

UE-N (AR-416)

CONSTRUCTING THE VIEW

Course: UE-N (AR-416): Constructing the View
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Introduction

Blurring Boundaries

Nowadays digital processing techniques have enabled the creation of images that are visually indistinguishable from photographs. The relationship between appearance and reality, truth and arrangement has become increasingly blurred. Our perceived reality is no longer solely understood by the reception of our immediate physical environment: It is steadily shaped and enhanced by digital surfaces (images) and virtual spaces whose configuration knows no physical limit. The virtual world of computers is no longer a parallel reality. It has increasingly become an integral part of the real environment in which we live.

Architecture and Image

Architecture and image have forever shared an intimate connection. A phase of imagination has always preceded the production of architecture, be it as drawings, diagrams, plans or perspectives, abstract or not. Architecture has always been thought and communicated through the means of images.

However, the rapid development of computer and information technologies have fundamentally changed the relationship between image and architecture and its subsequent perception. In addition to the conventional types of mostly abstract images used in design and planning phases – sketches, plans, elevations or axonometric drawings – a new type of image is now being used: a digitally created image that appears to be a photograph. In the context of architecture, this type of image has always been associated with the documentation of built architecture. Now, photorealistic images are increasingly used to make something appear real that has yet to be built. This leads to confusion and challenges the claim to reality of images that, at a glance, appear to be photographs.

Image Techniques in Transitions

Current digital processing techniques have enabled the creation of images that are visually indistinguishable from photographs. The rapid advancement of digital information technologies continually expands the range of these digital image techniques. Simultaneously, the usability and accessibility of these programs are increasingly simplified.

Three decades ago, with the advent of image editing software (e.g. Adobe Photoshop), a keen sense and skill were required to seamlessly blend various image fragments deceptively into the picture surface. Similarly, working with powerful 3D programs demanded certain prerequisites: modeling a fictional 3D scene and rendering it as a photorealistic image required, and still requires specific knowledge and expertise in 3D programs.

However, with the emergence of AI image generators in recent years, the situation has fundamentally changed. A significant leap forward has occurred in the field of digital image generation. Now, simply through a textual image description (prompt), photorealistic images can be generated at the push of a button. These AI image generators, accessible on user-friendly websites, allow for the transformation of practically any imagined and textually described situation into a convincing photorealistic image. The process happens almost instantaneously and requires no programming or software knowledge from the user. From now on, anyone can skillfully produce fictional content deceptively realistic and believable in images. It is equally within this context that the problem of deepfakes can be understood.

Quest for Emancipation

Whether we like it or not, digital imaging techniques are unstoppably defining the 21st century, therefore engaging with these techniques is indispensable. However, following closer inspection of the aesthetics and visual languages of these digitally created or generated images, a sense of disillusionment and disappointment often arises. The images repeat themselves, usually following redundant and already known modes of expression, such as the photorealistic visual language, without attempting to exploit the new freedoms, possibilities and potentials of the new medium. Perhaps this is the sign that digital imaging technology is still in its infancy, comparable to the situation when the invention of photography in the 19th century, initially, led to photographs that predominantly reproduced image concepts borrowed from classical painting. In hindsight, we clearly understand the emancipatory path that photography has taken in relation to painting over the last two centuries, and we wish that the same will happen for digital imaging technology.

Imaginative Realms - Redefining Reality

Digital imaging techniques are powerful. The issue of deepfakes has already showed us what these techniques are capable of, especially when used maliciously. But how can we use these modern imaging techniques more meaningfully and less as instruments of deception and spectacle? How can we anchor them more positively and constructively within our present and future?

Targeting or aiming to create more abstract and evocative images through digital imaging techniques can be a helpful approach. Conceptualizing images that increasingly resonate with imagination in content and expression can open up greater interpretative and ambiguous spaces for the viewer. This also means looking for scenarios, formulating utopias, and thus, creating hypothetical models for our transforming society. The constructed and synthetic image would actually become a predestined means for this purpose as it operates under entirely different laws than the depiction of our physical reality. Contents and compositional constructs can be created that require little or nothing to do with reality - anything is possible. Let's indeed embrace this freedom.

The primary focus here is particularly put on developing and exploring various digital imaging approaches and aesthetics that not only aim for the most exact implementation of photographic representation but can be fragmented, distorted, and exaggerated, and in doing so, capable of redefining the question of differentiating between image and reality.

Teaching Approach

Exploring Visual Strategies and Experimental Techniques

At the core of the teaching methodology is an exploration of the delicate relationship between objects and their pictorial representations, utilizing information technology and computer-based image processing techniques. This investigation is grounded in the study of visual phenomena within their socio-cultural and technological contexts. The teaching philosophy is built on three foundational pillars: the first encourages subjective perception, fostering individual interpretation and sensitivity; the second focuses on imparting creative strategies and experimental composition techniques; and the third promotes digital expressiveness by expanding the students' vocabulary of computer-aided visual expression.

In addition to developing skills in digital image processing and visual strategy, the curriculum emphasizes the importance of visual approaches and aesthetics that transcend mere photographic precision. These approaches can range from abstract and model-like to exaggerated, offering a fresh perspective on the relationship between reality and image. Of particular importance is the focus on experimental techniques in design and composition, where students learn to combine and rearrange seemingly incompatible elements. This results in visual constructs where everyday objects are intertwined with fragments of architecture, urban environments, and landscapes, creating new contexts both visually and conceptually. These constructs are often far removed from reality, operating as utopian visions rather than real-world representations.