



MAST: Journal of Media Art Study and Theory

CFP: Special Issue

Automating Visuality: The Image Beyond Representation

Guest editors

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Deadline for abstract submissions: **15th February 2021** (for publication in November 2021).

Today, it is no longer merely human labor power but also the labor of looking that is potentially rendered superfluous by automation. Whether in the routine inspection of manufacturing processes, the interpretation of drone surveillance footage, or the curating of fine-art, we are witnessing what the art critic Hal Foster describes as “the gradual automation not only of labor and war but also of seeing and imaging.” While the human remains in the loop in most cases, the “robo-eye” increasingly substitutes for human judgment in such diverse contexts as drone warfare, preventive policing, border control, insurance and tax collection, medicine, consumerism, online social interaction, and art.

Current developments in machinic vision—including drone sensors, pattern recognition, artificial neural networks, spectral imaging, and lidar technologies—are profoundly challenging ideas of vision and visuality as intrinsically related to human perception and understanding. Scholars and artists, in turn, have developed a host of new concepts—the operational image, soft image, post image, differential image, invisible image, to name a few—that address changes to the image-form and to the late-modern paradigm of visuality. While some scholars claim a loss of representation, others see new non- or posthuman representational mechanisms emerging through machine vision processes.

Whether celebrated or shunned, AI-powered machine vision unsettles entrenched notions of meaning and interpretation while highlighting discontinuities between machinic and human

scales of sensing, perception, and judgment. The automation of visibility is pushing the image to the limits or even beyond the perimeters of traditional theories of representation. Do we in the humanities still know what an image is, how it functions, what it represents, to whom it matters, and why? Perhaps “art history,” as artist-theorist Hito Steyerl provocatively asks, was something like “an anticipatory tutorial to help humans decode images made by machines, for machines?”

For a prospective interdisciplinary special issue, we ask contributors to take stock of the automation of visibility and to reflect upon questions related but not restricted to the following:

- What new forms of machinic vision bring historical paradigms of the image into relief in fields such as media studies, art history, media aesthetics, cultural theory, communications studies, and visual culture studies?
- How does the advent of automating visibility intervene in and change the cultures and technical procedures of film, photography, and art production?
- In what specific ways are practicing artists and curators negotiating, addressing, criticizing, and interpreting representation in the context of machinic vision?
- How do the mechanisms of representation in machine vision processes intervene as forms of “social sorting” and subject formation, especially regarding race and gender identities?
- How does the image-form retain value and meaning in the context of specific contemporary uses of machinic vision (e.g., in drone surveillance, automatic facial recognition systems, preventive policing, border control, and other relevant contexts)?
- How do new forms of machine vision map onto the larger cultural and political conditions and shifts within our current conjuncture?

We invite interdisciplinary contributions that bring into dialogue perspectives from e.g. visual culture, art history, literature, media studies, science and technology studies, cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, critical race theory, and other related fields in the humanities. Independent scholars and artists are also encouraged to submit. We particularly welcome submissions that closely analyze *specific* visual technologies and their possible contexts of

application. We will select a total of five to seven abstracts for our theme issue proposal to an international peer-reviewed journal of choice.

Please send your **abstract of 300-500 words** accompanied by a short biography to Dominique Routhier (dominique@sdu.dk) no later than **February 15, 2021**. We will notify you on March 1, 2021 whether we invite you for a full submission. Completed essays of approximately 7.500 words are due June 30, 2021.

This call for papers is produced as part of the research project Drone Imaginaries (2020-2024), funded by the Independent Danish Research Council and housed at the University of Southern Denmark (www.sdu.dk/diac). Direct possible inquires to a member of the editorial team: Dominique Routhier (dominique@sdu.dk), Kathrin Maurer (kamau@sdu.dk), Lila Lee-Morrison (lile@sdu.dk).

Editors' bio:

Kathrin Maurer (Dr. Phil. PhD) is Professor MSO of Humanities and Technology, leader of the *Center for Culture and Technology* (www.sdu.dk/en/cult-tech) at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). She is also the leader for the research cluster *Drone Imaginaries and Communities* (www.sdu.dk/da/diac). She has a PhD in German Literature from Columbia University and Dr. Phil from SDU. Her research interests are surveillance technology, drones, German literature, visual culture, and aesthetic theory. Her current book *The Sensorium of the Drone and Communities* is forthcoming with MIT Press. She has published *Visualizing History: The Power of the Image in German Historicism* (Walter de Gruyter, 2013) and the *Visualizing War: Images, Emotions, Communities* (Routledge, 2018) and published internal peer reviewed journals (*New German Critique, Media, War, and Conflict; Germanic Review*). She is also a Senior Fellow at the Danish Institute for Advanced Study at SDU and the recipient of a research grant from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

Lila Lee-Morrison is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Southern Denmark. Her research interests include cultures of machine vision and the intersection of contemporary art, critical theory and contemporary modes of perception, specifically by algorithmic processes. She is currently investigating the topic of machine vision in relation to the art historical genre of landscape imagery and at the theoretical intersection of the aesthetics of the anthropocene and posthumanism. Previous to this position she completed a PhD at the Dept of Art History and Visual Studies in Lund University with a published dissertation titled, *'Portraits of Automated Facial Recognition: On Machinic Ways of Seeing the Face'* (Transcript Verlag, 2019). She has written on the visual politics of drone warfare and of biometric systems

as well as on media images of the European immigration crisis. She has published with MIT Press, Liverpool University Press and Brill Publishing.

Dominique Routhier is a Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Department for the Study of Culture, University of Southern Denmark, where he has also recently received his PhD with a dissertation entitled *The Work of Art in the Age of Automation: The Situationist Movement, 1956-1968* (2020). Interests include the history of art, avant-garde studies, the history of science and technology, cybernetics and automation, 20th century intellectual history and philosophy, critical theories of technology, dissident Marxism(s), and contemporary art and theory. Currently affiliated with the research project *Drone Imaginaries and Communities* (Independent Research Fund Denmark, 2020-2024).

About the journal:

MAST is an online, open-access, and double-blind peer-reviewed journal featuring interdisciplinary scholarship in the domain of media studies. MAST stands for “Media Art Study and Theory” and is sponsored by NeMLA at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. mast-journal.org