Post-photographic Images. Generative Imaging Processes

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.

HSBI-SATELLIT, Wissenswerkstadt TUESDAY 25/11/2025

17:30 Generative Images HSBI-SATELLIT
Exhibition Opening Guest Artists
18:00 Joanna Zylinska KING'S COLLEGE LONDON
The Generous Image Keynote

HSBI, Department of Design WEDNESDAY 26/11/2025

10:00 Kirsten Wagner HSBI Introduction
10:30 Till Bovermann HMTM MÜNCHEN
Sounding Infrastructures Soundperformance
11:15 Rosemary Lee UNIVERSITY OF PORTO
From Apparatus of Capture to Generative Models

12:00 Lunch FOODTRUCK RESTLOS and Exhibition Opening HSBI Students

14:00 Rosa Menkman NETHERLANDS
Collection of Babel
14:45 Olga Moskatova HFG OFFENBACH Synthetic Memories: AI, Photography and the Mediality of Absence

15:30 Coffee

16:00 Antonio Somaini UNIVERSITÉ SORBONNE NOUVELLE
Titel Zoom
16:45 Yanai Toister TAMPERE UNIVERSITY FINLAND
Generative Photography, Generative AI: Two Logics of Making

18:00 Dinner

HSBI, Department of Design THURSDAY 27/11/2025

10:00 Hans-Christian von Herrmann TU BERLIN Zum Wandel generativer Ästhetik seit 1965
10:45 Francesca Franco UK / ITALY From Systems to Symmetries: Generative Imaging Practices in the Work of Ernest Edmonds and Manfred Mohr

11:30 Coffee

12:15 Ruth Horak AUSTRIA Die Rolle der Autor*innen

13:00 Lunch FOODTRUCK RESTLOS and Poster Presentation Guest Students

15:00 Franziska Kunze MUNICH Brain Twister. Gottfried Jägers Fotomaterialarbeiten zwischen Medienphilosophie, Performance und Denkspiel.

15:45 Coffee

16:30 Gottfried Jäger, Frieder Nake, Adrian Sauer Artist Talk
Moderation Ruth Horak, Jana Sehnert

17:30 End

Joanna Zylinska KING'S COLLEGE LONDON
The Generous Image Keynote

Our contemporary visual landscape is increasingly shaped by algorithmic systems that do not merely capture the world but actively generate new forms of seeing, sensing and knowing. While recent academic and public debate has understandably focused on the rise of generative AI systems - those capable of producing images from textual prompts - my talk proposes a broader and more radical claim: that all images today are potentially generative. Revisiting my previous work on photographic thinking and nonhuman vision, I will draw on the expanded sense of the concept of generativity as outlined, among others, at the Faculty of Design and Art at Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences. Going beyond its current computational framing, generativity in my argument will refer to a wide set of rule-based, apparatus-driven practices of image production, stretching from analogue photography to generative computer graphics and today's diffusion-based AI models.

By tracing a genealogy of generative practices in photography and other forms of image making, from mid-20th-century experiments in generative aesthetics to contemporary post-photographic media, I will argue for a reimagining of the image as generous. Building on the shared etymology between ›generativity‹ and ›generosity‹, this concept offers an alternative to the dominant tropes of image degradation, epistemic violence and planetary destruction - Hito Steyerl's ›poor image‹, ›mean image‹ and ›hot image‹ - by foregrounding the image's capacity to exceed function, build relations and give itself to the viewer. Yet this generosity is not unambiguously positive or simplistically naive: it recognises that images can also fracture bodies and institutions, overload biological and technical systems, and colonise our senses and sensibilities. The generous image does not therefore automatically soothe or reconcile; rather, it opens a space of encounter marked by being summoned by something other than oneself.

The generous image, then, is a speculative figure for thinking with and through images at a time when human perception is increasingly fused with algorithmic infrastructures. It invites a critical but hopeful response to our current visual condition: one that does not retreat into nostalgia for lost realities but that seeks new vocabularies and modes of attention appropriate to a media ecology in flux, while seeking conditions of life that go beyond mere survival. The talk will engage with a variety of visual works, including some from my own practice.

Till Bovermann HMTM MÜNCHEN
Sounding Infrastructures Soundperformance

Our engagement with creative processes, from creation to perception, is profoundly shaped by an often-invisible yet omnipresent layer of infrastructural elements.

The lecture-performance examines the underlying structures that support our creative practices; from the tools we use, the languages we communicate in, to the environments we inhabit.

We will explore how these infrastructures influence and contour our creative processes and experiences and propose to ask questions that might help us to better understand their role in our practices.

Rosemary Lee UNIVERSITY OF PORTO
From Apparatus of Capture to Generative Models

This talk looks at the shift from traditional perspectives on optical media – framing images as fixed visual representations of a view of the world captured in an instant – to recent methods involving machine learning, where what is visualized is the result of the statistical analysis of data. It will discuss historical instances and related theories in comparison with emerging methods in order to develop insights into how understandings of visual media may be impacted by the recent turn towards generative approaches to image-making.

Drawing from research into the formulation of images in terms of algorithmic constraints and procedures, this work considers the significance of moving from deterministic processes towards those that are probabilistic. Not only has this impacted relationships between images and the world they are taken to represent, but it also reshapes the way we think about their relationships with other images and the systems these are mediated through.

Rosa Menkman NETHERLANDS Collection of Babel

Abstract in Process

Olga Moskatova HFG OFFENBACH Synthetic Memories: AI, Photography and the Mediality of Absence

Today, the market for AI tools is saturated with applications designed to manage ›absence‹. This absence can take many forms: loss, death, heartbreak, separation, or simply longing for companionship. AI apps promise to bridge these emotional gaps. By using photos, chats, videos, and other types of personal data, users can synthesize the presence of absent individuals across various media, extending conversations or fabricating memories. These apps position AI as a form of surrogate media and even as ›Bachelor machines‹. Artistic projects intervene in this field, prompting reflection on cultural practices and the evolving role of AI. In my talk, I will focus on artistic works that explore the relationship between photography, AI, and memory – as a mediated and embodied way of engaging with an absent past.

In many theories of photography, the medium is considered a privileged mnemotechnology – a technology of memory (e.g., Santayana 1905; Kracauer 1929; Barthes 1989; Derrida 2001). Photography captures past events, making them available for remembrance and retrieval. Because it evokes something that is never fully present, photography has a hauntological structure and temporality; photos function as ghostly traces of the past. But what happens when AI-generated synthetic photos depict a past that never occurred? What if synthetic photography creates memories that were never experienced or lived?

This question is explored in art projects such as One Last Journey (Alexey Chernikov, 2023), Silent Hero (Alexey Yurenev, ongoing since 2019), and N.N. (Max Kreis, 2025). Drawing on Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology (1993), I will examine contemporary art projects that use AI to synthesize photographic memories. As I will argue, AI-generated images intensify the spectral quality of photography: they resemble memories, but refer to no actual past. By amplifying photography's ghostly mediality, these works question the traditional connections between memory and photography, but also between memory and affect.

Antonio Somaini UNIVERSITÉ SORBONNE NOUVELLE Titel Zoom

Abstract in Process

Yanai Toister TAMPERE UNIVERSITY FINLAND Generative Photography, Generative AI: Two Logics of Making

Generative photography, championed by Gottfried Jäger, is often praised for its elegant lattices and refusal of depiction. Yet its generativity lies less in appearance than in how photographs come into being. Applying what Frieder Nake dubbed »algorithmic thinking,« Jäger built compact cameras that fixed film, lens, shutter, masks and motion into rigid relations. Each device encoded a concise optical-mechanical algorithm executed repeatedly without further human touch. Parameters were set beforehand; the apparatus then exposed film quasi-autonomously. Material tolerances or ambient shifts injected minor noise, so every run produced a unique yet related frame. Generativity was thus protocol-driven, emerging from a strict rule set confronting contingent physical variation; authorship moved from pressing the shutter to designing that rule set.

Contemporary generative AI follows a different, statistical chain. Diffusion networks are trained on vast labelled corpora, compressing them into high-dimensional latent spaces of learned visual regularities. At synthesis, a text prompt steers a stochastic routine that gradually subtracts noise, guided by probabilities distilled during training. Results appear as statistically plausible recombinations of latent features rather than material variants of hardware constraints. Generativity is probabilistic, its possibility space bounded chiefly by training data and a random seed. Internal operations remain opaque even to developers, and no explicit, human-readable algorithm is performed.

Juxtaposing these regimes clarifies what »generative« now signals. Jäger's transparent, reproducible systems record the performance of tangible apparatus; the artist's labour lies in crafting a device and embracing its aleatory surprises. AI images, by contrast, register the state of an evolving model and the distributional biases of its source corpus. Examining Jäger's unpublished diagrams alongside computational graphs of diffusion models, this project maps the shift from protocol-driven to probabilistic generativity, recasting authorship, agency and materiality where camera mechanics meet predictive computation.

Hans-Christian von Herrmann TU BERLIN Zum Wandel generativer Ästhetik seit 1965

Max Benses kurzer Essay »Projekte generativer Ästhetik« erschien 1965 zusammen mit einer Reihe von Computergraphiken des Mathematikers und Programmierers Georg Nees in der Buchreihe »rot«. Aus der algorithmischen Verbindung von geometrischen Zeichenanweisungen mit arithmetischen Zufallszahlenfolgen waren damals Formen auf der Grenze von Ordnung und Unordnung entstanden. Sie konnten in Begriffen einer Informationsästhetik beschrieben werden, wie Bense und andere sie in jenen Jahren vorgelegt hatten. Ähnlich wie im Fall der frühen kybernetischen Maschinen von William Grey Walter und Norbert Wiener/Henry Singleton waren die zugrunde liegenden technischen Lösungen sehr einfach, wiesen aber eine überraschende Variationsbreite in ihrem ›Verhalten‹ auf. Sie können somit auch in das Gebiet der frühen KI-Experimente eingeordnet werden.

Der Vortrag wendet sich zunächst diesen historischen Zusammenhängen zu, um dann von dort aus auf die Wiederkehr des Generativen (in Bild und Text) in der Gegenwart zu schauen. Dabei soll nachverfolgt werden, wie das, was einstmals eine marginale ästhetische Praxis in wissenschaftlichen Rechenzentren war, zur Grundlage einer globalen Industrialisierung sprachlicher und kultureller Formen werden konnte. Zugleich wird die Frage aufgeworfen, was dieser technische Stand für die gestalterische Praxis bedeutet.

Francesca Franco UK / ITALY From Systems to Symmetries: Generative Imaging Practices in the Work of Ernest Edmonds and Manfred Mohr

This paper reflects on the historical development and contemporary evolution of generative imaging processes through the lens of two pioneers: Ernest Edmonds and Manfred Mohr. Informed by the conceptual legacy of Max Bense's generative aesthetics, both artists developed rule-based visual systems in the late 1960s and early 1970s that radically expanded the boundaries of visual language.

Drawing on material from my book »Generative Systems Art: The Work of Ernest Edmonds« (Routledge, 2017), I will discuss Edmonds' sustained exploration of interactivity, systems thinking, and networked co-presence in works such as Cities Tango 2025: Vancouver, London, Milan, a new commission for SIGGRAPH 2025. This real-time, site-connected piece creates an evolving image space through audience interaction across three cities, updating Edmonds' longstanding engagement with public participation and computational aesthetics.

In parallel, I will examine two algorithmic works by Manfred Mohr – Cubic Limit (1973-74) and Liquid Symmetry (2024) – both featured in the curated exhibition I am organizing for SIGGRAPH 2025.

These works frame Mohr's practice across five decades – from his pioneering use of custom algorithms to visualise the deconstruction of the cube, to his current explorations of 11-dimensional hypercubes through non-repetitive real-time animation. Both works exemplify the evolution of his approach to generative geometry and algorithmic abstraction.

Through this historical-contemporary dialogue, the paper aims to illuminate how early generative paradigms not only anticipated current AI-based image production, but continue to provide critical frameworks for understanding authorship, abstraction, and meaning in today's algorithmic visual culture.

Ruth Horak AUSTRIA Die Rolle der Autor*innen

Ausgehend von der Frage, ob und bis zu welchem Ausmaß generative Praktiken - wie sie von Künstler*innen verwendet werden - als generativ gelten können, möchte ich die damit verschränkte Rolle der Autor*innenschaft in den Fokus nehmen und sie anhand ausgewählter Beispiele analysieren. Welche Vorgehensweisen sind ›methodisch‹ genug, damit man von generierten Bildern sprechen kann? Wie ist das Verhältnis von Apparat und Künstler*in? Wie inhaltlich ›neutral‹ müssen generierte Bilder sein, oder anders gefragt: welchen Anteil darf die eigene Person bzw. die Biografie haben? Kurz: Wo und auf welche Weise wird die Autor*innenschaft in generativen Bildern sichtbar und - Max Benses »Erzeugungsästhetik« weiterdenkend - welche Rolle spielt die Materialität der Bilder, ihre Dimension und Inszenierung?

Denn wesentlicher Teil eines künstlerischen Werks ist das Experimentieren mit der Form, und entsprechend groß sind der zeitliche, finanzielle und handwerkliche Aufwand (auch wenn er ausgelagert wird). Es werden etwa Apparate (um)gebaut, um (originale) Werke zu schaffen, die von keiner öffentlich kursierenden Maschine hergestellt werden können. Die Bestimmung der Form gilt umso mehr für postfotografische Bilder, sobald sie nicht nur für einen Monitor konzipiert sind. Solange wir von realen Ausstellungsräumen ausgehen, in welchen Werke sinnlich erfahrbar sind, ist die Ausführung, die ein Bild zu einem physischen Objekt macht, um mit seinem Publikum in eine Beziehung zu treten, zentral.

Interessant wird es auch, wenn Autor*innen den eigenen Körper einbringen: Aspekte des Apparativen werden dann mit Aspekten des Menschlichen ›gemessen‹ und die jeweiligen Normen einander gegenübergestellt (z.B. Richard Kriesches »Satellitenfest« und Konrad Strutz' »Acheiropoietron«). Auch bei KI-generierten Bildern sind mir zutiefst biografisch motivierte Motive aufgefallen, die die generative Produktion ganz maßgeblich mit ihren Autor*innen verschränken. Und wenn Julian Palacz eine leere Photoshop-Seite als binären Code ausgibt, wird klar, dass wir die Sprache der Maschine nicht lesen können, sondern ein abstraktes Muster wahrnehmen. Sämtliche Ergebnisse von informationsverarbeitenden Systemen müssen immer in für uns verständliche Bilder, Zahlen, Diagramme u.ä. umgewandelt werden. Das Maß ist letztlich der Mensch.

Franziska Kunze MUNICH Brain Twister. Gottfried Jägers Fotomaterialarbeiten zwischen Medienphilosophie, Performance und Denkspiel.

Abstract in Process