★ Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge: Issue 41 (2026)

Flattened Regimes: On the Distribution of the Sensible in the Age of algorithms

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Abstract: This essay examines the tension between cultural redundancy and the myth of originality, tracing a line from Benjamin's notion of mechanical reproduction to the landscape of contemporary algorithmic culture. It connects Rancière's concept of the distribution of the sensible with the statistical normalization of perception in the digital era, where aesthetics converge into homogeneous, "good-enough" forms shaped by automation and data metrics. The emotional register, informed by Ngai's theory of weak affects, reflects this flattening, generating a muted fascination optimized for ongoing engagement. Drawing on Steyerl, Hui, and other critical voices, the essay critiques the erosion of judgment and the avant-garde, proposing that aesthetic agency now resides in navigating the ambient, algorithmically curated flow of modern media. It positions Filterworld's homogenized aesthetics within broader histories of mass standardization and cultural flattening. Today, judgment endures as attention—statistical, affective, and ambient—demonstrating that even the most diluted forms maintain an underlying structure.

Culture has long balanced between redundancy and the pursuit of originality—a tension shaping not only art but the economies of attention and value. Each new medium promises a fresh escape but ultimately delivers more of the same. This paradox stems from the technologies of reproduction—whether print, recording, or photography—that standardize not only content but the perception of it.

In the digital age, however, this process advances further: platforms do not merely replicate cultural content; they algorithmically reproduce perception itself. By governing what is visible, recommended, or suppressed, algorithms shape not only what we see but how we see it. This transformation recasts aesthetic judgment and cultural value as matters of governance and statistical norms.

Just as colors exist beyond the fixed digital boundaries of sRGB or CMYK palettes, the fullness of being exceeds even the most expansive algorithms. Digital information remains bounded—a lattice of countable units aspiring to infinitude yet remaining finite. However vast its datasets, it can only approximate the open-ended nature of experience, translating qualities into quantities and leaving the uncounted behind as residue.

Media theorist Kyle Chayka's *Filterworld* reveals a profound shift: platforms have transformed aesthetics from the realm of cultural institutions—museums, editors, curators, and critics—into computational infrastructure. Instead of human judgment determining what art or ideas gain visibility, algorithms now filter and prioritize content through opaque, data-driven processes. As a result, aesthetic value is increasingly defined by statistical patterns

of attention rather than critical evaluation; human curation has given way to machinic curation. The consequences ripple outward: public attention is shaped; institutional policies adapt to algorithmic norms, and even dissent is governed by the visibility these systems grant. Online boredom, for example, is no longer spontaneous but curated through endlessly refreshed playlists tailored to sustain engagement.

Chayka shows how automation and mass personalization converge to produce the same aesthetic outcome: smooth, frictionless, "good-enough" forms. Unlike Walter Benjamin's reproductions, which bore the trace of a hand, many of today's copies lack an identifiable origin from the moment of creation. Algorithms function as a kind of cultural unconscious: they reproduce patterns we did not consciously choose, replaying habits of attention and taste embedded in the data that trained them. In that sense, the information gathered and analyzed becomes a statement of the hypothesis.

Just as platforms algorithmically govern feeds and shape perception through statistical norms, the plasticity of data challenges any claim to stable truth. Data is inherently transient and malleable, as exemplified by Leo Breiman's original random-forest algorithm. This routine breaks a complex learning task into smaller sub-problems by generating random data subsets, running mini-models on each, and aggregating their results into an approximate solution. Yet each run produces different subsets, causing subtle or significant variations in outcome. This variability underscores that answers in algorithmic culture are provisional and contingent, reinforcing the essay's central argument that perception and judgment in digital environments are fluid rather than fixed. Random forests have since evolved into a diverse array of divide-and-conquer algorithms tailored to specific tasks and user needs.

Algorithmic repetition flattens cultural variation until differences feel merely cosmetic—songs, faces, and gestures merging into a continuous, smooth rhythm governed by profitability. Platforms rely on A/B testing, where small variations in metrics like click-through rate or user engagement determine what content succeeds. Even changes as tiny as fractions of a percentage point can decide which videos or posts are promoted. Yet, it is only the immense scale of data pouring through these systems that makes such subtle effects appear statistically significant. This dynamic masks the deeper homogenization at work, revealing how platforms organize and regulate perception through the illusion of choice.

Where earlier media reproduced tangible content, today's platforms algorithmically reproduce perception itself—shaping not only what we see but how seeing is structured and governed.

I. The Distributional Turn

Philosopher Jacques Rancière's concept of "the distribution of the sensible" captures how social orders shape not only what can be seen or heard but what kinds of perception are possible in the first place. Rather than focusing on specific content, Rancière emphasizes the underlying forms that organize experience and determine whose voices and bodies appear in shared public space. In the age of algorithms, this political geometry takes on a statistical form: data distributions and predictive feeds now govern visibility, deciding which perceptions enter the realm of the visible and which remain invisible or marginalized.

In the algorithmic age, Rancière's political geometry reappears in statistical form. Patterns of visibility are now expressed not only through laws and institutions but also through data distributions and choice architectures. The bell curve of the normal distribution illustrates how most data clusters tightly around an average, with roughly 95 percent falling within two standard deviations. Algorithmic systems often reinforce this tendency by trimming outliers—posts, images, or users that diverge too far from the norm. By filtering out these anomalies, platforms smooth over the very differences that once formed the basis of aesthetic or cultural innovation. What the bell curve includes—the "average"—defines the visible and acceptable, while what it excludes—the rare and extreme—slips into invisibility, erasing edges of difference and dissent.

Where aesthetic experience once sought the singular or transcendent, it now gravitates toward the statistically average—designs, sounds, and images tuned to median taste. The algorithmic sublime no longer erupts in overwhelming spectacle; it hums in quiet convergence, where thousands of similar videos, faces, and gestures accumulate into a single, ambient awe. You can feel it when scrolling through TikTok—the sense that every difference merges into the same rhythm, the same hues, the same face. Chayka traces this sameness to many corners, among them the interior designs of coffee bars, echoing globally in their familiar uniformity. Sometimes, in that scroll, I feel my own perception slacken—an almost physical smoothing behind the eyes. The rhythm becomes mine before I know it, as if the feed were not something I watched but something watching through me.

Earlier scholars treated Rancière's distribution as a political metaphor—a way to describe how art and power intersect. Translating that logic into data reveals how political visibility has become computational. Today, however, this distribution spans an apparent cultural abyss through algorithmic processes like predictive feeds and recommendation engines. Though historically anachronistic, translating Rancière's logic into statistical form clarifies how the digital present transforms perception into infrastructure. Rancière never mentions the normal curve, yet it enacts his logic precisely: it partitions the sensible into a spectrum of estimates and likelihoods, deciding which perceptions belong to the realm of the visible and which are statistically invisible. The curve becomes a horizon of vision, a topology of feeling—an invisible graph that measures not just data but desire.

Georges Bataille's notion of the *informe*—formlessness—was a revolt against hierarchy itself: a violent declassification that shattered distinctions between the aesthetic, the philosophical, and the sacred. For Bataille, formlessness was an event, a rupture that dissolved meaning's protective frames. Algorithmic culture offers a simulation of this effect but without the transgression: digital systems organize even the apparent chaos of unstructured text into structured, legible patterns. What looks like formlessness is merely computation in disguise. Where Bataille sought dissolution, platforms produce a controlled flattening that preserves order beneath the surface.

II. Weak Affects and the Early Aesthetics of Flatness

Building on Rancière's structural view of perception, philosopher Sianne Ngai introduces the concept of "weak affects" to describe the low-intensity, fleeting emotions that permeate everyday life under late capitalism. Unlike traditional aesthetic categories such as the sublime or the beautiful, weak affects—including feelings like "cuteness," "zaniness," and "interest"—are subtle, often ambiguous emotional states. These affective tones

circulate continuously through mediated experience, from the brief curiosity sparked by a viral meme to the gentle amusement elicited by a TikTok dance. Ngai's insight helps explain how digital platforms sustain user engagement not through powerful passions but through a steady flow of minor emotional stimuli.

Rather than provoking catharsis or critical distance, these affects leave us in a state of subtle, mercurial titillation—emotions that flicker briefly without resolution. Although Ngai's diagnosis predates the algorithmic era, she anticipated its contours: a culture of constant fascination that refreshes before feelings can deepen. Yet not all users succumb to numb repetition; some still find moments of genuine engagement amid the algorithmic flow, complicating simplistic narratives of affective decline. But why focus on these three affects? The cute and the zany are not intense passions but low-level responses—signs of a diminished capacity for strong feeling, reflecting our stupefaction in the face of overwhelming scale.

Long before today's feeds, the logic of the mean was already taking shape in computation. In the 1980s, computer scientist Usama Fayyad—then at Caltech and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory—trained one of the first machines to distinguish mountains from valleys in inchoate satellite telemetry data. Later, working with the first digital sky survey, he sought patterns in astronomical data too vast for human inspection. By partitioning the data into grids and ranking regions according to a metric of "interestingness," Fayyad taught the machine to prioritize novelty within immensity—to find needles in cosmic haystacks.

The internet did not invent these effects, but it perfected their circulation, turning every fleeting impulse into a reproducible form. TikTok's endless scroll compresses "interesting" into a flash of curiosity, an impulse so brief it erases itself. "Cute," meanwhile, has become a global vernacular for emotional response, a way to signal attachment without commitment. What Ngai once called "minor" affects now anchor the major platforms, setting the emotional tempo of digital life. I catch myself refreshing without intention, lulled by that same smoothness—an affective anesthesia that feels like calm until I notice how much time has disappeared. The interface produces a stillness that isn't rest. Ngai's weak affects were less a footnote to modernism than a forecast of *Filterworld*'s emotional economy—an early map of how feeling itself would be standardized. Chayka describes this as "homogeneity by optimization." Yet what he leaves implicit—and what Ngai intuited—is that this optimization is emotional: a subtle reprogramming of feeling to match the frictionless rhythms of circulation. The weak affects of platform culture are inseparable from its visual logic. What feels smooth to the user also looks smooth to the eye.

III. The Mean: From Ethics to Algorithm

Since antiquity, the mean has carried not only mathematical weight but moral consequence. For Aristotle, virtue lay in *mesotēs*—the balanced mean between excess and deficiency. Courage, generosity, temperance: each was defined not by extremity but by proportion, a harmony between opposing impulses. In China, Mencius and the Confucian *Doctrine of the Mean* likewise prized equilibrium as the foundation of social and cosmic order. The middle way, whether moral or metaphysical, promised stability through measured adjustment.

The algorithmic mean resembles moderation only in name. It doesn't balance extremes through judgment; it averages them through automation, producing not harmony but inertia. It does not emerge from deliberation or ethical discernment; it is computed from aggregates, indifferent to purpose or context. Its "balance" may have no

intrinsic relation to the real world—a statistical construct corresponding to nothing actually observed. In markets, extremes can be profitable; outliers may contain useful information; in culture, they attract attention. What appears as the new mean may therefore be a residue of engagement metrics, not a moral or aesthetic center. The middle way—once an ideal of virtue—becomes in algorithmic culture a byproduct of feedback: a statistical calm masking the volatility beneath.

Every era invents its own regression toward the mean. At the core of the algorithmic worldview lies this geometry of relation: regression. Linear regression once promised a transparent world, every outcome a weighted sum of its causes. It taught us to think of connection as slope, deviation as noise, and prediction as understanding. The curve became a creed—a way of seeing that turned probability into theology.

The newer architectures—neural networks, regression trees, gradient boosters—abandon the straight line but not the dream. They learn through iteration, interaction, recursion; they fit not a line but a labyrinth. Their power lies in relinquishing closure, yet the metaphysics remains the same: the faith that complexity can be domesticated through calibration. Each model becomes a new technology of flattening, translating the turbulence of life into gradients that can be optimized.

The world now runs on regressions of perception. Every feed is a fit; every user, a coefficient. What once mapped the correlation of fields has become the operating system of the sensible. Even the most intricate networks still descend toward a mean, haunted by the smooth curve they were built to escape.

Interlude: The Vulgar Time of the Feed

Martin Heidegger foresaw this ontological flattening in his analysis of vulgar time—the everyday conception of time as a chain of discrete "nows." In *Being and Time*, he contrasts this calculative temporality with an authentic temporality grounded in lived potentiality. The vulgar theory of time is not merely a philosophical error; it is the temporal structure of modernity itself. Time becomes measurable, divisible, exchangeable—a resource to be managed rather than a horizon to be inhabited. In this flattening of time, the rhythm of life is replaced by the tick of the clock, the scroll of the feed, the dashboard's refresh rate. What once unfolded as experience now proceeds as succession. The same calculative reason that reduces Being to standing-reserve reduces duration to data, rendering temporality another form of engagement metric. If Rancière shows how visibility is distributed, Heidegger shows how time itself is redistributed—compressed into a sequence of quantifiable presents.

IV. Television and the Flattening of Context

The flattening we now attribute to data was first rehearsed on the glowing surface of the television screen. Long before algorithms, television had already taught us how to live inside an average. In his 1980 essay *Within the Context of No-Context*, George W. S. Trow described television as a machine that dissolved context itself—a technology that equalized all events and ideas into a single, depthless plane of attention. Meaning and hierarchy, he wrote, were replaced by a culture of "nothing," in which every image was both immediately visible and instantly forgettable. Television's "flat spectacle" prefigured the algorithmic feed—an ecology where significance depends not on depth or scale but on recurrence, circulation, and statistical presence.

What Trow glimpsed in the analog age has since hardened into digital infrastructure. The feed completes the flattening he only foresaw: a seamless field where catastrophe and comedy share the same visual weight, and where every gesture—political, commercial, personal—appears calibrated for equal visibility. The difference between content types no longer matters; only circulation does.

V. The Average Image: Photography, Objectivity, and Statistical Ideals

Television dissolved depth; digital imaging completes the process. What was once a window becomes a mirror of prediction. This transformation is most incisively diagnosed in the work of Hito Steyerl, who charts the collapse of photographic indexicality alongside the rise of what she calls the flattened, average digital image. Traditional photographic theory holds that a photograph directly captures reality—light reflects off an object and imprints onto film or a sensor, making the image a physical trace of the real. This connection gave photography a unique claim to truth and evidence. Steyerl has traced this collapse of reference: the digital image no longer simply records the world but predicts it. In the age of AI synthesis and platform circulation, images are assembled, manipulated, or entirely generated without ever corresponding to a tangible real.

But the desire for statistical convergence is not unique to digital platforms. Historian Lorraine Daston shows in *Objectivity* that the emergence of scientific objectivity in the nineteenth century was marked by a retreat from subjective interpretation in favor of standardized, "mechanical" representations. What we now call the "average image" was once an epistemic ideal: composites in astronomy, botany, and criminology—like Quetelet's *l'homme moyen* (average man)—were celebrated as tools to eliminate the idiosyncrasies of individual perception.

Against this statistical calm, Hockney's multi-perspectival experiments reopen space. What once began as a strategy for scientific precision has become an ambient default—no longer shaped only by experts but generated by networks.

VI. Beyond the Fixed Eye: Heterarchy and the Reanimation of Space

David Hockney's explorations of nonlinear perspective went beyond artistic quirk. His experiments with 360-degree views and his interest in the 16th-century Chinese scroll *A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor* reflect a deliberate challenge to traditional ways of seeing. In Panofsky's terms, perspective is a "symbolic form," expressing a culture's underlying conception of space and vision. The single-point perspective perfected during the Renaissance assumes a stationary, monocular observer confronting the world from a fixed position—an ocular regime tied to humanism, property, and the sovereign individual.

This was never the only way of seeing. Guo Xi, a master painter of the Song Dynasty, developed what he called the "angle of totality." This floating perspective allows multiple vantage points to coexist within a single scroll. Guo Xi's landscapes do not bind the viewer to a fixed eye; instead, they invite a mobile gaze, letting the scene unfold over time and space, as if the viewer were walking through it.

Hockney's turn to Chinese scroll painting rejects a fixed, hierarchical gaze. It offers instead a heterarchical approach, where vantage points shift and spaces extend across time. Here the viewer moves, the world unfolds, and no single viewpoint dominates. This reanimation of space aligns with contemporary challenges to centralized authority in art, politics, and knowledge systems. If Panofsky linked perspective to a specific cultural order, Hockney's work hints at alternative orders—systems where vision is distributed, contingent, nonlinear, and participatory.

VII. From Shock to Ritual: The Dissolution of the Avant-Garde

J.M.W. Turner, once England's painter of the sublime, ended his career accused of incoherence. By the mid-nineteenth century, his late canvases—too loose, too luminous—were derided as blurs, failures of representation. Today those same works hang in museums as prophetic precursors to abstraction. The insult has become reverence: what once appeared degeneration now reads as vision.

That reversal marks the collapse of a once-stable avant-garde rhythm—a cycle of scandal, rejection, and eventual canonization. In today's borderless visual culture, that rhythm no longer holds. Nothing stays shocking long enough, and nothing remains hidden long enough to be rediscovered. Western art now harbors few unknown treasures, if any—only familiar embers that can be stirred to briefly glow again.

Hal Foster observes how the avant-garde, once revolutionary, has become ritualized—absorbed and reenacted by the very systems it sought to resist. What began as insurgency now persists as ceremony. The militaristic origins of the avant-garde, born from Napoleonic rhetoric and artistic warfare, feel like relics of another century, ill-suited to a digital world defined by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

In this new terrain there are no front lines. The term avant-garde has drifted from its battlefield into self-congratulatory metaphor, applied to any domain chasing novelty. Ryan Ruby's notion of a "golden age of popular criticism," in which literary critics act as cultural vanguards, shows how the label survives by expansion—covering territories once deemed peripheral to art itself.

The avant-garde has not vanished but dissolved into a borderless field where innovation can emerge anywhere and everywhere—vibe coding, subcultural feedback loops, interface design, motion graphics—rendering the old geography of artistic insurgency obsolete. What was once rupture has become ritual, performance without transgression.

Foster's insight endures: the shock tactics of the avant-garde have been domesticated. The cycle of opposition and assimilation now sustains the system it once unsettled. The tension between structure and anti-structure persists, but as choreography rather than combat. What begins as the repetition of style becomes, at scale, the repetition of world-making itself—a shift from the cultural to the cosmotechnical.

VIII. Cosmotechnics and the End of Aesthetic Universality

Where Hito Steyerl offers a critical anatomy of the visual field under algorithmic capitalism, Yuk Hui ventures further, tracing its metaphysical roots. In his concept of cosmotechnics, Hui proposes that every technical system is also a cosmological expression—an articulation of a culture's assumptions about order, relation, and reality. Each technology is a philosophy in practice.

This framework goes beyond cultural pluralism to suggest a transformation of perceptual regimes. Modern astrophysics, for instance, reveals a universe without fixed center or absolute direction—no true "up," "down," north, south, east, or west. At the cosmic scale, coordinates dissolve not because reality is illusory but because it exceeds inherited perceptual grids.

This is not relativism but situatedness: perception and position are bound to specific regimes—historical, technical, cosmological. Every alignment of instruments and bodies creates its own structure of truth.

Aesthetic judgment, then, does not evaporate but mutates. It operates within evolving regimes of sense, no longer claiming universality but local coherence. Judgment remains meaningful precisely because it is contingent—because it recognizes its own ground.

Hui's cosmotechnical view unites moral, technical, and cosmic orders within each culture's mode of perception. It reminds us that aesthetics has always been cosmological—that to see differently is to inhabit a different world.

Recognizing perception as locally constituted makes the question of judgment newly urgent. What becomes of evaluation when universality itself has dissolved?

IX. The Loss of Judgment

Judgment once required reflection; scrolling replaces it with reflex. The gesture of critique has been absorbed into the gesture of consumption.

Classically, aesthetics was an education of the senses—a training in discrimination and delay. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* defined this act as disinterested: stepping back from desire to ask, *Is this beautiful?* Such distance required time, attention, and suspension.

Algorithmic media collapse that distance. Platforms erase the temporal and spatial buffers that once made judgment possible. Attention becomes automatic; the feed decides for us, pre-judging what we see. The critic's task—to articulate why something matters—has been displaced by metrics of engagement: clicks, likes, streams. Aesthetic judgment dissolves into feedback.

This is the deeper sense of flatness: images no longer differ by medium or intent but coexist on a single ontological plane, where an artwork, an ad, and a meme circulate with equal weight and speed. The distinctions of form and value blur into continuous content.

Rancière helps clarify the politics of this flattening. His “distribution of the sensible” does not dictate what appears; it structures how appearing happens. That structure can take countless statistical forms—the normal curve, the power law, the algorithmic cluster—but all share a bias toward redundancy. The challenge is no longer to produce novelty but to perceive rarity. The extreme and the improbable have become the last refuges of resistance.

Ngai’s “interesting” becomes the only surviving aesthetic category: a feeling that suspends evaluation without resolving it. The cultural logic of Filterworld is thus the logic of endless pre-judgment—or perhaps of judgment fatigue. While many users succumb to it, others develop new literacies, improvising small strategies of resistance within the feed.

I notice it in myself: the feed trains reflex faster than reflection. I double-tap before I’ve decided why. Even as I write about flattening, I feel it—the small dopamine hum when I check whether anyone has read what I’ve said about it. Critique becomes another form of scrolling, another bid for visibility under the same metrics it condemns.

Judgment persists, but as habit more than act—a pulse that registers participation rather than thought. The sovereign gesture of separation has given way to a restless calibration, forever updating itself in real time.

X. Post-Criticism, Slop, and the Politics of Ambient Judgment

Slop, too, has its aesthetic. The culture of slop—content optimized for minimal effort—defines the new normal. TikTok’s infinite loop of “Wes Anderson–style” pastiches or Balenciaga’s pre-distressed sneakers belong to this regime. Instantly recognizable, endlessly reproducible, they are built for consumption without pause. Their true medium is the platform; their principle of evaluation is engagement.

The slop aesthetic aligns with Ngai’s *interesting* stripped of intensity, the zany without rupture. It reflects Chayka’s flattening: the erosion of photography’s evidentiary link metastasized into a universal stylistic compression. Every idiom—fashion, meme, protest—can now be absorbed and replayed within seconds.

Even Hui’s cosmotechnics applies here: the slop feed is its own regime of truth, optimized not for meaning but for retention metrics, shaping what counts as attention-worthy.

In this ecology, aesthetic distinction becomes a mere data point. The question is no longer whether something is good, original, or beautiful, but whether it can hold a viewer for three more seconds. Even resistance is assimilated. Punk’s defiance, the avant-garde’s shock, all reappear as marketing idioms—gestures of refusal retooled as styles of consent.

Yet judgment has not vanished. It has migrated from pronouncement to posture, from verdict to dwell time. The act of choosing where to linger—however brief—becomes the last site of aesthetic agency. Amid the churn, this small choice carries weight.

Can judgment still matter when everything already circulates as evaluation? The question lingers, like a cursor that refuses to stop blinking.

XI. Against Flattening

While this essay underscores the homogenizing and flattening effects of algorithmic platforms on culture and perception, enthusiasts of machine learning remind us of the benefits algorithms can bring to contemporary aesthetics. Algorithmic curation and generative AI have “democratized” creative production, expanding access to diverse artistic expressions. Personalized recommendation systems allow niche aesthetics to reach audiences with a precision human curators cannot match at scale. Meanwhile, AI-generated art introduces complex, novel patterns that blend randomness and control, pushing creative boundaries and fostering new modes of engagement.

Studies suggest that audiences can respond positively to AI-generated artworks, especially in contexts that value technical innovation and precision. On social media, algorithms have catalyzed new cultural movements by amplifying particular styles and trends, illustrating that algorithmic aesthetics can diversify and revitalize visual culture rather than solely producing sameness or suppressing originality.

Acknowledging these benefits does not negate concerns about commercial bias or metric-driven priorities. Instead, it highlights the ambivalent and multifaceted role algorithms play as both homogenizers and engines of creative transformation, contingent on human and infrastructural contexts. Nonetheless, this creative expansion often unfolds within commercial constraints that prioritize engagement over depth, creating a persistent tension between innovation and commodification.

XII. Judgment After Judgment

In the current perceptual regime, aesthetic judgment no longer issues as a sovereign pronouncement of value. A former monoculture—once sustained by centralized institutions and broadcast media—has fractured under digital decentralization, algorithmic curation, and neoliberal logics of competition and quantification.

What remains is plurality without consensus. Truth becomes provisional, shifting with each dataset, subset, and iteration; universality gives way to probability. Judgment becomes statistical, contingent, recalculated in real time.

This collapse is civilizational—a rupture in how meaning is produced and sustained. The metaphors of bounded palettes or finite datasets no longer need restating; they are the air in which our thinking breathes.

Writing against flattening already participates in it. Every sentence is formatted, optimized, rendered for circulation. The critic’s reflex becomes indistinguishable from the feed’s reflexivity—resistance absorbed as labor, critique monetized in real time. Yet judgment endures, not as verdict but as hesitation—the brief interval before the next scroll. To pause, to notice the system noticing us, is the last act of aesthetic resistance. Even exhaustion can be a form of awareness, even repetition, a form of thought. What remains visible no longer sees back.

The task is no longer to stand outside the system but to recognize how deeply one's own seeing is distributed through it.

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Cite this Essay

B., Thomas. “Flattened Regimes: On the Distribution of the Sensible in the Age of algorithms.” *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, no. 41, 2026, doi:10.20415/rhiz/041.e10

RHIZOMES ISSN 1555-9998 ★ 230 East Hall Bowling Green State University Bowling Green, OH 43403
Editors: Ellen Berry and Carol Siegel. Reviews editor: Craig J. Saper. Technical editor: Helen J Burgess