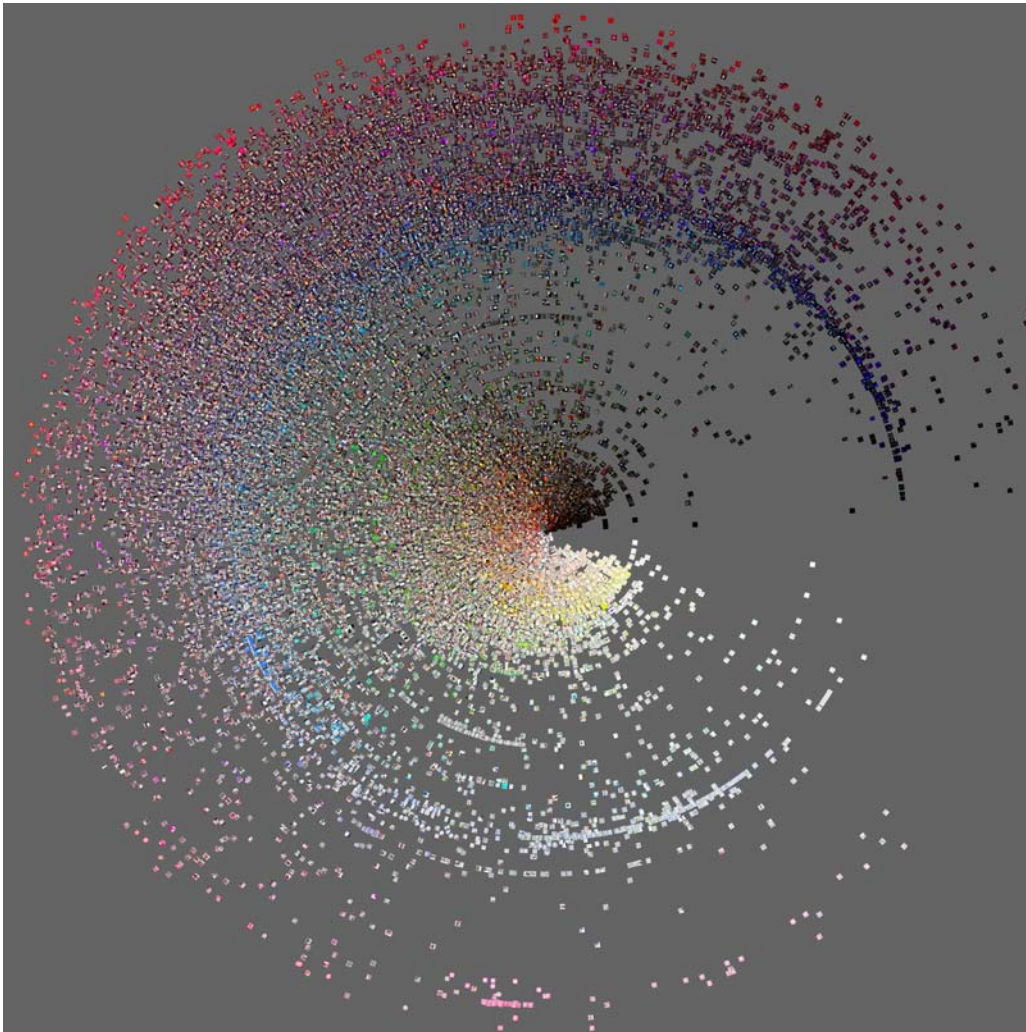


November 4, 2013



THE AGGREGATE EYE AT AMELIE A. WALLACE GALLERY: OCTOBER 29 – DECEMBER 5, 2013

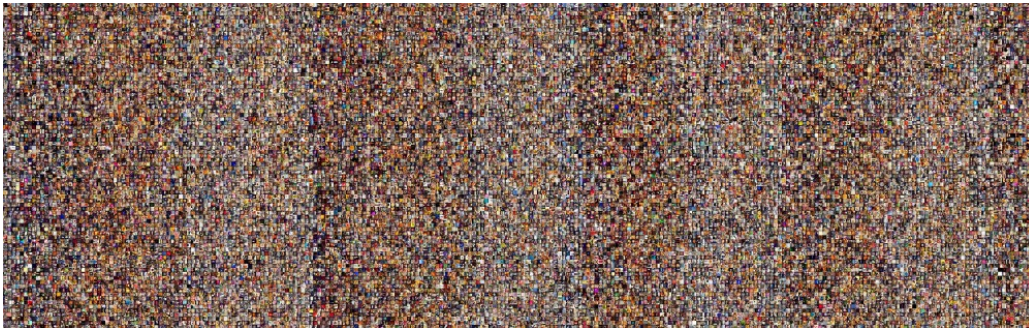
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Instagram is a vapid digital landscape bereft of any semblance of creativity, serving little function but to chronicle daily meals and provide a platform for self-photography.

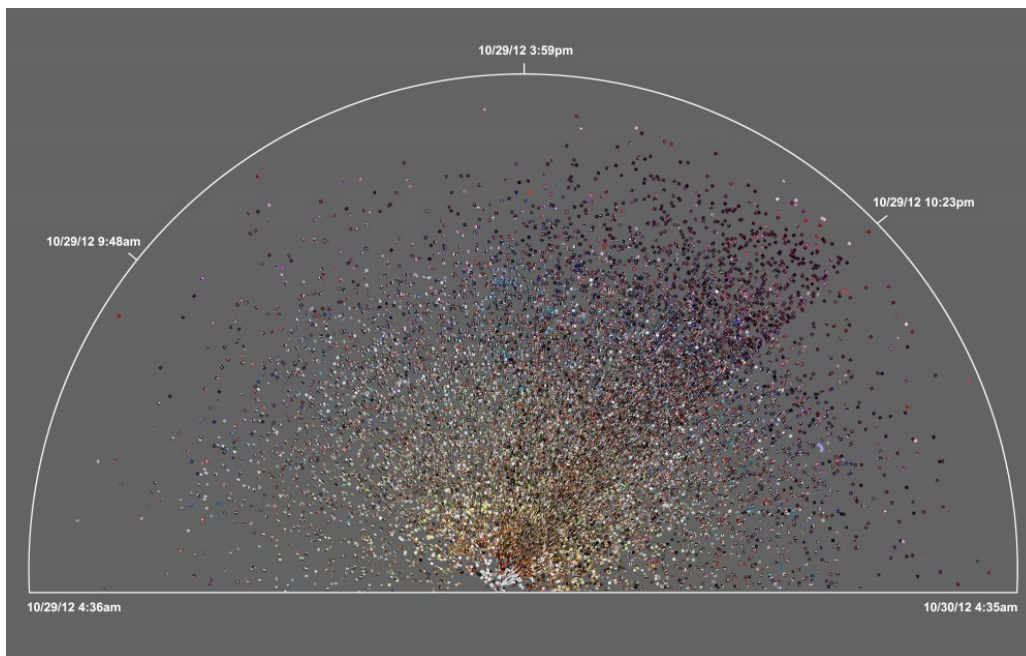
Tell that to Lev Manovich, Nadav Hochman, and Jay Chow, whose exhibition, *The Aggregate Eye*, now showing at the Amelie A. Wallace Gallery from October 29th to December 5th, transforms the everyday deluge of Instagram photos into colorful maps of human activity, meteorological anomalies, and cultural proclivities.

While the idea of gathering visual data in this nebulous manner took shape around 2005, originally to visualize historico-cultural changes between periods such as the Renaissance and the Baroque as evinced through paintings, *The Aggregate Eye* is a product of over 2 million Instagram photographs taken by a little more than 300,000 individuals in 13 cities, all over a 3-month period. These “collective portraits” of individual Instagram uploads, as Lev (a vanguard of the realm of digital humanities, and theorist of digital culture and media art) put it, essentially become each city’s fingerprint, revealing the day in and day out flow of human interaction with the medium that is Instagram. However, the project’s ability to highlight cultural differences is perhaps the most surprising aspect of the entire exhibition.



Tokyo: 53, 498 photos

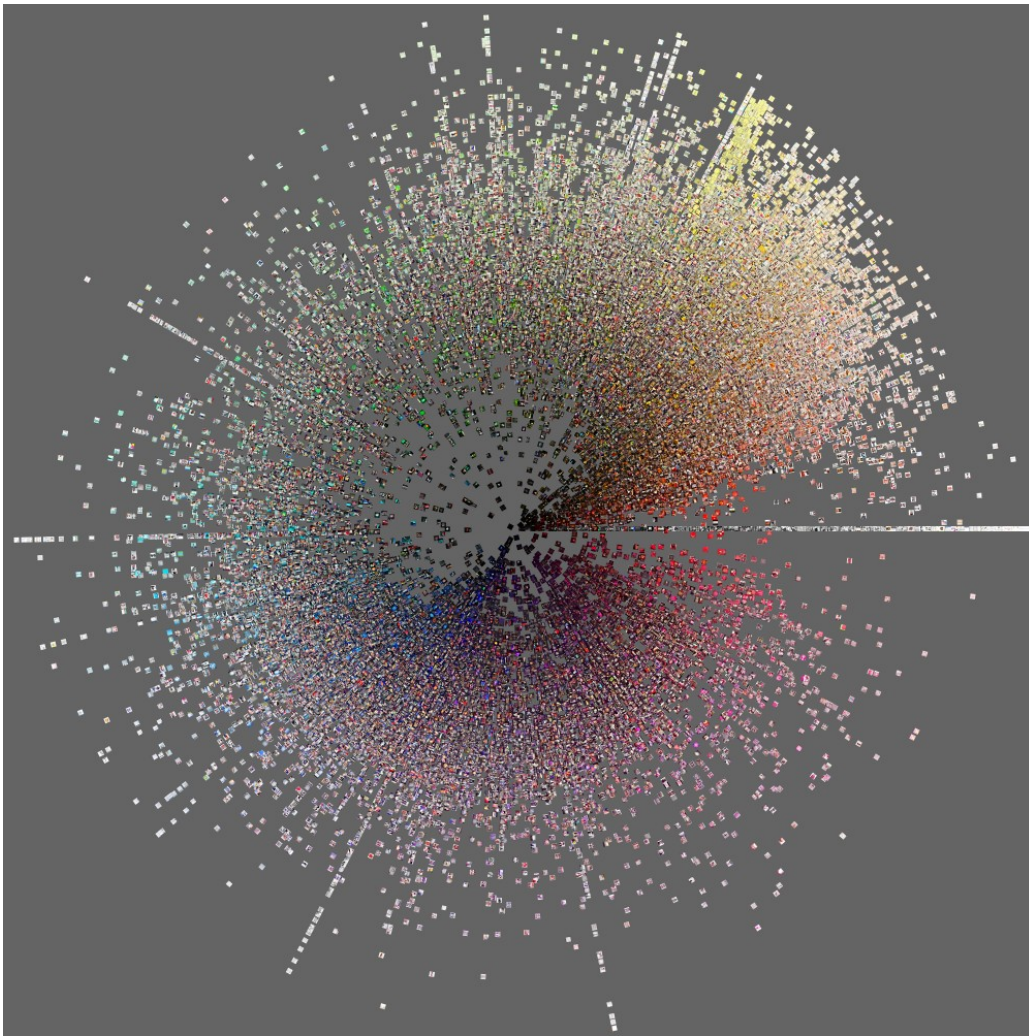
Above is the Montage visualization of 4 consecutive days in Tokyo, which was alongside its New York City equivalent. Up close, the two collages appeared quite similar, but upon putting some physical distance between yourself and the works, the striations were unmistakable: Tokyo’s days are clearly demarcated, as evident by the sharp contrast between vivid colors and brighter hues; on the other hand, New York’s days tend to blend together, as they more gradually shift between dark and light (Lev speculates this may be due to a more industrialist Japanese society, and the increased activity of New York due to tourism). Much as traditional photography does, these visual collections bottle up specific representations of time, but on an extremely grand scale. By the same token, *The Aggregate Eye* is then an apt appellation because, as Nadav (a doctoral student in the History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh) explained, “eye” refers to the way in which each individual chooses to view their cityscape. Combined, these perspectives create alternate understandings of major urban centers.



Brooklyn from November 29th-30th, during Hurricane Sandy: 23,581 photos

The above radial plot representation depicts the 24-hour span in which Hurricane Sandy hit the Brooklyn area. There is almost no need to elucidate the graph, as a strong line marks when the power went out, followed by a decrease in the number of Instagram photos uploaded. In a way, this chronicle equates human creativity (Instagram as an artistic medium is arguable) with power/energy; the prior depends on the latter, and without the luxuries of modern life, imaginative output becomes more challenging and possibly more meaningful.

In the next iteration of this project, the collaborators hope to put more emphasis on "semantics and analysis," to really pinpoint cultural trends that can be extrapolated from this form of illustration. Lev, Nadav, and Jay, in an attempt to remove the political facet of search engines, wish to make the analysis of large-scale visual data "democratic." All of the images incorporated in this review are free and may be accessed as part of a larger body of work called, *Phototrails*: <http://phototrails.net/>. Users are able to zoom-in on each unique Instagram photo, giving them the ability to view the big picture, while also maintaining the human element. *The Aggregate Eye* turns a spotlight onto the world of social photography, raising a whole new generation of questions concerning art and its place in society.



Bangkok: 50,000 photos (arranged by hue and brightness)

Review by Paul Longo

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