

Call for book chapter proposals: Virtual Photography (2024)

Leiden University

Deadline: Jun 15, 2023

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Call for book chapter proposals: Virtual Photography.

Over the past two decades, the medium of photography has repeatedly skipped its hasty demise (Mitchell, 1995) by readily adapting to its rapid technological transformations (Manovich, 1996; Rosler, 2004; Leister, 2013). Seemingly disinterested in prefixes such as “post-” (Batchen, 2000; Fontcuberta, 2015), “after” (Ritchin, 2009), or “non-” (Laurelle, 2011), photography has outlived its indexical past and ushered its way into the dematerialized, cybernetic, and algorithmic era. While it has traditionally been seen as a means of documenting an external reality or expressing an internal feeling, photography is now capable of actualizing never-existed pasts and never-lived experiences. Thanks to the latest photographic technologies, we can now take/make photographs in computer games, interpolate them in virtual reality platforms, or synthesise them via artificial intelligence. While some see such epistemological shifts as the creation of a “new visual regime” (Rubenstein, Golding & Fisher, 2013), others view them as the promise of yet-to-come subjectivities (Bate, 2014). It is no longer a question whether photography is an “expanded field” (Baker, 2005) or still “expanding form” (Plummer, 2015), but to which direction it is transmuting post-haste.

Presently, the most ubiquitous and contentious threads of such photographic expansions are: Artificial Intelligence, Extended Reality, and In-game Photography. Owing to the photographic features of popular video games such as *Second Life*, *Skyrim*, *Fall Out 3*, and *The Last of Us*, the (non)diegetic (Galloway, 2006), remediative (Rizov, 2021), affective (Möring & De Mutiis, 2019), aesthetic (Tavinor, 2010), isometric (Poremba, 2007), and cybernetic (Moore, 2022) features of in-game photography have been discussed. Yet, due to the rapid transformation of video game industry itself, in-game photography is continually generating new aesthetics and modalities, such as: screencast and screenshot photography (Gerling, Möring, & De Mutiis, 2023).

While the ontological implication of in-game photography is still an ongoing debate, the socio-cultural and ethico-political ramifications of AI imagery are yet to be explored. Because of the rapid popularization of the AI platforms such as DALL-E 2, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion over the past couple of years, Boris Eldagsen’s AI generated image, called “the electrician”, has become the first AI image to win the Sony World Photography Award in 2023: the prize he refused to accept, thus putting into question the artistic legitimacy of AI photography as a medium. Obviously, not only AI photography necessitates a call for digital authorship and documentary veracity (DFA, 2023), but it also demands us to reformulate new ways of thinking about collectivity and

individuality. Slowly but steadily, photography is also becoming part and parcel of Extended Reality platforms, consisting of: Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Mixed Reality, and Cross Reality. While Extended Reality photography became mainstream via IKEA's 3D rendered images of furniture pieces in 2008, new features of ER photography are now being used in ecological psychology (Boffi et al. 2022), design and modelling (Hedman, 2020), and memory studies (Juan et al. 2022).

Whether we subsume such images under the category of the "technical image" (Flusser, 1985), the "operational image" (Parikka, 2023), the "poor image" (Steyerl, 2009), the "algorithmic image" (Rubenstein, 2013), or the "soft image" (Hoelzl & Marie, 2015), all such images retain and convey a photographic "function" (Zylinska, 2022). To cohesively account for the most recent photographic practices and technologies, our book proposes the term Virtual Photography as a binding theoretical and methodological framework. Although the term "virtual photography" has so far been loosely applied only to in-game photography, our book aims to consider any photographic practice that has a "virtual" core as Virtual Photography.

As some major thinkers of the 20th century have shown, the term "virtual" is a vexed concept for its definition is inherently contingent upon other concepts (Virilio, 1994; Baudrillard, 1995; Levy, 1998; Quéau, 1998). For example, while virtual can be seen as an "ideal" (Berthier, 2004) or non-materialized real (Shield, 2003), it can also refer to the "realm of affect" (O'Sullivan, 2001) or "potential" (Massumi, 1995). Yet, as Gilles Deleuze has postulated, the virtual is neither opposed to the real nor to the possible, but to the actual. As such, in Deleuze's words: "The possible is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a 'realisation'. By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is that of actualisation" (1994, 211).

This is, according to Grant Tavinor, the first misstep in understanding the virtual: that we lay too much emphasis on the distinction between the virtual and the real, whereas something virtual can be fully real (2022). Following this thought, a virtual *x* is almost or nearly an *x*, but not actually so: "virtual retains the efficiency or function of a real *x*, while manifesting these in an unfamiliar or non-customary form" (25). Virtual Photography, too, follows a similar logic: it refers to a photography that retains the efficiency or function of real (camera-based) photography while manifesting these in an unfamiliar or non-customary form. In other words, we would like to think of virtual photographs as real photographs undergoing actualization.

Thus, by pivoting around the concept of "virtual" and via the medium of photography, our book project inquires:

What are the ontological and epistemological modalities of virtual photography in contemporary cultures and how can they enable us to conceive memory, identity, and subjectivity anew?

To this end, we welcome disciplinary and interdisciplinary abstracts that reflect on the topic of Virtual Photography via the most recent photographic practices and technologies, including but not limited to: Artificial Intelligence, Extended Reality, and In-game photography.

The proposed topics may include, but are not limited to:

Photography &
- Virtuality

- Actuality
- Artificial Intelligence
- AI creative freedom & copyright
- Deep learning
- Synthetic image
- Poor image
- Operational image
- Soft image
- Algorithmic image
- In-game photography
- Screenshot, Screencast, Screen image
- Virtual reality technologies
- Augmented reality
- Mixed & Cross reality
- Photogrammetry
- CGI
- Remediation
- Expanded field & expanding form
- 3D imaging
- Phasmagraphy
- Cybernetics
- Virtual memory & virtual time
- Phenomenology of the virtual

Abstracts:

We welcome English abstracts of 200-250 words that engage with, and reflect on, the theme of Virtual Photography through the most recent photographic practices and technologies, including but not limited to: Artificial Intelligence, Extended Reality, and In-game photography.

Please send your abstract & a short biography to the following Email addresses no later than June 15th, 2023:

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A selected number of abstracts will be invited to submit a full chapter of 3,000 to 6,000 words.

Schedules & Deadlines:

Submitting the abstract: June 15th, 2023

Communication of acceptance/rejection: June 30th, 2023

Submitting the full chapter: December 1st, 2023

Provisional date for publishing the book: Mid-2024

"Virtual Photography" will be published full open access at an academic publisher in 2024.

Co-editors:

-Dr. Ali Shobeiri, Assistant Professor of Photography and Visual Culture, Leiden University

-Dr. Helen Westgeest, Associate Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History and Theories

of Photography, Leiden University

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