Post-photographic Images. Generative Imaging Processes
1st Bielefeld Post-photography Symposium
November 26-28, 2025

The international conference *Post-photographic Images. Generative Imaging Processes* reflects the evolution of the technical image from the photographic to the post-photographic image, which includes digital photographs and AI-generated images. It will focus on a particular aspect of recent image production: the aspect of the generative. Used as an umbrella term, generative refers to a variety of different imaging processes that obviously have an algorithmic or at least rule-based precondition. The conference will explore the various imaging processes both experimentally and in terms of the history of ideas. The most recent and current turn of the generative occurred with open AI, for which the term generative artificial intelligence has become established. Beyond the use of algorithms, generative here refers to a specific moment of image production that goes beyond the simple generation of an image from an existing dataset. It includes instead that the datasets are read out on the basis of machine learning in such a way that entirely new and self-referential images are automatically generated. To date, neither the various generative imaging processes and practices, nor the connotations attached to the concept of the generative as a result, have yet been differentiated and presented in detail. However, this seems to be a prerequisite for individual agency and engagement in both technological and social processes of transformation that are expressed and reinforced through image production and reception. For only a deeper understanding of the algorithmic nature of data mining and processing, model training, statistical probability, pattern recognition and image generation, which are part of the current media conditions of our perception and are involved in the creation of our reality, enables both their appropriation and their critique.

The conference is divided into two main sections:

<u>(I) A review of generative approaches to image production and reception from a praxeological and conceptual-historical perspective</u>

With regard to post-photographic images, the aim is to examine the practices in which they are materially incorporated. In particular, it is to be clarified whether and to what extent these practices, and the images that emerge from them, can be regarded as generative. Answering these questions requires a praxeological and conceptual-historical review of the generative, which since the 1960s has become an independent technical term in several disciplines, such as linguistics, aesthetics and photographic theory, and since then has also referred to various approaches to applied and artistic image production: from generative computer graphics to generative photography developed at the Faculty of Design and Art at Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences to current generative artificial intelligence. This historically oriented section focuses on Max Bense's generative aesthetics, generative computer graphics and generative photography.

<u>(II) Practices, aesthetics and critique of generative imagery</u>

Images created with the help of artificial intelligence or image generators have been introduced into the current discussion as a new class of images under the neologism of "imagenesis", formed from "image" and "generation". Here, they are to be classified as

post-photographic images, especially since not only photographs have remained fundamental to the image databases used, but also the photographic dispositive in general has been adopted by AI image generators. Since image databases emerge from and at the same time represent social image practices (of photographing, tagging and sharing images) and can also be understood as a virtual collective memory of images, a new social form of the image has been identified in AI images. It is in this context that the term "social imagery" has also come up. The ambiguity of the term imagery, which can refer to image, visual language, symbolism and metaphor, and the semantic relationship of the term to the imagination and the imaginary, allows it to address both material forms of images and collective pictorial concepts. This section focuses on the current expansion of post-photographic images to include AI-generated images, the relationship between photographic dispositives and image generators, new text-(prompt)-image relationships, and the transformation of the generative through AI-assisted image production.

In addition to the transdisciplinary, praxeological and historical research on the various generative imaging processes and their methodological, technological and aesthetic preconditions, the conference will serve to network with other research institutions and museum collections involved in the study and further development of generative imaging processes. The conference may include aesthetic and curatorial contributions as well as purely theoretical ones. An additional CfP will be launched to support young scholars in the field of artistic research. It is aimed at graduate and postgraduate students whose artistic and scientific research projects on generative imaging processes are to be presented in the form of posters and short talks.

Organisation: Prof. Dr. Kirsten Wagner, Prof. Adrian Sauer, Jana Sehnert (Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Design and Art)

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