Introduction

We witness an era with more screens than ever before, and within each screen, a multitude of visual varieties. Our experiences of screen images stretch from the large format screens of 3D cinema to the computer's multiple windows we can click through and resize. We perceive screen images to be all-encompassing when we immerse ourselves in them, or to be fleeting when we quickly scroll through them. More than ever before, we have also become screen image producers: we record videos with our mobile phones, we take selfies and post them online, we participate in TikTok Challenges or create Stories on Instagram, we process film fragments into GIFs or share our game experiences as Let's Play videos. On the one hand, digital screen images are ephemeral, since they are nothing but an accumulation of data deprived of any material basis. On the other hand, they are persistent, since, in their ubiquity, they surround us, affect our perception, and shape our modes of viewing.

This book is dedicated to the diverse image forms and aesthetics driven by digital screen culture. In particular, it explores the relationships between two predominant phenomena of screen technology and practice. These are large image forms, such as those produced by CGI blockbuster films and 3D cinema (Part I: *Big Screens*), and small mobile image forms, such as those found in the smartphone film, selfie photography, or the media practices of Instagram (Part II: *Small Forms*). I consider the media-specific potential of both phenomena as well as their intersections and entanglements as sites of productive exchange. Looking at a variety of screen media in terms of their inherent capabilities of generating visual aesthetics and shaping media practices, I demonstrate that the image forms that emerge from large and small, static and mobile screen arrangements come into being as a complex interplay of technological, sociological, and epistemological factors.

Part I involves an inquiry into the aesthetic character of new image spaces created by digital cinema, specifically in relation to spectacle and sensation,

and to television series in the age of streaming, particularly in their bridging function between large and small forms of digital visual culture. The first chapter ("Fantastic Views: Superheroes, Visual Perception und Digital Perspective") explores the conceptual and stylistic fluidity of the cinematic image in an era marked by the continual pursuit – technologically as well as sociologically—of hyperperception. Positing the figure of the superhero as an aesthetic construction rooted in the evolution of both analog and digital technologies, I demonstrate how these tech-centric superheroes allow us to rethink established notions of cinematic space and viewing positions. Following and fostering aesthetic transformations, the superhero's transmedia existence points to the performative process of generating perception and perspective and to media's contribution to this very process. By analyzing how superheroes look at and move through the complex properties of urban and cyber space, I establish a connection between a contemporary stylistic trend towards visual excess and a heightened social interest in unlimited and unbound supervision.

Chapter 2 ("Attraction, Simulation, Speculation: *The Day After Tomorrow*") considers the digital imaging techniques of CGI spectacle cinema as a form of media reflection. In doing so, I assume that in the age of post-cinema, Hollywood realigns its own image requirements and makes this process visible and recognizable through filmic operations. Using the example of the climate disaster film *The Day After Tomorrow*, I show how the narrative of climate change intertwines with the process of film-aesthetic change, demonstrating that Hollywood can not only associatively invoke the structural transformation to which it itself is subjected, but also reflexively elaborate it—especially when it comes to its own visual digital forms and formations. Central to this is a discussion of the notions of attraction, simulation, and speculation, and how they can be made productive as a post-cinematic field of aesthetic negotiation.

Chapter 3 ("Incorporations: On the Mediality of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Cinematically Built Bodies") provides a reading of the structural and aesthetic excessiveness of cinematic embodiment. Considering Schwarzenegger's body as a medium, I argue that his incorporations enable viewers to reflect on complex concepts such as movement, gender, and technology. By offering mutable visual strategies of display, Schwarzenegger's excessive corporeality becomes a multi-mediated body that produces varying applications of its representational forms. Focusing on the binaries of mobility and immobility, masculinity and femininity, and biology and technology, I demonstrate that Schwarzeneg-

ger's filmic bodies constantly cross the boundaries between these seemingly strict binaries, thus enabling audiences to realize the arbitrariness of all attempts to distinguish clearly between them.

In chapter 4 ("Dimension and Duration: On the Aesthetic Relationship of Space and Time in 3D Cinema"), I outline how 3D cinema creates its own aesthetic form of spatiotemporality. Arguing that the staging of expanded space, which has characterized stereoscopic film since its inception, is connected to a specific understanding of temporal continuity, I explore what aesthetic and narrative possibilities this opens up for 3D cinema. I first analyze the early phase of stereoscopic cinema and the first approaches to a distinct 3D film grammar, then turn to classical cinema and the aesthetic capabilities of three-dimension spatial depth gradation, and finally consider contemporary digital 3D film as an aesthetic reflection of altered perceptive dispositions within digital media culture.

Chapter 5 ("The (Imaginary) Man of (Hollywood) Cinema: An Encounter with Edgar Morin") offers a reading of Edgar Morin's anthropology of cinema and proposes to make his positions fruitful as an approach to investigate phenomena of film-aesthetic fluidity. With Morin, the category of the fluid can be understood as a central media specificity of film, making possible new spatiotemporal movements and modes of perception. I explain how Morin brings together the fluidity of the image and the involvement of cinematic man into this fluid space-time as an integrative reciprocal relationship, and then ask about the connectivity of Morin's cinematic thinking beyond the time of its creation. Here, I propose to consider the visual worlds of digital cinema as a new vanishing point for film-aesthetic fluidity. Digital images explicitly address seeing as a fluid process that can decisively help to understand their aesthetic quality and imaginative potential as a permanent state of transition.

The aesthetics of digital 3D cinema have often been discussed in relation to the special effects of blockbuster films. In chapter 6 ("Back to the Beginning. Wim Wenders' *Pina* and the Spatial Aesthetics of 3D Cinema"), I consider a different approach, namely the question of how 3D cinema can be made aesthetically productive for documentary films. Concentrating on Wim Wenders' *Pina*, I investigate how the intertwining of spatial depth and temporal continuity evokes a sense of reality that extends beyond the representational capability of the flat image. For Wenders, the question of how image space and movement can be brought together to form new modes of perceptual experiences is not a question of a cohesive event but of open play. This becomes especially clear in such moments when the actors are not performing

in specifically designed stage scenarios but act in unstaged, preexisting locations. As Wenders shows, digital 3D films don't have to be direct successors to spectacle cinema. Instead, his approach is directed to the space of our everyday experience that we need to rediscover.

The last two chapters of the first part consider the narrative and aesthetic form of contemporary television series, allowing us to reflect on a newly emerging television style in a period of media convergence. Innovations in production techniques and transformations in digital distribution have enabled TV series to create visual experiences similar to ones that were once only seen in Hollywood movies. As more and more homes install widescreen HD televisions complete with surround sound systems, television is now becoming a medium that seems to rival film for entertainment. In terms of their aesthetic character, television series have the potential to vary and transform visual motifs and image structures by means of serial processes, and, moreover, to unfold this potential as perpetually incomplete, as something that can always be continued. They are therefore not only carriers or mediators, but also drivers of image-aesthetic transformation processes in digital media culture.

Chapter 7 ("Scars and Screens: *Nip/Tuck*") discusses principles of self-optimization in relation to both the human body and serial television. Concentrating on the example of *Nip/Tuck*, I explore how this series presents plastic surgery as an effective means of self-optimization, making it appear as a catalyst for bodily perfection. Significantly, however, the program of self-regulation does not focus on a conclusion but demands perpetual continuation. It is therefore itself already serial: every intervention implies a follow-up intervention, every step in the direction of perfection demands another one. In *Nip/Tuck*, both the body and the image of the body are subjected to a series of optimization procedures, enabling television to reflect on the requirements and foundations of regulating self-production. It is precisely here where the media reflexive potential of the series *Nip/Tuck* is made manifest: it not only depicts the process of perfection but also considers its claims and contradictions as media procedures.

In chapter 8 ("Prescripts and Postscripts: *Mr. Robot*'s Digital Writing Operations"), I consider practices of writing under digital conditions and explore which cultural-technical and media-aesthetic transformations are connected to these practices. Using the series *Mr. Robot*'s preoccupation with hacking culture as thematic through-lines to my reading, I argue that the hacker's disregard for technical standards, regulations, and rules sheds light on a cre-

ative potential that exchanges the abstract world of fictional writing for the concrete situation of auto-operative writing practices. In this sense, the seriality that underlies *Mr. Robot* is a specifically digital seriality: it is based on connectivity and variability, on the constant transformability of shifting relations. This applies to both the writing and reading processes prominently addressed in the series and to the transmedial expansion of televisual narration as a whole.

Following part I (*Big Screens*) with its focus on large image constructions, part II (*Small Forms*) concerns itself with new media cultural practices that generate aesthetic forms and formats of condensation, fragmentation, and brevity. We encounter such phenomena of the small in the context of media-driven popular culture, especially with regard to mobile screens, but also where the marginal and the rudimentary are aesthetically re-valorized. Small formats generate new forms of representability and narrativity through their inherent ability to condense and accelerate medial processes of production and consumption. Time and again, they transcend and transgress conventional forms of visual culture, bringing information and narration, imagery and textuality, ephemerality and preservability into a productive relational structure.

Chapter 9 ("Tipp-Ex: Small Corrections") examines the cultural technique of deletion as well as its technological presumptions and consequences in the digital age. Taking an interactive viral video campaign for Tipp-Ex as an example, I turn to forms and procedures of erasing and overwriting in order to divert the gaze from the completeness of a text and instead look at the structural and material conditions of its production. This involves a shift in perspective from the large to the small and, connected to this, the question of the epistemological function of small corrections as they are induced by erasure media such as Tipp-Ex.

Chapter 10 ("Micro Movies: On the Smartphone Film as Media Miniature") is similarly interested in small forms and formats, turning my considerations of media aesthetic transformations resulting from the small in the direction of filmic forms. Central to my analysis are the practices of mobile filmmaking which generate a new understanding and conception of mobile images. The mobile media practices of the smartphone film are characterized by the fact that they no longer rely on stable or exclusive locations—places of production, editing, and distribution. Rather, their unique quality consists of a specific type of mobility—a mobility of devices, users, processes, and transmissions. Smartphone films are subject to and adapted to the conditions of

mobile screens and mobile viewers. They operate with a short attention span and limited means of production, thereby enabling a newly emerging aesthetic of volatile visuality.

Chapter 11 ("Strike a Pose: Robot Selfies") investigates robotic photographic self-portraiture as a way of android self-monitoring. Dealing with Google's museum robot *Gigapan*, NASA's Mars rover *Curiosity*, Canadian hitchhiking robot *Hitchbot* and the automated, purely techno/self-centered images they produce, I reflect on the embeddedness of the selfie into contexts of self-knowledge within a machine age. The peculiarity of robot selfies, I argue, lies in their aptitude to mediate between self-reflection and self-transformation. Robot selfies exist both as effects and alternative modes of selfie culture, exemplifying a medial reflection that points to the consequences of a transformation of both visual technology and knowledge formation. This process involves not only questions of machinic sensibilities but also, and even more so, an enhanced understanding of the form and function of the selfie as an epistemic technique.

In chapter 12 ("Instagramming: Instagram's Media Practices"), I explore how Instagram's digital networked media practices stand in marked contrast to the practices of analog instant photography. Given the profound transformations that Instagram produces as a mobile image network, I argue for a shift in perspective that considers the modifiability and transformability of the image and its additional operations in the context of digital platforms. Crucial to this is the fact that the use of Instagram is no longer oriented toward an individual, inalterable image but is bound up in the practices and potentials of mobile media engagement. As a social network, Instagram organizes how images are produced, distributed, and received. This includes the fact that in the saving and sharing of an image, the app applies a set of protocols that aim to conform to predefined settings, thereby organizing both aesthetic alignments and medial forms of self-depiction via photographic images. As performative processes of image-making, Instagram's media practices demonstrate what it means to communicate with and through images in a period characterized by mobile screen culture.

Chapter 13 ("Right here, right now. Evolution, Animation, and Music Video) discusses two media theoretical concepts, evolution and animation, and connects them to digital media developments in music videos. Via the example of the music video for Fatboy Slim's "Right here, right now" (Hammer & Tongs, 1999), I demonstrate how the video presents an aesthetic form of expression that not only visualizes a satire of creation history but

also implies a commentary on its own media evolution by means of reflecting on its digital imagery. Relying on the animation technique of morphing, this music video presents a flow of images constantly transforming and modifying themselves. This is where the self-reflexive potential of the digital image proves to be a salient illustration of the model of media evolution. Instead of linear chronology, evolution represents constant change; instead of a rapid break, it points to a gradual development, interdependencies, and relational structures. This enables us to rethink not only key concepts of media history and theory but also to redetect them in the microstructures of music videos.

Chapter 14 ("Types and Bytes: Ludic Seriality and Digital Typography") focuses on the media development of writing techniques and its historically variable practices and procedures. *Type:Rider* (2013), a videogame that both implements the theme of writing's transformation and, by means of its own specific medial properties, drives its progression, serves as an example. As an adventure and puzzle game, *Type:Rider* discovers the history of typography to be a complex configuration. By moving along the historical lines of letters and lettering, the game not only depicts their inherent techniques and aesthetics, but also renders them as evolutionary processes of mediated communication and information. Exploring the ways in which *Type:Rider* plays with mobile typography, I demonstrate that this game elaborates the potential of typing as a cultural technique in a specific manner. As a media practice characterized by ludic seriality, playing with types not only relies on the logics of digital manipulation and flexibility, but also makes them formally visible and recognizable.

In chapter 15 ("Touch/Don't Toch: Visuality, Tactility, and Music Video"), I examine music videos as an aesthetic zone where visuality and tactility encounter one another. With "Black or White" and "Africa Shox" I consider two music videos that not only use digital technology in innovative ways, but also produce remarkable representations of the body, bringing to the fore the visible and touchable surfaces of these bodies, i.e. the skin and the sensory modalities of visuality and tactility associated with it. Presuming that sensory perception adapts itself to new media, forming itself according to their requirements, I bring together the visual and the tactile as a newly emerging media assemblage that becomes observable in experimental media forms like music videos.

The last chapter ("Going in Circles. Rotation and Immersion in Björk's *Wanderlust*") investigates pictorial principles that are no longer aligned with

the rectangular frame, but transcend it and expand it into a circular form. Taking the stereoscopic 3D production of Björk's "Wanderlust" as an example, I consider viewing configurations that give up the logics of vertical and horizontal image structures and replace them with curved lines. Björk's experiments with circular image forms, I argue, point to an expanded media dispositif whose digital image worlds find their vanishing point in an innovative focus on roundness. In the digital age, the rectangular format seems to be increasingly retreating. The more electronic displays and image media penetrate all areas of everyday life, the more elastic the images surrounding us become. Virtuality and immersion, augmented and mixed reality are today displacing the concept of the image as a clearly closed, hermetically framed picture surface. In this sense, the future belongs to unbounded displays, rendering the image ever more flexible and malleable.