

IMG JOURNAL: CRITICAL GENEALOGIES AND EMERGING PATHWAYS IN IMAGE RESEARCH

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INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

IMAGE AS KNOWLEDGE

AI-GENERATED IMAGES

IMAGE STUDIES

EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE IMAGE

This paper reflects on the first ten issues of *IMG Journal – International and Interdisciplinary Journal on Image, Imagery and Imagination* as a coherent intellectual project that has progressively articulated a critical genealogy of the image as a form of knowledge, cultural mediation, and situated social practice. Rather than offering a merely chronological or thematic overview, the article adopts a dual analytical perspective: a *Status Quaestionis*, reconstructing the epistemological foundations and internal coherence of the journal through its editorials (2019–2024), and a *Potentialitas*, aimed at identifying the generative trajectories that this *corpus* prefigures for future research. The analysis highlights three interconnected directions that structure the journal's evolving agenda: an ecological perspective on visibility,

which frames images as epistemic and operative environments embedded in material, technical, and infrastructural conditions; a reformulation of educational and project-based devices, in which images function as cognitive, relational, and participatory environments within learning and design processes; and a critical reflection on computational aesthetics and artificial intelligence, addressing the transformation of authorship, creativity, and regimes of visibility in algorithmically mediated cultures. Through these axes, the paper argues that *IMG Journal* operates as an open theoretical laboratory, capable of crossing disciplinary boundaries while maintaining analytical rigour, and of translating critical genealogies into operative perspectives for research, education, and cultural practice.

The achievement of the milestone represented by the first ten issues of *IMG Journal – International and Interdisciplinary Journal on Image, Imagery and Imagination* provides a timely opportunity for critical reflection on the route developed thus far. This moment calls not merely for a quantitative assessment of editorial activity, but for a deliberate and analytically grounded interrogation of the epistemological coherence, theoretical consistency, and generative capacity of the project that the journal has embodied since its inception.

When considered in sequence, the ten editorials (plus an additional editorial essay in *Issue04*) published between 2019 and 2024 do not amount to a simple thematic progression. Rather, they delineate a conceptual constellation organized around a shared core premise: the recognition of the image as a form of knowledge, as a device of cultural mediation, and as a situated social practice. From this perspective, *IMG Journal* has progressively established itself as an open theoretical laboratory, capable of hosting a plurality of approaches while maintaining a clear and rigorous scientific positioning.

For these reasons, it becomes necessary to approach this *corpus* through a dual analytical lens: on the one hand, a critical review aimed at articulating its state of the art and internal coherence; on the other, a prospective reading oriented toward identifying its generative potential and the trajectories of future development that it prefigures.

STATUS QUÆSTIONIS

The inaugural editorial, programmatically entitled *Manifesto* (Luigini & Panciroli, 2019), does not merely fulfil an introductory function, but assumes the explicit value of a foundational act. It emerges from the experience of the homonymous international conference and from the recognition of a widespread need: the absence of a structured editorial space capable of accommodating research on images situated within epistemic borderlands.

The *Manifesto* clearly defines three foundational axes intended to remain constant over time. First, interdisciplinarity, understood not as the mere juxtaposition of competences, but as a productive tension among differing methods, languages, and scientific traditions. Second, the centrality of the image, conceived not as a passive object of analysis, but as an active agent in processes of knowledge production, communication, and learning. Finally, a deliberate ethical and political commitment to open access, understood as a necessary condition for the free circulation of knowledge and for the construction of genuinely inclusive scientific communities.

The collective character of the first issue, conceived as a plural *Manifesto*, further reflects the intention to present the journal as a shared project, thereby removing it from dominant author-centred or discipline-bound logics.

With the second issue, *Issue 02 – Graphics* (Cicalò, 2020), *IMG Journal* takes a first decisive step towards the structuring of its field of reference. The editorial advances an operation that is simultaneously descriptive and theoretical: it begins with an empirical analysis of the contributions presented at the IMG2019 conference in order to test the hypothesis of the existence of a field of knowledge that may be identified with the so-called *graphic sciences*.

What emerges is a profoundly anti-dogmatic perspective: the graphic sciences are not presented as an autonomous and closed discipline, but rather as a networked constellation of practices encompassing drawing, data visualisation, digital modelling, visual communication, immersive technologies, and cognitive processes related to the production and interpretation of images. The use of graphic models and visual taxonomies within the editorial is not ancillary, but fully consistent with the underlying assumption of *thinking the image through the image*, thereby acknowledging its heuristic value. This issue consolidates one of the distinctive features of the journal: the awareness that visuality cannot be reduced to a mere supporting language, but instead constitutes a fully-fledged epistemic environment.

Issue 03 – Remediating Distances (Treleani & Zucconi, 2020) marks a moment of significant openness towards the urgencies of the present. The editorial addresses the notion of distance not as a simple by-product of the pandemic contingency, but as a structural category of mediation. Drawing on theories of remediation and on a radical conception of media, the editorial argues that visual technologies do not merely bridge pre-existing distances, but actively contribute to redefining space, time, and social relations. The pandemic thus becomes a powerful revealer of the media infrastructures that regulate everyday life and of the visual practices that render them operative.

Within this framework, the image assumes an ambivalent function: on the one hand, as a tool for connection and social immunisation; on the other, as a critical element capable of making visible the norms, diapositives, and power asymmetries that structure contemporary experience. This issue significantly extends the theoretical horizon of the journal, introducing environmental, political, and anthropological questions that are destined to re-emerge in subsequent issues.

With *Issue 04 – Copy / False / Fake* (Ghizzoni & Musiani, 2021; Luigini & Menchetelli, 2021), *IMG Journal* addresses one of the most sensitive issues in contemporary visual culture: the redefinition of the concept of authenticity in the age of digital reproducibility and artificial intelligence. The editorial adopts a long-term historical perspective, demonstrating how the categories of copy and falsehood have always accompanied cultural production, assuming different meanings and values across time. However, the widespread diffusion of technologies such as deepfakes introduces a significant discontinuity, insofar as it undermines the epistemic trust traditionally placed in images as witnesses of reality.

The position advanced is neither apocalyptic nor naïvely celebratory. Rather, the editorial calls for a critical qualification of the different forms of copying, recognising their cognitive, educational, and projective value. From this perspective, the copy is not only a threat, but also an opportunity to

rethink processes of knowledge production, preservation, and transmission.

Issue 05 – Imaging Peripheries (Boos, Ietri & Mastropietro, 2021) shifts the focus towards peripheries, understood not merely as geographical locations, but as symbolic and political conditions. The editorial rejects a deficit-based representation of marginal territories, proposing instead an interpretation that foregrounds their transformative potential. Practices of representation are understood as tools capable of constructing projectual visions and counter-imaginaries, activating participatory processes, and redefining local identities. Within this framework, the image becomes a device of research-action, able to exert a concrete impact on social and territorial dynamics. This issue reinforces an ethical and political dimension already present in the journal's project: the idea that visuality may contribute not only to describing the world, but also to transforming it.

With *Issue 06 – Image Learning* (Villa & Zuccoli, 2022), *IMG Journal* articulates in a systematic manner its sustained attention to educational and formative processes. The editorial advances a structured reflection on the role of images within formal and informal learning contexts, drawing upon a tradition that extends from Comenius to contemporary theories of visual thinking. The image is conceived as a space of cognitive exploration, capable of fostering not only understanding, but also the autonomous production of knowledge. Within this perspective, the acts of drawing, observing, and interpreting images become integral components of the learning process. This issue consolidates the pedagogical dimension of the journal, demonstrating how visuality may serve as a bridge between scientific research, teaching, and educational practices.

Issue 07 – Wordless Images (Luigini & Menchetelli, 2022) further deepens the investigation into the relationship between image and language by focusing on contexts in which images operate in the absence of words. The editorial challenges the presumed dependence of images on textual

mediation, demonstrating how “wordless” images require the viewer to assume an active role in interpretation and meaning-making. From silent books to infographics, from visual games to augmentative and alternative communication systems, a conception of the image emerges as an open language capable of crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries. This issue reinforces the understanding of the image as an inclusive practice endowed with significant educational and social potential.

The issue devoted to architecture—*Issue 08 – Imaging and Imagery in Architecture* (Luigini, 2023)—reaffirms the central role of drawing as both a cognitive and projective act. The editorial retraces the evolution of architectural representation practices, showing how the transition to digital media has not replaced drawing, but has instead expanded its imaginative possibilities. Drawing emerges as a privileged site of mediation between idea and form, between imagination and construction. In this sense, architecture becomes a paradigmatic field through which to observe the relationship between image and project, confirming the centrality of visuality within creative processes.

With *Issue 09 – Metaverse Dilemma* (Alfieri & Rossi, 2023), *IMG Journal* devotes itself to a critical analysis of immersive technologies and the cultural rhetorics that have accompanied the emergence of the metaverse. The editorial addresses the metaverse not as a mere technological innovation, but as a cultural and perceptual environment that restructures modes of experience, interaction, and symbolic production. In dialogue with McLuhan’s thought and with theories of media as environments, the issue questions utopian and deterministic narratives, examining the anthropological, aesthetic, and political implications of virtual and extended realities. Within this framework, the image is no longer understood solely as representation, but as an experiential and operative space, opening a broader reflection on the relationship between subject, technology, and imagination in the contemporary context. This issue reinforces the

journal's critical vocation, confirming its capacity to problematise dominant narratives.

Issue 10 – Imagin(g) Heritage (Brusaporci, 2024) advances a reflection on cultural heritage understood as a cultural and social process rather than as a static assemblage of assets. The editorial develops a vision of heritage as a discursive and participatory practice, in which the intangible dimension does not stand in opposition to the material one, but constitutes a structural component of it. In dialogue with the principles of the Faro Convention, heritage is conceived as a living practice, rooted in communities and continuously renegotiated in the present. Within this framework, the image assumes a central role as a mediating device between history and memory, between experience and narrative, opening research perspectives in the fields of education, cultural participation, and heritage design.

POTENTIALITAS

If the first ten issues of *IMG Journal* have progressively constructed a critical genealogy of the image as a form of knowledge, the question that now imposes itself no longer concerns merely *what* images are or *how* they function, but rather *where* they are leading scientific, project-based, educational, and cultural practices as a whole. The themes addressed by the journal—from visual mediation to reproducibility, from the construction of the imaginary to the educational dimension of the image, from immersive simulation to cultural participation and creative practices—find an increasingly clear resonance within an international landscape in which image studies converge towards a radical redefinition of their epistemological premises.

Ecological Perspective on Visuality

The so-called *visual turn* (Mitchell, 1994; Boehm, 1994), which initially foregrounded the centrality of images in

contemporary culture, now appears insufficient to describe a context in which images are no longer merely *a posteriori* representations to be interpreted, but rather genuine *operative agents*, embedded within technological infrastructures, immersive environments, and, at times, automated decision-making processes. This shift entails a significant reorientation: attention can no longer be focused exclusively on the meaning of images, but must be extended to the material, technical, and environmental conditions that enable their action and pervasiveness. It is within this framework that Pinotti perceives the need to introduce a neologism –*an-iconic*– to designate that threshold which tends to erase the distance between image and reality, between representation and experience, presenting itself not as an image *of* something, but as an environment in which one is immersed (Ampollini et al., 2023). The *an-iconic* thus designates a profound transformation in the status of the image, which no longer merely mediates the world but comes to be configured as a totalising experiential space.

From this perspective, the image increasingly assumes the characteristics of an *epistemic and operative environment*, as anticipated from different angles in issues such as *Remediating Distances* and *Metaverse Dilemma*, as well as *Image and Imagery in Architecture* and *Imaging Peripheries*. These contributions have shown how images now operate as dispositifs that organise experience, orient practices, and shape relationships between subjects, spaces, and technologies. Research in *media studies*, the philosophy of technology, and the *visual* and *graphic sciences* confirms this trajectory, demonstrating how digital images act at pre-perceptual and temporal levels, influencing experience even before it becomes an object of reflective consciousness (Hansen, 2015). In parallel, media archaeology and studies in *digital materialism* have brought to light the inseparable link between images, infrastructures, and material resources, situating visibility within a broader *media ecology* (Parikka, 2012). This awareness, moreover, was already present in the early 1990s in

Maldonado's reflections, when in *Reale e virtuale* he emphasised the inescapability of our material and corporeal condition in the face of the rhetorics of technological dematerialisation (Maldonado, 1992).

Reformulating Educational and Project-Based Devices

Within this scenario, the reflections developed in *Image Learning* and *Wordless Images* now find an increasingly fertile ground for dialogue with cognitive neuroscience, cultural psychology, and the sciences of education, all of which recognise the central role of images in processes of *embodied cognition* and meaning-making (Gallese & Lakoff, 2005; Barsalou, 2008). These contributions converge in overcoming a conception of the image as a mere support or didactic aid, instead recognising it as an active cognitive environment in which perception, body, emotion, and thought intertwine in the production of knowledge. From this perspective, learning through images entails activating forms of situated understanding, in which knowledge is not simply transmitted but constructed through experience and interaction.

In a world characterised by global communicative flows and multicultural contexts, the capacity of images to operate beyond verbal language—already explored by the journal through *silent books*, infographics, and augmentative and alternative communication systems—assumes strategic value for inclusion, accessibility, and situated learning. Images enable the crossing of linguistic and cultural barriers, offering mediating forms that make participation possible for subjects with diverse competences, experiences, and backgrounds. In this sense, visuality does not merely accompany educational processes, but actively contributes to redefining their underlying assumptions, calling for instructional design attentive to the sensory, relational, and cultural dimensions of learning.

On a territorial and political level, the issues raised in *Imaging Peripheries* intersect with research in *critical geography*, *visual cultural studies*, and postcolonial studies, which

interrogate the role of images in the construction of maps, narratives, and dominant imaginaries (Harley, 1989; Corner, 1999; Perkins, 2007). Within this domain, practices of counter-mapping, participatory visualisation, and visual research-action demonstrate how images can function as design—as well as educational—devices, capable of exerting a concrete impact on social and territorial dynamics. Through such practices, the image becomes a tool for the critical problematisation of space and power, rendering visible subjects, histories, and places that would otherwise remain marginalised, and fostering processes of awareness, participation, and transformation. In this sense, the reformulation of educational and project-based devices necessarily involves a rethinking of the role of the visual as a site of mediation between knowledge, experience, and collective action.

Critical Reflection on Computational Aesthetics and Artificial Intelligence

Within this framework, the issues raised in *Copy / False / Fake* acquire a renewed and particular urgency. The emergence of images generated by artificial intelligence systems does not merely raise questions related to the authenticity or veracity of representations, but compels a profound rethinking of fundamental concepts such as authorship, intentionality, and epistemic responsibility (Manovich, 2020; Crawford, 2021). The image can no longer be reduced to an individual creative act or to a unitary authorial will; rather, it increasingly takes shape as the outcome of complex computational processes, grounded in datasets, statistical models, and machine-learning procedures. In this sense, contemporary visual production destabilises consolidated aesthetic and theoretical categories, calling for new critical tools capable of interpreting both the nature and the effects of images.

Images are no longer produced exclusively by human subjects, but by hybrid human-machine systems capable of learning, simulating, and anticipating visual figures or

patterns on a massive scale, with implications that span heterogeneous domains, from diagnostic medicine to surveillance, from architectural design to cultural production. In such contexts, the image becomes an operative interface between data, algorithms, and decisions, assuming a function that exceeds representation in order to directly affect processes of evaluation, prediction, and action. *Computational aesthetics* thus take shape not as mere visual styles, but as *regimes of visibility* that render otherwise opaque logics of calculation perceptible and sensible.

Similarly, the trajectory developed in *Imagin(g) Heritage* fully aligns with international debates that conceive heritage no longer as a static assemblage of objects, but as a discursive, performative, and participatory process (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). Within this framework, images play a central role in the negotiation of meanings, in the construction of collective memory, and in the definition of identities, also in relation to digital platforms and the logics of *convergent culture* (Jenkins, 2006). The production and circulation of images mediated by digital and algorithmic technologies thus redefine the ways in which the past is narrated, visualised, and reinterpreted in the present, opening up new possibilities while simultaneously introducing new cultural and political responsibilities.

Images thereby become sites of intersection between past and future, between memory and project, between conservation and innovation, positioning themselves at the centre of a broader debate that involves philosophy, anthropology, and the social sciences on the relationship between image, environment, and subjectivity in the age of hyperconnectivity and the *onlife* condition (Floridi, 2015). The progressive dissolution of dichotomies between real and virtual, online and offline, presence and distance compels a rethinking of the image no longer as a window onto the world, but as a habitable space in which the modalities of experience, relation, and action are continuously reconfigured. In this sense, a critical reflection on computational

aesthetics and artificial intelligence becomes indispensable for understanding and orienting ongoing transformations, reaffirming the role of theoretical analysis and cultural responsibility in the face of emerging regimes of the visible.

LINEAMENTA

Within this complex and constantly evolving framework, *IMG Journal* is called not merely to record or describe the transformations currently taking place in the field of visual culture, but to intervene critically in them, maintaining and strengthening a reflexive stance capable of bringing heterogeneous bodies of knowledge, practices, and perspectives into dialogue. The interdisciplinary vocation of the journal is thus configured not as a simple thematic openness, but as a *method of inquiry*: a conscious traversal of disciplines such as architecture, design, education, psychology, computer science, cultural studies, philosophy, and the social sciences, oriented towards the construction of shared theoretical tools without relinquishing analytical rigour.

To look towards the future trajectories of the editorial project means to assume the image no longer as an isolated object or a specialist language, but as a *space of negotiation* in which epistemic, technical, political, and pedagogical dimensions intertwine. The image thus becomes a site in which the relationships between the human and the non-human, between memory and anticipation, between representation and simulation are continuously redefined, calling into question consolidated categories and prompting new forms of critical responsibility. From this perspective, to interrogate images means to move beyond what they show and to focus instead on what they do: how they act within social, educational, and technological contexts, and which worlds they contribute to making thinkable, habitable, and shareable.

The task that thus emerges for *IMG Journal* is to continue to function as a cultural laboratory—both theoretical and

pragmatic– capable of reading and systematising transformations of the visible through a form of reflection that is at once historically grounded and oriented towards the future. In this sense, the journal does not position itself as a site of definitive synthesis, but as an open space of elaboration, in which the genealogy constructed across the first ten issues is translated into a critical project aimed at imagining, with awareness and responsibility, the futures of visual culture.

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