

Posthuman Photography

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1 Introduction: The photographic message

“I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.” (Replicant Roy Batty’s Tears in the rain monologue, in Ridley Scott’s, Blade Runner, 1982)

Before its electrical support system was switched off for the last time at 09:00 Universal Coordinated Time on 27 July 2014, the Philae lander sent several photographs from its landing site on the face of the comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko to Earth. And while Philae’s scientific mission was cut short when its solar panels failed to recharge, the images that reached planet Earth are immediately recognisable as snapshots. They are rectangular, black and white, lacking detail in shadows and highlights (one of two extra f-stops would not go amiss) and carelessly composed to include Philae’s own feet in the foreground. Gazing into these likenesses one experiences a mixture of wonder and tedious familiarity: Who knew that a rock is a rock, a shadow is a shadow and perspective works just the same whether you are on the face of a comet or in your own back yard. Here and there photography erases all differences in scale and location in favour of representations designed to be viewed by a human eye. The near and the distant, the micro and the macro are rendered by the photographic camera all the same. The photographic treatment consists of producing representations of whatever happens to be in-front of the

lens, reflecting the whole world as if in a mirror, bestowing a comforting uniformity on everything that appears in its field of view. Even a picture of a comet 300 million miles away confirms to the familiar logical construct of a model represented in a copy. No matter how remote or alien the model is, photography can be trusted to show it to us as familiar, and we can be trusted in turn to interpret the photograph as relating to our own sense of a temporal and spatial reality. We do this by projecting onto the photograph our experience of time as chronological and linear, and of space as continuous, three dimensional and populated by distinct objects.



Figure 1: Photograph: CIVA/Philae/Rosetta/ESA

The common denominator of the astonishing variety of pictures that are delivered daily to our desktops, laptops and smartphones is the photographic apparatus that is specifically designed to produce pictures that humans can comprehend. All these images have one, and only one subject: us, the onlookers

for whom photography toils day and night, in producing images for the consumption by the human eye.¹

The message of photography is not only that comets look a bit like roadworks, but also that human vision is the universal and homogeneous mode of access to reality in all its forms. Almost 500 years since Copernicus declared that the Sun rather than the Earth is the centre of the universe, we are still welded to the world view that sees us, the human species, as the Sun that is holding together all that there is in the world. The message of photography is that we, the humans are species apart, because we possess the rational view of the world, we own the vantage point from which everything can be observed as a reflection, a copy and a representation.

The photographic treatment of reality is dovetailed with the belief in the binary opposition of model and copy, underpinned by the dialectics of subject and object, that posits a universal subjectivity as a cornerstone of human-centric world view. In particular, this view asserts that the thing represented is completely distinct and independent from the mechanism of representation.² And even as we are now entering the age of the Anthropocene, in which the extinction

¹ On the construction of a different photographic apparatus that does not succumb to the rhetoric of single point of view and perspectival geometry, see: Azoulay, *Aim Deïelle Lüski and Horizontal Photography*.

² Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, 46.

by humans of other species expands to the self-extinction of humanity, our faith in the dualisms enshrined by photographic representation remains unperturbed.³

It is the aim in this essay to outline another photography, that is more suited to the tasks of our time than the humanist, representational approach. I name this photography *posthuman* not only to distinguish it from the previous epoch, but also to underscore its rejection of the model-copy paradigm, and the subjective modes engendered by it. Posthuman photography is concerned with the photographic image that is based not on the patriarchal politics of identity and subject-object dualisms but on establishing the multiversal: a rhizomatic assemblage of interconnected fragments [0] + [1] repetition, that when taken together form a picture of what it means 'to be' in the digital age⁴. Posthuman photography is not asking what things in the world look like, but what it means to live in the world of interconnected and networked entities that create meaningful objects without recourse to the universal values 'god', 'absolute', 'index', 'signifier' and 'sign'.

³ Colebrook, "Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1."

⁴ Golding, Johnny. 2014 "Ecce Homo Sexual; Ontology and eros in the age of incompleteness and entanglement". *Parallax* 20 (3) 217-230. See also: Golding, Johnny. 2010. "Fractal philosophy, trembling a plane of immanence and the small matter of learning how to listen: Attunement as the task of art. In *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*."

2 The rhizome, the frame

Is it possible to speak of photography from any perspective other than the representational? Yes, of course it is. Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the rhizome allows us to think of photography as a multiple, proliferating structure that reproduces itself through exponential multiplication, simultaneously engaging in visual, economic, social and political production.

Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added ($n + 1$). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the One is always subtracted ($n - 1$). When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. These lines, or lineaments, should not be confused with lineages of the arborescent type, which are merely localizable linkages between points and positions. [...] In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states. What is at question in the rhizome is a relation to sexuality-

but also to the animal, the vegetal, the world, politics, the book, things natural and artificial-that is totally different from the arborescent relation: all manner of "becomings."⁵

A rhizomatic approach to photography does not begin from a distinction between model and copy or subject and object, instead it makes connections between various points across temporary proliferating arrangements, branching out, creating networks, always multiplying and sprouting in new directions. Conceived as a rhizome, a photograph is understood as connected to other photographs, as well as to objects, entities, processes and organisms, forming a network that continually evolves through expansions and contractions. A rhizomatic understanding of photography takes account of the fact that meaning and knowledge are not derived from representing but from connections between bodies and their direct material engagements with the world.

Representation of pre-existing reality is not the be-all and end-all of photography. As Foucault have observed, space itself has a history⁶. The unified, ordered, geometrical space of the photograph belongs squarely with the conception of space as measurable and calculable, in which every point is identical to every other point. This rational, perspectival space was invented by scientists, artists and philosophers of the Enlightenment, who attempted to produce a logical picture of the world. Photography however, stands on a threshold of a new era, populated not by representations, but by networks, webs

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

⁶ Foucault, *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984. Vol. 2, Aesthetics*, 175-6.

and grids, and defined not by the subjectivity of the observer but by the relationships between interconnected points and entities that have no fixed and stable identities, but produce meaning by association, through dissemination, processing and sharing via online systems. In what follows I will show that in the age of post-truth and fake news, photography does not cease to make pictures, but confronts the eye with images that emerge at the limits of representation, questioning the supremacy of human vision, and questioning the claims of representationalism for objectivity and realism.

One side of photography is no doubt representational and signifying but to say that photography is only this, is not only to legitimise forms of mastery and domination contained with the ‘master-copy’ paradigm, but also to overlook the material processes of reproduction, copying, distribution and dissemination that operate within and around the image. No semiotic analysis can grasp what is going on at the moment of looking, because nothing in this situation can be reduced to stable, meaningful signs.

The photograph is situated at cross-roads between complex systems, each one of which has its own specific parameters and its own consistency. A photograph simultaneously interlaces several layers of (co)existence: 1) rational world view based on mathematical foundations. 2) technical know-how capable of translating this world view into material objects. 3) Economic systems capable of producing and distributing these objects. 4) collective imagination and desire

for the consumption of these objects. 5) Political agendas that release the capital required for the distribution and public consumption.⁷ However, the amalgamation of these forces is far from harmonious or seamless: desires, politics, economics and reason are at war with each other and the photograph is not the setting of their happy union but the site of the hand-to-hand combat of energies that are barely contained within its rectangular frame.⁸



Figure 2. Mont Blanc observatory deck, France, Marco Bohr 2006

The image in *figure 2* is not only a recording of a scene, but also an assertion of a centering and selective gaze that legitimises certain viewing and political practices that cohere around the demand for objectivity, rigidity and

⁷ Guattari, Félix. 1995. *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* Trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis. Indiana University Press. Pp 47-48.

⁸ On 'hand to hand combat of energies' see Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 146.

hegemony.⁹ To say the same thing slightly differently, the correspondence between a photograph and the world is depending on the presumption of the subjectivity of the observer on the one hand, and the objectivity of the ‘out there’ on the other. This presumption is sustained by means of ignoring all those aspects of the picture that do not fit within this representational schema. Our very insistence to see photographs as representations of past events has consequences to the way we see ourselves as passive onlookers for whom the world is a spectacle. To illustrate the way photography produces specific forms of subjectivity, where technical, optical, economic, and political mechanisms play a dominant role, consider what happens to me during the act of looking at a photograph. We can recall here Felix Guattari’s analysis of looking at a TV screen¹⁰. When I look at a photograph I exist at an intersection: 1. I am fascinated by the content of the image, whether shocking, entertaining or arousing. 2. I am associating the spatial-motor-temporal dimensions of my world to the photograph, recognising it as situated in a specific chronological and geographical relation to myself. 3. I am also at the same time daydreaming, fantasising or thinking in ways that are only partially (if at all) triggered by the event of looking a photograph. And finally 4. I am already anticipating the next

⁹ ‘conceptualisation does not simply create hierarchies of thought; rather it serves to legitimate of justify certain visual, linguistic, social, and political practices that developed around the demand for intelligibility, rigidity, and hegemony.’ Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*, 25

¹⁰ Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*, 16.

image, that will reveal itself after a click, a swipe or a tap on the screen. How can there be a cohesion between these fragments that pull me in different directions?

The frame is a constant reminder that the photograph struggles to maintain an equilibrium between its claim for realism and the obvious fact that it is detached from the real. The photograph endeavours to depict continuity and homogeneity, but these fragile qualities can only be sustained for the price of ignoring an obvious truth: a photograph looks nothing like the reality it purports to represent. For one thing, reality is not contained within a frame, it has no border, no limit, no edge. For that reason, the edge of the photograph must be summarily ignored in order to maintain the illusion of similarity between the photograph and the world. The edge of the photograph simply drops out of any and all discussions of photography, nobody seems to ask what part of the real the edge corresponds with. But perhaps these questions must be asked: who and for what reasons decided that the edge is not important and must be ignored? Why and when was it established that the edge is less important than the middle? And finally, what can the edge of the photograph reveal about the geometrical optics of representation and the construction of identity engendered by it?

Shifting the attention from the content of the image to the edge that encloses it is a strategic move that disregards the common-sense notion of what a photograph is for. The usual view that sees the photograph as a representation is based in the fantasy of an authentic present, from which we look back at a fixed and immobile past. As Karen Barad has shown, the activity of boundary making is an essential attribute of anthropocentric, representationalist tendencies, because representationalist attitude is founded on the premise that images mediate between the known and the knower.

Refusing the anthropocentrism of humanism and antihumanism, *posthumanism* marks the practice of accounting for the boundary-making practices by which the 'human' and its others are differentially delineated and defined.¹¹

The trust in the power of photography to mirror a pre-existing state of affairs is an attribute of a status-quo that believes in the triumph of objectivity and reason over the darker, more ambiguous aspects of human nature.

Drawing on the figure of the philosopher-king as the upholder of universal values, the photographer-king provides a model of rational human conduct by being attached to a universal system of image-making and the universally applicable logic of reflection, in which subjectivity is seen as the privileged means of relating to the world. The rationality of the photographic procedure is connected with the idea of subjectivity as a real-life practice of relating to the world through images on the one hand, and on the other with the overarching metaphor of photography as *reflection*: the image is always conceived as a reflection of something that is external to it. Straight away we are justified in registering a concern, a grievance even, for is it not the case that reflection presupposes the existence of original (the one being reflected) and copy (the reflection), and with them the notion that former is more genuine than the later, has greater rights to call itself 'authentic' and generally lord it over the lesser

¹¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, 136., see also the talk by Professor Karen Barad with the title: "Troubling Time/s, Undoing the Future." At: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBnOJioYNHU>, accessed January 15, 2017

entity that is relegated to the position of a copy, a replica or a clone¹². According to the logic of reflection, the world is populated by clones that bear visual resemblance to ‘originals’ but have none of the vital characteristics of authentic beings. Understood as a reflection photography is not only a visual regime but also an ideology that believes in the notions of authenticity and originality, as well as in the subordination of the copy to the model. Reflection-photography does not only provide us with images of the world, it also shapes our thinking about the world by emphasizing hierarchical structures and modes of subjectivisation that are engendered in the idea of reflection as a visual methodology.

Simply put, the whole point of reality surely must be that it cannot be contained in a frame, and equally, that anything framed has already lost touch with the real. Photographic practice is taking for granted the notion that the real can be diced and sliced, packaged in neat little rectangles, that are supposed to contain a grain of truth about the world that is out-there. Notice that here we are already dealing with two assumptions, two separate levels of truth: 1. The world is true, and 2. The picture of the world is also true.

Representation takes this separation between the image and the world as foundational, it divides the real into things on the one hand, and images on the other, and maintains that they are fully distinct from each other.¹³

¹² Haraway, Dona J. 199

¹³ Colebrook, Claire. 1999

Representational approach to photography asserts that there are only two kinds of entities: there are bodies and there are images. Bodies are entities fixed in space and time, while images are not even entities, they are merely clones of objects. From this perspective a photograph has truth value because it *corresponds* to something out-there, however, correspondence demands the presence of an individual who is qualified to *recognise* the resemblance between the real and the image. For that reason, representation brings with it a conception of nature that is objectified and of a subject who is viewing the world through logical and rational prism.

Making a small shift from the centre of the image to its edge, I will discuss below another way of looking, that does not involve the bear hug of the master-copy paradigm. The edge of the image is formed from the same elements that make the image, but it also contains the additional sense of a limit, a threshold or a cut. Considered on its own merits, the edge of the photograph is the non-signifying part of the image, yet it manages to speak of the experience of depth that, in the words of Maurice Blanchot ‘does not surrender itself face to face; it only reveals itself by concealing itself in the work’¹⁴. To show what kind of work the edge does, Blanchot recalls the myth of Orpheus who descended to hell to bring Eurydice back from the dead. Photography is like Orpheus, tirelessly rescuing people, events and situations from disappearing into the darkness,

¹⁴ Blanchot, Maurice. 1981. *The Gaze of Orpheus, and Other Literary Essays*. Ed. P Adams Sitney. Trans. L Davis Barrytown, N.Y. ; Station Hill Press, p.100

preserving in a snapshot the likeness of that which is no more. Like Orpheus, photography can only perform this task on the condition that it does not turn back to look at the edge out of which the image emerges. The edge is not a sign or a symbol but a physical mark in the physical world, yet formed entirely by the materials of the image, as such the edge is both material and immaterial, both an appearance and a reality.

The whole Platonic distinction between the model and the copy hinges on the complete distinction between the two,¹⁵ yet here, within the edge of the image, the eye encounters something which is both true and false at the same time. This state of undecidability of the edge (is it an image? Is it a thing?) points not towards identity between images and things, but towards altogether different image economy that does not relate at all to the true / false opposition, instead the edge exposes this opposition itself as untrue. In place of an opposition, the edge presents us with superpositionality. As Barad explains, superpositions are the embodiment of indeterminacy.¹⁶ Where is the edge of the image? Where the image ends? It is a question that opens the door to an approach to photography that is not based on the logic of reflection but on an engagement with images that is in equal parts material and semiotic¹⁷. The edge of the image has its own

¹⁵ Plato, "The Republic," 1124-1125 (504d-505b). See also Jeffery A. Bell, *Philosophy at the Edge of Chaos*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 69.

¹⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, p.265

¹⁷ On posthuman / non-human strategies of mediation see: Haraway, Donna. 2016. Tentacular thinking: Anthropocene, capitalocene, chrhulucene. *E-flux*, no. 75:01-17.

superpower: one look at it and the picture dissolves and disappears and in its place another truth is being revealed, the truth of the *other* image, produced not by the surface of representation, but by its edge.

The edge of the photograph points to the exact location where representation finds its limit, where the content of the image gives way to the material conditions of imageness. The edge is the self-referential fragment that appears again and again in every photograph, indicating in a simple and unambiguous manner that an image is being made. As far as the edge is concerned, there is no question of representation, only of the presence of the statement 'it is an image'. However, it also gets complicated, because the frame implies a content that constitutes the object of the image, a content around which the frame frames. Nevertheless, the object has to be suspended for the frame to be articulated and come into view. The object does not come before the frame, the frame, in that sense does not frame the object but dissolves it. Vision here is faced with the almost impossible task of facing the ground zero of vision: the limit of visibility. The frame dissolves not only the object but also the dialectics of subject and object, form and content.

When we are committed to establishing a correspondence between a photograph and the world, we are prepared to overlook, ignore and blank out the edge of the picture for the sake of reassurance in the translatability of the real into images. In other words, in our haste to establish an equivalence between the photograph and the world we agree to overlook all those attributes that do not match, but through which another dimension of the image (and of the world) is being made visible.

3 The constriction of photographic identity

By giving every member of society a recognisable and recordable face that could be preserved in a family album, stored in a police file and exhibited in a gallery, photography acts as a catalyst for the creation of the modern individual as someone who spends their life as a passive spectator of flickering images while at the same time being exposed to universal procedures of recording and surveillance. The determining factor here is that both as a form of mass entertainment and of social control, photography is marked by a rational and logical relationship among images and the world they allegedly represent. In what follows I will suggest that when the engagement with photography is limited to questions of recognition and resemblance, such approach stifles our experience of the world and directs us towards monotonous homogeneity in which everything can be represented in a photograph, and a photograph is always a representation of something or other. And yet, a photograph has the potential to move our gaze beyond representation of events and situations in a way that allows us to penetrate the appearance of things and to sense their inner truth, rather than act as a mere illustration.

As two brief examples, we might think of the photograph in a passport that is used to verify the identity of its owner when the border control (human or facial recognition algorithm) compares the resemblance between the image and the person, and then, in a different (but connected) manner, the video recording made by Diamond Reynolds of the aftermath of her boyfriend, Philando Castile being shot by police officers, which was viewed by millions of people online, and acted as a catalyst to the 'Black Lives Matter' movement. In the first case, the passport photo speaks not only about the similarity between the image and the person, but also about a system of power and control that attributes a legal status to visual resemblance, and legitimises

the passing of judgement that is based on visual appearance. In the second example the cameraphone recording captures the moment when visual appearance gets someone killed. Here the video footage frames the car window as a screen within a screen on which a situation unfolds that transcends the logic of recognition, in which we see a black man bleeding out after being shot by police. Representation here is subjected to a violent reality check: this is not a police drama played out on a screen in front of my eyes, rather I am witnessing the extent to which the visual (on all its virtual, optical, political and racial components) forms the peculiar materiality of the everyday.

What is presented to the viewer through the images and the voices that the camera captured, is not only a documentation of an event, but also the perception of a reality that is bigger and more complex than any representation. Rather than being a faithful documentation of something that happened, this footage acquires a certain autonomy from the event it recorded, *releasing* from it a force that is haunting and scarring the viewer. While we can never feel what it was like to be in that car during that shooting, the jittery recording of the car window that frames the policeman on an ubiquitous sidewalk shouting hysterically, combined with the narration by Diamond Reynolds, who is talking both to the officer and to us, simultaneously obeying the orders to show her hands and reporting her boyfriend's death and her own arrest, suggest that violence, racism and fear are both everyday occurrences in suburban America and that they have a specific visual form that this video recording managed to capture.



Figure 3. Screenshot of livestream video recording made by Diamond Reynolds of the fatal shooting of Philando Castille on 6 July 2016.

In both examples discussed above the image acts not only as a rational representation of an external reality, and its authority and agency are anchored not only in our naive belief in photography's ability to simply record a world of people, objects and events just as it is. Rather, what we are able to glimpse is the autonomy of the photographic image (both moving and still), and its ability to expose the power of the image *qua* image to shape and intervene in the world around us. What we are witnessing is not a representation of pre-existing reality, but the photograph allows us to intuit that the visual image is endowed with unique power, and that the power of photography lies not in its ability to represent, but in asserting the materiality of visual perception.



Figure 4. Photo by Yavuz Alatan/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

The assassination of the Russian Ambassador to Turkey during the opening of a photographic exhibition, captured by the professional photographer who was there to document diplomat's visit to the gallery, provides another glimpse into the complex network that interlinks political and visual situations. Reality here appears produced by photography, rather than being recorded by it. Besides being a visually striking recording of a historical event, these images may also be seen as a rhizome, suggesting that photography and reality are not two separate and distinct entities. Instead this image implies that reality itself is like a photographic collage in which political violence operates through images, and the 'shooting' of photographs is already a violent act. The photograph of the assassination in a photographic gallery appears to capture the ability of photography to transform reality. Framed by the photographs on the gallery walls, this recording of the moment and the aftermath of a killing suggests that politics, violence and philosophy are not clearly separate from the visual field, but co-exist within it via complex mesh of intra-connections. Even when we look at this image for the first time our experience is framed by other images of violence, some real and some fictional. It is filtered through both the collective and the personal memories of, for instance, the cinematic iconography of Quentin Tarantino and the

execution of a Viet Cong prisoner, and while this image can be seen as a simple manifestation of our ability to make records and to document, it is also philosophical meditation on the specific power of visuality, and its unique ability to shape ethical, moral and aesthetic perceptions.

4 From representation to materiality

How might we begin to think about the materiality of photography in a way that frees it from a dependence on representation? Consider for instance the slideshow REM (2016) by Kenta Kobayashi: the sequence is dominated by a continuous movement through an imaginary landscape constructed from parts of photographs, liquefied billboards and morphed walls, surrounded by reflective, water-like surface. Floating through this world one might think of gliding the canals of Venice, or of Ridley Scott's panning shoots of the post-apocalyptic New York in *Blade Runner* (1982). And yet, in REM every solid composite that first appears to the eye as a billboard or a wall of a building is revealed to be nothing more (or less) than a surface: the camera pierces each surface in turn, revealing another surface behind it, that – like the previous one – appears solid at first, but has no other substance than the data it is made of. What this work allows us to experience is that beyond the compositional elements of an image lies its material condition of continuous repetition, copy and self-replication. Jean-Francois Lyotard named this condition 'The Great Ephemeral Skin'. In *Libidinal Economy* he proposed that the role of the artist is to lay bare the mechanisms of representation, to show that if there is anything real about representation, it is because there also exists a fully real virtual domain constructed not from objects and things, but from intensities, desires and surfaces:

The representative chamber is an energetic *dispositif*. To describe it

and to follow its functioning, that's what needs to be done. No need to do a critique of metaphysics (or of political economy, which is the same thing), since critique presupposes and ceaselessly creates this very theatricality; rather *be inside and forget it*, that's the position of the death drive, describe these foldings and gluings, these energetic vections that establish the theatrical cube with its six homogenous faces on the unique and heterogeneous surface.¹⁸



Slideshow 'REM' 4min49sec. 2016 Collaboration with a media artist God Scorpion and a track maker Molphobia.

Figure 5. Kenta Kobayashi, Slideshow 'REM' 4 min 49 sec. 2016 Collaboration with Media Artist God Scorpion and a track maker Molphobia

In REM photography is being revealed not as a 'representative chamber', but as an infinite movement of surfaces that continuously self-replicate and morph into each other. The laws of matter in a three dimensional world do not apply to the great ephemeral screen on which images proliferate, as on this screen the logic of Euclidian geometry is replaced by the evolving symmetry of fractal geometry. This is not

¹⁸ Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 3.

because photography here is rejecting a reference to reality, but because reality itself is understood as photographic and for that reason indefinitely signified, continuously recurring, subject to the logic of technology, mass-production and the perpetual reformulation of commodities for new markets.

In its traditional form photography expresses the potential for representation located within capitalist organization of society. But when photography is detached from its ability to produce representations and considered as a flow of image-data, one arrives at another fully real force that springs from photography's ability to produce rhythms and not forms, reproduce and not represent, proliferate and not identify, self-replicate and not copy. As a process of instantaneous distribution, photography is being detached from objects in space as it poses a question about the condition of seeing as such. Instead of evaluating images on the basis of their similarity to actual events or situations, instead of re-examining their indexical or symbolic content, what is required is to inquire after the conditions that make something like an image possible. By exploring the rules of engagement that govern the use of images, it might be possible to free thought from its dependence on the Platonic opposites of *image* (eikon) and *Reality* (eidos), and from the binary dualisms that follow from it¹⁹. For as long as the rule of this binary model persists, it is impossible to escape what Deleuze branded as 'the four iron collars of representation: Identity in the concept, opposition in the predicate, analogy in judgment and resemblance in perception.'²⁰

¹⁹ Plato, "The Republic," 601 b-c.

²⁰ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 330.

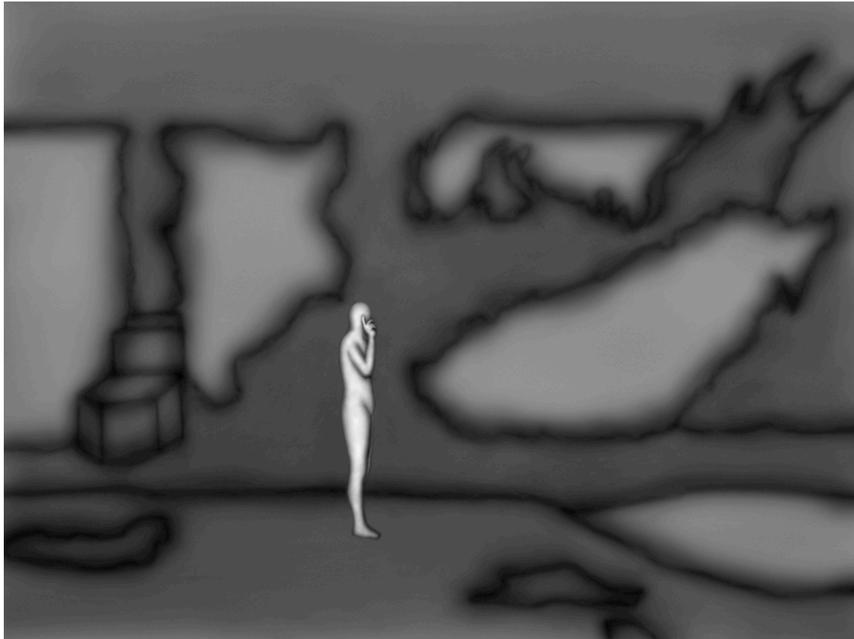


Figure 6 Daisuke Yokota, Interception 2009

The work of Daisuke Yokota can be considered in this light, as an attempt to draw attention away from representation, to the process that can make a picture possible. By working with aspects of image production, Yokota approaches the visual via a series of transformations that tend to obscure, obliterate and deface the optical surface while simultaneously creating an image that exposes the strategies of image making. Yokota's works could be read as a critique of traditional photography's anti-photographic tendencies: by privileging sharpness, clarity and realism photography modelled itself on how the human subject wants to see the world, rather than insisting on a view of the world that is inherently photographic. The camera lens is not the same as a human eye, and the chemical or algorithmic processing is not the same as the processing of visual stimuli by human brain. Because the camera is not a human prosthetic limb, it can create images that are divorced from the way the world presents itself to a human subjectivity. Crucially, photography can show us the world not as it appears to a spectator, but as a collection of perceptions of intensity, before they are submitted to the logic of representation. To say the same thing slightly differently, it is

not me who is making images of the world, rather by encountering the world as an image, I become who I am. In the famous opening paragraphs of *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson explains:

Here I am in the presence of images, in the vaguest sense of the word, images perceived when my senses are opened to them, unperceived when they are closed. All these images act and react upon one another in all their elementary parts according to constant laws which I call laws of nature, and, as a perfect knowledge of these laws would probably allow us to calculate and to foresee what will happen in each of these images, the future of the images must be contained in their present and will add to them nothing new. Yet there is one of them which is distinct from all the others, in that I do not know it only from without by perceptions, but from within by affections: it is my body.²¹

Externally I might see a tree, a dog or a house, but internally all I can sense is images and I experience my own body as an image. Photography then is not an accidental invention or a random discovery of the technological age, but rather it is rooted in the very process that is making human beings out of animals and political subjects out of humans. The photograph is giving us an image of the world that is not human because it is not constrained to the subjective processes of representation. Instead, the photograph interrupts the relationship between us and the world, producing familiarity and repetition on the one hand and openness towards new, previously unknown forms of experience on the other.

All this means that photography is not a tool that is making us look further, remember better and record everything for posterity, rather, it is a way of experiencing reality as layered amalgam of data connected through processes of repetition, self-

²¹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 17.

replication and copy. The power of photography, its enduring fascination and mystery is that it allows us to see the world not reduced to the view of the human eye.

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