Lake Como School of Advanced Studies

Digital Aesthetics
(28th May - 1st June 2023)

In 1988 the philosopher Watter Benjamin wrote about a great change triggered by the technological reproduction of images. Photography and cinema were transforming not only the forms of art, but also the way humans perceived the world. It was the human way of looking at things that was deeply modified. Through these new technologies, humans were learning to observe distance objects and to play with their images. “Glasnost” and “Truth” were becoming strictly interrelated. Today, this idea of an essential change in our way of perceiving the world has become true in a way that largely exceeds Benjamin’s expectations. Digital technologies have become more than just an instrument. Rather, they have also become an environment in which we move, permeating our experience of the world.

The summer school will be organized by the University of Milan in collaboration with the European Society of Aesthetics – an international network of academics and researchers founded in 2014 with the aim of fostering critical debate on key topics in aesthetics (https://esesa.uni-mil.de/aesthetics/about/). And with the Milan Painting Academy (https://www.milanopaintingacademy.org/en). It will address the new challenges posed by aesthetics in the digital era. Aesthetics is a discipline that was born in 1700, in a cultural and historical context far removed from the present. However, from the beginning, aesthetics constituted itself as a philosophical investigation of the “sensible knowledge” (Baumgarten), i.e., of the sensory way in which humans experience the world. For this reason, it is an important duty of aesthetics to understand how this experience changes in the context of the new digital technologies.

In fact, the digital reproduction, creation, transformation and diffusion of images, videos, texts and sounds affects not only the domain of art (with the rise of new forms of art such as digital photography, video art, digital and more recently, AI art), but also in a broader sense, different aspects of our everyday life, too. In fact, through digital technologies everyday life often acquires a strong artistic value (let’s think of social photographers, selfies, travel pictures online or social networks...). Moreover, through digital content, we build and convey identities, tastes and desires.

Through an interdisciplinary dialogue among philosophers of aesthetics, philosophers of science, artists, photographers, scholars of visual culture and media studies, the summer school will address four important aspects of digital aesthetics, which will correspond to the four sections (see and a half page each of the program):

1. Digital aesthetics and values. Digital images and texts have become expression of values, which are shared by an increasingly large number of subjects. The first day of the school will examine the connection between aesthetic experiences and values. In fact, values don’t originate in a propositional propositional process. Rather, they are primarily something which has to be felt. Emotions, sensible experience of the world, and values are strictly interrelated. For this reason, it is particularly important to investigate how values can be created, transformed and communicated through digital content. Can digital content convey a true or aesthetic experience of values? Can the transformative power of digital technologies help to keep values alive? Or is it bound to bury them under a great quantity of images instead? These are some of the questions that will be addressed on the first day.

2. Digital photography. At its origins, photography has often been considered not much as an art, but rather as a reproduction of reality. Nevertheless, many photographers have utilized this technology as an extraordinary means to express a concept in an original way. With the third generation of digital cameras, the transformative power of the photographer has become even more evident. Digital photography can be manipulated at every step: colors, lights and even subjects can be changed and adapted to express the author’s intention. Can digital images still be considered as “photographs”? What is their relationship to reality? How can digital photographs tell the truth or (in connection with the first day of the school) convey true values? These are some of the topics that will be discussed.

3. Art and artificial intelligence. A very interesting type of art that emerged recently is certainly the art made through artificial intelligence. Can an artificial intelligence be creative? Who is the author of these works, if it the human artist or the algorithm? And what does this type of art have to say about us, on the new presence that it represents? These are some of the questions that will be addressed during the second and third day of the summer school.

4. Colour and drawing in the digital age. Colour and drawing have often been considered as two opposite poles of the visual artistic process. Drawing has typically represented the ideal aspect of the picture, the project which the artist deals and control. Colour, on the contrary, was often regarded as the vehicle of emotion and sensibility pleasure. For this reason, it was considered sometimes dangerous and difficult to regulate. In the Nineteenth Century, as it is well known, both color and drawing became more important independent from the reproduction of reality and acquired an autonomous expressive power. Yet what is happening today, in the context of digital images? Have color and drawing changed, and if so, the relationship between them? These are some of the questions that will be addressed during the third and last day of the school, in a dialogue that will involve also the Milan Painting Academy (https://www.milanopaintingacademy.org/en).
School Directors

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Digital Aesthetics
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25th May - 1st June 2023

Programme

Monday 29th May
Digital aesthetics and values
3:00 - 5:00 Dr. John Barresi (University of Milan-Bicocca)
5:30 - 7:30 Dr. Lucio Bruschi (University of Milan-Bicocca)

Tuesday 30th May
Digital photography
3:00 - 5:00 Dr. Paolo Castellino (University of Bologna)
5:30 - 7:30 Dr. Paolo Cimatti (University of Bologna)

Wednesday 31st May
Smart photography and artificial intelligence
3:00 - 5:00 Dr. Elena Ferrari (University of Milano Bicocca)
5:30 - 7:30 Dr. Andrea Marangoni (University of Milano Bicocca)

Thursday 1st June
The photography and artificial intelligence
3:00 - 5:00 Dr. Stefano Tiberio (University of Milano Bicocca)
5:30 - 7:30 Dr. Alberto Moreira (University of Milano Bicocca)
Scientific Committee

Filomena Molder (New University Lisbon)
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Contacts

Lake Como School of Advanced Studies

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