Generic and Flat Ensembles – The Appearance of Discretisation in Everyday Visual Media

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Abstract

The blockbusters of the digital present are iOS and Windows 11, TikTok, Instagram, and Fortnite. They constitute an aisthesis of habit, the sensible articulation of medial appearance. This paper is concerned with the appearance of computation in everyday visual media. Digital visual media are computational media, as generated and supported through processes of discretisation and determination that are often seen as nonsensuous and closed off from sensuous experience. In light of a wide set of media theories that posit the precognitive, the extra-phenomenal, the discrete, and the invisual, humans are nevertheless still apprehending media consciously – we are still seeing and experiencing visual media. Emmanuel Alloa's medial phenomenology and Mark Hansen's media entangled phenomenology are explored here as approaches towards the differential mediation of computationally grounded visual media – the appearance of the discrete. This entails a focus on the appearance of the middle, appearance as the locus of both aesthetics and aisthesis, and the possibility of a media aesthetic approach to the shaky distinctions between digital and analogue, discrete and continuous. Art is often seen as offering a critical distance to the order of life and society – but the images encountered by the average screen media user today offer no critical distance, rather they are a generic presence of the real and a flattening of the critical and unique aspects of art. What these images or visual media are is not necessarily poor images, rather mundane mediations. Everyday mediation is here exemplified through analyses of the smartphone homescreen, loading screens in apps and websites, as well as the everyday use of text-2-image generation models. These sites of mediation share formal expressions such as the grid, rounded edges and a flatness of resemblance and reproductions that approaches abstraction. Through these examples and the concept of the generic, this paper explores the ways in which a technical medium of display makes its own appearance visible, as a generic aisthesis. The computational process of discretization structures the continuous appearance of the mediation, a medial expression of nonsensuous computation and algorithmic governance.

Keywords
Habitual media, media phenomenology, computation, mediation, aesthetics

Bio
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