

The Photographic Image in Digital Culture of the Screen

Edited By Martin Lister

Hito Steyerl

ACADEMIC CITATIONS 1. “The technologies that place all these images on the screens of computers and phones are not accidents of industrial processes, but rather, they are part of the technological framework that governs, measures, orients and controls the behaviour of human beings.” 2. “As the screen never ceases to supply visual images this road is always open, yet it harbours two hazards: first is the narrow interpretation of the network as a text to be seen, to be read, to be interpreted through a rigid and universal model of linguistic analysis. Such a reading risks missing out on those aspects of life that changed drastically with the expansion of global communication technologies with their particular mixture of mega-universalism and hyper-localism.” anxiety.” 2. The poor image is no longer about the real thing the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation.

DETAILS Quote: “As our machines increasingly read and write without us, as our machines become more and more unreadable so that seeing no longer guarantees knowing (if it ever did), we the so-called users are offered more to see, more to read. As our machines disappear getting flatter and flatter, the density and opacity of their computation increases. Every use is also an act of faith: we believe these images and systems render us transparent not for technological, but rather for metaphorical, or more strongly ideological reasons.” Chun, W.H.K. (2011) *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*. 2. Definition; Folksonomy: a user-generated, collaborative classification system where individuals apply public tags to online content (images, bookmarks, web pages) to categorize and make them easier to find. Coined in 2004 by Thomas Vander Wal, it combines “folk” and “taxonomy,” representing a “people’s classification” that is organic, decentralized, and bottom-up, unlike traditional top-down expert-driven taxonomies. 3. Quote: “Theodor Adorno (1973: 265–70) argues that causality is unsuitable for the understanding of culture, because social phenomena are inherently irrational and any sociology that takes rational causality as its guiding principle is bound to distort the true picture of society.” resistant this actually is. While these images feel like acts of defiance, I’m not convinced they are as outside the system as they seem. No matter how many times an image is reworked or circulated, it often still sits within Western frameworks of legibility. What reads as subversive may still be shaped by the same structures it tries to push against. My work stays with this tension, where defiance and conformity blur into STATEMENT As noted, “the technologies...are part of the technological framework that governs...human behaviour,” which reframes the algorithm as an active agent rather than a neutral tool. It was within the network’s “mixture of mega-universalism and hyper-localism” that this tension became most legible: a system that standardises visual language at a global scale while simultaneously inserting flattened, often stereotyped markers of identity to simulate specificity.

'In Defense of the Poor Image' The Wretched of the Screen

Marcel Danesi

Hito Steyerl

ACADEMIC CITATIONS 1. "The individualist brain is an ideal, shaped by previous socio-technological forces at work in human evolution. As such it is still a worthy one; but it also has a serious downside. Mental diseases-

ACADEMIC CITATIONS 1. "The circulation of poor images thus creates visual bonds, as Dziga Vertov once called them. This visual bond was, according to Vertov, supposed to link the workers of the world with each other. He imagined a sort of communist, visual, Adamic language that could not only inform or entertain, but also organize its viewers. In a sense, his dream has come true, if mostly under the rule of a global information capitalism whose audiences are linked almost in a physical sense by mutual excitement, affective attunement, and anxiety." 2. The poor image is no longer about the real thing the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation.

DETAILS 1. Quote: "Imagine somebody from the past with a beret asking you, Comrade, what is your visual bond today? You might answer: it is this link to the present."

STATEMENT The circulation of low-resolution images produces what Dziga Vertov called "visual bonds," which can now be reshaped within global information capitalism. These bonds no longer organize solidarity in the way they once promised, but instead connect audiences through shared affect: excitement, attention, even anxiety. The poor image, detached from any stable original, moves through swarm circulation and digital dispersion, foregrounding how it exists rather than where it comes from. At the same time, I'm interested in questioning how resistant this actually is. While these images feel like acts of defiance, I'm not convinced they are as outside the system as they seem. No matter how many times an image is reworked or circulated, it often still sits within Western frameworks of legibility. What reads as subversive may still be shaped by the same structures it tries to push against. My work stays with this tension, where defiance and conformity blur into each other.

STATEMENT This made me wonder who the "leader" really is here. The people building and profiting from these systems don't come from a neutral place, they come from histories of power, superiority, and colonisation. To then trust our identities with the same structures feels uneasy, especially when those identities are already under pressure, constantly remixed, distorted, and sometimes reduced to ridicule just to sustain visibility. I wonder how different could it really turn out for us this time? If the framework remains the same, then what actually shifts? Will we ever, within their terms, be seen as human without being marked as different, or is that difference something the system needs to keep us legible at all?

Memes and the Future of Pop Culture

Conditions in Net Utopia

Marcel Danesi

Mike Pepi

ACADEMIC CITATIONS 1. “The individualist brain is an ideal, shaped by previous socio-technological forces at work in human evolution. As such it is still a worthy one; but it also has a serious downside. Mental diseases, clinically diagnosed, are part of this downside. For this reason clinical psychology, not religion, emerged in modernity to harmonize the mind scientifically with its surroundings. Movements such as psychoanalysis, existentialism, absurdism, surrealism, and postmodernism could never have emerged in a tribal society where the harmony of the group is emphasized; they are products of the individualist brain which is subject to alienation and anomie, as discussed above. It is little wonder that in the Web 2.0 world, where a virtual communal brain has crystallized, such movements hold less sway. In academia, individualism brought about debates and studies on identity, alterity, and other constructs of the individualist mind, bringing the tendencies of the Romantic idealists into sharp social focus with individualist artistic movements from expressionism to surrealism. The notion of personal identity—if it emerges at all—has little value in communal groupings, where the only identity that has value is that of the leader—the shaman, the noble, the hero, and so on—who determines groupthink.” 2. “...it can be said that meme culture is built on the same promise of the attainment of a communal consciousness through artificial means. Living in a social media universe, we may indeed feel that it is the only option available to us. The triumph of the Internet lies in its implicit promise to allow human needs to be expressed individualistically, yet connect them communally—hence the paradox. Moreover, as the communal brain becomes more and more engrained in social media communities, which are themselves connected to the larger pathways of a global connected intelligence, a new brain has emerged, called by some a “global brain,” that is, a brain that meshes communal brains into one overarching system of thought and behavior. This is an effect of living in an electronic environment.”

DETAILS 1. Quote: “Man in the electronic age has no possible environment except the globe and no possible occupation except information-gathering.” McLuhan (1998: 27) 2. Definition; Cultural relativism: The principle that an individual’s beliefs, values, and practices should be understood based on that person’s own culture, rather than judged against the standards of another

STATEMENT This made me wonder who the “leader” really is here. The people building and profiting from these systems don’t come from a neutral place, they come from histories of power, superiority, and colonisation. To then trust our identities with the same structures feels uneasy, especially when those identities are already under pressure, constantly remixed, distorted, and sometimes reduced to ridicule just to sustain visibility. I wonder how different could it really turn out for us this time? If the framework remains the same, then what actually shifts? Will we ever, within their terms, be seen as human without being marked as different, or is that difference something the system needs to keep us legible at all?

Is a Museum a Database?: Institutional Memes, Conditions in Net Utopia

Mike Pepin

ACADEMIC CITATIONS 1. “Today we find the museum organizing itself for transmission and retrieval, anticipating the final aspirations of an algorithmic regime. The resulting database logic aligns the institution with interests originating from the model of the Silicon Valley enterprise—in constantly updating streams/cycles, the museum reformats its content towards structured, indexed, or digitally stored data sets or sets of relations among data.” 2. “There is hegemony in data.” Memes, are the survivors of a ruthlessly subtractive process. The art is in surfing the waves of reduction while not giving up on the idea.” 2. “Graphic design as a trade and as a client-based practice indeed may be too tied to institutional practice of any kind to constitute a revolutionary act on its own merits.”

STATEMENT The title *Is a Museum a Database?: Institutional Conditions in Net Utopia* is what drew me in first. It made sense to think of the museum and the internet alongside each other, both operating as databases where identity is stored, organised, and made legible. As the text suggests, the museum is increasingly structured around “transmission and retrieval,” aligning itself with an algorithmic logic of indexing and constant updating. If both the museum and the internet function through similar systems, then they are shaped by the same dominant gaze. There is, as the text puts it, “hegemony in data.” What gets archived, how it is categorised, and how it is retrieved is never neutral. It is organised into something manageable, something that can be circulated, after being flattened to fit within the limits of that gaze. What feels scary is not just what these systems show, but what they end up teaching our children about us. They don’t only reflect who we are but also decide what remains of us. Even in their most authentic form, small distortions and partial readings stay embedded. Over time, that becomes the version that lasts, the one that gets inherited and learned from, whether or not it ever held us fully. Like image macros, what survives is not necessarily what is most expressive, but what can circulate. So the process becomes about holding onto an idea while it moves through these limits, letting it be reduced without fully losing it. Additionally, the idea that graphic design, as a client-based and institutional practice, may not be revolutionary on its own makes sense in this context. If the tools, formats, and systems we work within are already shaped by institutional logic, then the work can only push so far before it folds back into the same structures.

Can Jokes Bring Down Governments? Memes, Design and Politics

Nadia Asparouhova

Metahaven

ACADEMIC CITATIONS 1. “Creative self-expression is the only way we will continue to make our mark as humans in times of uncertainty, and it doesn’t come from doing what you think will sell to other people. It doesn’t come from what will sell, but from something deeper, feels misaligned with how the internet currently operates. Most of what circulates is shaped by visibility, by what performs, by what fits. Making something that might not be seen starts to feel like going against the grain of the system. This also led me to the Dark forest theory. It treats visibility as a type of exposure that can work against you. Together, they

ACADEMIC CITATIONS 1. “The aesthetic of “image macros” is a byproduct of the omnipresence of Microsoft Windows. Such images often use the font Impact, one of eleven “core fonts of the web” distributed with the operating system from 1996 to 2002. Impact (itself based on Helvetica Inserat “display” type) is a standard, wind tunnel and time-tested. The remaining Darwinian core is a bare bones typeface that can’t be reduced any further. Somehow such standards, like memes, are the survivors of a ruthlessly subtractive process. The art is in surfing the waves of reduction while not giving up on the idea.” 2. “Graphic design as a trade and as a client-based practice indeed may be too tied to institutional practice of any kind to constitute a revolutionary act on its own merits.”

DETAILS 1. Quote: “Memes are a rough and ready democracy – that is, something works if you see it working.” Paul Mason 2. Definition; Image Macro: a piece of digital media featuring a picture, or artwork, with some form of text superimposed. The text frequently appears at the top and bottom of the image.

STATEMENT In my work, especially in how I approach the reel artefacts with meme-like forms, this idea of reduction is central. The visual language I’m working with is already shaped by constraint, standardised formats, compressed aesthetics, repeatable structures. Like image macros, what survives is not necessarily what is most expressive, but what can circulate. So the process becomes about holding onto an idea while it moves through these limits, letting it be reduced without fully losing it. Additionally, the idea that graphic design, as a client-based and institutional practice, may not be revolutionary on its own makes sense in this context. If the tools, formats, and systems we work within are already shaped by institutional logic, then the work can only push so far before it folds back into the same structures.

Antimemetics: Why Some Ideas Resist Spreading

Nadia Asparouhova

ACADEMIC CITATIONS 1. “Creative self-expression is the only way we will continue to make our mark as humans in times of uncertainty, and it doesn’t come from doing what you think will sell to other people. It comes from wanting to express something deep in your soul. Sometimes those ideas are trite and “cringe,” and most of them fail to find an audience. But we can’t let this fear of failure keep us from trying to produce things that feel truly original to us.”

STATEMENT This came up in a rabbit hole of references. Antimemetics, in this context, is the idea that creative self-expression doesn’t come from what will sell, but from something deeper, feels misaligned with how the internet currently operates. Most of what circulates is shaped by visibility, by what performs, by what fits. Making something that might not be seen starts to feel like going against the grain of the system. This also led me to the Dark forest theory. It treats visibility as a type of exposure that can work against you. Together, they start to feel like strong counterpoints to the idea we’ve simply accepted, that virality is necessary, that being heard by everyone is imperative. I’m interested to dive into these further and see if my enquiry or methodology shifts.