

## QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE CHANGING ONTOLOGY OF THE IMAGE

Traditionally we think of images as relatively individualized or delimited phenomena that, in one way or the other, appear to the human mind and apparatus of perception. Currently, however, we are witnessing an intensification of what we might call the *networkedness* of the image along with a proliferation of machine imagery that operates independently of human perception and cognition. These “operative images” are, in Harun Farocki’s oft-cited formulation, “images without a social goal, not for edification, not for reflection”—they “do not represent an object, but rather are part of an operation.” In fact, one might claim that one of the characteristics of the contemporary image-space is its increasing integration of operational images and machine vision. At the same time, more and more images seem to gain meaning and significance through their relationships with other images, and from being networked, as much as through their reference to our lifeworld, even if at some point they were indexically derived. Indeed, the global circulation of images and the workings of new media realities increasingly seem to mediate social relations and the social imaginary (accelerated during the pandemic, where much social interaction has been referred to the interfaces of different real-time communication technologies), to the point that the social field is now largely constituted by the production and distribution of images.

To which extent do the advent of operative images and machine vision and the increasing number of images that become networked change the ontology of the image? To which extent do these developments involve what Walter Benjamin would call “profound changes in apperception”? How do they affect our imaginative potential? How do we—as artists, theorists, critics, analysts, etc.—conceive of these changes in the ontology of the image? How are contemporary images to be analyzed? Can they still be grasped within the established fields of visual culture, image science, media archaeology, etc.? Or do they require other analytical and theoretical approaches—approaches, perhaps, that challenge an anthropomorphic register? In which ways does the contemporary networked image shape and affect people, politics and social systems?

How do we make images and how do we imagine under these conditions? What are the image-political implications? How do we practice image-critique and visual activism? How does the globally networked image-space affect the work of art—as noun as well as verb? In which ways may the contemporary image-space be seen to change the very conditions of the work of art?

—Jacob Lund