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Alessandro Luigini, Chiara Panciroli

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INDEX

ISSUE 11 OCTOBER 2024 Summary

i m g i m g ! m
m g ! m g i m g
g i m g i m g i
i m g i m g ! m
m g ! m g i m g
g i m g i m g i
i m g i m g ! m
m g ! m g i m g
g i m g i m g i
i m g i m g ! m
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EDITORIAL

ISSUE 11 OCTOBER 2024 Summary

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With Issue 11, *IMG Journal* introduces a moment of deliberate and collective reflection on its editorial trajectory, five years after the launch of the project and following the publication of ten monographic issues devoted to specific aspects of visuality. This volume is not conceived as an additional thematic special issue, but rather as a threshold issue, intended to interrogate what has changed in the field of image research, in theoretical frameworks, in project-based and educational practices, and within the journal itself.

As articulated in the internal call that generated this issue, we sought contributions capable of offering a plural state of the art: texts reflecting on transformations that have occurred over the past five years; research that is now possible and meaningful precisely >

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because of these changes; or recent projects that exemplify new configurations of the relationship between image, knowledge, and society. The result is a volume marked by heterogeneity of approaches and disciplinary backgrounds, yet structured by a number of shared thematic lines that ensure its overall coherence.

A first axis of reflection, developed in the contributions by the journal's Co-Editors-in-Chief, concerns the critical reconstruction of the theoretical genealogies of visuality and the epistemological repositioning of the image within the contemporary context. In this direction, Alessandro Luigini offers a systematic reading of the first ten editorials of *IMG Journal* as a coherent theoretical corpus. Rather than adopting a celebratory stance, the essay interprets the journal's trajectory as a progressive redefinition of the image as a form of knowledge, a mediating device, and a situated practice. Concepts such as the image as an epistemic environment, its operative dimension, and critical interdisciplinarity emerge as key interpretative nodes. The contribution thus assumes the value of a metatheoretical reflection on the editorial project, clearly distinguished from its directorial function.

On a complementary plane, explicitly oriented towards pedagogy, Chiara Panciroli addresses the relationship between visual culture, image education, and post-digital innovation. Her contribution proposes an epistemological redefinition of visual culture and identifies three developmental trajectories –image ecologies, immersive instructional design, and computational aesthetics– as foundational axes of a critical visual pedagogy capable

of inhabiting the tensions between the human and the artificial, imagination and technique, creativity and responsibility. In this case, education constitutes the explicit horizon of the argument.
A second thematic line concerns the critical responsibility of the gaze and the status of the image in contemporary culture. Valeria Menchetelli addresses recurring narratives surrounding the "death of the image", interpreting them not as signs of exhaustion but as indicators of transformation that call into question the ethics of representation and the active role of the observer. The image thus emerges as a space of cultural and interpretative responsibility, rather than as a passive object of consumption.
The relationship between images, design, and disciplinary research constitutes a further axis of inquiry. Edoardo Dotto and Francesco Maggio interpret the experience of *IMG Journal* as a space of methodological "resistance" within the field of drawing and representation, capable of countering the fragmentation and hyper-productivity of contemporary research while reaffirming the value of drawing as a critical and cognitive tool. From a related but distinct perspective, Michael Renner reflects on the role of aesthetic judgement in practice-led research, interrogating the criteria through which artistic and design-based research is evaluated and legitimised within academic contexts.
A strong focus on the territorial, urban, and environmental dimensions of visuality characterises the contribution by Paola Puma, who presents the *Identity Survey* model as a holistic methodology integrating material and immaterial, visual and sensory representations. Here, the image

becomes an instrument of situated knowledge, capable of restituting the complexity of urban contexts through a syncretic reading of the *genius loci*.
The theme of digitality as a cultural and theoretical horizon, rather than as a domain of formal education or digital literacy, traverses several contributions in the volume. Stefano Brusaporci offers a historical and critical reconstruction of key stages in digital culture –from cybernetics to the metaverse and artificial intelligence– providing conceptual tools for a reflective understanding of ongoing transformations. His contribution operates primarily on the level of cultural and theoretical formation. From a complementary perspective grounded in the field of *graphic sciences*, Enrico Cicalò presents a structured mapping of image-based research, distinguishing between basic and applied research and demonstrating how visual production constitutes not merely an outcome, but a method of scientific and disciplinary inquiry, with implications also for higher education.
Taken together, the contributions to Issue 11 delineate a research landscape in which the image is no longer conceived as mere representation, but as an epistemic environment, an operative dispositif, and a situated cultural practice. The heterogeneity of approaches does not result in dispersion, but rather in a critical constellation that confirms *IMG Journal*'s vocation as an open interdisciplinary laboratory, capable of connecting theory and practice, memory and project, scientific rigour and experimentation. This issue thus presents itself as a new: not a definitive synthesis, but a reflective threshold from which to observe

the path undertaken and, at the same time, to imagine future trajectories of image research. In this sense, we reaffirm the cultural function of *IMG Journal*: not merely to observe the visible, but to contribute to the construction of the critical conditions necessary to inhabit it consciously.

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 visuality, 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 visuality 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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VISUAL CULTURE, IMAGE EDUCATION, AND POST-DIGITAL INNOVATION: INTERSECTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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VISUAL
AGENCY
CULTURAL ACTORS
ECOLOGY OF IMAGES
CRITICAL CREATIVITY

This paper examines the evolving relationship between visual culture, image education, and post-digital innovation, situating these themes within the broader framework of contemporary educational theory and practice. Building on reflections developed through *IMG Journal* over its first five years, the contribution argues that visual culture has become a key epistemic domain for understanding how learning, knowledge construction, and subject formation are reshaped by digital and algorithmic environments. The article advances an epistemological redefinition of visual culture, understood not merely as the study of images, but as an inquiry into visuality, regimes of visibility, and the socio-technical conditions that organise seeing.

Against this background, the paper identifies three interconnected trajectories for future pedagogical development: 'image ecologies', which frame visual environments as spaces requiring care, critical distance, and responsibility; 'immersive instructional design', which repositions immersive technologies as tools for meaningful and reflective learning rather than spectacular consumption; and 'computational aesthetics', which interrogate the impact of generative artificial intelligence on creativity, authorship, and learning. Through these perspectives, the contribution proposes a model of post-digital visual pedagogy that integrates critical awareness, creative practice, and ethical responsibility. The paper concludes by arguing that education must reclaim a generative and mediating role, enabling learners to navigate contemporary visual environments critically and to inhabit the tensions between human agency, technological systems, imagination, and power.

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of these five years, through *IMG Journal*, we have come to understand how visual culture has become an indispensable interpretative key for analysing the multiple dimensions that characterise the contemporary educational landscape. This is not merely a matter of acknowledging the ever-growing proliferation of images that surround us and solicit us, in different ways, towards diverse forms of interaction, but rather of recognising a shift in the paradigms through which we learn, communicate, construct knowledge, and represent reality. Today, the image is no longer only an object of aesthetic consumption; it functions increasingly as a 'cognitive and social infrastructure', a carrier of data, and an expression of algorithmic systems. This scenario entails profound consequences at the socio-educational level, which is continuously reshaped by emerging technologies. Urgent questions thus arise: what does it mean today to educate in visual culture within a world dominated by digital flows, generative artificial intelligences, and algorithmic platforms? Which competences are required to inhabit, in a critical and informed manner, digital environments that are increasingly visual? On the occasion of the journal's fifth anniversary, it is therefore timely to reflect on these critical junctures by offering a concise conceptual and operational map aimed at a conscious evolution of the relationship between visuality, education, and innovation. More specifically, I will identify three perspectives for development –image ecologies, immersive instructional design, and computational aesthetics– as trajectories for a critical visual pedagogy capable of inhabiting the boundaries between the human and the artificial, between imagination and technique.

RETHINKING VISUAL CULTURE: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

'Visual culture', understood as both a theoretical and practical field, is not confined to the iconographic analysis of

images, but encompasses an examination of the ways in which the visual constructs meaning, influences behaviour, orients experience, and shapes social relations. Since the 1990s, visual culture studies have consolidated as an interdisciplinary area bringing into dialogue art history, cultural studies, media studies, anthropology, semiotics, and critical theory, taking as their object not only 'images' as such, but more fundamentally the domain of 'visuality'. The latter refers to practices of seeing, to the dispositifs that organise the gaze, and to the "regimes of visibility" that determine what can be shown, recognised, and legitimised (Winkel, 2005). As clarified by the foundational reflections within the field, this perspective emphasises that no single, stable definition of 'visual culture' exists, since the term is mobilised for different theoretical purposes; what ultimately matters is the field's capacity to generate new research strategies and new configurations of the object through the encounter between visual practices, apparatuses of vision, and viewing subjectivities (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009).

Following the theoretical framework proposed by Mitchell (2005), visual culture entails a paradigmatic shift: images are no longer conceived as inert entities that merely 'transmit' content, but as agentive forms that participate in social and cognitive life, interrogating desires, beliefs, and power relations. From this standpoint, Mitchell's *picture theory* invites scholars to treat images as cultural actors rather than as simple illustrations of verbal discourse. From a different yet complementary perspective, Mirzoeff (2011) has shown how modernity can also be read as a history of conflict between visuality and counter-visuality, linking 'visual authority' to dispositifs of governance and hierarchisation –colonial, political, and cultural– and reclaiming a "right to look" as a critical practice (Mirzoeff, 2011). Alongside these contributions, the genealogy of the field is informed by authors who have redefined seeing as a historical and cultural construction: from John Berger, who popularised the idea that every image embodies a "way of seeing" (Berger, 1972, p. X) and thus a social position, to Jonathan Crary

(2013), whose work reconstructs the historical formation of the modern observer by revealing the interconnections between technologies of vision, subjectivity, and modernity. In parallel, texts such as Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (2003) have reinforced the centrality of the spectator's experience and the affective and corporeal dimensions of seeing, opening up a tradition of analysis in which photography –and visuality more broadly– is understood as a perceptual and relational event. This theoretical consolidation has been accompanied by studies that have contributed to the institutionalisation of the field. In particular, *Visual Culture: The Reader*, edited by Evans and Hall (1999), has emphasised that the study of visual culture must hold together at least three dimensions –the sign, the institution, and the viewing subject– thereby underscoring that images always exist within social apparatuses and frameworks of power. From a methodological perspective, research on *Visual Methodologies* by Gillian Rose (2016) has provided tools for analysing visual culture in relation to contexts, practices, and circulation, reinforcing the notion that 'seeing' is a situated act and that the interpretation of the visual requires explicit and critically grounded methods.

Within this framework, the visual becomes the distinctive language of global culture, permeating domains traditionally considered non-visual –such as science, economics, politics, and social media– with direct repercussions for education and training. This widespread diffusion, enabled by platforms and automated processes, raises unprecedented questions: who controls images? How is visual authority constructed? In what ways do algorithmic selection and the logic of attention reshape what appears 'relevant' or 'credible'? The use of immersive technologies –augmented, virtual, and mixed reality– represents a promising yet ambivalent frontier for education. On the one hand, these technologies enable multisensory and engaging experiences; on the other, they may induce forms of perceptual passivity and interpretative delegation, particularly when

visual experience is designed as spectacle rather than as an opportunity for inquiry. The challenge, therefore, lies in conceiving innovation as 'augmented pedagogy' rather than as mere technical incorporation, valuing educational design as a critical, aesthetic, and relational act.

Within educational contexts, visual culture constitutes a space of hybridisation for learning. Images –videos, maps, infographics, simulations– are not simply didactic supports, but cognitive and relational environments: they actively participate in the construction of attention, engagement, and memory, as also indicated by neuroscientific research on learning (Dehaene, 2019). A well-designed image can foster deep understanding and conceptual connections; conversely, a chaotic or hyper-stimulating visual environment may hinder concentration and encourage fragmented and superficial modes of engagement.

Despite this, educational systems often remain inadequately prepared to integrate visuality as a transversal competence. 'Visual literacy' should not be confined to iconographic decoding, but must also encompass conscious production, ethical reflection on representation, and an understanding of the technological logics –such as filters, metrics, and algorithmic biases– that shape what we see. It is in this sense that visual culture intersects with digital citizenship, calling into question the social responsibility of representation. The advent of digital technologies and, in particular, artificial intelligence has profoundly transformed the ways in which images are created, distributed, and perceived. Images generated by neural networks (GANs), interpreted by artificial vision systems (computer vision), and manipulated in real time through deepfakes and augmented reality have become integral to everyday experience. This transformation increasingly blurs the distinction between what is real and what is simulated (Eugeni, 2015), as well as between what is human and what is automated (Panciroli & Rivoltella, 2021). Yet this may not be the most urgent issue to be addressed through definitive answers. In the face of these mutations, it is instead imperative to develop

an educational approach with broader horizons –one that is not merely technical or functional, but also critical, creative, and ethical. Educating for visual culture today also entails fostering an understanding of algorithms, an awareness of data, and a critical reflection on the relationship between visual coding and power. A pedagogy that conceives innovation as a reflexive and situated practice can offer tools for navigating the contemporary 'visual landscape' (Panciroli & Rivoltella, 2021) without being dominated by it, while at the same time making a meaningful contribution to it. From this perspective, visual culture acquires a fully educational value only when situated within an explicit pedagogical framework, in which the relationship between subjects, images, and technologies is understood as constitutive of knowledge processes. In this sense, the visual becomes a 'infrasctructure of mediation' between sensory experience, educational design, and technological infrastructures (Panciroli, 2019; 2022). Within this framework, the image is no longer merely an object of analysis, but becomes a pedagogical device capable of activating situated, reflective, and critical forms of learning. Integrating visual culture into educational design therefore means recognising the visual as a site of meaning-making rather than as a simple communicative support, reaffirming the role of education as an interpretative and generative practice.

THREE PERSPECTIVES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

In light of this epistemological redefinition of visual culture, it becomes possible to identify a number of developmental trajectories capable of translating these theoretical premises into operative pedagogical directions. The three perspectives that follow –image ecologies, immersive instructional design, and computational aesthetics– should not be understood as separate domains, but rather as interconnected axes of a visual pedagogy oriented towards the formation of subjects capable of inhabiting contemporary regimes of the visible in a reflective and responsible manner.

Image Ecologies: Towards a Pedagogy of the Visual Threshold

Within a communicative ecosystem characterised by the overproduction and incessant circulation of images, speaking of *image ecologies* entails recognising that the issue is not merely quantitative, but profoundly qualitative and cultural. As Nicholas Mirzoeff has observed, visuality is never neutral: it is always a social practice, a way of organising the visible and, simultaneously, the invisible. In the current hypermediated context, images do not simply represent the world, but actively contribute to shaping emotions and processes of subjectivation. The notion of image ecology explicitly recalls the paradigm of environmental education: just as the natural environment requires care, awareness, and responsibility, so too does the visual environment demand educational practices oriented towards selection and critical distance. Crary has shown how the visual phenomenon is situated within a terrain where abstract, visual, and linguistic elements converge, and how contemporary regimes –sustained by digital platforms and algorithms– produce a condition of permanent vigilance that diminishes the possibility of deep and reflective perception. In this sense, *iconic bulimia* is not merely an excess of images, but a dispositif that affects the ways in which subjects inhabit time and space. Visual education, within an ecological perspective, thus assumes a crucial formative function: teaching how to see less in order to see better, how to recognise the value of emptiness, pause, and threshold. As W. J. T. Mitchell has famously argued, "pictures want" (2005): they demand attention, adherence, and affect. Educating in visual culture therefore means rendering this desire of images visible, unveiling their strategies, and restoring to the subject an active and responsible position. Education thus becomes a space of critical resistance, within which learners are encouraged to interrogate not only images themselves, but also the systems that render them pervasive.

Immersive Educational Design: From Spectacle to Meaningful Experience

Immersive technologies –virtual, augmented, and mixed reality– represent one of the most promising, yet also most ambiguous, terrains for educational innovation. Their potential lies in their capacity to generate embodied, situated, and multisensory experiences that engage the body and space beyond the purely symbolic dimension of text. However, as Laurillard (2014) has emphasised, no technology is pedagogically effective in itself: it is instructional design that determines whether an experience becomes genuinely formative or remains merely a spectacular event.

The primary risk of immersive design lies in the aestheticisation of learning, whereby the effects of presence and wonder replace the construction of meaning. In such a scenario, education may easily slide into a logic of experience consumption rather than critical reflection. To avoid this drift, it is necessary to develop forms of instructional design that articulate pedagogical intentionality, cognitive objectives, and experiential dimensions. Research on situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 2006) and on embodied cognition (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991) demonstrates that immersive experience can foster deep processes of understanding, provided that it is accompanied by moments of reflexivity, reworking, and dialogue. Effective immersive instructional design does not merely aim to 'provide an experience', but rather constructs a pathway that integrates exploration, narration, comparison, and metacognition.

In relation to visual culture and AI literacy (Panciroli & Rivoltella, 2024), immersive technologies become environments in which algorithmic regimes of visibility can be explored in a critical and informed manner. Virtual and augmented reality environments can be designed not only to display content, but also to render explicit the processes of simulation, modelling, and automated decision-making. In this sense, immersive design may become a privileged space for the development of critical competences in relation to artificial intelligence, making perceptible dynamics that would otherwise remain opaque.

Computational Aesthetics and Critical Creativity: Rethinking Art, Authorship, and Learning

Images generated by systems of generative artificial intelligence are profoundly reshaping the concepts of creativity, authorship, and aesthetics. As Manovich (2020) observes, we are witnessing a new phase of visual culture in which the image is no longer the outcome of a single authorial intention, but rather the result of computational processes grounded in datasets, statistical models, and probabilistic operations. Within educational contexts, this scenario opens up unprecedented opportunities. Students are able to engage in dialogue with generative systems, explore visual variants, hypotheses, styles, and combinations that would be difficult to access through traditional tools alone. However, without adequate pedagogical guidance, there is a risk of 'delegated creativity', in which the creative act is reduced to the selection or refinement of algorithmic outputs.

It is precisely at this point that the notion of 'critical creativity' becomes central. Educating for creativity in the age of artificial intelligence entails not only the use of generative tools, but also an understanding and problematisation of the processes that make them possible. As Selwyn (2024) emphasises, AI literacy cannot be limited to operational competences, but must include an epistemic and ethical dimension: who decides what is considered '*beautiful*', '*coherent*', or '*artistic*'? Which imaginaries are reproduced, and which are excluded? Within the field of art education, this approach leads to a reconfiguration of the studio or laboratory as a space of inquiry. Drawing on the idea of "*thinking through images*" (Panciroli, 2019), aesthetic experience becomes a space for thought through code, interrogating datasets, deconstructing and recomposing models, and confronting human intentionality with computational logics. Art, in this sense, confirms its role as a privileged domain for critical AI literacy. Computational aesthetics, far from constituting a mere stylistic category, thus become a pedagogical dispositif: a means of rendering visible the otherwise invisible infrastructures of artificial intelligence and of forming subjects capable of inhabiting contemporary visual culture in a conscious, critical, and creative manner.

TOWARDS A POST-DIGITAL VISUAL PEDAGOGY

The educational challenge that lies ahead is both complex and demanding: to continue building a visual culture capable of holding together imagination and awareness, creativity and responsibility, aesthetics and technique. Within a media ecosystem profoundly transformed by digitalisation and artificial intelligence, images can no longer be regarded as mere communicative supports or ancillary didactic tools. They increasingly constitute cognitive environments, symbolic infrastructures, and mediation devices through which knowledge, identities, and worldviews are constructed.

As already highlighted by reflections on post-digital pedagogy, we no longer live 'after' the digital, but 'within' a condition in which technologies, social practices, and educational processes are structurally intertwined. The post-digital does not signify the overcoming of the digital, but rather a phase of critical maturity, in which attention shifts from tools to relations, from devices to practices, and from novelty effects to their cultural and pedagogical implications. Within this framework, visuality assumes a central role: it is through images that the digital becomes experienceable, interpretable, and open to discussion. Images, however, are never neutral. They embody choices, values, and models of the world; they convey power relations and symbolic hierarchies; and they contribute to rendering certain realities visible while obscuring others. In the age of platforms and algorithms, this dimension is further intensified: what becomes visible is the result of automated selection processes, relevance metrics, and predictive models that often operate below the threshold of awareness. The image thus becomes not only representation, but the outcome of calculation, a sensitive surface of complex systems that intertwine data, code, and decision-making processes.

Rethinking education from this perspective means recognising that visual culture has become one of the primary arenas in which the formation of the contemporary subject

takes place. A post-digital visual pedagogy cannot be confined to teaching how to 'read' images; rather, it must create the conditions for interrogating them, problematising them, and dismantling the mechanisms through which they are produced and recomposed. The image thus becomes not only an object of critical analysis, but also a space of demonstration, conceptual exploration, and creative experimentation. In this direction, education is called upon to reclaim a generative function: not merely to transmit knowledge, but to construct contexts in which students and educators can develop a reflective relationship with the visual, learning to recognise its complexity and ambivalence. Visual pedagogy is therefore grounded in a productive tension between imagination and responsibility: on the one hand, it values the expressive and creative potential of images; on the other, it assumes their ethical, political, and social dimensions. Particularly significant in this scenario is the contribution of intelligent technologies, which amplify the possibilities of visual production and manipulation while simultaneously rendering the underlying processes more opaque. Images generated by artificial intelligence systems, immersive simulations, and data visualisations raise profound questions concerning the relationship between truth, fiction, and verisimilitude. A visual pedagogy does not seek to provide definitive answers, but rather to equip subjects cognitively to inhabit this uncertainty, transforming it into an opportunity for critical learning. In this sense, the image becomes a privileged space for exercising competences in AI literacy, digital citizenship, and critical thinking. Making invisible processes visible –data, algorithms, training logics– means restoring to education its mediating role between technological complexity and human understanding. Schools and universities can thus be configured as spaces in which the visual is not passively consumed, but reinterpreted, discussed, and reinvented. A post-digital visual pedagogy, finally, positions itself consciously at the boundaries between the human and the artificial, between aesthetic sensibility and technical rationality. The aim is not to oppose creativity and technology, but

to explore the hybrid forms of thought that emerge from their encounter. Within this liminal space, education can reclaim its transformative role: forming subjects capable not only of using images, but of 'thinking through images', recognising their generative power and assuming responsibility for it.

With its interdisciplinary vocation, *IMG Journal* represents a valuable and indispensable laboratory for accompanying this transformation, combining scientific rigour with imaginative openness. Within a cultural and academic landscape marked by the growing complexity of visual languages and the pervasive presence of digital and algorithmic technologies, the journal positions itself as a critical space of dialogue capable of bringing different forms of knowledge, practices, and perspectives into conversation. Its role is not limited to observing and describing ongoing changes, but extends to actively contributing to the construction of interpretative frameworks, analytical categories, and educational practices capable of orienting such transformations. In this sense, *IMG Journal* assumes a strategic role in promoting a reflection on visual culture that is neither technophilic nor defensive, but rather conscious, problematising, and generative. By offering a shared space of elaboration between research, education, and cultural design, the journal contributes to strengthening a pedagogy of the visual capable of inhabiting the tensions between the human and the artificial, between aesthetic experience and technological infrastructures, and between imagination and responsibility. Its function will therefore become increasingly necessary: not only to observe images, but to construct –together– a critical, reflective, and inclusive visual citizenship, capable of interpreting the present and consciously imagining the possible futures of seeing.

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THE E-ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: A COMPACT GUIDE THROUGH DIGITALITY

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DIGITAL CULTURE
DIGITAL MEDIA
DIGITAL EDUCATION

The paper presents the main steps of digital media growing, highlighting how experiential and narrative modalities, and the related cultural issues, have evolved over time. In parallel with the development of information technology, computer graphics, the Internet, ICT and AI, the concepts and characteristics of cybernetics, virtual reality, augmented reality, hyper-connection, metaverse and artificial intelligence are studied. The paper organization is based on analysing some of the main texts that deal with these specific topics, and the texts are used to trace a fil rouge through the field of digitality.
The paper is addressed to students, but at the same time to scholars to discuss the interpretation of the arguments and the issues of digital education. This paper seeks to foster a critical understanding and cultural sensitivity regarding the true nature and significance of the digital realm.

Fig. 1 Gere, *Digital Culture*, 2002. Book cover.

Teachers often devote part of their lessons to topics referred to digitality because they believe that this theme is very important, not only for the education in the use of advanced tools –whose methods of use students often know even better than the teachers–, but to develop a critical consciousness and a cultural awareness. Though the topic of digitality is endless and the savvy reader may find the contents of the paper didactic –if it happens I will be happy as this means that the reader has a good grasp of certain topics–, through the discussion of some essays on the argument, the purpose of this paper is to examine the interpretation of key arguments and the challenges facing digital culture and education, last but not least to raise questions in those who already use digital applications and instruments in a shrewd way, but often without dwelling on the real characteristics and significance of the digital dimension.

The spread of economic digital applications and systems with increasingly advanced performance characteristics, coupled with the development of ICT Information and Communication Technologies, have made digital systems an essential part of our daily lives, with tools that accompany the user anywhere and at any time, with applications to be used remotely through simple and intuitive interfaces. The technological theme goes hand in hand with the cultural one, according to interrelated implications, where the cultural aspects do not have to be understood simply consequential from digital innovations (Gere, 2002).

In general, the theme of digital technology began to develop in the fifties. The concept of cybernetics, a term coined by Norbert Wiener in 1948, is pivotal and based on the idea that the processes underlying biological, artificial or social systems (regardless of their nature) could be understood through mathematical and statistical analytical approaches, based on feedback information. They are also the harbingers of cybernetics as a reflection on a post-human based on a physical interaction between biological and mechanical, therefore digital. Proceeding broadly, we could

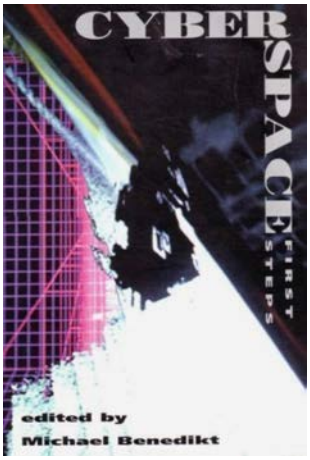

Fig. 2 Benedikt, *Cyberspace: first steps*, 1991. Book cover.

look at the years immediately following, a period referable to post-modernism and post-structuralism.

In particular, the possibility offered by computers to generate rendered images allows the development of virtual reality applications substantially based on immersion, primarily visual, in digital worlds. In this sense, Sutherland in 1965 prefigured a display so advanced that it could simulate physical reality in an indistinguishable way. It is not just about displaying images but about creating immersive experiences where the user can interact with virtual objects as if they were real, conceptually providing immersive environments, 3D graphics and the development of Head-Mounted Displays.

From the seventies, and therefore with a significant acceleration in the eighties, there was the birth of personal computers and the spread of video games. Consequently computer graphics and digital environments, and in particular three-dimensional ones, have become part of cultural practice and the collective imagination. There is a wide debate on virtual reality, and therefore on the dichotomy/transliteration/real-virtual integration (Krueger, 1991; Rheingold, 1992). Interest is aroused by the virtual experience and cyberspace, as is evident at the conference held at the University of Texas at Austin in 1990 (Benedikt, 1991).

The cultural reflection on digital culture took on strength in the nineties, with the effective diffusion of home consoles in homes, to find use both in the professional sphere and in everyday life, and then around the middle of the decade with the birth and spread of the Internet. All this raises questions not only technological, but also cultural, sociological, anthropological, epistemological, cognitive, educational, infographic, ethical, political (Barrett, 1994; Feenberg, 1995). Digital systems favour the collection and processing of information according to procedures not unlike those used by our mind, that is, according to visual and spatial systems, non-linear, different from the traditional alphabetical organization.

De Kerckhove (1991), based on studies on the relationship between mind, body and digital technologies, indicates

how it modifies the modes of interaction and facilitates the processes of conception and elaboration, according to a sort of 'sensory remapping'. In particular, he outlines a framework where technologies come to frame the mind, offering new tools of interconnection and interpretation to overcome the alphabetic approach, recovering and renewing ancient processes based on bodily interaction, spatiality, touch, favoured by interactive three-dimensional virtuality.

Negroponte in *Being Digital* (1995) coined the term 'digitality', to indicate a condition that derives from the possibilities offered by digital and the web: a new era, a digital life of post-information that goes beyond analogy and cybernetics, where the human being, in a certain way ousted by machines, and reduced to a posthuman rank, returns to the centre of the discourse.

Strongly critical positions are offered by Baudrillard (1976) who identifies mechanisms of alienation in the mechanisms of communication, induced by the incompatibility between the speed of digital interaction and the proper time required by the processes of symbolic exchange. In this way, simulation leads to a hyper-production of reality that leads to sedating the imagination, the latter understood not as a mirage or fantasy that distances us from reality, but as a vehicle to get closer to the meaning and essence of things. On the contrary, virtual reality creates realistic three-dimensional environments, that is, a perfect immersive reality devoid of symbolic dimension, without meaning and aura (Baudrillard, 1997).

Similarly is the vision of Virilio (1993) is critical: he attributes to the new media the sterilization of the imagination of the spectators, primarily caused by the acceleration in time and space of information, a 'new spectacular' where the thing described comes to take over the real thing.

Lévy's (1995) approach is different, referring to the virtual starting from the etymology of the word: Something endowed with virtue, which exists potentially, which has the possibility of being able to be. In this sense, a reading in

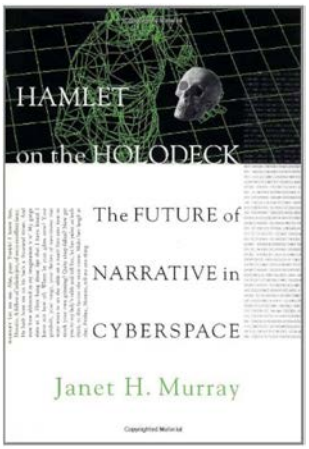

Fig. 3 Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, 1997. Book cover.

opposition to Baudrillard's de-realization or Virilio's space-time implosion, and which has little to do with illusion and falsehood. Not an opposition to reality but countless opportunities for the actualization of forms and solutions starting from a dynamic configuration of forces and purposes in response to the stimuli of reality.

At the dawn of the new century, there is the spread of the Internet, the birth of social media, the mass marketing of smartphones. Bolder and Grusin (1999) highlight how media acquire characteristics of transparency and naturalness, based on immediacy, hypermediality and remediation: immediacy makes applications perceive less 'arbitrary', more 'real' for the user; hypermediality is exemplified by windows operative system, that is visual interfaces offer the possibility of managing information in a simple and simultaneous way; finally remediation as media that continuously transcode other media (mediation of mediation).

In *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* –whose title takes up the so-called 'holodeck' present in the science fiction television series *Star Treck* capable of creating a realistic 3D simulation of a real or imaginary environment in which you can interact freely with the environment, objects and characters, and where you can experience a story– Murray (1997) reflects on how digital technology is transforming the way we tell stories, through new forms of interactive, immersive and participatory storytelling. In this sense, digital is configured not only as a technological tool but as an expressive means that allows the development of multiform stories, where multiple plots and endings coexist. Murray highlights how the digital medium is characterized by four fundamental properties: procedurality, according to rules and algorithms; participation, with the active involvement of the user; spatiality, with navigable and immersive environments; encyclopedicity, i.e. the ability to contain large amounts of information. They come to define a new aesthetic of digital narration, characterized by immersivity, the user's ability to influence the story

(Agency), the ability to kaleidoscopic transformation of avatars, environments, behaviours, models, points of view, plot. Overall, Murray proposes a vision where digital does not destroy traditional storytelling, but expands it, offering new expressive possibilities.

Manovich (2001) emphasizes how the media speak a new language, according to the following five fundamental principles: numerical representation, i.e. all digital content is numerically encoded, so that it can be manipulated by algorithms; modularity, i.e. digital media are composed of independent modules (e.g. pixels, frames, 3D objects) that can be combined and reused; automation, i.e. creative and technical processes can be automated, reducing human intervention; variability, i.e. digital content can exist in multiple versions and dynamically adapt to the context; cultural transcoding, i.e. digital media transforms cultural data into computable data, changing the way culture is produced and perceived.

In this way, a media product, unlike traditional ones assembled once and for all according to human intentionality, is now based on modular data structures organized according to computer principles, which give rise to cultural products in a continuously different way based on computer processing and interactions with users. Manovich underlines how new media have a different nature than traditional ones and place us in a new phase with respect to McLuhan's theories –that is 'the media is the message'–, requiring us to shift attention from the theme of media characteristics to the study of software. The theme of software is explored in his next essay *Software Takes Command* (2010) where he explores the 'software culture', or the set of digital programs and environments that mediate our experience of the world, shaping thought, aesthetics, communication and social representation. According to Manovich, software has become the universal engine of the global information society. It expounds the concept of 'metamedium', the cornerstone of a new period of cultural hybridization.

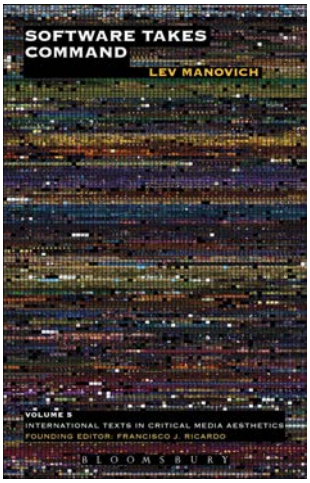

Fig. 4 Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, 2010. Book cover.

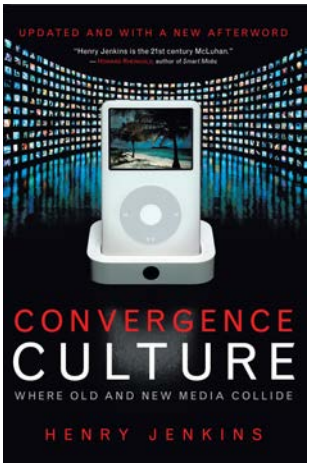

Fig. 5 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 2006. Book cover.

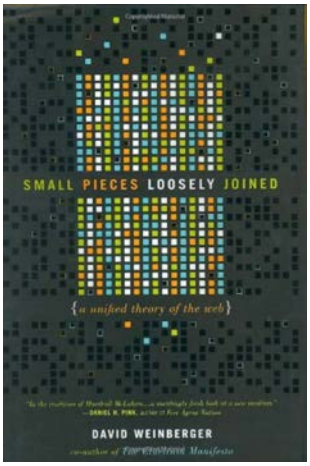

Fig. 6 Weinberger, *Small Pieces Loosely Joined: A Unified Theory of the Web*, 2002. Book cover..

With social media there is a transition from mass consumption to daily and continuous mass production. Jenkins speaks of 'convergent culture' (2006), taking up and renewing the concept of 'collective intelligence' (Lévy, 1995), made possible by digital communication and based on participation and systems of common interest, no longer referred to institutional centres, specific territories and societies. In particular, the phenomenon of convergent culture arises in relation to three concepts: the convergence of media, participatory culture, and collective intelligence. The term participatory culture goes beyond the traditional concepts of media producers versus passive spectators, although not all actors can exert more weight than others. 'Convergence' refers to the flow of content across multiple platforms in relation to the participatory behaviour of users and the media industry.

As a result, the public space of meeting and dialogue changes: the Internet and social media foster relationships and discussions, particularly within interest groups populated by users with similar interests. These are spaces of affinity where ideas can be shared, lines of thought can grow and spread (Weinberger, 2002).

Jenkins (2009) lists as forms of participatory culture: affiliation (membership in online communities); the production of independent content according to new forms of expression such as videos, comments, memes; collaborative problem solving, i.e. I work in formal or informal collaboration, such as in online games or Wikipedia; circulation, e.g. podcasting and blogging. Potential benefits can derive from this context: "[...] opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, a changed attitude toward intellectual property, the diversification of cultural expression, the development of skills valued in the modern workplace, and a more empowered conception of citizenship" (Jenkins, 2009, p.xii). And at the same time elements of attention in terms of participation gaps (unequal access), problems of transparency (regarding how the media represent events),

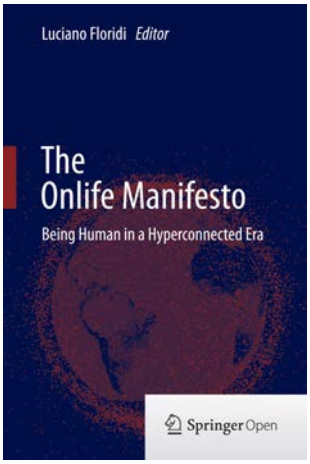

Fig. 7 Floridi, *The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era*, 2015. Book cover.

ethical issues. But above all, new skills are required, such as play, performance, simulation, appropriation, multitasking, distributed cognition, collective intelligence, judgment, transmedia navigation, networking, negotiation (Jenkins, 2009, pp. xii-xiv). Also in this case, a sensible approach requires focusing more on cultural than instrumental aspects: Jenkins (2009) points out that the questions posed by participatory culture are basically eminently cultural issues and not only technological.

With the development of ICT and the spread of smartphones, the system of interconnections has extended to envelop the objects that surround us (IoT - Internet of Things and Smart Objects). A condition described by *The Onlife Manifesto, Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era* which refers to an everyday life where ICT marries reality through a hyperconnection that correlates real and digital in a single dimension (Floridi, 2015).

The conditions are in place for a new participatory cultural dimension, defined by a constant and ubiquitous immersion of people in a global infosphere. The term infosphere recalls Lotman's "semiosphere": in a context of crisis of traditional epistemological models, Lotman comes to configure the image of knowledge not as a stable and predictable construction, but as a network that has no centre and that offers an unlimited number of interconnected meshes to be identified and travelled freely (Salvestroni, 1985). A decidedly contemporary, ecosystemic, integrated and integrating vision, which stitches together continuous and discreet. The semiosphere is a cultural biosphere, which evokes and is well suited to a system of knowledge that is discontinuous in the fragments of applications and in the nodes of the network but continuous in the cloud, discontinuous in the fragmented multimedia and multidirectional communication but continuous in the geo-spatial flows of the infosphere.

In this context, augmented reality and mixed reality play an important role. These concepts have been already proposed at the time by Milgram and Kishino (1994): the two

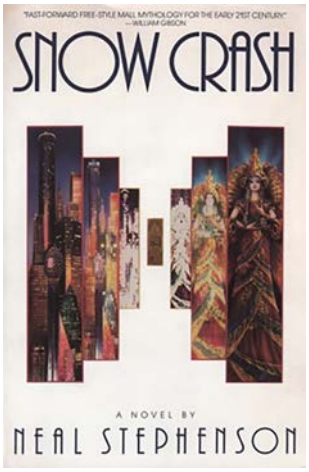

Fig. 8 Stephenson, *Snow Crash*, 1992. Book cover.

scholars develop the concept of reality-virtuality continuum, which goes from completely real reality (without virtual elements) to augmented reality (AR), i.e. a real environment enriched by virtual objects, to augmented virtual reality (AV), i.e. a virtual environment enriched by real elements, up to completely virtual reality. It is a single dimension where, except for the extremes (the real world and the totally virtual environment), different states of mixed reality are experienced, in this way reconnecting different types of experiences in a single conceptual system. Both augmented reality and mixed reality presuppose the information enrichment of the physical world that surrounds the user, made possible by the real-time superimposition between the image of what is framed through a screen and digital data and objects.

The possibility offered by ICT and devices that accompany each of us always suggests the possibility of a continuous mixture between real and virtual, which can be declined both in an immersion in a totally synthetic environment, and in an experience of reality systematically always flanked in every place and by digital tools. Hence the idea of the metaverse, a term coined by Neal Stephenson in the 1992 science fiction novel "Snow Crash". A general definition of the metaverse is proposed by Matthew Ball (2022, p. 55) who describes it as a highly scalable and interoperable network of real-time rendered 3D virtual worlds, which can be experienced synchronously and persistently by an effectively unlimited number of users with an individual sense of presence within them, and which guarantee the continuity of data relating to identity, history, rights, objects, communications and payments. In a general sense, the metaverse represents a cultural logic referable to a virtual environment, in perspective increasingly integrated with the real one, indeed, constantly parallel to the physical one, where, unlike the virtual reality of the first hour, it is now constantly inhabited by the global universe of users, who find a way to interact seamlessly here. In particular, the idea

of the metaverse refers to social networks that see in this idea the evolution of their environments.

Arcagni (2023) dwells on the theme of the metaverse understood as a cultural logic and relational space, emphasizing its cultural aspects and critical issues. It highlights the characteristic of representing a system of thought made possible by immersive technologies, where the communicative dimension is based on the principles of immersion, participation, sharing, and interaction. It is a performative model, made possible by different technologies and at the same time favoured by a cultural system of reference based on the pre-eminence of: a non-linear and haptic thought/action; the centrality of space in relation to knowledge and communication; a single, vast, immersive social environment. Furthermore, at the basis of the logic of the metaverse, there are two main rules: the gamification of narrative mechanisms, typical of video games; the spatial logic of distribution and use of contents. (p.34-35).

The metaverse, based on an engaging cognitive and participatory activity, both from an intellectual and physical point of view (thought/action/space), is rooted in an inclusive meta-context that combines a situated digital dimension and a digitized real one. Compared to traditional analogue and digital media, the concepts of action and space induce new phenomena, and renew what Baudrillard predicted with the hyperreal where the simulacrum loses the function of copy to emancipate itself as a new reality. According to Arcagni, it is a dimension based on a disturbing aesthetic, referring to an uncanny space where "non-place" environments are represented as humanized as they are called upon to replicate models of life, fashions and myths, as well as social systems and communities, like the physical world.

This is a critical vision, which can be reduced if lived with full awareness of metaverse nature, also in relation to the context of hybridization of physical and digital dimensions.

On the 'quantitative' issue of data roots the development, growth and diffusion of Artificial Intelligence, made possible

by a series of concomitant factors: the deeply stratified neural computing networks, made up of countless decision-making units, insignificant when considered alone, but extraordinarily powerful when aggregated on a large scale, to the point of escaping human comprehension; a colossal amount of data available, which allows you to have quantities of useful information to learn to recognize and process multimedia content, training the neural network to develop products and improve its performance, that is, to self-learn on the basis of the information available, which therefore the more you are, the more you can improve the result; the development of high-performance processors –in fact those created by the graphics market– organized in huge computing centres; last but not least –and at the base of everything– the extraordinary economic investments made by the IT giants, which make it essentially the prerogative of these investors. On the one hand, AI's incredible abilities follow, and on the other, a public bias dictated by issues of fairness, privacy and fears of both the social changes it may lead, such as in the field of work, and the opacity of the processing process, which appears not entirely controllable (Fei-Fei Li, 2024).

In relation to the incredible capabilities that AI demonstrates and to its ever-increasing evolution, it seems natural to ask how humanity can differentiate from AI. Prencipe and Sideri (2023) trace the humanistic question by emphasizing how the art of formulating questions remains a jealous attribute of the human. Benanti and Maffettone (2024) reflect on the relationship between AI and the humanistic dimension, a theme that raises obvious ethical questions. Moriggi and Pireddu (2024) wonder if a machine can think, if and how it is intelligent, if it can deceive by pretending to be a person.

These questions require to consider ourselves and our values, opening to an epistemological framework that must question us by opening to the definition of a new humanism, understood as a moment of crisis of consciousness of

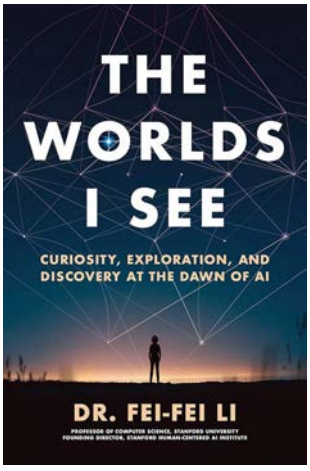

Fig. 9 Li, *The Worlds I See: Curiosity, Exploration, and Discovery at the Dawn of AI*, 2023. Book cover..

the end of a previous order and the need to define a new one. A new attribution of meaning is needed, where the categories of acting, understanding and intentionality open to an existential risk, posed by the projection of human traits on digital systems. The challenge is to keep the human dimension at the centre, which in turn can find in AI a means to be augmented, developed and deepened.

However, Floridi (2025) highlights how AI should be understood not as a form of intelligence but as the ability to act with high levels of performance, and emphasizes that what distinguishes man from AI is 'semantics', i.e. the meaning given to actions. In particular, the true human peculiarity is the 'beautiful glitch', i.e. freedom of thought, creativity and the ability to think 'out of this world' and not anchored to the here and now or data, producing innovation. The importance of AI can lie in supporting the enhancement of this human 'added value', recovering the relational and artisanal dimension of doing. According to Floridi, what is needed is not human-centric AI, but a relation-centric approach capable of building meaning in the interaction between people, machines, society and the environment.

Colamedici carries out an experiment: starting from the concept of post-truth, and from the questioning of unifying narratives, as favoured by social media, he writes with –or has written by– AI a book titled "Hypnocracy" where he develops the concept of post-truth to develop the ability to recognize and navigate between parallel reality systems. In this sense, the book is attributed to a Chinese scholar who does not exist but made real by the narrative system of the book (Xun, 2025). In particular, he book highlights how the algorithmic systems underlying social media –a pervasive dimension of today's society– tend to produce a relational cultural logic that redefines praxis, meaning and perceptual modalities, based on multiple, personalized but limited, even economically oriented discourses and truths. The author concludes that what we are witnessing is not simply a quantitative accumulation of technologies that alter the

states of consciousness, but the approach of a qualitative leap in the evolution of consciousness itself. Hypnocracy aims to control every aspect of experience, and it may have unintentionally created the conditions for the emergence of something radically different: cracking the algorithmic order, under the weight of its own pervasiveness and forced certainty, the possibility of glimpsing a free space rise.

The concept of 'virtual' as declined by Lévi comes to mind, that is, a 'field' that can be questioned, from which effective manifestations can arise thanks to its ability to decline its ontological centre of gravity (Lèvy, 1995): The model is no longer configured as a finished product, but rather as an open ecosystem, and is 'virtual' in the etymological sense of something endowed with 'virtues' in relation to its dynamic ability to conform, analyse and communicate content and support experiences.

Already in 1967 Calvino reflected on narrative as a combinatorial process, wondered if a computer could carry out procedures of conception and composition of poems and novels. In this sense, Calvino specifies that he is not referring to a machine capable of carrying out a mechanized and mass-produced literary production but capable of developing a product on the basis of lived experience, the unpredictability of mood and the illuminations of memory: in short, Calvino highlights how a text of literature, in order to distinguish itself from automated writing, must arise from a condition of disorder. In this way:

> The real literary machine will be the one that will itself feel the need to produce disorder but as a reaction to its previous production of order […]. In fact, given that the developments of cybernetics focus on machines capable of learning, of changing their program, of developing their sensitivity and their needs, nothing prevents us from envisaging a literary machine that at a certain point feels the dissatisfaction of its traditionalism and begins to propose new ways of understanding writing and completely upset their codes (p.209).

> Calvino points out, even when there is this type of machine, what will disappear will be the role of the author, but in any case "literature will continue to be a privileged place of human consciousness [...] The work will continue to be born, to be judged, to be destroyed or continuously renewed in contact with the reading eye" (p. 211). And he concludes: "Let the author disappear [...] to leave his place to a more conscious man, who will know that the author is a machine and will know how this machine works (p. 212).

Calvino predicts creative characteristics that AI does not yet seem to possess, as today it stands as an agent capable of incredible performances. In any case, the contest is constantly evolving. At the same time, considerations regarding the centrality of the reader/observer/user appear to be of particular interest, especially considering our immersion in the digital, with the related issues of emancipation and conscious management of the virtual, participatory and narrative dimensions of AI and the metaverse, and the intertwined correlations between digitality and physicality.

Educational issues are very important and media education is a hotly debated topic, where essential arguments are the digital literacy, the critical ability to relate to digital media, the ability to use tools and the ability to create content, the knowledge of the characteristics of communication systems, not least the challenges posed by AI (Baacke, 1997; Selwyn, 2013; Rivoltella, Panciroli, 2023).

Copeland (2006) wrote for the European Commission a paper entitled *European democratic citizenship, heritage education and identity* where he underlines the significance of the correlation between heritage education and citizenship education, because

> Heritage education provides a cultural dimension for citizenship education which: – enables an understanding of contemporary issues by drawing on experience and knowledge of relevant facts, ideas and processes from the past of cultures; – demonstrates an understanding of people's cultural needs and wants and the implications

Fig. 10 The e-Elephant in the Room (generated using AI).

of these for social and racial equity; – enables an understanding of the causes of, and possible approaches to, resolving conflict and controversy in a democratic society; – enables critical appreciation of decision-making processes in the cultural heritage (p.27).

He highlights the following and consequent themes: 'Education about citizenship and heritage', 'Education

through citizenship and heritage', 'Education for citizenship and heritage'.

In conclusion I think that Copeland lesson can suggest useful issues also in relation to digitality, that is a parallel and interrelated argument with the heritage one, both substantial parts of our daily lives. Mutatis mutandis, a digital education must be correlated with citizenship and heritage education, because separate these topics is very difficult, if not impossible.

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ON IMAGES:
BASIC AND APPLIED RESEARCH

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IMAGES
RESEARCH
TEACHING
DESIGN

In numerous disciplinary fields, images are fundamental sources of information for research activities and, as such, are collected, used, and discussed within their respective theoretical and methodological frameworks. However, it is in the specific field of graphic sciences that the production of images becomes the primary focus of research and teaching activities. In this field, the scientific community focuses mainly on this aspect, although based on a complex set of theoretical, historical, geometric, and operational insights, as highlighted by the taxonomy reconstructed and discussed in this paper. Five years after the launch of the img journal publishing project this article offers a systematic reflection on the main strands of research and teaching in the field of images today. The analysis of scientific production related to graphic sciences allows us to identify some prevailing research trends, both in basic and applied research. These categories include not only individual scientific contributions —which, as already noted, may intersect and feed into several strands at the same time— but also publications such as journals and series, as well as conferences and scientific events that contribute to the structuring and dissemination of disciplinary debate.

The research and teaching activities of researchers working in the field of images are now divided into multiple forms, depending on the different cultural and disciplinary traditions of reference. In many fields of knowledge, images are a primary source of information and knowledge, forming the basis of studies conducted in disciplines such as art and architecture history, sociology and anthropology, psychology and pedagogy. In these contexts, images —in their various forms of drawings, symbols, photographs, illustrations, maps, diagrams, videos, and other graphic languages— are collected, analysed, and discussed as support for the processes of verifying research hypotheses and demonstrating the theses developed within the various disciplinary strands.

The role that images play in the graphic sciences is different, characterized not so much, or not only, by the analysis and interpretation of existing images, but above all by their design and production. In this disciplinary field, images are understood as the results of design processes aimed at representing ideas, narratives, events, messages, objects, environments, and spaces, and are both tools of investigation and results of research.

Within the scientific community of graphic sciences, however, there are also areas of research that address topics and adopt approaches that are apparently distant from the operational dimension of design and image production, favouring theoretical, historical, and cultural perspectives. Far from representing a departure from the core discipline, these studies play a fundamental role in the acquisition of critical awareness and conceptual tools that are subsequently applied in design processes, both in research and teaching.

In this sense, contributions relating to theory, history, geometry, and the study of representation tools constitute the main areas of basic research in graphic sciences, providing the necessary premises for the observation and analysis of the phenomenology of images, as well as for the identification and discussion of case studies on which design experiences are based. The application and experimentation activities

related to the design and production of images, on the other hand, are the privileged fields of applied research in this disciplinary area, completing and integrating the overall picture of graphic sciences. A dialogue and continuous cross-fertilization are established between the knowledge of basic research and the know-how of applied research, giving rise to the eminently design-oriented nature of graphic sciences.

BASIC RESEARCH: IMAGE ANALYSIS AND STUDY

History and iconography

A fundamental aspect of basic research is the reconstruction and critical analysis of the history of images and drawing, from its origins as a tool for documentation and pre-linguistic communication, through the great historical traditions, to its transformations in the modern and contemporary era. This includes the study of treatises, theories, schools of thought, and key figures that have shaped the discipline. Historical research is not only a retrospective exercise but provides the basis for understanding the evolution of methodologies, techniques, and meanings associated with images, informing and guiding current and future practices.

Historical and iconographic studies in the field of graphic sciences focus on the analysis of the history of images, techniques, and methods of representation, with particular attention to visual production processes and their relationship with the history of art and graphic languages. Such research generally adopts an iconographic or iconological approach, aimed at systematizing images from different eras and cultural contexts, or at exploring specific subjects, reconstructing their iconographic evolution or collecting and analysing the available documentary and archival repertoire.

This field also includes biographical studies, which examine the work of significant figures such as designers, illustrators, artists, architects, and planners, as well as mathematicians, surveyors, and other scientists, helping to reconstruct

the role played by individual authors in the development of representation practices and knowledge.

However, historical research in the graphic sciences is not limited to the analysis of past productions, but also includes studies of contemporary production, observed with historical sensitivity and an awareness of the relationship between the experiences analysed and the broader socio-cultural context of reference. In this perspective, images are investigated with an approach like that of art history, which considers them as works with aesthetic and symbolic value, embedded in the processes of evolution of visual and cultural sensibility.

Historical research on images frequently requires the identification and analysis of unpublished sources, found in both paper and digital archives. This area also includes research aimed at exploring, enhancing, and making available archival collections, with the goal of recovering, cataloguing, and contextualizing images and drawings within their respective cultural and scientific frameworks, contributing to the construction and dissemination of new knowledge in the field of graphic sciences.

Form and geometry

Basic research explores theories of representation, analysing projection systems and their historical, mathematical and philosophical roots. This includes the study of projective and descriptive geometries, their evolution and their implications for the perception of space and form.

Geometry, and in particular descriptive geometry, provides the theoretical and practical foundations necessary for the representation of objects and spaces. Research in this area focuses on the use of geometry to describe, analyse and generate spatial configurations and complex objects. Geometry and form are closely intertwined, as geometry provides the theoretical and mathematical tools necessary to define, understand and analyse the forms of existing or designed objects.

Approaches in this field are oriented towards the study and three-dimensional modelling of complex shapes, including

through generative and parametric techniques, often aimed at digital prototyping and 3D printing. The formal complexity that is the subject of this research may concern both objects to be designed and created, and existing or historically significant objects, for which it is necessary to study in depth the history of the evolution of architectural and artistic forms over the centuries, as well as the methods of representation and construction that made their creation possible.

Images also play a fundamental role as sources of information for the investigation of design criteria, construction methods, properties and aesthetic sensibilities. They can be subjected to graphic analysis that reveals hidden rules and geometries, essential for understanding generative and perceptual processes. In this context, proportion, harmony and geometry become crucial tools for analysing both visual artefacts and the objects they represent.

The theory of colour, light and shadow, texture and material are also subjects of study, not only in terms of aesthetic rendering, but as structural elements of perception and communication.

Tools and techniques

This strand includes research and teaching experiences relating to the tools used in image construction, in the representation of shapes through drawing and descriptive geometry, but also in digital modelling and manufacturing and three-dimensional modelling. Three-dimensional models are also mainly used through their visualisations and, consequently, communicated through the images that represent them.

This type of research is taking on an increasingly central role in contemporary scientific debate, characterised by the introduction of new methods, tools and digital technologies. However, these developments often generate phases of great interest which, over time, tend to peter out when they are superseded by subsequent technologies, which render previous approaches obsolete or marginal. Some of the

research in this field takes a critical approach, aimed at placing the tools or techniques in a cultural context, highlighting both their potential and their limitations; others, on the other hand, take a practical approach, with the aim of highlighting the innovative aspects compared to the state of the art.

In recent years, this trend has also been enriched by ethical considerations, particularly in relation to the impact of generative artificial intelligence, which raises ethical questions about the nature of algorithmically produced images and their relationship with human authorship.

APPLIED RESEARCH: IMAGE DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Uses and applications

A first area of research consists of studies that adopt the case study method, through which researchers select, collect, analyse and discuss significant examples relating to specific areas of application, themes or theoretical-methodological approaches. This type of contribution plays a fundamental role in building a shared critical awareness, on which subsequent experiences and design experiments are based and developed. This area includes, for example, studies on visual communication that do not focus on the processes of image production —the subject of other lines of research— but rather on their use within communication processes, through the analysis and commentary of visual artefacts from both historical tradition and the contemporary context.

The cross-disciplinary nature of images is particularly evident in studies of a predominantly interdisciplinary nature, which investigate their use and role within different disciplinary fields, such as psychology, pedagogy, sociology and the medical-health sector. These contributions may take a strictly disciplinary perspective, focusing on the use of images within a single field of study, or an explicitly interdisciplinary perspective, based on a comparison of methods, techniques, tools and procedures specific to different fields.

In the latter case, research encourages processes of cross-fertilisation and methodological hybridisation, contributing to the development of innovative practices in the use and interpretation of images.

Experiences and experiments

The field of image production is at the heart of research in graphic sciences and represents its most distinctive feature. Starting from the established tradition of drawing, this field is mainly oriented towards the design and creation of visual artifacts, placing the image at the centre of the processes of investigation, experimentation, and design production. This perspective encompasses the entire field of studies dedicated to teaching, which includes both the teaching of drawing and image production in school and university contexts, and the development of advanced representation methods based on the use of digital technologies, applied in various professional fields.

This category also includes research aimed at representing architectural heritage, both existing and planned. The reproduction of the form of the environment at different scales, as well as the processes of designing new spaces, involve the production of images as a fundamental tool for analysis, description, and design. These studies focus on the methods of producing representations, technical procedures, and the application of technologies, highlighting the central role of images in the processes of knowledge and design of the built environment.

This area also includes all research experiences that present and document the processes of producing graphic artifacts, going beyond a merely descriptive or interpretative dimension of images produced by other authors. This research directly addresses concrete design issues, experimented with through the elaboration of images and other visual artifacts in different application contexts, emphasizing the operational and experimental dimension of visual production.

Overall, these contributions take the form of research that is eminently design-oriented, in that the production of imag-

es and visual artifacts requires structured design processes like those needed to create material artifacts. These characteristic places graphic sciences squarely within the design disciplines. Design is expressed through different operating methods and the use of heterogeneous tools and technologies, ranging from graphic design to virtual and augmented reality, from traditional drawing to digital modelling, from photography to video animation, and from manual illustration techniques to artificial intelligence.

CONCLUSIONS

Five years after the launch of the img journal publishing project and four years after the revision of the scientific-disciplinary sector declaration, this contribution highlights the vitality and complexity of research in the field of images within the graphic sciences.

The proposed taxonomy offers a structured view of research, dividing it into two main macro-categories: basic research and applied research, between which a continuous and fruitful dialogue is established. Basic research, exploring the strands of theory and visual culture, history and iconography, form and geometry, and the tools and techniques of representation, provides the conceptual, critical, and methodological foundations necessary to understand the ontological, aesthetic, and cognitive nature of images. Although these studies may often seem distant from operational practice, they represent the essential foundations for any design activity, fostering a critical awareness that nourishes both research and teaching.

Applied research, on the other hand, focuses on the design and production of images as creative acts and tools for investigation, ranging across the fields of interdisciplinary uses and design experimentation. It is in this dimension that the eminently design-oriented nature of graphic sciences emerges most clearly, as a discipline of visual "know-how"

capable of generating graphic artifacts in response to concrete problems and contributing to the representation and transformation of reality.

Basic research often inspires and underpins innovations in applied research, providing the necessary theoretical and methodological principles. At the same time, the challenges that emerge from applied research can prompt new questions and investigations in basic research, creating a virtuous cycle of knowledge and innovation.

The overall picture that emerges confirms the hybrid and cross-cutting nature of the sector: graphic sciences are not limited to an interpretative analysis of existing images, as is the case in many other disciplines, but make them the heart of cognitive and creative production, thus emphasizing their eminently design-oriented connotation.

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TOWARD A RESISTANT DRAWING

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ESSAY 162/11

DRAWING
REPRESENTATION
TECHNOLOGY
SURVEY
CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The text reflects on the five years of activity of the IMG journal, highlighting its role as a bulwark against the fragmentation of studies and the ambiguity of research focuses in the field of Drawing. In an academic context increasingly driven by quantity rather than quality, spaces of "resistance" emerge where technical sensitivity and critical vision merge into a balanced and innovative image of the future. The impact of new technologies, such as clouds of dots, algorithms, and artificial intelligence, is analysed, as they risk overshadowing traditional methods of architectural representation, which are essential for a critical understanding of architecture. Despite the trend towards hyper-productivity, solid research persists, integrating innovative tools with a rigorous methodological approach. The IMG journal stands out for its ability to combine past, present, and future, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and critical reflection on representation, while maintaining a balance between technological innovation and cultural depth.

INTRODUCTION

A review of the IMG journal's five years of full activity, which corresponds to ten consecutive issues animated by the same generous energy with method and perseverance, cannot be separated from a reflection on what is happening within the –albeit broad and discontinuous– confines of the disciplinary area of Drawing. In this brief note, we would like to share the outcomes of some impassioned conversations between the authors to whom it appears evident how –in a panorama that is in some ways worrying and seems to prelude a sort of generalised disengagement from the fundamentals of the discipline– there still exist solid places of "resistance", in which sensitivity to the demands posed by the progress of technical means and even by the needs posed by the practice of academic evaluation manages to merge with a complete, balanced and at the same time visionary image of the future.

In times of constant renewal, it is now evident how IMG constitutes a solid bulwark against the spread of two widespread *biases*, that of the fragmentation of studies and the ambiguity of the research focus.

FRAGMENTATION

Clouds of dots, extraordinary remote–controlled flying objects, virtual tours for improbable surveys, the study of algorithms, tables, virtual immersions, the almost automatic production of images produced by AI, have generated the disappearance of those drawings in 'healthy' orthogonal or axonometric projection (or even in Brunelleschi's perspective) that can give an account of any architectural artefact in order to observe its quality and criticality.

The thermometer of this state of the art are the countless essays produced within the discipline of 'Drawing', some often supported by repeated arguments produced by

the same author, in which we frequently witness paradoxes generating bittersweet smiles; it happens, for example, to come across small collected essays on the survey of a small artefact in place 'X' photographed by 'Y', an inhabitant of 'Xland', and processed by 'Z', 'M', 'N' and 'P' who have never visited 'Xland' or touched the artefact itself.

The virtual survey, without the surveyor: the discipline of the future...

Images that some fools would consider 'obsolete', elaborated with the oldest (but still solid and standardized) methods of representation, are often replaced in scientific products, with contented happiness and lightness, by illegible screenshots showing applications of NeRF or Gaussian Splatting codes in which all simple metric data, the foundation of any architectural survey, disappears. Even today, more than twenty years later, Vittorio Ugo's words seem very topical: "Amazing special effects, renderings, photorealism, solid modelling... in reality they almost always conceal an emptiness of content, an absence of criticism and an expressive poverty directly proportional to the prevalence of image over form, of Darstellung over Vorstellung" (Ugo, 2004, p. 8).

This type of study leaves room for considerations about their existence that manifest a kind of engineering/informatics character of the scientific interests in vogue today, but also attempts to transform and disguise, often badly, topography and photogrammetry research for design studies.

The causes of this inordinate bulimia of production/confusion can be traced back to the continuous demand underlying the academic evaluation criteria for a plethora of research 'products' (sic!) whose value lies essentially in their volume rather than in their content.

It would seem, then, that we are witnessing the formation of real teams, ready to take the field in a match between 'bachelors' and 'married men', set up to win the most points in the general classification of the Thai A league, whose technical level, it is a well-known fact, has never reached sufficiency; but in a democratically sporting world,

the A league is everywhere, even in the neighbourhood oratories. Instead, it would be a case of playing in more structured tournaments where amateurism is not contemplated, and referees are more rigorous[1].

The consequence of playing at all costs and in any league is that both (critical) measurement and architecture 'disappear'; or rather, interest in questions about the representation of architecture disappears altogether.

Vittorio Ugo, with the lucidity that distinguished his thinking, argued that "having assumed the centrality of the project as a specific form of architectural knowledge, representation is configured as the privileged place both of its formation and elaboration, and of the interpretation and critical analysis of the built work. Representation is therefore to be understood as a technical and conceptual structure that regulates and manages, in both directions, the complex relationship that exists between the objectively heterogeneous spheres of 'words' (i.e. theory, criticism, aesthetics, history...) and the 'things' of designed and built architecture, considering, furthermore, analysis and project as entirely contiguous and integrated phases. The formative role of representation thus clearly prevails over the merely communicative one" (Ugo, 2004, p. 7). The words of the Palermitan scholar are echoed in many solid researches in the sector that, going beyond the desire to be a mere expression of productive quantity and acting as a counterbalance to the instructions on which photographic lenses to use, sink their gaze between visual method and intellectual intention, exploring the themes of visual culture with exactitude or, for example, investigate ancient optics and the models of vision after Euclid with extreme scientific rigour.

Tracing and describing today's trajectories of design studies is not easy as the search for meaning is often overwhelmed by an obsessed hyper –productivity generating great confusion. But as has happened throughout the history of civilisation, the action of resistance has never relented, sometimes expressing itself in extraordinary insights[2].

AIMING POINT

As mentioned, in recent decades more than in any other historical period, technological evolution has radically transformed operational practices in the field of representation and survey, introducing increasingly sophisticated tools. These tools have fascinated the most recent generations of scholars, sometimes pushing them towards an almost 'exhibitionist' use of technology. Although this has generally been able to raise the average level of research results, one cannot ignore how the enthusiasm for these innovations has sometimes risked blurring the critical sense, favouring an excessive focus on their technical capabilities rather than their real methodological and cultural value.

The comparison –often competitive– that led to the ostentation of metric precision and the quantity of data acquired in surveying justified, for example, the sharing of enormous –and 'heavy', albeit virtual– point clouds, which became the symbol of an innovation that risked proving sterile and cumbersome. However, these risks are not exclusive to our time. Already in the past, the introduction of innovative technological tools has aroused similar enthusiasm. Suffice it to say that even in the early 1990s, expert lecturers proudly glorified the performance of their (already) antiquated photogrammetric restitutors, showing how the uncritical fascination with technological progress has deep roots. The definition of the so–called 'digital twins' even led some to speculate that a sort of 'end of history' of representation was approaching, in which virtual models could completely replace the experience of the real thing. Such a faith in technology runs the risk of forgetting the ductility and cultural breadth of the disciplinary field of Drawing, which, by its intrinsic nature –as emphasised in the recent declaratory which explicitly recalls a scientific-technological field and a social-humanistic one– aims at balancing the correct acquisition of data with their critical processing.

Despite this trend, the renewed interest in traditional drawing and graphic analysis techniques that has emerged in recent years shows that each new mode of representation does not replace the previous ones, but enriches them, contributing to defining an ever–expanding methodological arsenal. Innovative technologies offer new keys to interpretation and surprising analogies with reality, but do not undermine the established value of traditional practices, which maintain an intrinsic and irreplaceable specificity. As Nita Faharany recalls with regard to the new acquisitions of neuroscience, "society does not adapt at the same speed as technology"[3], and the risk is that the gap between technology and disciplinary awareness will lead to the uncritical predominance of the former. Probably the wisest solution lies in committing one's energies to the construction of conceptual structures capable of managing the disciplinary implications of technical innovations in every field. Quality research is based on the solidity of questions posed from a well–defined disciplinary theme, within which the use of technology takes on a precise role and meaning. The most desirable fate for any innovative device, having passed the initial phase of experimentation, is to be brought back to its role as a tool, to an even 'routine' condition, integrated into solid operational practices. A critical approach to new tools, in this sense, cannot but open up unprecedented reflections, orienting both analytical and creative paths in an original way and triggering, as Vittorio Ugo (Ugo, 1994, pp. 15 –19) –whose predictive lucidity never ceases to amaze– once again recalled, the need for in–depth reflection on the heuristic potential of every mode of representation. It is precisely in this direction that the reflections of Riccardo Migliari take on particular value. In a recent note, he described 'hybrid drawing', an operative mode that fluidly combines analogue and digital drawing, proposing an exemplary synthesis that seems to resolve any previous conflict between the two different modes of operation (Migliari, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

IMG's editorial proposals, relevant and sometimes surprising, trace an intense and recent history characterised by a clear militancy on these issues and represent an exemplary condition of balance, supported moreover by a truly multidisciplinary nature of the scientific committee, reviewers, and authors. Purely by way of example, which could be extended to practically all issues of the journal, a collection of essays such as the one in the third issue, Remediating Distance, shows in a timely manner how a substantial theme, urgently posed to the scientific community by the 2020 pandemic, cannot but be tackled with the support of knowledge and technical solutions, referring them, however, to specific interdisciplinary thematic areas and proposing complex and inclusive readings.

An old paediatrician –joking, but not so much– used to say that children who can already stand, first learn to walk and then to run when they move their head forward and, in order not to fall, they have to chase it, moving their legs. IMG's proposals always seem to be underpinned by a knowledge of the past and a solid awareness of the present, but they find their energy from the willingness to move into the future, carrying the head forward, building an unstable but confident balance, oriented with curiosity towards what we do not yet know.

NOTES

1 A small metaphorical glossary: team=a large group of authors; points=number of articles; ranking=indicators; A series=A class; Thai=little science; technical rate=coherence, originality and methodological rigour; tournaments=magazines; structured=not simple containers; referees=reviewers.
2 In the economy of meaning of the text, reference is made to Francesco Venezia's 2014 book, *Nel profondo della cattedrale*. Caserta 2010 –2014, with facing Latin text.
3 <https://www.ted.com/talks/nita_farahany_when_technology_can_read_minds_how_will_we_protect_our_privacy?subtitle=en>

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THE IMAGE IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE IMAGE!
DISAPPEARANCE AND EVOLUTION IN VISUAL CULTURE

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ESSAY 163/11

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE IMAGE
ICONOSPHERE
RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GAZE
EVOLUTION

This contribution critically investigates the recurring theme of the 'death of the image' in contemporary thought, relating diagnoses of crisis that have marked its status to the persistent proliferation of images in present-day society. Drawing on a theoretical genealogy that spans philosophy, visual studies, and media theory, the article identifies four levels at which the disappearance of the image manifests itself: technical, political, functional, and semiotic. These 'declarations of death' are not, however, understood as the definitive exhaustion of the image, but rather as signals of an evolution –understood in a biological sense– of its role and value. From this perspective, the crisis of the image opens onto a process of regeneration grounded in the ethical nature of the gaze, which addresses the viewer in terms of responsibility and critical awareness. The image thus survives as an unstable and mutable form, capable of adapting to media contexts and renewing its potential for meaning.

INTRODUCTION: THE IMAGE IS DEAD

The image is dead. The theme of its disappearance is among the most pervasive and widely debated in contemporary critical thought. From the late nineteenth century onward, and consistently throughout the twentieth century, philosophical inquiry, art theory, and media studies have repeatedly announced the exhaustion of the image's function, proclaiming the loss of its authenticity and of its semiotic and symbolic value, thereby undermining its very status at its foundations. In the age of media multiplication and digital circulation, the image has been declared to have irreversibly lost its role and its spectrum of meanings, having been reduced to a mere surface incapable of actively communicating, embedded within an incessant visual flow devoid of depth. This inauspicious and seemingly irreversible diagnosis is nevertheless counterbalanced by a constant and irreducible productive proliferation of images, which not only continue to appear and multiply, but also to exert influence and produce effects within society.

This article, whose title echoes the paradoxical statement "*le roi est mort, vive le roi!*", aims to critically relate these two tensions: on the one hand, the crisis of the image's status, and on the other, its capacity to maintain an evolutionary nature and thus to regenerate itself through transformation. The premise from which this reflection proceeds is that the disappearance of the image is not so much attributable to its nature as a visual object, but rather to the betrayal of the promise of truth that derives from its existence. It is therefore not possible to speak of a material disappearance of the image, but rather of a crisis of its role on perceptual and interpretative levels, which leads to a reassessment of its value and to the necessity of regenerating its meaning.

From a methodological standpoint, this article adopts a theoretical-critical approach and situates itself in a liminal field between image theory, visual culture, and media studies. By identifying and examining four levels at which

the disappearance of the image manifests itself –technical, political, functional, and semiotic–, the article ultimately underscores how a renewed identity of the image can emerge only on a plane that synergistically evolves and integrates these contexts within an ethical perspective.

DECLARATIONS OF DEATH

The theme of disappearance, and the study of the testimonies and rhetorical modalities that document this phenomenon within a given cultural context, have accompanied the image since its very origins. Visual culture studies and image theory have long acknowledged and progressively consolidated the original connection between the appearance of the image and the event of death: "the image is born, constitutively, together with the experience of death and its conscious apprehension by human beings" (Pinotti & Somaini, 2016, p. 235, translation by the author). Emblematically, Hans Belting identifies the origin of the image in humanity's need to replace the physical presence of the deceased person with a 'container of meaning' capable of symbolically embodying their role and value (Belting, 2013). The very myth of the birth of painting, narrated by Pliny the Elder through the famous episode in which the daughter of the Greek potter Butades traces on a wall the outline of the shadow of her beloved before his departure, vividly confirms the powerful role of the image, capable of evoking and at the same time substituting that which is no longer present.

Theoretical speculation on the disappearance of the image thus analyzes the behavior of an object –since the image may be understood as a visual object– that is itself a document of disappearance. Discourse on the crisis of the image has been repeatedly and consistently nourished, above all, by the evolution of the technical possibilities of image production –and reproduction– and by the multiplication of the media contexts in which images are introduced and operate.

Fig. 1 René Magritte, *La trahison des images*, 1929, oil on canvas, 60,3 × 81,1 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Retrieved January, 10, 2025 from https://www.flickr.com/photos/profzucker/3320751204

It is therefore possible to trace a concise genealogy of theoretical approaches to the disappearance of the image, identifying the fundamental stages that have diagnosed a loss of its value or a 'betrayal' (Figure 1) of its role, thereby problematizing its function. One of the foundational moments of this genealogy is undoubtedly Walter Benjamin's well-known reflection on the loss of the aura of the work of art in the age of its technical reproducibility (Benjamin, 1936/2008): the possibility of indefinitely reproducing an image dissolves its spatial and temporal uniqueness, compromising the ritual bond that connects it to the present dimension. The image thus loses its authority as an 'original' and opens itself to mass circulation, which enables its emancipation while simultaneously destabilizing its role.

Throughout the twentieth century, this diagnosis is repeatedly invoked and reaffirmed, intensifying the negation

of the relationship between representation and truth and emphasizing the autonomous value of the image with respect to reality. Jean Baudrillard (1981) formulates one of the most radical theses in this regard, asserting the complete autonomy of the sign as a "simulacrum" that declares only itself, rendering the role of the real referent irrelevant. From this perspective, the disappearance of the image coincides with the disappearance of the primordial relationship linking sign and referent and, ultimately, with the total self-referentiality of the sign. With the exponential multiplication of images and the emergence of the concept of the iconosphere –a totalizing visual universe in which human life increasingly unfolds through interaction with digital images and in the absence of direct experience of reality– the definitive loss of meaning of the image becomes concrete, a condition that Fontcuberta (2018) identifies as "post-photography." We inhabit the image, but we are also inhabited by it, immersed in a context of visual 'fury' that sanctions the dissolution of authorship, originality, truth, and memory: the death of the image thus occurs through redundancy, saturation, and, inevitably, indifference.

On the basis of these considerations, it is possible to identify specific domains in which the loss of meaning of the image manifests itself, for which particular 'declarations of death' may be issued. Specifically, these domains are articulated along technical, political, functional, and semiotic lines.

Technical death

The disappearance of the image first and foremost has a material and technical nature. Every image, in relation to the historical period, the available technological apparatus, and the cultural context in which it is produced, possesses intrinsic technical qualities determined by conceptual intentions and production processes, as well as by the modalities and trajectories of its circulation and preservation. From private to public images, from 'disposable' images to those destined for diffusion and iconic proliferation, the technologies, supports, and devices that enable their production and

'consumption' directly affect their survival. The discipline of media archaeology (Parikka, 2011/2019) demonstrates in this regard that images are not abstract entities, but objects that are always historically and technologically situated, thereby foregrounding the importance of the materiality of the image. Every support –from stone to film, from paper to magnetic tape, up to the variety of digital formats– is subject to processes of deterioration and aging that may ultimately decree the death of the image in the form of mute inaccessibility.

The rapid technological obsolescence of supports and production processes thus represents one of the principal threats to the survival of contemporary images, constituting a crucial factor in decisive fields such as the safeguarding and conservation of art and, more broadly, of cultural heritage. The need to conceptualize new media (Manovich, 2001) precisely from their material condition leads to reflection on the transience of the digital image, which, often perceived as durable precisely because of its immateriality, is in reality extremely fragile, since it depends on hardware, software, protocols, and platforms subject to rapid transformation. The promise of global digital archiving therefore clashes with the reality of an unstable and selective memory, and the archive itself, understood as a place of preservation, becomes at once the custodian of memory and the tomb of images that, no longer readable, become invisible.

Political death

The death of the image on the political level is often a violent death, the consequence of a deliberate act of destruction, removal, or interdiction, which targets the image because it is the bearer of symbolic, political, or affective power. In this case, the image does not die from obsolescence, excessive saturation, or loss of meaning, but because it is deemed dangerous, offensive, or responsible for the dissemination of ideologies to be opposed. Iconoclastic practices, from antiquity to the present day, demonstrate the persistent historical recurrence of this mode of erasure

(Pinotti & Somaini, 2016, pp. 240-243; Bettetini, 2016): from Byzantine iconoclasm to the destruction of religious images during the Protestant Reformation, up to more recent acts involving the demolition of monuments, the systematic vandalization of iconographic testimonies in wartime contexts, or the removal of visual content from social media platforms. Iconoclasm, aimed at the negation of the image (Freedberg, 1989), paradoxically ends up implicitly acknowledging its efficacy and relinquishing any attempt to counter its power to act, influence, and generate behavior, destroying it instead as an admission of manifest impotence. In the contemporary context, the violent death of the image may also be expressed in less spectacular and visible, yet equally incisive and insidious forms: the algorithmic removal of content, preventive censorship exercised by digital platforms, de-indexing, and selective invisibilization produce a death of the image that leaves no material traces, but profoundly shapes the field of the visible (Cicalò, 2022). Controversies surrounding so-called cancel culture once again reveal how the death of the image is a political act (Maifreda, 2022): deciding which images may circulate and which must be removed, thereby constructing the framework within which access is permitted, means recognizing that the disappearance of images is never a neutral process, but is always inscribed within relations of power.

Functional death

The disappearance of the image also manifests itself on a functional level, insofar as it loses its capacity to generate an experiential form of engagement and to convey meaningful content. In the contemporary iconosphere, images do not die because their visual nature is removed, but because they cease to function as artifacts capable of engaging the gaze, generating attention, and provoking cognitive responses: the sheer quantity of images and their modes of consumption compromise their effectiveness. This occurs paradoxically even in the case of images that, by virtue of their emotional

content, should most strongly elicit feelings of pain and unsettle our conscience. Susan Sontag (2003) describes this phenomenon as a form of "emotional anesthesia", whereby continuous exposure to violence and the spectacle of suffering produce indifference and habituation rather than awareness and empathy. At this level, the progressive transformation of visual practices and modes of looking also plays a decisive role (Berger, 1972; Cousins, 2018): the shift from looking to browsing –scrolling–, from contemplation to 'consumption', and from slowness to speed determines a profound mutation of the visual experience. At the end of the 1990s, Jonathan Crary (1999) focused on the crisis of attention as a defining feature of contemporaneity, one that nonetheless has its roots in nineteenth-century modernity, when the development of new technical devices for vision introduced a plurality of possible visual experiences, depriving the gaze of duration and concentration and anticipating the loss of the image's efficacy that today manifests itself as functional death.

Semiotic death

The semiotic disappearance of the image concerns the crisis of its status as a signifying sign and, more specifically, the loss of its capacity to establish a reliable relationship with a real referent. From this point of view, we may state that the image dies when its representative nature is compromised: it becomes self-referential and deprived of a direct anchoring in reality. Once again invoking the concept of the simulacrum, in this context the image substitutes itself for reality, generating a hyperreality that no longer requires the criterion of originality. The Peircean semiotic triad of referent-sign-interpretant, now deprived of the referent, thus becomes a binomial in which the institution of meaning is entrusted to the visual-interpretive relationship between sign and interpretant, producing a plurality of possible meanings all placed on the same level of authority, since the nature of the relationship with the referent has become unknowable. Consequently, the semiotic crisis of the image does not

imply an absence of meaning, but rather an uncontrolled proliferation of meanings, all equally possible, which refer to nothing other than their own circulation. The image does not signify, but rather, simply and non-hierarchically, operates, nonetheless producing its effects. In this sense, William J.T. Mitchell's question *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005) invites a shift of attention from the referentiality of the image to its agency. The semiotic death of the image thus seals the epilogue of a pact of trust with the observer-user, insofar as it is no longer possible to establish a stable relationship between sign and meaning. The image survives as an unstable, ambiguous, and opaque sign, whose interpretation can only be entrusted to the responsibility of the gaze.

EVOLUTION AND SURVIVAL

Declarations of the technical, political, functional, and semiotic death of the image seem to lay the foundations for an irresolvable dilemma concerning its future. However, the multiple facets of the crisis that places the role of the image at its center provide the very conditions for its vital regeneration, which can manifest itself only through a mutation of its status. The domain of the image is neither fixed nor immutable; rather, it is a fluid and mobile field and, as such, capable –like a language– of adapting, evolving, and expanding according to the uses made of it (Debray, 1999). Precisely by virtue of this fluid and constitutively mutable nature, the contemporary image can overcome the limits imposed by the materiality of supports, political erasure, functional impoverishment, and the loss of its relationship with reality, transforming itself and constructing a renewed identity.

In this sense, the regeneration of the image assumes an ethical character, since, freed from its original promise of truth, it now addresses the spectator by calling for the acquisition of critical consciousness and awareness. Georges Didi-Huberman (2003) had already observed that it is precisely those images

that display fragility, incompleteness, or degradation that are capable of generating a more authentic experience of reception, compelling the observer to engage in a critical labor of looking, an assumption of responsibility through reflection on the meaning and implications of the visual act. This perspective appears to enter into dialogue with the ethical thought of Emmanuel Levinas (1961/1980), according to whom the face of the Other is not an object of knowledge or a representable form, but a demand for responsibility that materializes in the moment of encounter between the observer and what is observed. Judith Butler (2009) likewise identifies an ethical path for the survival of the image in its role as an active provocation, which requires attention not only to what is visible but also to what is absent from the image, and therefore may no longer be seen or heard. In the digital context, Hito Steyerl also reflects on the circulation of what she defines as "poor images" (Steyerl, 2009), articulating their taxonomy and listing their characteristics –technical degradation, fragmentation, imperfection– in order to highlight their resilience. Thanks to their free and democratic circulation, which makes them instruments of global connection and information, these images prove to be even more alive and powerful than 'high' images: it is their instability that determines their strength, constructing new networks of visibility, fostering interpretive multiplicity, and overturning traditional hierarchies of value and authority. The survival of the image may also be read through a biologically inflected evolutionary perspective, as an open and heterogeneous process, often governed by contingency and chance. In *Darwin Architect*, Roberto de Rubertis (2012) discussed the application of Darwinian thought to architecture, emphasizing how architectural development does not necessarily unfold according to a logical or consequential design, but rather through contingent adaptations influenced by environmental factors, unforeseen uses, mutations, and selections that are not always controllable in advance. Drawing a parallel with this view, we may conceive of the image as matter in

Fig. 2 Top: Carlo Enrico Bernardelli, *Ritmi di materia in trasformazione*, 2012 (de Rubertis, 2012, p. 78). Bottom: Eric Kessels, *24 Hours in Photos*, 2011. Retrieved January, 10, 2025 from https://www.kesselskramer.com/project/24-hrs-in-photos.

transformation, destined to adapt to contexts and to undergo continuous re-semantization. Its regeneration is thus the result of a process of natural –and cultural– selection that leads to the persistence of certain images –those that spread and take root because they impact society– and to the extinction of others, which instead remain unused or latent. In this sense, the evolution of the image is a process in which chance, error, repetition, and everyday use play a decisive role, calling into question any attempt at total control over the production and circulation of the visible. This evolutionary dynamic finds a powerful visual translation in the striking similarity (Figure 2) between the drawings from the series *Ritmi di materia in formazione* by Carlo Enrico Bernardelli (2012), which illustrate de Rubertis's volume, and the work *24 Hours in Photos* by Erik Kessels (2011): in the former, matter is represented as a chaotic system traversed by tensions that precede the formation of stable structures, depicted in a critical phase in which it is forced either to change configuration or to collapse; in the latter, the physical accumulation of millions of printed photographs constitutes a formless mass with high entropy, likewise destined to organize itself into a new structure of meaning. The excess of images that characterizes the contemporary iconosphere can thus be interpreted as a liminal condition, analogous to that of evolving systems, in which the loss of order opens up the possibility of new constitutive forms.

CONCLUSION: LONG LIVE THE IMAGE!

Like a language that changes and renews itself through everyday use, like matter awaiting the assumption of new forms dictated by evolutionary principles, the contemporary image transforms and evolves, embracing mutation as a condition of survival and offering new tools for critical interpretation. The image never dies definitively; rather, it changes its status: the acknowledgment of its disappearance is the necessary precondition for the possibility of a new

form of life, perhaps more fragile, yet at the same time more conscious and enduring. In a context characterized by visual saturation and medial instability, the image survives no longer by imposing itself, but by opening itself to relational forms of interpretation and by demanding to be looked at with attention and responsibility. The epilogue announced in the title thus unfolds in the awareness that the vital energy of the image leads it toward continuous mutation, toward a process of adaptation that invites human beings to exercise a critical gaze with ever greater awareness. Long live the image!

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THE IDENTITY SURVEY: SIDE NOTES ON A HOLISTIC MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE OF URBAN CONTEXTS

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GENIUS LOCI
URBAN SURVEY
IDENTITY SURVEY

If on the one hand the legibility of a place is a shared collective ability, on the other the sensorial domain is an inevitable individual prerogative that each person experiences daily in the close connection between the micro-environmental conditions (sounds, smells, the light and chromatic atmosphere etc.) that environment presents in so particular moment and the subjective image that we form of that place, often with an indelible memory.

The intent to read both these dimensions therefore implies that the urban Survey attempts to repertoire, alongside the disciplinarily shared level of 'objective' descriptions based on multiscalar images and the hyperrealistic representations of the visible elements, the second level of intangible micro-environmental conditions —the atmosphere of the place— placing the objective and the subjective side by side in a holistic understanding of the ontologies of the contexts.

The article summarizes an excursus on the methodology of the Identity Survey, developed since 2015, which was born to consciously bring out the 'genius loci' and represent its complexity in the integral, syncretic and multisensorial experience of the corporeal dimension.

> All'inizio, insomma, non c'è un gran che:
> il nulla, l'impalpabile, il praticamente immateriale:
> c'è la distesa, l'esterno, quello che ci è esterno,
> ciò in mezzo a cui ci spostiamo, l'ambiente,
> lo spazio tutt'intorno. (Perec, 1974/1989, p. 11)

> In the beginning, in short, there is not much:
> nothingness, the impalpable, the virtually immaterial;
> there is the expanse, the exterior, that which is external to us,
> that within which we move, the environment,
> the space all around.

INTRODUCTION, SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND OF IDENTITY SURVEY

The Anglo-Saxon school of Architectural Review must still be recognized today as having been among the first forums to have systematically introduced into the specialist discourse of the II post-war period the themes of the urban landscape as a scene to be artistically composed with elements all collaborating for its best vision (Cullen, 1961/1976). These themes are accompanied by the fundamental studies by Kevin Lynch on the perception of the urban scene articulated in a system of systems as a necessary paradigm of virtuous design practices, which will evolve into the innovative interdisciplinary contaminations of environmental psychology and cultural geography.To go deeply in how people organize spatial information in mental maps, bringing out the affinity of elements and common mental schemes in the perceptive process of urban space (Lynch, 1960/2001), in the same fruitful decade are added the anthropological insights that Edward T. Hall develops giving rise to proxemics as the "silent language of space" (Hall, 1966/1996).

In particular, Hall introduces the role of distance receptors (eyes, ears, nose) in the formation of the corresponding visual, auditory and olfactory spaces that prefigure a

very current semiology of architectural and urban space as a unicum. It is formed by a coagulation of the material components of buildings –the physical ones measured by the traditional urban and architectural Survey– and the immaterial dimensions –the sound, light, olfactory, tactile, kinaesthetic ones– that form the multisensory landscapes in which we are constantly immersed.

A few decades later, Norberg-Schulz (1979) focuses on his phenomenology of architecture that identifies the stratification of historical contexts producing "the perceived uniqueness of a place" as an unicum of values (Norberg-Schulz, 1979/1997). From this background emerges the specificity of each context, the genius loci, expressed by the link between tangible and intangible elements and signs and a combination of physical characteristics of the place, the activities that take place there, and the meanings that are attributed to that place by the inhabitants.

Although largely updated also by the most recent advances in neuroscience –which have largely confirmed and explained them– these holistic approaches to the analysis and reading of architecture and urban contexts can be said to have somehow constituted the major critical nuclei acting as a driving force behind the research that led to the formulation of the Identity Survey methodology.

MATERIALS, GENIUS LOCI AND IDENTITY SURVEY

If on the one hand the legibility of a place, that is the ability of communities to orient themselves and understand a well-designed urban space, is a shared collective ability, on the other hand the sensorial domain is an inevitable individual prerogative that each of us experiences daily in the close connection between the micro-environmental conditions (sounds, smells, the light and chromatic atmosphere etc.) that that environment presents in that particular moment and the subjective image that we form

of that place, often with indelible memory, as deepened by emotional Geography.

The intent to read both dimensions identified above therefore implies that the urban Survey attempts to compile, alongside the disciplinarily shared level of 'objective' descriptions based on multiscalar images and the hyperrealistic representation of the visible elements, the second level of intangible micro-environmental conditions -the atmosphere of the place- placing the objective and subjective side by side in a holistic understanding of the ontologies of the contexts.

In our opinion, in fact, an in-depth understanding of urban environments can only be communicated in its entirety using a more integrated representation capable of describing the inextricable factors of a place's identity (Puma, 2024, p. 133). Based on these premises, in 2015 the research group coordinated by the author began to conceive and work on a methodology designed to understand and represent the complexity of places in their integral and syncretic experience, aware of the multisensorial bodily dimension (Puma, 2015, 2020).

The progressive approximation to the conceptual formulation of the ID Survey therefore follows an almost topological meaning ("The study of the geometric properties of figures that do not depend on the notion of measure, but are linked to problems of deformation of the figures themselves", from Treccani, lemma Topologia) where the epistemological study of the properties of a place no longer depends on the notion of measure alone but is also linked to the deformation of the interpretative lens of the places and the figures that describe them, removing exclusivity from the visual representation and adding languages and figures specific to other disciplinary domains (soundscape, smellscape etc.).

METHODS, MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL HABITATS OF URBAN CONTEXTS AND IDENTITY SURVEY

Following this approach, the Identity Survey constitutes an attempt to recall in the disciplinary domain of the Urban

Survey to recompose ad unum the traditional graphic representations of the conventional representation of architecture (the material tangible habitat) with the descriptive ones corresponding to the multisensory nature of the contexts (the immaterial intangible habitat).

The environment under study is segmented for conceptual and operational purposes into two equal qualitative categories, completely devoid of priority attribution: on the one hand, category A comprising the material data (in their visible and tangible characteristics of size: shape, materials, colours, components of the townscape etc.), on the other, category B comprising the data on the immaterial characteristics of its genius loci. Category B includes the intangible characteristics that define the "character" of a place including the sensorial environment (Schafer, 1977/1993; Henshaw, 2013), its function, the chronological dimension that characterizes its rhythm of life during the day or in the seasons, the social typology of its visitors, etc.

"Considering that a true understanding of a city passes through a more holistic representation of its genius loci, the 'identity survey' methodology will overcome traditional representations that are based on graphical and visual language only. Applications of sensory output of smart devices can serve as a key to access a deeper level of knowledge for a given place, pursued as well as the traditional architectural survey even with the multisensory reproduction of the environment" (Puma &Trombadore, 2020, p. 211).

The workflow is therefore structured as follows:

1. Category A -material tangible habitat:
   Acquisition of information elements on the architectural and environmental heritage by Architectural Survey, remote sensing etc.;
   Definition of the specific numerical, graphic and textual material repertoires by 2D, 3D graphs, visual, animations, etc.;
2. Category B -immaterial intangible habitat:
   Production of documentary repertoires with basic and critical multi-scalar contents;

Interactive maps for the description of the sensory characteristics of the place by soundmaps, chronomaps, olfact maps.

RESULTS, EXAMPLES AND CASE STUDIES

The Identity survey methodology represented from the contexts survey to expliciting material and immaterial features of the places has been applied on three cases studies in Tuscany, Italy (Puma, 2024, pp. 135-137).

The results consist of the outline of the urban Identity Atlas's model containing the cases studies outputs. Based on these premises, some campaigns of Identity Survey have been conducted on sample cases, whose crucial phase is constituted by the interactive representation, interpreted as the convergence between data from the traditional urban survey and 3D representations to obtain advanced visualization models evolving to dynamic data creating in real-time identity maps.

The three case studies were selected to sample the settlement scales which are also exemplary of critical issues deriving from the imbalances of livability in:

1. The square of San Pier Maggiore in Florence, affected by "airification" phenomena and excessive anthropic load (Puma, 2018). Here the Survey, Representation and Communication project carried out is based on two axes:
   The knowledge axis: the data production and interpretation by data acquisition -traditional urban survey and identity survey- and data post processing;
   The communication axis: the data dissemination of results by 2D graphics, and 3D models, and interactive maps.
2. A depopulated Apennine village, Gombitelli. Here the village was mapped through the urban survey of 12 significant small sites -carried out with an integrated laser scanner and aerial and terrestrial SFM methodologies- and the visual information contents containing interactive descriptions by maps created as a result of the identity survey (Puma, 2021, 2022).

3. In Castelnuovo Garfagnana, a small touristic town that decided to start the transition towards a slow tourism and circular economic model, in order to work on the material and intangible heritage as a trigger for a sustainable tourist livability of the historic center, the urban surveys carried out were set up to produce the urban mapping conceived for the description of the identity potential of the place.

The traditional descriptive and critical 2D graphic representations are accompanied by 3D models of the main architectural townscape's nodes and landmarks as well as a first data visualization platform designed in virtual tour including the soundscape.

CONCLUSIONS, OUTLOOK ABOUT THE IDENTITY SURVEY

The Identity Survey is an evolving methodology that aims to direct future studies in two apparently opposite directions. On the one hand, research on the representation of multisensoriality (with further tests on olfactory landscapes) and on the representation of the impact of 'time' on the perception of urban spaces.

Here the term is multifaceted in its many meanings: from chronological time, which differentiates the urban exploration of the flaneur from that of the city user or the organized travel tourist, to meteorological time to the time of the past that colors the same spaces differently if traveled and experienced by the child, the adolescent, the elderly. On the other hand, research on the support that Identity Survey can give with respect to the paradigm of sustainability and urban resilience.

The importance of the urban scene and its good structure, adopting placemaking as a circular approach to its design, maintenance and care, is crucial as it represents the connective tissue of communities and promotes the development and maintenance of a sense of belonging to places.

Maintaining a good physical structure of urban space therefore also means being able to leverage the shared cultural and symbolic meanings that individuals in a community attribute to that place, as a resource to draw on in the most difficult processes of habitat transformation.

Using the Identity Survey procedure that attempts to read the townscape in its integrity and material and immaterial richness can therefore contribute to highlighting risks, bringing out the potential triggers, monitoring its "state of health" and the intervention measures to be adopted, acting on multiple levels of governance of urban environments:

1. Promoting the livability of public spaces and the ability to keep cities 'alive' through interactions between individuals and groups;
2. Preserving the cultural identity, especially in the symbolic components of the townscape, positively impact on socio-economic contexts.

"Keep the spirit of the place" is one of the the recommendations by ICOMOS 2021 that officially added symbolic dimension of intangible risk to the list of commonly defined hazards and expanded its meanings to the interdependencies between the intangible environment and built heritage (ICOMOS, 2021, p. 59).

Following the primary sector guidelines that broaden the value of the protection of built heritage to include its social value, the promotion of inclusive citizenship, and balanced economic development also incorporating the intangible elements of heritage (COE, 2005; UNESCO, 2011; SDGs 2015; ICOMOS 2021), we argue that an additional reading category, C, could be integrated into the workflow of the Identity Survey described above, namely "Assessment and marking of immaterial vulnerability and urban resilience". This category is intended to enhance critical awareness of the intangible characteristics of places, in order to reconcile the cultural sustainability of urban transformation processes with long-term urban resilience and socially responsive development strategies.

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THE GROWING FEAR OF AN AESTHETIC EVALUATION

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PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH
DESIGN RESEARCH
IMAGE RESEARCH
VISUAL COMMUNICATION
AESTHETICS

This paper examines the evolution of practice-led image research within Swiss visual communication design departments, observing a shift from basic research inquiries to concrete applications. Recent projects align with the prevailing notion that research is considered scientific if its results are quantifiable, reproducible, delegated to technical apparatuses, and seemingly independent of individual aesthetic judgment. By providing an overview of the aesthetic discourse in Western philosophy relevant to practice-led image research, this paper establishes a foundation for understanding the potential and pit falls of aesthetic judgment as a methodological approach to exploring how images generate meaning. The value of aesthetic evaluation in practice-led image research is discussed and contrasted with the critical perspective of aesthetic theory, which highlights the situated nature of aesthetic evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

To review the past years of research in the context of images, I cannot provide a statistical overview of the field, detailing which topics emerged, dominated, or faded away. However, I can examine the developments evident in practice-led image research, which arises from the practice of visual communication design. This assessment is conducted within the context of third-party-funded visual communication research at higher education institutions for visual communication in Switzerland and does not claim to be independent of it.

As a project partner and member of the board of directors of *eikones,* the Swiss National Center of Competence in Iconic Research, from 2005 to 2013, we developed an approach we termed *practice-led image research* (Renner 2010; Renner 2011; Renner et al. 2016/2017). Within the interdisciplinary framework of *eikones,* which brought together various disciplines from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, it became evident that the practical field of visual communication design contributes to the broader inquiry into how images generate meaning **1** – particularly through its ability to create visual artifacts. These images, created for research purposes, are intended to enhance the understanding of images through comparative evaluation rather than serving as a medium for transmitting messages for clients. Within the practice-led research approach, we identified two main areas, each addressing a variety of subtopics.

(1) Inquiry into specific categories of images based on their occurrence in daily life, such as documentary, diagrammatic, ornamental, scientific, or portrait images **2**.

(2) Inquiry into the processes of image generation and the evaluation of factors influencing intuitive decision-making, including cultural settings, tools, individual traits, and training **3**. These early practical explorations were grounded in theories of embodiment (Johnson 2007; Johnson&Lakoff 1999; Johnson&Lakoff 2003; Damasio 1999), reflections on gesture

(Tomasello 2008; McNeill 2005), and philosophical concepts such as poiesis (Aristotle ca. 350 B.C./2008, Part XXII). They also considered the relationship between the sensuous and the supersensuous in Western thought (Nietzsche 2010; Heidegger 2010), aesthetic theories (Kant 1790/2018; Heidegger 1950/2008; Dewey 1934/1980), Heidegger's concept of *Handlability* (Heidegger 1927/2006; Bolt 2006), and early publications advocating a practice-led research approach in art and design, such as *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* by Barbara Bolt (Bolt 2004).

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

In the meantime, the discourse surrounding the practice-led approach to image research has been extended in different directions. On one hand, practitioners in the field of visual communication continue to assert that any applied project constitutes research, even in the absence of a verbal evaluation of the visual message. On the other hand, the practice-led approach to image research within the academic context of visual communication has shifted towards more concrete applications.

For example, some projects explore which types of images are most effective in social counseling to explain complex processes (Parpan-Blaser, Imhof & López Grüninger, 2021), which kinds of images support language recovery in aphasia patients (Reymond et al. 2022), or which image-generation settings are best suited for participatory urban planning processes (Renner et al. 2026, in print) to foster dialogue. These projects intend to develop communicable outcomes that can be shared within the community of visual communication designers or with a broader public. They aim to describe best practices or provide recommendations for other projects with similar goals. Their objective is to contribute to the visual literacy of a wider audience. To evaluate images developed to address a research question, they employ empirical methods

ranging from eye tracking to questionnaires and surveys. They draw on approaches from psychology, sociology, anthropology, and statistics to avoid aesthetic judgments by researchers in the interdisciplinary team, even though visual communication designers are part of the project teams. These projects try hard to conform with the widespread notion that research is scientific if the results are quantifiable, reproducible, delegated to technical apparatuses, and seemingly independent of any individual judgment or interpretation.

RECAPITULATING AESTHETICS FOR DESIGNERS

The research teams of the aforementioned projects do not share Heidegger's notion of the work of art as a means to reveal the essence of an experience, and therefore, to transfer an insight to the beholder (Heidegger 2010, 133/134). The truth, as part of an aesthetic experience, is considered as subjective, unscientific or even the result of a culturally determined power relation (Adorno 1970/2013; Escobar 2018; Fry 1999/2020). But what exactly is the aesthetic experience, the aesthetic judgement, or the creation of an aesthetic object? The discourse of aesthetics is often specifically linked to the field of art, the evaluation of the beautiful or the ugly, and the aim of understanding the individual and shared affect caused by an work of art. However, even when considering the etymological roots of the Ancient Greek term *αἰσθησις*, we can challenge this narrow understanding, as the term broadly signifies *perception* and *sensation*. Plato's understanding of the beautiful is grounded in his epistemology, where the idea – derived from sensuous perception – serves as the means to escape the deceptive nature of our sensory experience (Plato 370 B.C./2010, 170; Rüegg, 2–15 1999; Nietzsche 2010, 60–72; Heidegger 2010, 118–129). For Plato, some objects make the idea appear more clearly than others, and he considers these objects beautiful. The Platonic solids, based on mathematical principles, are beautiful in this

sense, but not the affect caused by a work of art or an object of design (Böhme 1995/2022). Since the idea is the only means to attain truth, and the object that points to the idea is considered beautiful, the beautiful is equated with the truth and the good. However, we no longer share this equation today. For example, we have learned from practices such as graphology or physiognomy that a person's beautiful or ugly appearance does not represent their character (see also Böhme 1995/2022, 197–201).

Although the Ancient Greek philosophers addressed the question of the beautiful, aesthetics as a philosophical discipline was introduced by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in his dissertation *Philosophical Contemplation on Some Requirements of a Poem* (Baumgarten 1735). Immanuel Kant, who was aware of Baumgarten's work, published his famous *Critique of Judgement* in 1790 (Kant 1790/2018). In his complex argumentation, Kant describes that an object can be *pleasing* to an individual but the *beautiful* as the sensation of disinterested pleasure, is a sensation that can be shared. What is surprising, however, is Kant's description of this sensation of disinterested pleasure as a means of cognition. He argues that processes of imagination, triggered by the beautiful object in view, spark the interaction with the intellect (Kant 1790/2018, 91; Schubbach 2022, 174; Böhme 1995/2022, 293). In this approach, sensation, as a continuous process, is not guided by ideas, concepts, or language. However, by focusing on sensation, the interaction with the intellect can become playful, allowing for unexpected inferences. This can be seen as a first step in overcoming Platonism, as Nietzsche described it in his aphorism *How the 'True World' finally became a fable* (Nietzsche 2010; Heidegger 2010). Nietzsche recapitulates four historical epochs of Western thought before adding two additional epochs through his own work. He highlights the enduring influence of Plato's ideas, which persisted in the epochs of Western philosophy following Plato: Platonism, Enlightenment, and German Idealism. All four periods before Nietzsche, according to him, represent the continuation

of a hierarchical order between sensuous and conceptual thought – the super sensuous, in Nietzsche's terminology. In the fifth epoch, Nietzsche's first contribution, he calls for the inversion of this hierarchy. According to his early philosophy, the sensuous should be placed above the super sensuous, and he abolishes the very possibility of attaining truth. In the sixth phase of philosophy, Nietzsche's second contribution, he calls for the complete abandonment of the hierarchy between the sensuous and the super sensuous. Rather than a hierarchy, he describes the need for a continuous exchange between the sensuous and the super sensuous on an equal level. The process of creating a work of art is, for Nietzsche, also closely related to the sensuous and the super sensuous. On one hand, there is the Dionysian drunkenness – the sensuous, intuitive making and reacting in a medium. On the other hand, there is the strategic and controlled Apollonian contemplation, which is sparked by the outcome of the Dionysian and frames its intuition as well (Menke 2022, 37). With this revision of the relationship between the sensuous and conceptual inferences, Nietzsche shifted the focus of aesthetic evaluation as a means of ontology and paved the way for an epistemology of the arts.

Later reflections by John Dewey describe the aesthetic experience as a process in which a deviation from what we immediately know and can interpret is perceived (Dewey 1934/1980). The pleasure lies in the process of interpretation, which begins with a deviation from what we already know, recognize, or label (Dewey 1934/1980, 53). This initial deviation carries the promise of leading to a meaningful interpretation. It is no longer just the beautiful in modern art that triggers this process in the beholder. Dewey also equates the process of the beholder engaging with a work of art with the process the artist undergoes to arrive at the deviation necessary for an aesthetic experience (Dewey 1934/1980, 48).

Jean-François Lyotard has extended this restriction to art and describes the graphic artist as someone who creates

art for the street. In his view, the graphic artist is constantly searching for an aesthetic experience through a deviation that intrigues, surprises, or shocks the beholder in order to capture attention. The ephemeral aesthetic effect that an object of visual communication intends to achieve in the beholder is tied to a specific historical moment and context in which it appears as such (Lyotard 1997, 41). The effect of a novel object of visual communication in society cannot be predicted by interpolating visual messages that have had this effect in the past. The "black beast" – the audience, in Lyotard's words – is unpredictable (Lyotard 1997, 42/43).

A much stronger focus on the connection between art, the cultural industry, society, and its institutions is the subject of Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, published in 1970, one year after his death (Adorno 1970/2013). In a society permeated by an ideological framework, the cultural industry and its institutions are also shaped by the structure of the ideology. Art, even though it is influenced by the societal context, can serve as an utopian mirror that reflects the true being of a society. Art thus differs from merely serving the ideology, decorating, or entertaining, and instead takes a political approach. In this role, aesthetics becomes a means of ontology and provides a critical lens on the inherent mechanisms of society (Adorno 1970/2013, 31–34; Paddison 1987, 355). Adorno also equates philosophy and art in their ability to create an utopian counterpoint through their distinct approaches (Adorno 1970/2013; Paddison 1987, 357).

The New Aesthetics, developed by Gernot Böhme in the 1990s, also builds on a pressing issue of concern (Böhme 1995/2022). The ecological crisis, in which people are again threatened physically through overcrowded agglomerations, pollution, severe weather, droughts, and lost crops, calls for the design of environments where homeostasis can be restored. As nature has disappeared, the need to design atmospheres with acceptable conditions for living beings has become an urgent issue (Böhme 1995/2022, 13/14). With this foundation, the New Aesthetics definitively frees the dis-

course from its exclusivity in the context of art and does not devalue applied art as decoration, entertainment, or service to an ideology. Architecture, product design, scenography, visual communication, and art are at the center of the creation of atmospheres as environments suited for being in the world.

GROUNDING AESTHETIC EVALUATION IN THE CONCEPTS OF AESTHETIC THEORY

The roughly summarized positions of the aesthetic discourse presented here are not intended as a contribution to philosophical discourse. However, this summary brings together arguments regarding whether or not aesthetic judgment should be included in research projects employing a practice-led image research methodology.

We can recapitulate the following key findings relevant to this argument:

(1) The beautiful is not the truth (Böhme 1995/2022, 197–201).

(2) The relationship between the sensuous and the conceptual is not hierarchical but should exist in continuous exchange. Aesthetic experience sparks interaction with the intellect – understood as conscious, conceptual thought. This aligns with recent cognitive science models that describe a dispositional space and an image space interacting continuously **4**.

(3) Aesthetic experience, characterized by intrigue, surprise, or even shock, extends the field of visual phenomena beyond beauty and beyond the context of art. The fact that our entire environment today must be designed necessitates a new understanding of practices that are responsible for adreesing our senses in daily life.

(4) The critical approach to aesthetic theory highlights the impossibility of escaping the ideological context that shapes society and its institutions. Therefore, individual aesthetic evaluation is also embedded within cultural, political, and economic frameworks, with the potential to reflect its situatedness (Haraway 1988).

BEYOND THESE FIVE MANIFESTO-LIKE STATEMENTS, WE CAN REFINE THEM FURTHER FOR THE FIELD OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN AND PRACTICE-LED IMAGE RESEARCH.

The critical approach to aesthetics developed by Adorno (1970/2013), on one hand, would not grant applied arts the potential to unveil the ideological mechanisms of society and its institutions (Wallenstein 2021, 117). From this perspective, the practice of visual communication merely provides a service within a capitalist environment or contributes to the spectacle of entertainment. On the other hand, Lyotard, situated in a postmodern world, distinguishes between the graphic artist – who is in continuous search of deviations that intrigue and surprise – and the strategic planner, who creates objects of propaganda. In Lyotard's understanding, propaganda relies on messages already known to be effective in capturing attention and seducing the masses (Lyotard 1997, 43).

In contrast, the graphic artist, though part of a cultural context, must conform to certain cultural restrictions while simultaneously introducing a specific deviation from the already seen, thereby opening space for individual interpretation. This creates an opportunity to reflect the intrinsic mechanisms of the world. Through the continuous search for deviation, visual communication – through the work of the graphic artist – aims to offer the beholder a new and unexpected perspective on a subject. Ideally, the multivocality of interpretations contributes to the democratic formation of individual opinions (Arendt 1958/2010, 213; Tavani 2013, 467). In this sense, we can argue that aesthetic interpretation within visual communication practice plays a vital role in fostering a diverse and democratic society.

Having established the argument for aesthetic evaluation in practice, we can now turn to practice-led image research. As the New Aesthetics has emphasized, design practices serve as a context in which material (analog or

digital) constellations – those that create the atmosphere of an environment – are continuously tested and intuitively evaluated. Aesthetic experience is not an inherent quality of an object but rather something that occurs between an object and its beholder. Consequently, the variables influencing atmosphere are both the objects themselves and the audience perceiving them. Böhme describes atmospheres and their quasi-objective character as follows:

Atmospheres, to be sure, are not things. They do not exist as entities which remain identical over time; nevertheless, even after a temporal interruption they can be recognized as the same, through their character. Moreover, although they are always perceived only in subjective experience – as a taste or a smell, for example, to return to Tellenbach – it is possible to communicate about them intersubjectively. We can discuss with one another what kind of atmosphere prevails in a room. This teaches us that there is an inter-subjectivity which is not grounded in an identical object. We are accustomed, through the predominant scientific mode of thinking, to assume that inter-subjectivity is grounded in objectivity, that detection of the presence and determinateness of something is independent of subjective perception and can be delegated to an apparatus. Contrary to this, however, the quasi-objectivity of atmospheres is demonstrated by the fact that we can communicate about them in language. Of course, this communication has its preconditions: an audience which is to experience a stage set in roughly the same way must have a certain homogeneity, that is to say, a certain mode of perception must have been instilled in it through cultural socialization. Nevertheless, independently of the culture-relative character of atmospheres, their quasi-objective status is preserved (Böhme, 1995/2017, 15).

Even though the term *atmospheres* might seem problematic at first glance, the quoted paragraph provides a solid foundation for understanding how images create meaning from the practice-led perspective of visual communication.

The atmosphere, the aesthetic experience, or any meaning an image can generate lies between the visual object and the beholder, whose perception is shaped by their cultural context and individual experience. Since we cannot alter the beholder, the practice of visual communication offers its expertise in modifying the visual object to evaluate the audience's response.

We can now describe two key contributions that aesthetic evaluation can provide in a practice-led image research project:

In the process of image design, the designer is not merely materializing mental images but engaging in an aesthetic process that is inherently part of a cultural context. This occurs through *intra-action* (Barad 2007, 132–185) with the material (Dewey 1934/1980, 48; Ingold 2013, 126–141). Through this dynamic interaction, aesthetic (intuitive) image generation unfolds its potential by sparking a dialogue with analytical evaluation on a conceptual level. In the creation of image variations, unexpected visual outcomes emerge.

The designer is also the first to evaluate these image variations within the process of intuitive image creation, where they are immersed *in* the image (Boehm 2019, 23–31). However, as someone embedded in a cultural context, the designer can also step back and be *apart* from the image (Boehm 2019, 23–31). This dual perspective allows the designer to formulate a hypothesis about how a visual message might be understood by the public (Lyotard 1997, 40). In this role, the designer employs aesthetic evaluation to conduct a comparative analysis, providing a hermeneutic interpretation and a linguistic description of the meaning conveyed by one image variation in relation to another.

With this dual approach to aesthetic evaluation, practice-led image research can fully realize its potential to contribute to the field of image research while maintaining an awareness of the situated nature of its aesthetic assessment.

NOTE

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2 Boehm G., Budelacci O., Di Monte G., Renner M. (2015): *Face and Identity*. München, DE: Wilhelm Fink.

3 Renner, M. (2019): Word and Image. In Search of Unseen Images, in: Oxvig H., Bäcklund J., Renner M., Søberg M. (eds.), *What Images Do*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, pp. 89–108.

4 "The image space is that in which images of all sensory types occur explicitly. [...] The dispositional space is that in which dispositions contain the knowledge base and the mechanisms with which images can be constructed from recall, with which movements can be generated, and with which the processing of images can be facilitated". (Damasio, A. 1999, 331)

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EDITORIAL

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Con l'Issue 11, *IMG Journal* introduce un momento di riflessione consapevole sul proprio percorso editoriale, a cinque anni dall'avvio del progetto e dopo la pubblicazione di dieci numeri monografici dedicati a singoli temi della visualità. Questo volume non si configura come un'ulteriore tematizzazione settoriale, ma come un numero di soglia, pensato per interrogare ciò che è cambiato nel campo della ricerca sull'immagine, nei quadri teorici, nelle pratiche progettuali ed educative, così come nel progetto stesso della rivista.
Come esplicitato nella call interna che ha dato origine al numero, abbiamo inteso raccogliere contributi capaci di restituire uno stato dell'arte plurale: testi utili a comprendere cosa sia mutato negli ultimi cinque anni, quali ricerche siano oggi possibili e rilevanti proprio in virtù di tali trasformazioni, o che raccontino esperienze di ricerca recenti, significative per i temi del journal. Ne emerge un volume eterogeneo per approcci e ambiti disciplinari, ma attraversato da alcune linee di forza comuni, che ne garantiscono la coerenza complessiva.
Un primo asse di riflessione, sviluppato nei contributi dei co-direttori della rivista, riguarda la ricostruzione critica delle genealogie teoriche della visualità e il riposizionamento epistemologico dell'immagine nel contesto contemporaneo. In questa direzione si colloca il contributo di Alessandro Luigini, che propone una lettura sistematica dei primi dieci editoriali di *IMG Journal* come un corpus teorico coerente. Il saggio interpreta il percorso della rivista come una progressiva ridefinizione dell'immagine quale forma di conoscenza, dispositivo di mediazione e pratica situata, individuando nelle nozioni di ambiente epistemico, operatività dell'immagine e interdisciplinarità critica alcuni dei nuclei concettuali emersi nel tempo. Il contributo assume così il valore di una riflessione metateorica sul progetto editoriale, chiaramente distinta dalla funzione direttiva.
Su un piano complementare, ma esplicitamente orientato alla dimensione pedagogica, si colloca il contributo di Chiara Panciroli, che affronta il rapporto tra cultura visuale, educazione all'immagine e innovazione postdigitale. Il saggio propone una ridefinizione epistemologica della cultura visuale e individua tre traiettorie di sviluppo – ecologie delle immagini, design didattico immersivo ed estetiche computazionali – come assi portanti di una pedagogia visuale critica, capace di abitare le tensioni tra umano e artificiale, immaginazione e tecnica, creatività e responsabilità. In questo caso, l'educazione costituisce l'orizzonte esplicito dell'argomentazione.
Una seconda direttrice tematica del volume riguarda la responsabilità critica dello sguardo e lo statuto dell'immagine nel contesto contemporaneo. Il contributo di Valeria Menchetelli affronta il tema delle ricorrenti "morti dell'immagine", interpretandole non come segnali di esaurimento, ma come momenti di trasformazione che chiamano in causa l'etica della rappresentazione e il ruolo attivo dell'osservatore. L'immagine emerge così come spazio di responsabilità culturale e interpretativa, più che come oggetto passivo di consumo.
Il rapporto tra immagini, progettazione e ricerca disciplinare costituisce un ulteriore asse di lettura. Edoardo Dotto e Francesco Maggio interpretano l'esperienza di *IMG Journal* come spazio di "resistenza" metodologica nel campo del Disegno, capace di contrastare la frammentazione e l'iper-produttività della ricerca contemporanea, riaffermando il valore del disegno come strumento critico e conoscitivo. In una prospettiva affine ma con un focus differente, Michael Renner riflette sul ruolo del giudizio estetico nella ricerca practice-led, interrogando i criteri di valutazione e legittimazione della ricerca artistica e progettuale in ambito accademico.
Una forte attenzione alla dimensione territoriale, urbana e ambientale della visualità emerge nel contributo di Paola Puma, che presenta il modello dell'*Identity Survey* come metodologia olistica capace di integrare rappresentazioni materiali e immateriali, visive e sensoriali. L'immagine diventa qui strumento di conoscenza situata, in grado di restituire la complessità dei contesti urbani attraverso una lettura sincretica del *genius loci*.

Il tema della digitalità come orizzonte culturale e teorico, più che come ambito di educazione formale o di *digital literacy*, attraversa alcuni contributi del volume. Stefano Brusaporci propone una ricostruzione storico-critica delle principali tappe della cultura digitale – dalla cibernetica al metaverso, fino all'intelligenza artificiale – offrendo strumenti concettuali per una comprensione consapevole delle trasformazioni in atto. Il contributo si colloca sul piano della formazione culturale e teorica, piuttosto che su quello pedagogico in senso stretto. In una prospettiva complementare, ma ancorata al campo delle *graphic sciences*, Enrico Cicalò restituisce una mappatura articolata della ricerca sulle immagini, distinguendo tra ricerca di base e ricerca applicata e mostrando come la produzione visuale costituisca non solo un esito, ma un metodo di indagine scientifica e disciplinare, con ricadute anche sull'insegnamento universitario.

Nel loro insieme, i contributi dell'Issue 11 delineano un paesaggio di ricerca in cui l'immagine non è più concepita come semplice rappresentazione, ma come ambiente epistemico, dispositivo operativo e pratica culturale situata. L'eterogeneità degli approcci non produce dispersione, ma costruisce una costellazione critica che conferma la vocazione di *IMG Journal* come laboratorio interdisciplinare aperto, capace di mettere in relazione teoria e pratica, memoria e progetto, rigore scientifico e sperimentazione.

Questo numero si configura dunque come un nuovo *manifesto implicito*: non una sintesi conclusiva, ma una soglia riflessiva da cui osservare il percorso compiuto e, al tempo stesso, immaginare le traiettorie future della ricerca sull'immagine. In questo senso, rinnoviamo la funzione culturale della rivista: non limitarci a osservare il visibile, ma contribuire a costruire le condizioni critiche per abitarlo consapevolmente.

IMG JOURNAL: GENEALOGIE CRITICHE E PROSPETTIVE EMERGENTI DELLA RICERCA SULL'IMMAGINE

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Keywords
Ricerca interdisciplinare, Immagine come conoscenza, Immagini generate dall'intelligenza artificiale, Studi sull'immagine, Epistemologia dell'immagine

Il superamento della soglia dei primi dieci numeri di *IMG Journal – International and Interdisciplinary Journal on Image, Imagery and Imagination* rappresenta un momento opportuno per un esercizio di riflessione critica sul percorso compiuto. Non si tratta soltanto di tracciare un bilancio quantitativo delle attività editoriali, ma di interrogare, in modo consapevole e argomentato, la coerenza epistemologica, la tenuta teorica e la capacità generativa del progetto che la rivista ha incarnato fin dalla sua fondazione.
Letti nella loro sequenza, i dieci editoriali pubblicati tra il 2019 e il 2024 non costituiscono una semplice successione tematica, bensì delineano una costellazione concettuale che ruota attorno a un nucleo comune: il riconoscimento dell'immagine come forma di conoscenza, come dispositivo di mediazione culturale e come pratica sociale situata. In questo senso, *IMG Journal* si è progressivamente configurata come un laboratorio teorico aperto, capace di accogliere pluralità di sguardi senza rinunciare a un preciso atteggiamento scientifico.
Per queste ragioni, appare necessario interrogare questo *corpus* attraverso una duplice prospettiva: una ricognizione critica che ne restituisca lo stato dell'arte e la coerenza interna, e una lettura prospettica capace di individuarne il potenziale generativo e le traiettorie di sviluppo futuro

Status Quæstionis
L'editoriale inaugurale, programmaticamente intitolato M*anifesto* (Luigini & Panciroli, 2019), non svolge una funzione meramente introduttiva, ma assume il valore di atto fondativo esplicito. Esso nasce dall'esperienza dell'omonima conferenza internazionale e dalla constatazione di un'esigenza diffusa: la mancanza di uno spazio editoriale strutturato capace di accogliere ricerche sull'immagine collocate in territori epistemici di confine. Il *Manifesto* definisce con chiarezza tre assi portanti destinati a rimanere costanti nel tempo. In primo luogo, *l'interdisciplinarità*, intesa non come giustapposizione di competenze, ma come tensione produttiva tra metodi, linguaggi e tradizioni scientifiche differenti. In secondo luogo, la centralità dell'immagine non come oggetto passivo di analisi, ma come agente attivo nei processi di conoscenza, comunicazione e apprendimento. Infine, una precisa scelta etica e politica a favore dell'*open access*, inteso come condizione necessaria per la circolazione libera del sapere e per la costruzione di comunità scientifiche realmente inclusive.
Il carattere collettivo del primo numero, concepito come *Manifesto* plurale, riflette inoltre la volontà di presentare la rivista come progetto condiviso, sottraendola a logiche autorali o disciplinari dominanti.
Con il secondo numero, *Issue02 – Graphics* (Cicalò, 2020), *IMG Journal* compie un primo passo decisivo verso la strutturazione del proprio campo di riferimento. L'editoriale propone un'operazione di natura al tempo stesso descrittiva e teorica: partire dall'analisi empirica dei contributi presentati al convegno IMG2019 per verificare l'ipotesi dell'esistenza di un campo di conoscenza riconducibile alle cosiddette *graphic sciences*.
Ciò che emerge è una visione profondamente anti-dogmatica: le *graphic sciences* non vengono presentate come una disciplina autonoma e chiusa, ma come un insieme reticolare di pratiche, che comprende il disegno, la visualizzazione dei dati, la modellazione digitale, la comunicazione visiva, le tecnologie immersive e i processi cognitivi legati alla produzione e interpretazione delle immagini. L'uso di modelli grafici e tassonomie visuali all'interno dell'editoriale non è accessorio, ma coerente con l'assunto di fondo: *pensare l'immagine attraverso l'immagine*, riconoscendone il valore euristico. Questo numero consolida uno dei tratti distintivi della rivista: la consapevolezza che la visualità non sia riducibile a un linguaggio di supporto, ma costituisca un vero e proprio ambiente epistemico.
Issue03 – Remediating Distances (Treleani & Zucconi, 2020), segna un momento di forte apertura verso le urgenze del presente. L'editoriale affronta il tema della distanza non come semplice effetto

della contingenza pandemica, ma come categoria strutturale della mediazione.
Richiamandosi alle teorie della *remediation* e a una concezione radicale dei media, l'editoriale sostiene che le tecnologie visive non si limitano a colmare distanze preesistenti, ma contribuiscono a ridefinire lo spazio, il tempo e le relazioni sociali. La pandemia diventa così un potente rivelatore delle infrastrutture mediali che regolano la vita quotidiana e delle pratiche visive che le rendono operative.
In questo contesto, l'immagine assume una funzione ambivalente: da un lato strumento di connessione e immunizzazione sociale, dall'altro elemento critico capace di rendere visibili le norme, i dispositivi e le asimmetrie di potere che strutturano l'esperienza contemporanea. Questo numero estende in modo significativo l'orizzonte teorico della rivista, introducendo questioni ambientali, politiche e antropologiche destinate a riemergere nei numeri successivi.
Con *Issue04 – Copy / False / Fake* (Ghizzoni & Musiani, 2021; Luigini & Menchetelli, 2021), *IMG Journal* affronta uno dei nodi più delicati della cultura visiva contemporanea: la ridefinizione del concetto di autenticità nell'epoca della riproducibilità digitale e dell'intelligenza artificiale.
L'editoriale adotta una prospettiva storica di lunga durata, mostrando come le categorie di copia e falso abbiano sempre accompagnato la produzione culturale, assumendo di volta in volta valori differenti. Tuttavia, la diffusione di tecnologie come i *deepfake* introduce una discontinuità significativa, poiché mette in crisi la fiducia epistemica tradizionalmente accordata all'immagine come testimonianza del reale.
La posizione assunta non è né apocalittica né ingenuamente celebrativa: l'editoriale invita piuttosto a una qualificazione critica delle diverse forme di copia, riconoscendone il valore cognitivo, didattico e progettuale. In questo senso, la copia non è solo minaccia, ma anche opportunità per ripensare i processi di conoscenza, conservazione e trasmissione del sapere.
Issue05 – Imaging Peripheries (Boos, Ietri & Mastropietro, 2021), sposta il focus sulle periferie, intese non soltanto come luoghi geografici, ma come condizioni simboliche e politiche. L'editoriale rifiuta una rappresentazione *deficit-based* dei territori marginali, proponendo invece una lettura che ne evidenzia il potenziale trasformativo.
Le pratiche di rappresentazione vengono interpretate come strumenti capaci di costruire progettualità e contro-immaginari, di attivare processi partecipativi e di ridefinire le identità locali. In questo contesto, l'immagine diventa un dispositivo di ricerca-azione, in grado di incidere concretamente sulle dinamiche sociali e territoriali. Questo numero rafforza una dimensione etico-politica già presente nel progetto della rivista: l'idea che la visualità possa contribuire non solo a descrivere il mondo, ma anche a trasformarlo.
Con *Issue06 – Image Learning* (Villa & Zuccoli, 2022), *IMG Journal* esplicita in modo sistematico la propria attenzione ai processi educativi e formativi. L'editoriale propone una riflessione articolata sul ruolo dell'immagine nei contesti di apprendimento formale e informale, richiamandosi a una tradizione che va da Comenio alle teorie contemporanee del *visual thinking*.
L'immagine viene concepita come spazio di esplorazione cognitiva, capace di favorire non solo la comprensione, ma anche la produzione autonoma di conoscenza. In questa prospettiva, l'atto del disegnare, osservare e interpretare immagini diventa parte integrante del processo di apprendimento. Questo numero consolida la dimensione pedagogica della rivista, mostrando come la visualità possa fungere da ponte tra ricerca scientifica, didattica e pratiche educative.
Issue07 – Wordless Images (Luigini & Menchetelli, 2022) approfondisce ulteriormente il rapporto tra immagine e linguaggio, concentrandosi sui contesti in cui l'immagine opera in assenza di parole. L'editoriale mette in discussione la presunta dipendenza dell'immagine dal testo, mostrando come le immagini "senza parole" richiedano al fruitore un ruolo attivo di interpretazione e costruzione di senso.
Dai *silent books* alle infografiche, dai giochi visivi ai sistemi di comunicazione aumentativa, emerge una concezione dell'immagine come linguaggio aperto, capace di attraversare barriere linguistiche e culturali. Questo numero rafforza l'idea dell'immagine come pratica inclusiva, dotata di un forte potenziale educativo e sociale.
Il numero dedicato all'architettura – *Issue 08 – Imaging and Imagery in Architecture* (Luigini, 2023) – riafferma il ruolo centrale del disegno come atto cognitivo e progettuale. L'editoriale ripercorre l'evoluzione delle pratiche di rappresentazione architettonica, mostrando come il passaggio al

digitale non abbia sostituito il disegno, ma ne abbia ampliato le possibilità immaginative.
Il disegno emerge come luogo privilegiato di mediazione tra idea e forma, tra immaginazione e costruzione. In questo senso, l'architettura diventa un campo paradigmatico per osservare la relazione tra immagine e progetto, confermando la centralità della visualità nei processi creativi.
Con *Issue09 – Metaverse Dilemma* (Alfieri & Rossi, 2023), *IMG Journal* è dedicato a un'analisi critica delle tecnologie immersive e delle retoriche culturali che hanno accompagnato l'emergere del metaverso. L'editoriale affronta il metaverso non come semplice innovazione tecnologica, ma come ambiente culturale e percettivo che ristruttura le modalità di esperienza, relazione e produzione simbolica. In dialogo con il pensiero di McLuhan e con le teorie dei media come ambienti, il numero mette in discussione le narrazioni utopiche e deterministiche, interrogando le implicazioni antropologiche, estetiche e politiche delle realtà virtuali ed estese. In questo quadro, l'immagine non è più intesa solo come rappresentazione, ma come spazio esperienziale e operativo**,** aprendo una riflessione più ampia sul rapporto tra soggetto, tecnologia e immaginazione nel contesto contemporaneo. Questo numero rafforza la vocazione critica della rivista, confermandone la capacità di problematizzare le narrazioni dominanti.
Issue 10 – Imagin(g) Heritage (Brusaporci, 2024) propone una riflessione sul patrimonio culturale inteso come processo culturale e sociale, piuttosto che come insieme statico di beni. L'editoriale sviluppa una visione del patrimonio come pratica discorsiva e partecipativa, in cui la dimensione intangibile non si contrappone a quella materiale, ma ne costituisce una componente strutturale. In dialogo con i principi della Convenzione di Faro, il patrimonio è concepito come pratica viva, radicata nelle comunità e costantemente rinegoziata nel presente. In questo quadro, l'immagine assume un ruolo centrale come dispositivo di mediazione tra storia e memoria, tra esperienza e narrazione, aprendo prospettive di ricerca nei campi dell'educazione, della partecipazione culturale e della progettazione del patrimonio.

Potentialitas
Se i primi dieci numeri di *IMG Journal* hanno progressivamente costruito una genealogia critica dell'immagine come forma di conoscenza, la questione che oggi si impone non riguarda più soltanto che *cosa* siano le immagini o *come* funzionino, ma *dove* esse stiano conducendo le pratiche scientifiche, progettuali, educative e culturali nel loro insieme. I temi affrontati dalla rivista – dalla mediazione visiva alla riproducibilità, dalla costruzione dell'immaginario alla dimensione educativa dell'immagine, dalla simulazione immersiva alla partecipazione culturale alle pratiche creative – trovano una risonanza sempre più evidente in un panorama internazionale in cui gli studi sull'immagine convergono verso una ridefinizione radicale dei propri presupposti epistemologici.

Prospettiva ecologica della visualità
Il cosiddetto *visual turn* (Mitchell, 1994; Boehm, 1994), che aveva inizialmente posto l'accento sulla centralità delle immagini nella cultura contemporanea, appare oggi insufficiente a descrivere un contesto in cui le immagini non sono più soltanto rappresentazioni a posteriori da interpretare, ma veri e propri *agenti operativi*, incorporati in infrastrutture tecnologiche, ambienti immersivi e processi decisionali talvolta automatizzati. Tale mutamento implica uno spostamento rilevante: l'attenzione non può più concentrarsi esclusivamente sul significato delle immagini, ma deve estendersi alle condizioni materiali, tecniche e ambientali che ne rendono possibile l'azione e la pervasività. È in questo quadro che Pinotti avverte l'esigenza di introdurre un neologismo – an-iconico – per indicare quella soglia che tende a cancellare la distanza tra immagine e realtà, tra rappresentazione ed esperienza, presentandosi non come immagine di qualcosa, ma come ambiente in cui si è immersi (Ampollini et al., 2023). L'an-iconico designa dunque una trasformazione profonda dello statuto dell'immagine, che non si limita più a mediare il mondo, ma si configura come spazio esperienziale totalizzante.
In questa prospettiva, l'immagine assume sempre più i tratti di un *ambiente epistemico e operativo*, come anticipato da angolazioni diverse nei numeri dedicati a *Remediating Distances* e *Metaverse Dilemma*, ma anche in *Image and Imagery in Architecture* e *Imaging Peripheries*. Tali contributi hanno mostrato come le immagini operino ormai come dispositivi che organizzano l'esperienza, orientano le pratiche e modellano le relazioni tra soggetti, spazi e tecnologie. Le ricerche nei

media studies, nella filosofia della tecnica e nelle *visual* e *graphic sciences* confermano questa direzione, evidenziando come le immagini digitali agiscano a livelli pre-percettivi e temporali, influenzando l'esperienza prima ancora che essa diventi oggetto di coscienza riflessiva (Hansen, 2015). Parallelamente, l'archeologia dei media e gli studi sul materialismo digitale hanno messo in luce il legame inscindibile tra immagini, infrastrutture e risorse materiali, riconducendo la visualità all'interno di una più ampia ecologia dei media (Parikka, 2012). Una consapevolezza che, peraltro, era già presente nei primi anni Novanta nella riflessione di Maldonado, quando in *Reale e virtuale* richiamava l'ineluttabilità della nostra condizione materiale e corporea di fronte alle retoriche della smaterializzazione tecnologica (Maldonado, 1992).

Riformulazione dei dispositivi educativi e progettuali

All'interno di questo scenario, le riflessioni sviluppate in *Image Learning* e *Wordless Images* trovano oggi un terreno di dialogo sempre più fertile con le neuroscienze cognitive, la psicologia culturale e le scienze dell'educazione, che riconoscono il ruolo centrale delle immagini nei processi di *embodied cognition* e di costruzione del significato (Gallese & Lakoff, 2005; Barsalou, 2008). Tali contributi convergono nel superare una concezione dell'immagine come semplice supporto o ausilio didattico, per riconoscerla invece come *ambiente cognitivo attivo*, in cui percezione, corpo, emozione e pensiero si intrecciano nella produzione di conoscenza. In questa prospettiva, apprendere attraverso le immagini significa attivare forme di comprensione situata, in cui il sapere non viene semplicemente trasmesso, ma costruito attraverso l'esperienza e l'interazione.

In un mondo caratterizzato da flussi comunicativi globali e da contesti multiculturali, la capacità delle immagini di operare oltre il linguaggio verbale – già esplorata dalla rivista attraverso i *silent books*, le infografiche e i sistemi di comunicazione aumentativa – assume un valore strategico per l'inclusione, l'accessibilità e l'apprendimento situato. Le immagini consentono infatti di attraversare barriere linguistiche e culturali, offrendo forme di mediazione che rendono possibile la partecipazione di soggetti con competenze, esperienze e *background* differenti. In questo senso, la visualità non solo accompagna i processi educativi, ma contribuisce a ridefinirne i presupposti, sollecitando una progettazione didattica attenta alle dimensioni sensoriali, relazionali e culturali dell'apprendimento.

Sul piano territoriale e politico, le istanze emerse in *Imaging Peripheries* si intrecciano con le ricerche della *critical geography*, dei *visual cultural studies* e degli studi postcoloniali, che interrogano il ruolo delle immagini nella costruzione di mappe, narrazioni e immaginari dominanti (Harley, 1989; Corner, 1999; Perkins, 2007). In questo ambito, le pratiche di contro-mappatura, di visualizzazione partecipata e di ricerca-azione visiva mostrano come le immagini possano funzionare come *dispositivi progettuali* ma anche *educativi*, capaci di incidere concretamente sulle dinamiche sociali e territoriali. Attraverso tali pratiche, l'immagine diventa strumento di problematizzazione critica dello spazio e del potere, rendendo visibili soggetti, storie e luoghi altrimenti marginalizzati e favorendo processi di consapevolezza, partecipazione e trasformazione. In questo senso, la riformulazione dei dispositivi educativi e progettuali passa necessariamente attraverso un ripensamento del ruolo del visivo come luogo di mediazione tra conoscenza, esperienza e azione collettiva.

Riflessone critica su estetiche computazionali e intelligenza artificiale

In questo quadro, le questioni sollevate in *Copy / False / Fake* acquistano una nuova e particolare urgenza. L'emergere di immagini generate da sistemi di intelligenza artificiale non pone infatti soltanto problemi legati all'autenticità o alla veridicità delle rappresentazioni, ma impone di ripensare in profondità concetti fondamentali quali *autorialità*, *intenzionalità* e *responsabilità epistemica* (Manovich, 2020; Crawford, 2021). L'immagine non può più essere ricondotta a un atto creativo individuale o a una volontà autoriale unitaria, ma si configura sempre più come l'esito di processi computazionali complessi, basati su *dataset*, modelli statistici e procedure di apprendimento automatico. In questo senso, la produzione visuale contemporanea mette in crisi categorie estetiche e teoriche consolidate, richiedendo nuovi strumenti critici per interpretare la natura e gli effetti delle immagini.

Le immagini non sono più prodotte esclusivamente da soggetti umani, ma da sistemi ibridi

uomo/macchina capaci di apprendere, simulare e anticipare figure o pattern visivi su scala massiva, con ricadute che investono ambiti eterogenei – dalla medicina diagnostica alla sorveglianza, dalla progettazione architettonica alla produzione culturale. In tali contesti, l'immagine diventa un'interfaccia operativa tra dati, algoritmi e decisioni, assumendo una funzione che va oltre la rappresentazione per incidere direttamente sui processi di valutazione, previsione e azione. Le estetiche computazionali si configurano così non come semplici stili visivi, ma come *regimi di visibilità* che rendono sensibili e percepibili logiche di calcolo altrimenti opache.

Analogamente, il percorso sviluppato in *Imagin(g) Heritage* si inserisce pienamente nel dibattito internazionale che concepisce il patrimonio non più come insieme statico di oggetti, ma come processo discorsivo, performativo e partecipativo (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). In questo quadro, le immagini svolgono un ruolo centrale nella negoziazione dei significati, nella costruzione della memoria collettiva e nella definizione delle identità, anche in relazione alle piattaforme digitali e alle logiche della *convergent culture* (Jenkins, 2006). La produzione e circolazione di immagini mediate da tecnologie digitali e algoritmiche ridefinisce le modalità attraverso cui il passato viene narrato, visualizzato e reinterpretato nel presente, aprendo nuove possibilità ma anche nuove responsabilità sul piano culturale e politico.

Le immagini diventano così luoghi di intersezione tra passato e futuro, tra memoria e progetto, tra conservazione e innovazione, collocandosi al centro di un dibattito più ampio che coinvolge la filosofia, l'antropologia e le scienze sociali sul rapporto tra immagine, ambiente e soggettività nell'epoca dell'iperconnessione e dell'*onlife* (Floridi, 2015). La progressiva dissoluzione delle dicotomie tra reale e virtuale, *online* e *offline*, presenza e distanza impone di ripensare l'immagine non più come finestra sul mondo, ma come spazio abitabile, in cui si ridefiniscono continuamente le modalità dell'esperienza, della relazione e dell'azione. In questo senso, una riflessione critica sulle estetiche computazionali e sull'intelligenza artificiale diventa imprescindibile per comprendere e orientare le trasformazioni in atto, riaffermando il ruolo dell'analisi teorica e della responsabilità culturale di fronte ai nuovi regimi del visibile.

Lineamenta

In questo quadro complesso e in continua evoluzione, *IMG Journal* è chiamata a non limitarsi a registrare o descrivere le trasformazioni in atto nel campo della cultura visuale, ma a intervenirvi criticamente, mantenendo e rafforzando una postura riflessiva capace di mettere in relazione saperi, pratiche e prospettive eterogenee. La vocazione interdisciplinare della rivista si configura, in questo senso, non come semplice apertura tematica, ma come *metodo di lavoro*: un attraversamento consapevole di discipline quali architettura, design, educazione, psicologia, informatica, studi culturali, filosofia e scienze sociali, orientato a costruire strumenti teorici condivisi senza rinunciare al rigore analitico.

Guardare alle prospettive future del progetto editoriale significa assumere l'immagine non più come oggetto isolato o come linguaggio specialistico, ma come *spazio di negoziazione* in cui si intrecciano dimensioni epistemiche, tecniche, politiche e pedagogiche. L'immagine diventa così un luogo in cui si ridefiniscono continuamente i rapporti tra umano e non umano, tra memoria e previsione, tra rappresentazione e simulazione, mettendo in discussione categorie consolidate e sollecitando nuove forme di responsabilità critica. In questa prospettiva, interrogare le immagini significa andare oltre ciò che esse mostrano per concentrarsi su *ciò che fanno*, su come agiscono nei contesti sociali, educativi e tecnologici, e su quali mondi contribuiscono a rendere pensabili, abitabili e condivisibili.

Il compito che si profila per *IMG Journal* è dunque quello di continuare a funzionare come laboratorio culturale – teorico e pragmatico – capace di leggere e sistematizzare le trasformazioni del visibile attraverso una riflessione che sia al tempo stesso storicamente consolidata e proiettata verso il futuro. In questo senso, la rivista non si pone come luogo di sintesi definitiva, ma come spazio aperto di elaborazione, in cui la genealogia costruita nei primi dieci numeri si traduce in una progettualità critica volta a immaginare, con consapevolezza e responsabilità, i futuri della cultura visuale.

CULTURA VISUALE, EDUCAZIONE ALL'IMMAGINE E INNOVAZIONE POSTDIGITALE: INTRECCI E TRAIETTORIE FUTURE

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Introduzione

Nel corso di questi cinque anni, attraverso *IMG Journal*, abbiamo potuto comprendere come la cultura visuale sia diventata una chiave di lettura indispensabile per analizzare i molteplici aspetti che caratterizzano il mondo educativo contemporaneo. Non si tratta soltanto di prendere atto di una proliferazione sempre maggiore di immagini che ci circonda e che in diverso modo ci sollecita a diverse forme di interazione, ma ad un mutamento nel paradigma dei modi in cui apprendiamo, comunichiamo, costruiamo conoscenza e rappresentiamo la realtà. L'immagine, oggi, non è più solo oggetto di fruizione estetica, ma rappresenta una sorta di *infrastruttura cognitiva e sociale*, veicolo di dati, espressione di sistemi algoritmici. Questo scenario ha conseguenze profonde sul piano socio-educativo, continuamente rimodellato dalle tecnologie emergenti. Si aprono interrogativi urgenti: cosa significa oggi educare alla cultura visuale in un mondo dominato da flussi digitali, intelligenze artificiali generative e piattaforme algoritmiche? Quali competenze sono necessarie per abitare con consapevolezza ambienti digitali sempre più visivi? In occasione del quinto anniversario della rivista, è opportuno riflettere su questi snodi, offrendo una breve mappa concettuale e operativa per un'evoluzione consapevole del rapporto tra visualità, formazione e innovazione. Individuerò, nello specifico, tre prospettive di sviluppo – ecologia delle immagini, design didattico immersivo ed estetiche computazionali – come traiettorie per una pedagogia visiva critica, capace di abitare i confini tra umano e artificiale, tra immaginazione e tecnica.

Cultura visuale: una ridefinizione epistemologica

La cultura visuale, come campo teorico e pratico, non si limita all'analisi iconografica delle immagini, ma include una comprensione delle modalità attraverso cui il visivo costruisce significati, influenza comportamenti, orienta esperienze e modella relazioni sociali. A partire dagli anni Novanta, gli studi di *visual culture* si sono consolidati come un'area interdisciplinare che mette in relazione storia dell'arte, cultural studies, media studies, antropologia, semiotica e teoria critica, assumendo come oggetto non solo "le immagini" ma soprattutto l'area della visualità. Quest'ultima richiama alle pratiche del vedere, ai dispositivi che organizzano lo sguardo e ai "regimi di visibilità "che definiscono ciò che può essere mostrato, riconosciuto, legittimato. Questa prospettiva – come chiarisce la riflessione introduttiva sul campo – sottolinea che non esiste una definizione unica e stabile di "cultura visuale", perché il termine è impiegato per finalità teoriche differenti; ciò che conta, in ogni caso, è la capacità del campo di produrre nuove strategie di ricerca e nuove "configurazioni dell'oggetto" a partire dall'incontro tra pratiche visive, apparati di visione e soggettività che guardano (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009).
Seguendo le teorizzazioni di Mitchell (2005), la cultura visuale implica un cambio di paradigma: le immagini non sono enti inerti che "trasmettono" contenuti, ma *forme agentive* che partecipano alla vita sociale e cognitiva, interrogando desideri, credenze e rapporti di potere; da qui la sua "picture theory", che invita a trattare le immagini come *attori culturali* e non come semplici illustrazioni del verbale. Da un altro versante, Mirzoeff (2011) ha mostrato come la modernità sia anche una storia di competizione tra visualità e contro-visualità, legando l'"autorità visiva" a dispositivi di governo e gerarchizzazione (coloniali, politici, culturali) e rivendicando un "diritto di guardare" come pratica critica. Accanto a questi contributi, la genealogia del campo si nutre di autori che hanno ridefinito il vedere come *costruzione storica e culturale*: da John Berger, che ha reso popolare l'idea che ogni immagine incorpori un "modo di vedere" e dunque una posizione sociale, a Jonathan Crary, che ha ricostruito la formazione storica dell'osservatore moderno mostrando il legame tra tecnologie della visione, soggettività e modernità. In parallelo, testi come quello di Barthes (2003) hanno rafforzato la centralità dell'esperienza dello spettatore e della dimensione affettiva e corporea del vedere, aprendo una tradizione di analisi in cui la fotografia (e più in generale il visivo) viene considerata anche come

evento percettivo e relazionale. Questo consolidamento teorico è stato accompagnato da studi che hanno contribuito a istituzionalizzare il campo: in particolare, *Visual Culture: The Reader* di Jessica Evans e Stuart Hall (2000) ha sottolineato come lo studio della cultura visuale debba tenere insieme almeno tre dimensioni – *il segno, l'istituzione e il soggetto che guarda* – evidenziando quindi che l'immagine vive sempre dentro apparati sociali e cornici di potere. Sul versante metodologico, le ricerche sulle *Visual Methodologies* di Gillian Rose (2016), hanno fornito strumenti per analizzare la cultura visuale in relazione a contesti, pratiche e circolazione, rafforzando l'idea che "vedere" sia un atto situato e che l'interpretazione del visivo richieda metodi espliciti e criticamente fondati.

In tale cornice, il visivo diviene linguaggio proprio della cultura globale, penetrando ambiti tradizionalmente non visuali come la scienza, l'economia, la politica e i social media, con una ricaduta diretta anche sulla formazione. Questa diffusione, resa possibile da piattaforme e processi automatizzati, solleva interrogativi inediti: chi controlla le immagini? Come si costruisce l'autorità visiva? In che modo la selezione algoritmica e la logica dell'attenzione trasformano ciò che appare "rilevante" o "credibile"? L'uso di tecnologie immersive – realtà aumentata, virtuale e mista – rappresenta una frontiera promettente per l'educazione, ma anche ambigua: se da un lato abilita esperienze multisensoriali e coinvolgenti, dall'altro può indurre forme di passività percettiva e di delega interpretativa, soprattutto quando l'esperienza visiva viene progettata come spettacolo invece che come occasione di indagine. La sfida è dunque pensare l'innovazione come *pedagogia aumentata* e non come semplice incorporazione tecnica, valorizzando la progettazione educativa come atto critico, estetico e relazionale. Nel contesto educativo, la cultura visuale rappresenta uno spazio di ibridazione per l'apprendimento. Le immagini – video, mappe, infografiche, simulazioni – non sono semplici supporti didattici, ma ambienti cognitivi e relazionali: partecipano alla costruzione dell'attenzione, del coinvolgimento e della memoria, come indicano anche le ricerche neuroscientifiche sull'apprendimento (Dehaene, 2019). Un'immagine ben progettata può favorire comprensione profonda e connessioni concettuali; al contrario, un ambiente visivo caotico o iperstimolante può ostacolare la concentrazione e alimentare pratiche di fruizione frammentate e superficiali.

Nonostante ciò, i sistemi educativi risultano ancora spesso impreparati a integrare la visualità come competenza trasversale. L'alfabetizzazione visiva – *visual literacy* – non deve limitarsi alla decodifica iconografica, ma includere la produzione consapevole, la riflessione sull'etica delle rappresentazioni e la comprensione delle logiche tecnologiche (ad es. filtri, metriche, bias algoritmici) che modellano ciò che vediamo. È in tal senso che la cultura visuale si intreccia con la cittadinanza digitale, chiamando in causa anche la responsabilità sociale della rappresentazione. L'avvento delle tecnologie digitali e, in particolare, dell'intelligenza artificiale, ha rivoluzionato il modo in cui le immagini vengono create, distribuite e percepite. Le immagini oggi generate da reti neurali (GANs), interpretate da sistemi di visione artificiale (computer vision) e manipolate in tempo reale tramite deepfake e realtà aumentata sono ormai parte della nostra realtà quotidiana. Questa trasformazione rende sempre più difficile distinguere tra ciò che è reale e ciò che è simulato (Eugeni, 2015), tra ciò che è umano e ciò che è automatizzato (Panciroli & Rivoltella, 2021). Ma forse non è questa la priorità che va indagata, a cui cercare di dare risposte puntuali. Di fronte a queste mutazioni, è urgente sviluppare un'educazione dagli orizzonti più ampi, che non sia solo tecnica o funzionale, ma anche critica, creativa ed etica. Formare alla cultura visuale oggi significa anche formare alla comprensione degli algoritmi, alla consapevolezza del dato e alla riflessione sulla relazione tra codifica visuale e potere. Una pedagogia che assuma l'innovazione come pratica riflessiva e situata può offrire strumenti per navigare nel "paesaggio visivo" (Panciroli, 2021) contemporaneo senza da un lato esserne dominati ma dall'altro dando un contributo significativo. In questa prospettiva, la cultura visuale assume una valenza pienamente educativa solo se collocata entro una cornice educativa, in cui il rapporto tra soggetti, immagini e tecnologie è inteso come costitutivo dei processi di conoscenza. Il tal senso, il visivo diventa *officina di mediazione* tra esperienza sensibile, progettazione didattica e infrastrutture tecnologiche (Panciroli, 2019; 2022). L'immagine, in questo contesto, non è solo un oggetto di analisi, ma diviene dispositivo didattico, capace di attivare forme di apprendimento situato, riflessivo e critico.

Integrare la cultura visuale nella progettazione educativa significa dunque riconoscere il visivo come luogo di costruzione del senso e non come semplice supporto comunicativo, riaffermando il ruolo dell'educazione come pratica interpretativa e generativa.

Tre prospettive di sviluppo

Alla luce di questa ridefinizione epistemologica della cultura visuale, diventa possibile individuare alcune traiettorie di sviluppo capaci di tradurre tali presupposti teorici in direzioni pedagogiche operative. Le tre prospettive che seguono – ecologia delle immagini, design didattico immersivo ed estetiche computazionali – non vanno intese come ambiti separati, ma come assi interconnessi di una pedagogia visuale orientata a formare soggetti capaci di abitare in modo riflessivo e responsabile i regimi contemporanei del visibile.

Ecologia delle immagini: verso una pedagogia della soglia visiva

In un ecosistema comunicativo caratterizzato da una sovrapproduzione e circolazione incessante di immagini, parlare di *ecologia delle immagini* significa riconoscere che il problema non è solo quantitativo, ma profondamente qualitativo e culturale. Come osserva Nicholas Mirzoeff, la visualità non è mai neutra: essa è sempre una pratica sociale, un modo di organizzare il visibile e, al contempo, l'invisibile. Nell'attuale contesto ipermediato, le immagini non si limitano a rappresentare il mondo, ma contribuiscono a modellare le emozioni e i processi di soggettivazione. L'ecologia delle immagini richiama esplicitamente al paradigma dell'educazione ambientale: così come l'ambiente naturale richiede cura, consapevolezza e responsabilità, anche l'ambiente visuale necessita di pratiche educative orientate alla selezione e alla distanza critica. Crary ci mostra come il fenomeno visivo è situato in un terreno dove coincidono elementi astratti, visivi e linguistici e nei regimi contemporanei sostenuti da piattaforme digitali e algoritmi, essi producano una condizione di vigilanza permanente che riduce la possibilità di una percezione profonda e riflessiva. In questo senso, la "bulimia iconica" non è solo un eccesso di immagini, ma un dispositivo che incide sul modo in cui il soggetto abita il tempo e lo spazio. L'educazione visiva, all'interno di una prospettiva ecologica, assume quindi una funzione formativa cruciale: insegnare a vedere meno per vedere meglio, a riconoscere il valore del vuoto, della pausa, della soglia. Come sottolinea W.J.T. Mitchell, le immagini "vogliono qualcosa" (*pictures want*): chiedono attenzione, adesione, affetto. Educare alla cultura visuale significa allora rendere visibile questo desiderio delle immagini, smascherarne le strategie e restituire al soggetto una posizione attiva e responsabile. L'educazione diventa così uno spazio di resistenza critica, in cui imparare a interrogare non solo le immagini, ma i sistemi che le rendono pervasive.

Design didattico immersivo: dall'esperienza spettacolare all'esperienza significativa

Le tecnologie immersive – realtà virtuale, aumentata e mista – rappresentano uno dei terreni più promettenti, ma anche più ambigui, per l'innovazione didattica. La loro forza risiede nella capacità di generare esperienze *embodied*, situate e multisensoriali, che coinvolgono il corpo e lo spazio oltre la dimensione puramente simbolica del testo. Tuttavia, come sottolinea Laurillard (2014), nessuna tecnologia è pedagogicamente efficace di per sé: è la progettazione didattica a determinare se un'esperienza diventa realmente formativa o resta un evento spettacolare.

Il rischio principale del design immersivo è quello di una estetizzazione dell'apprendimento, in cui l'effetto di presenza e meraviglia sostituisce la costruzione di senso. In questo scenario, l'educazione può facilmente scivolare verso una logica di consumo dell'esperienza, piuttosto che di riflessione critica. Per evitare questa deriva, è necessario sviluppare forme di *instructional design* che mettano in relazione intenzionalità pedagogica, obiettivi cognitivi e dimensione esperienziale. Studi sull'apprendimento situato (Lave & Wenger, 2006) e sull'*embodied cognition* (Varela et al., 1991) mostrano come l'esperienza immersiva possa favorire processi profondi di comprensione, a condizione che sia accompagnata da momenti di riflessività, rielaborazione e dialogo. Il design didattico immersivo efficace non si limita a "far vivere un'esperienza", ma costruisce un percorso che integra esplorazione, narrazione, confronto e metacognizione. In relazione alla cultura visuale e all'AI *literacy* (Panciroli & Rivoltella, 2024), le tecnologie immersive diventano ambienti in cui sperimentare in modo consapevole i regimi di visibilità algoritmica. Ambienti VR o AR possono

essere progettati non solo per mostrare contenuti, ma per rendere espliciti i processi di simulazione, modellazione e decisione automatizzata. In questo senso, il design immersivo può diventare uno spazio privilegiato per sviluppare competenze critiche sull'IA, rendendo percepibili dinamiche altrimenti opache.

Estetiche computazionali e creatività critica: ripensare arte, autorialità e apprendimento

Le immagini generate da sistemi di intelligenza artificiale generativa stanno profondamente ridefinendo i concetti di creatività, autorialità ed estetica. Come osserva Manovich (2020), ci troviamo di fronte a una nuova fase della cultura visuale, in cui l'immagine non è più il risultato di una singola intenzione autoriale, ma l'esito di processi computazionali basati su dataset, modelli statistici e probabilità. In ambito educativo, questo scenario apre opportunità inedite. Gli studenti possono dialogare con sistemi generativi, esplorare varianti, ipotesi visive, stili e combinazioni che sarebbero difficilmente accessibili attraverso strumenti tradizionali. Tuttavia, senza un adeguato accompagnamento pedagogico, il rischio è quello di una creatività delegata, in cui l'atto creativo si riduce alla selezione o alla rifinitura di output algoritmici.

È qui che diventa centrale il concetto di *creatività critica*. Educare alla creatività nell'era delle IA significa non solo usare strumenti generativi, ma comprendere e problematizzare i processi che li rendono possibili. Come sottolinea Selwyn, (2024), l'AI literacy non può limitarsi a competenze operative, ma deve includere una dimensione epistemica ed etica: chi decide cosa è "bello", "coerente", "artistico"? Quali immaginari vengono riprodotti? Quali vengono esclusi? Nel campo dell'educazione artistica, questo approccio si traduce in una riconfigurazione del laboratorio come spazio di indagine. Riprendendo l'idea di "pensare per immagini" (Panciroli, 2019), l'esperienza estetica diventa spazio di pensiero attraverso i codici, interrogare dataset, smontare e rimontare modelli, confrontare l'intenzionalità umana con le logiche computazionali. L'arte, in questo senso, si conferma come uno spazio privilegiato di alfabetizzazione critica all'IA. Le estetiche computazionali, lungi dall'essere un semplice stile, diventano così un dispositivo pedagogico: un modo per rendere visibili le infrastrutture invisibili dell'intelligenza artificiale e per formare soggetti capaci di abitare in modo consapevole e creativo la cultura visuale contemporanea.

Per una pedagogia visuale postdigitale

La sfida educativa che ci attende è complessa e nello spesso tempo sfidante: continuare a costruire una cultura visuale capace di tenere insieme immaginazione e consapevolezza, creatività e responsabilità, estetica e tecnica. In un ecosistema mediale profondamente trasformato dalla digitalizzazione e dall'intelligenza artificiale, le immagini non possono più essere considerate semplici supporti comunicativi o strumenti didattici accessori. Esse costituiscono, sempre più, ambienti cognitivi, infrastrutture simboliche e dispositivi di mediazione attraverso cui si costruiscono conoscenze, identità e visioni del mondo.

Come già evidenziato dalla riflessione sulla didattica postdigitale, non viviamo più "dopo" il digitale, ma *dentro* una condizione in cui tecnologie, pratiche sociali e processi educativi risultano intrecciati in modo strutturale. Il postdigitale non indica un superamento del digitale, bensì una fase di maturità critica, in cui l'attenzione si sposta dagli strumenti alle relazioni, dai dispositivi alle pratiche, dagli effetti di novità agli impatti culturali e pedagogici. In questo quadro, la visualità assume un ruolo centrale: è attraverso le immagini che il digitale si rende esperibile, interpretabile, discutibile. Le immagini, tuttavia, non sono mai neutre. Esse incorporano scelte, valori, modelli di mondo; veicolano poteri e gerarchie simboliche; contribuiscono a rendere visibili alcune realtà e invisibili altre. Nell'epoca delle piattaforme e degli algoritmi, questa dimensione si accentua ulteriormente: il visibile è il risultato di processi di selezione automatizzata, di metriche di rilevanza, di modelli predittivi che agiscono spesso al di sotto della soglia di consapevolezza. L'immagine diventa così non solo rappresentazione, ma esito di un calcolo, superficie sensibile di sistemi complessi che intrecciano dati, codici e decisioni.

Ripensare l'educazione in questa prospettiva significa riconoscere che la cultura visuale è oggi uno dei principali terreni su cui si gioca la formazione del soggetto contemporaneo. Una pedagogia visuale postdigitale non può limitarsi a insegnare a "leggere" le immagini, ma deve creare le condizioni per interrogarle, problematizzarle, smontarne i meccanismi di produzione e ricom-

posizione. L'immagine diventa così oggetto di analisi critica, ma anche spazio di dimostrazione, di esplorazione concettuale e di sperimentazione creativa. In questa direzione, l'educazione è chiamata a recuperare una funzione generativa: non solo trasmettere saperi, ma costruire contesti in cui studenti e docenti possano sviluppare una relazione riflessiva con il visivo, imparando a riconoscerne la complessità e l'ambivalenza. La pedagogia visuale si fonda pertanto su una tensione feconda tra immaginazione e responsabilità: da un lato valorizza il potenziale espressivo e creativo delle immagini, dall'altro ne assume la dimensione etica, politica e sociale. Particolarmente rilevante, in questo scenario, è il contributo delle tecnologie intelligenti, che amplificano le possibilità di produzione e manipolazione visiva ma rendono al contempo più opachi i processi che le sostengono. Le immagini generate da sistemi di intelligenza artificiale, le simulazioni immersive, le visualizzazioni di dati pongono interrogativi profondi sul rapporto tra verità, finzione e verosimiglianza. Una pedagogia visuale non mira a fornire risposte definitive, ma ad attrezzare cognitivamente i soggetti per abitare questa incertezza, trasformandola in occasione di apprendimento critico. In questo senso, l'immagine diventa uno spazio privilegiato per esercitare competenze di AI literacy, di cittadinanza digitale e di pensiero critico. Rendere visibili i processi invisibili – i dati, gli algoritmi, le logiche di addestramento – significa restituire all'educazione il compito di mediare tra complessità tecnologica e comprensione umana. La scuola e l'università possono così configurarsi come luoghi in cui il visivo non è consumato passivamente, ma reinterpretato, discusso e reinventato. Una pedagogia visuale postdigitale, infine, si colloca consapevolmente ai confini tra umano e artificiale, tra sensibilità estetica e razionalità tecnica. Non si tratta di opporre creatività e tecnologia, ma di esplorare le forme ibride di pensiero che emergono dal loro incontro. In questo spazio liminale, l'educazione può recuperare il proprio ruolo trasformativo: formare soggetti capaci non solo di usare le immagini, ma di pensare attraverso le immagini, riconoscendone il potere generativo e assumendone la responsabilità.

IMG Journal, con la sua vocazione interdisciplinare, rappresenta un laboratorio prezioso e indispensabile per accompagnare questa trasformazione, coniugando rigore scientifico e apertura immaginativa. In un panorama culturale e accademico segnato dalla crescente complessità dei linguaggi visivi e dalla pervasività delle tecnologie digitali e algoritmiche, la rivista si configura come uno spazio di confronto critico capace di mettere in dialogo saperi, pratiche e prospettive differenti. La sua funzione non è soltanto quella di osservare e descrivere i mutamenti in atto, ma di contribuire attivamente alla costruzione di cornici interpretative, categorie analitiche e pratiche educative in grado di orientare tali trasformazioni. In questo senso, *IMG Journal* assume un ruolo strategico nel promuovere una riflessione sulla cultura visuale che non sia né tecnofila né difensiva, ma consapevole, problematizzante e generativa. Offrendo uno spazio di elaborazione condivisa tra ricerca, educazione e progettazione culturale, la rivista contribuisce a rafforzare una pedagogia del visivo capace di abitare le tensioni tra umano e artificiale, tra esperienza estetica e infrastrutture tecnologiche, tra immaginazione e responsabilità. La sua funzione sarà dunque sempre più necessaria: non solo osservare le immagini, ma costruire – insieme – una cittadinanza visuale critica, riflessiva e inclusiva, capace di interpretare il presente e di immaginare, con consapevolezza, i possibili futuri del vedere.