

Reputation and Surveillance Capitalist Aesthetics

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Abstract:

In financial markets and online environments, reputational cues directly impact prices and earnings. Speculations on companies' future profitability influence share values. Ratings on 'sharing' sites like Airbnb directly impact sellers' and hosts' earnings. In these contexts, reputation – with its myriad indices and interpreters, in the form of 'stars', 'likes' and machine learning algorithms – becomes a confounding, yet carefully managed asset for both individuals and companies. Given the hyper-visibility and direct operationalization of reputational cues, combined with the hyper-proprietary nature of their interpretation by credit scoring companies and online platforms, how might the efficacy of reputation's visual cues be theorized and understood? How might artworks and other cultural artefacts try to make sense of the highly consequential, yet obfuscating, nature of the sensible within this assetized regime of valuation? This paper aims to understand online reputation as part of "surveillance capitalist aesthetics." It follows Shoshana Zuboff's theory of surveillance capitalism (2015) – a new regime of accumulation, according to which surveilling, analysing and intervening in behaviour becomes directly profitable – but extends this theory in order to draw more attention to the conflicted, yet key role that visual reputational cues make within assetized regimes of value. Further, it examines artist Cassie Thornton's project *Give Me Cred!* (2012 –) as a strategic intervention into the aesthetics of reputation.