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IMAGING AND SPACE IN THE POST-DIGITALITY—BETWEEN VISIBILITY AND NONVISIBILITY. INTRODUCTION

The advent of ubiquitous computing, with its architecture based on fluid configuration of mobile media, the internet of things and sensor-based networks, coincided with major technological, social and cultural changes. Discourse about "smart technologies" invaded the public debate, with the figure of the "smart city" (and, more generally, "smart environments" and "smart objects") becoming one of the most powerful cultural phantasies of the first decade of the 21st century. "Becoming environmental of computation"[1], to borrow the insightful phrase coined by Jennifer Gabrys, contributed to the currently ongoing changes in media configurations, especially in terms of how media images relate to space. In the meantime, the excitement for the newness of all things digital started evaporating, which inspired both the fresh wave of popcultural nostalgia and the renewed penchant for older platforms, software and devices. On the other hand, the plethora of sensor-based technologies often employed in environmental research (especially in monitoring the scale and pace of climate change) is symptomatic of yet another transformation: the ubiquity of computing has reached beyond the urban setting—it is now integrating with agriculture and the protection of nature. It has also increased the awareness of the dataveillance inherent in the multifarious processes of the fusing of digital data with physical space as well as with human, animal and vegetal bodies.

Such processes provide the ground for the reading of media becoming, as Mark B.N. Hansen called it, "atmospheric, collective and micro-temporal".[2] Numerous questions accompany fresh attempts to grasp the newly forged entanglements of digital imagery with space and place, including a very basic one: to what extent—if at all—should images and space be seen as separate phenomena, considering the increased levels of datafication of everyday life? Is the centrality of image production main-

[1] J. Gabrys, *Program Earth: Environmental Sensing Technologies and the Making of a Computational Planet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, loc. 324 (Kindle Edition).

[2] M.B.N. Hansen, "Ubiquitous Sensation: Toward an Atmospheric, Collective, and Microtemporal Model of Media", in: *Throughout: Art and Culture Emerging with Ubiquitous Computing*, ed. by U. Ekman, Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 2013.

tained under the circumstances of the nascent post-digital condition? What role do digital images play in spatial media environments and ambient informatics? To what extent has the known and familiar conceptualization of visuality and visibility been affected by the shift towards understanding image as "the continuous actualization of networked data" or the "networked terminal"[3], now occurring also in the physical space and/or mediated with human bodies and living organisms? Is the dichotomy of visible/non-visible—well-researched and oft-referred to in the field of visual studies—being maintained, reconfigured or delegitimized? How are the relationships between embodiment and image being shaped under the circumstances of booming biometric technologies? How is the relationship between media, imagery and urban space—symptomatic of Western modernity—being reconfigured? This list of questions is provisional, far from complete, and meant to trigger further discussion rather than to delimit its boundaries in any decisive way. The authors of the articles presented in the thematic section clearly add more points for potential scholarly investigations on the subject.

The section opens with Anne Karhio's insightful observations on how applications and devices that offer "machine-enhanced visual perception" take over the production of visual landscape imagery in the special physical conditions of sunlight-deprived Svalbard island during the winter months. The traditional landscape aesthetic is a starting point for extended inquiry about human agency in a world increasingly shaped by the processes and structures of the "metainterface".[4] The term recently proposed by Christian Ulrik Andersen and Søren Bro Pold aptly describes the conditions of these ubiquitous yet dispersed and often invisible interfaces. The concept as such is a very interesting theoretical invitation to further problematize the uneasy relationships of the visible and the non-visible in the era of info visualization that is growing into the dominant genre of manic image production on a global scale—all too often grounded in the invisible operations of the massive data processing and exchange infrastructure. From the medium scale of landscape, Devon Schiller in his fascinating account of the genealogy of the technology-mediated visual discourse of the face, shifts the perspective to the microscale of the media technologies invading the intimate space. Tracing the rich histories of ideas shaping representation of the human face, Schiller crafts his meticulous analysis based on three interesting historical points set across the 20th century and across the disciplines of anthropology, neurology and computer science. He convincingly maps "a genealogical landscape of ideas that roams across human and mediated vision, between inner and outer ways of seeing, from visible to nonvisible imaging, as well as over both the presence and absence of color". Considering the importance of automated facial recognition both in the public space and in the nascent

[3] R. Marie, I. Hoelzl, *Softimage: Towards a New Theory of the Digital Image*, Bristol & Chicago: Intellect, 2015, loc. 146 (Kindle Edition).

[4] Ch.U. Andersen, S. Bro Pold, *The Metainterface: The Art of Platforms, Cities, and Clouds*, Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 2018.

field of machine vision, Schiller's proposition is a must-read for scholars interested in the subject. Marek Wojtaszek's proposition broadens the discussion on the relationships between the experiencing human subject and the environment infused with digital media. While analyzing how the specificity of the visual-haptic experience remodels our attitudes to digital imagery, he employs the innovatory and fresh concept of sensory meshwork, valuable in its capacity to grasp "the visual diversity of haptic technosensation". Post-digitality is defined, among others, by increased ambiguity of differentiation between real and virtual, yet in ways much separate from the framework set up in the 1980s by Jean Baudrillard. 3D computer-generated simulations are often inadvertently "real" in terms of their direct connection to the physical environment, which gets datafied and translated into visuals. Therefore, any in-depth inquiry into the conditions of image production in post-digitality should not forget the recent massive wave of interest in VR. Scholarly reflection on VR has broadened exponentially over the last few years, after the sort of milestone that was reached in the years 2014-2016, when a whole range of easily accessible, affordable devices hit the global consumer electronics market (in 2016 80 million such items were available on the global market).[5] On the grounds of interface criticism again, much in the vein of the perspective employed by Andersen and Pold, Łukasz Mirocha argues that VR presents an entirely new type of software media interface, yet building on the already established design rules and aesthetics of the familiar GUI interface, which gets spatially remediated. While Mirocha focuses on virtual working environments, the thread that seems particularly interesting with regard to the current industry-driven cultural phantasies surrounding the current wave of VR platforms is the observation of "the vagueness of the media and tech industry narrative on VR technologies." Following Mirocha's insightful inquiry, Mateusz Felczak analyses the data-gathering practices (both in-game and as additional features) employed by the major platforms of digital games distribution, such as Steam and GOG, touching on the issue of data privacy. This contribution broadens the scope of the datafication of everyday life, where very access to digital entertainment is founded on the presumption of users' willingness to negotiate the limits of their privacy. The section closes with a rewarding venture into the cultural history of ubiquitous and spatial computing: Vassilis Delioglanis offers a valuable insight into how mobile communications and spatial informatics are conceptualized in William Gibson's *The Peripheral*, published in 2014. The novel of this acclaimed author, who almost single-handedly modeled the cyberpunk sensibilities of the early wave of networked technologies in the 1980s and 1990s, attempts to articulate "in literary terms the cultural and technological changes of his time".

[5] K. Dooley, "Storytelling in Virtual Reality with 360 Degrees: A New Screen Grammar", *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 2017, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 161-171, accessed 15 September 2018.

The editors of this thematic section hope to invigorate the discussion on the (increasingly uneasy) relationships between images circulating not only in vast digital networks, but also between the growingly problematic domains of the physical and the digital.

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