Look at a photograph of your choice. What is the medium you are inspecting? What is proper to it? A longstanding, honourable tradition has viewed the direct connection between the shot and the instant, the experience in the present and its recording for any future time as its distinctive trait. Recent research has questioned this link. The advent of advanced digital techniques presents us with “photographs of the future”, crafted by algorithms, and photogrammetric images that can be explored from various perspectives. Even predating the digital revolution, and irrespective of it, an extensive scientific domain contributes to unveiling an alternative perspective on the photographic. From the moment cameras pointed skyward, the awareness of the insurmountable gulf between the mechanical eye and the celestial expanse challenged the notion that photography inherently embodies the simultaneous presence of the observer and the observed. Astrophotography perennially navigates the delicate boundary between recording and visualization, as well as between the human and the posthuman. It challenges the operator to decipher visual traces, which extend far beyond conventional notions of representing celestial bodies and yet provide indispensable clues to unravelling their astrophysical identities. The “cultivation”, measurement, and digitisation of these photo-signals from elsewhere historically became a female task. Women astronomers, often referred to as “computers”, were a flesh-and-blood version of the calculating machines that were to become established in the following decades – they constitute an archaeology incarnate of the digital. Rediscovering their role, re-locating their figures somewhere between that of the art curator and the engineer, also means to explore a female archaeology of the postphotographic image. This conference, characterized by its interdisciplinary approach, unites media archaeologists, image theorists, historians and philosophers of science, women’s studies scholars, and artists delving into the nexus of astrophotography and visual culture.

Curated by
Barbara Grespi and Luca Guzzardi
(Department of Philosophy “Piero Martinetti”)

Scientific committee
Christa Blümlinger, Gabriele D’Autilia, Rossella Catanese, Marilisa D’Amico, Bernard Geoghegan, Giulia Giannini, Jussi Parikka, Andrea Pinotti, Antonio Somaini, Matteo Vagelli

Organising committee
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NECS MAA
Media Archaeology and the Arts

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Image Credits: Frame from The Edge of All We Know (2020), a film by Peter Galison. Detail. Courtesy of the author.
11 December

14:30 - 15:00 Welcome Coffee / Registration

15:00 - 15:15 Welcome address
Marilisa D’Amico | Vice-Rector for Legality, Transparency, and Equality of Rights, University of Milan
Marcello D’Agostino | Director of the Department of Philosophy “Piero Martinetti”, University of Milan
Andrea Pinotti | Director of the Research Centre EXT (Extended Realities), University of Milan

15:15 - 15:30 A Conference Guide
Barbara Grespi, Luca Guzzardi

15:30 - 17:00 Panel 1 Archiving the stars
Guy Consolmagno | Director of the Vatican Observatory
Brooke Belisle | Stony Brook University
Chair: Giancarlo Grossi | Catholic University of Milan

17:15 - 19:30 Screenings with the Author
Room 211, via Festa del Perdono, University of Milan
Introduced by Luca Guzzardi | University of Milan

13 December

9:30 - 10:45 Keynote Speech
A. Sissel Aurora Hoel | Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Operational Objectivity: From Human Computers to Digital Twins
Chair: Barbara Grespi | University of Milan

10:45 - 11:15 Coffee Break

11:15 - 12:45 Panel 4
Black Holes and Their Revelations
Om Salafia | Brera Astronomical Observatory, INAF
The Event Horizon Telescope images of the M87 and Sagittarius A* black holes
Emilie K. Sunde | University of Melbourne
From Outer Space to Latent Space
Francesco Giarrusso | Catholic University of Milan
Deciphering the Invisible: Chirp and Algorithmic Photography of Black Hole M87
Chair: Roberto Lalli | Polytechnic University of Turin

17:30 - 19:00 Book Presentations
The following presentations will be held in Italian
Maria Pia Abbracchio, Marilisa D’Amico, Donne nella scienza. La lunga strada verso la parità, Franco Angeli, Milano 2023
 Introduced by Carlotta Cossutta | University of Milan
Anna Caterina Dalmasso, Barbara Grespi (eds.), Mediarcheologia. I testi fondamentali, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2023
Curators and Translators in dialogue with Enrico Campo, Luca Guzzardi, and the publisher

Full Program