Age of Ubiquity" (2020, co-edited with Annette Markham). She is currently working on a project on visual digital trust (TRAVIS, https://www.tlu.ee/en/bfm/research/trust-and-visuality-everyday-digital-practices-travis). Her research interests span social media, digital cultures, networked visuality, internet governance and self-care. More info at: https://katrin-tiidenberg.com/

Moderators

ESTORICK, ALEXANDER

Bio: Alex Estorick is a media theorist who seeks to develop socially progressive approaches to new technologies. As Editor-in-Chief at Right Click Save, he aims to drive critical conversation about blockchain, NFTs, and Web3. He is also Contributing Editor for Art and Technology at Flash Art. Recent curatorial projects include The Pixel Generation at Unit London, Cure³ at Bonhams, FEMGEN at Art Basel Miami Beach, and Ecotone on Feral File. He contributes to various publications – from Frieze to the Financial Times – and has lectured on art and technology at Imperial College London, the Royal College of Art, Central Saint Martins, Sotheby's Institute of Art, and the Berlin Art Institute. He was lead author of the first aesthetics of crypto art and is an International Selector for The Lumen Prize.

KORNWEITZ, ARIF

Bio: Arif Kornweitz is a PhD candidate at the KIM research group on critical AI at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design, where he conducts research about conflict prediction in the humanitarian sector. Since 2023, he is the director of an MFA at the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam, titled Artificial Times and focused on practices across music and AI. He holds an MSc in Conflict Resolution and Governance from the University of Amsterdam. Arif is also the co-founder of Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee, a curatorial platform for contemporary art and critical music that explores radio as a space for artistic practice.

Organizers

BRUHN, MATTHIAS

Bio: After completing his studies in art history and philosophy in Hamburg, Bruhn obtained his doctorate with a dissertation on the correspondence of the French painter Nicolas Poussin. In 2001, he was one of the co-founders of the network „ArtHist", which has developed into a worldwide used information service in art history. As director of the research center „Politische Ikonografie" at the Warburg-Haus in Hamburg, his research focused on the historical forms of political representation, on the basis of media-economic factors of visual communication, especially the importance of photo agencies. With this topic Bruhn was a scholarship holder of the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, whose board of trustees he belongs to today. After a stopover in Cottbus in 2005 he took over the Berlin department „The Technical Picture", which is dedicated to the analysis of scientific forms of visualization. Bruhn is also a member of the Cluster of Excellence „Image Knowledge Design" and its successor „Matters of Activity", which will be collaborating over 40 different disciplines over the next seven years.

WEINSTOCK, KATHARINA

Bio: Katharina Weinstock is a media and visual culture scholar with a research focus on contemporary art and digital culture. Since 2023, upon completing her doctorate, she has been pursuing the post doc project „Designing Habits" in collaboration with Prof. Matthias Bruhn. From 2019 to 2023, she was a research assistant at the Karlsruhe University of Arts & Design (HfG) where she taught seminars in the department of Art Research and Media Philosophy, and where she founded UMBAU – an academic online journal for the promotion of art, research, and design. Katharina had initially studied art history, philosophy curatorial practice, and cultural studies at HfG Karlsruhe and the Humboldt University Berlin. After completing her Master's degree in Karlsruhe, she became part of the PhD program „The Real in Modernist Culture" at the University of Konstanz, which enabled her to pursue studies and exchanges at the Getty Research Center, the University of California Los Angeles, and Yale University. Within the DFG priority program „The Digital Image", Katharina's post doc project „Designing Habits. The Digital Image as Application" explores the digital image as social interface and as a site of technological developments, which intertwines patterns of digital interaction, everyday practices, and commercial interests.