ArtHist.net

React & Respond. Image Cultures under Platform Capitalism (Zurich, 2–4 Oct 24)

Zurich, Oct 2–04, 2025

Roland Meyer

Contemporary networked image cultures cannot be understood outside of platform capitalism. Today, the production, distribution and reception of visual media is largely managed and controlled by the algorithmic infrastructures, corporate policies and business models of digital platforms. At the heart of platform architectures is the quantification, evaluation and monetization of reactions – whatever we encounter online is designed to trigger our reactions, and our reaction patterns in turn drive the visual economies of platform capitalism. With algorithmically curated feeds and personalized content, what we get to see online and how we react to it is inextricably linked in ways we can often only speculate about.

Bringing together scholars and artists from a range of fields and backgrounds, the international conference «React & Respond» aims to map and analyze these contemporary economies of networked image cultures and their aesthetic, ideological and political implications.
The conference is organized by the DIZH Bridge Professorship Digital Cultures and Arts at the University of Zurich and the Zurich University of the Arts in cooperation with Fotomuseum Winterthur, Kino Xenix and Zentrum Künste und Kulturtheorie (ZKK).

Following an opening night with a screening at Kino Xenix on Thursday, October 2nd, the conference will continue on Friday, October 3rd, at Cabaret Voltaire and conclude on Saturday, October 4th, at the Fotomuseum Winterthur.

The conference is open to all interested guests, but places are limited. We therefore kindly ask you to register at https://luma.com/9wd029dm

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

October 2, 2025 – Opening Evening
Kino Xenix Bar, Kanzleistrasse 52, 8004 Zürich

18:30 - 20:15 Apéro & Arrival

20:15 - 21:45 Platform Realities – Screening Night (Their Eyes / xena's body) with Nicolas Gourault, Occitane Lacurie
Two short films show how digital platforms govern everyday life – from the subtle surveillance of one's own body to precarious data work in the Global South. Xena's Body (2024) by Occitane Lacurie uses the example of period tracking apps to show how intimate interaction with the continuous stream of images and data on smartphones exposes the female* body to a largely invisi-

ble form of surveillance. Their Eyes (2025) by Nicolas Gourault shows the often invisible, precarious work of data workers in the Global South, who are tasked with making the visible world readable for AI pattern recognition by classifying and annotating vast amounts of digital images. In the accompanying discussion, the filmmakers will consider how film can be used to convey realities whose experience is increasingly mediated, filtered, and controlled by digital interfaces and algorithmic pattern recognition.

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October 3, 2025 – Day 1
Cabaret Voltaire, Spiegelgasse 1, 8001 Zürich

09:30 - 10:00 Coffee & Arrival

10:00 - 10:30 Introduction to the Conference

10:30 - 12:30 Platform Aesthetics and Meme Politics
with Annekathrin Kohout, Simon Strick, Valentina Tanni
Moderation: Kathrin Trattner
Networked image production is increasingly defined by escalating chains of reaction in which images are made to react to other images, comment on each other, and express affects and attitudes towards what we see online. With the proliferation of AI-generated media, optimised to trigger user interactions and reactions, aesthetic preferences and ideological expectations of potential consumers are reinforced and automated. By considering how memes, emojis, reaction GIFs and video responses turn reactions into a mode of content production, the panel navigates the politics of content under platform capitalism.

12:30 - 14:00 Lunch Break

14:00 - 16:00 Patterns of Automation
with Ranjodh Singh Dhaliwal, Felix Stalder, Tiziana Terranova
Moderation: Roland Meyer
By which means do platform architectures foster and accelerate the increasing automation of online content production? The panel zooms out to the infrastructural and economic conditions which determine our contemporary networked images cultures. Quantifiable reactions are not only constantly tracked, aggregated and monetized by online platforms, but also predicted, premediated and transformed into exploitable behavioral data on a massive scale. How are users and consumers integrated into the feedback loops of value creation, and what forms of social production provide the basis for today's reaction economies?

16:00 - 16:30 Coffee Break

16:30 - 18:30 Training Rounds & Testing Grounds
with Adio Dinika, Ariana Dongus, Phil Jones
Moderation: Lars Pinkwart
In the context of generative AI, there is always a «human in the loop» – but one that is often invisibilized and exploited. The panel considers the global conditions of labour that underly platform capitalism, the practices and techniques of reacting to images performed by data workers, and

the challenging conditions of this kind of work, which is often devalued as mere «clickwork». How can we respond to these conditions, and how can data workers reclaim discursive power in regards to the data practices of platforms?

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October 4, 2025 – Day 2
Fotomuseum Winterthur, Grüzenstrasse 44-45, 8400 Winterthur

09:40- 10:00 Coffee & Arrival

10:00 - 12:30 Aesthetic Responses
with Sara Bezovšek, Marie-France Rafael, Noura Tafeche
Moderation: Marco De Mutiis

What is the potential of artistic interventions in response to the conditions of platform capitalism? Engaging with the works of Noura Tafeche and Sara Bezovšek in the exhibition «The Lure of the Image», the panel approaches the way arts-based methodologies critically mobilise and re-appropriate the image worlds and aesthetics of platform capitalism, playing off and subverting the mechanisms of our contemporary reaction economies.

12:30 - 14:00 Lunch Break

14:00 - 15:00 Guided Tour «The Lure of the Image» with Marco De Mutiis

Reference:

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