The Image Speaks- "Capital Room vol. 2 Hanako Murakami"

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1.

Is it possible to hypothesize a history without images, particularly when we speak of history since the 20th century, which witnessed the explosive expansion of technologies of image production and distribution?

History can no longer be spoken without an account of images. Human existence has colluded with the history of images and as a result, the analysis of images has attained the potential to become an essential facet, on par with or even superseding texts and testaments, of the detailed discourse of history and civilization. In other words, through the development of technologies such as photography, moving images, and print media, mankind has searched for a new format of historical description, i.e. "image-based historical description," in the 20th century.

In the last dozen years or so, the works of scholars such as Georges Didi-Huberman, Hans Belting, Jonathan Crary, and Geoffrey Batchen, which have also been actively introduced in Japan, have all aimed to liberate images from the limiting context of art history toward one more aligned with anthropology and theories of civilization. They have, moreover, sought to show how images suture the conscious and unconscious, and, both form the subject and contribute to its crisis and destabilization. This approach frequently marks a distinction from the art historical approach, which has posited the traditional media as the object of the viewing subjects' visual apprehension and contemplation. To describe the "history of images," then, is decidedly different from the writing of "art history," which remains a description of the history of objects. Instead, the history of images accounts for the role images play in the historical process of the formation of mankind and or subjects.

The above-mentioned scholars' frequent reference to "Foucauldian archaeology " is not unrelated to the fact that in Foucault's historiographic projects, he interrogated the genealogy of technologies that produced and regulated subjects. That is to say, according to Foucault, humans do not objectively sustain or control technology, but are rather produced by it. The production of subjects was, of course, importantly carried out at the site of the body. Following Foucault's framework then, each new image production technology provides a correspondingly new site for transforming the body.

Understanding imaging technologies in this way, one can also argue that the image itself cannot be a monolithic entity. They are instead historical subjects with specific histories and characteristics that cross words with the body through their technological and physiological features. Images are hence neither universal nor a historically transcendental. Each image has a specific origin and physical texture. At any rate, images were produced historically, and they have more potential to subjectively speak their own histories than to function as media or objects. In other words, we should not treat images as objective documents, but instead wager on their subjective speech. It is in this way that the study of images can be properly situated in an anthropological context.

2.

By activating the "speech" of images associated with their historical process, one might position Hanako Murakami's practice within an archaeology of images. Murakami is interested in the archaeological and historical "origins" of each image. Every one of her works–examining and re-staging the invention of daguerrotypes and silver-halide prints; recreating the theological image of the Veil of Veronica on cosmetic degreasing paper; or exploring the shift away from the gold standard in the brilliance of the silver-plated surface of the copper U.S. one cent coin adorned with a portrait of Abraham Lincoln–speaks to the origin of a specific image and shows that each image is an event that has produced a specific history. Just as film and photography were invented, each new image reciprocally produced a unique time-space.

Moreover, Murakami's works problematize the process through which the image is revived in the present in the search for its origin. In this solo exhibition, Murakami resurrects antiquated technologies and recreates them to produce her works. Below is an excerpt from a text accompanying one of the works.

> *An image slowly appears on the mirrored surface of silver-plated copper—this was the dawn of photography, the daguerreotype. Now instantly and infinitely reproducible, photographs were once one-of-a-kind art objects. I approached a daguerreotypist, someone with mastery of this antiquated process, with a photograph of clouds I had found on the Internet.[1]*

In the work described above, Murakami visited a daguerrotypist to employ an outdated technology. In *The Perfect*, she exhibited a dry photographic plate, originally sold in the 1920s, as a variant on the readymade. These relics from the past are retransmitted to the present as Murakami's "works." The result is a crossing of the present and past tenses. The anecdotal episodes accompanying each work combine originary tales of particular imaging technologies Murakami's

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[1] All quoted passages are from texts displayed at Murakami's exhibition.

personal experiences to blur the distinction between the past and present. Each work is then supported by a complex intersection of divergent "tenses."

This crossing of tenses will create a fissure in the being of the work itself. The viewer, for example, will see a dry photographic plate and be unable to determine whether it is a readymade discovered in storage or a fake produced by the artist in the 2000s. Such errors in identifying multiple tenses are steeped in anachronism in the sense of upturning the linear progression of time. It is also of note that this type of anachronism is at work in Murakami's intersection of multiple image histories in her process of exposing a daguerrotype with an image of a cloud found on the internet. Multiple technologies of image production are also crossed in that process.

Murakami says that she once planned to create a film composed of daguerrotypes. Historically, of course, film was invented after the daguerrotype. The process of connecting multiple still images to create a motion picture is a historical fact. This process cannot be reversed. In this sense, if she were to make a film out of daguerrotypes, she would effectively put time out of joint. In other words, Murakami's works depend on the moment in which a particular system that supports time is destroyed by the crossing of multiple times and tenses.

3.
Murakami's works thus pursue the possibility of multiple times coexisting so that an origin could simultaneously be a conclusion, and an end also a beginning. For example, in *El Fin del Mundo no Llego (The End of the World Didn't Come)*, Murakami printed a poster to commemorate the fact that the world did not end on the date predicted by the Mayan calendar. The work speaks to the idea that the world's end is also its beginning.

> *Speaking of the end of the world, the Mayan calendar ends on the December 21, 2012. Before the day arrived, some interpreted this as predicting the apocalypse, others the dawn of a new era. One interpretation held that it marked the advent of flexible and immaterial technology. On this day I was in Colombia, where the descendants of the Maya peoples live today. The next day, I visited a woodcut printing workshop there to celebrate the fact that the world had not ended. The printer helped me pick out the subjects for my poster, a dancing man and woman and two chickens. And the two birds on the poster rejoiced: "The end of the world didn't come".*

And here is another way to tell the same story. Louis Daguerre, who invented the daguerrotype, which is to say, he who was present to its origin, was also made present to the world's end through mercury poisoning.

> *In the 19th century the dangers of mercury were not yet known, and Daguerre, the inventor and namesake of the process, breathed in great amounts of the vapor. Apparently, he then fell under the delusion that the end of the world was coming.*

The origin of photographic technology was thus plagued with apocalyptic delusion. Such crossings and dissonances in one's sense of time also touches on the problem of uncertainty regarding images' authenticity, which Murakami has also pursued in her works. For example, in a previous work, Murakami took on the persona of an other to produce photographs that were falsely presented as historical relics. These were "fake" relics resurrected from the rubble of the past. That which was thought to be produced in the past merely mimicked the past. In such an object, the time is montaged. In other words, the multiplicity of time is folded into the question of the image's authenticity.

4.

Through the processes outlined above, Murakami's works, such as the above-mentioned degreasing paper "tailored" as the Veil of Veronica, are full of images that are "fakes." Her silver-plated copper penny adorned with a portrait of Abraham Lincoln is also a "fake" tailored to look like silver coin.

> To produce a plate for daguerreotype photography, a sheet of copper must be plated with silver. The copper sheet is plunged into a tank of liquid potassium cyanide, and electric current passed through it while the copper is alloyed with silver. While observing this process, said to be as old as civilization itself, I was thinking about Abraham Lincoln. It was he who first introduced the policy of valuing paper money equally with coins of equivalent face value. Lincoln not only freed the slaves, he also emancipated currency from metal. "Liberty" – the word appears alongside Lincoln's profile portrait on the copper US penny. Here I have silver-plated the penny like a daguerreotype plate.

Lincoln liberated currency from the substantive value of metal so that paper currency could circulate based on the collateral of immaterial "trust." Paper currency is in essence a "placeholder" backed by "faith." As if to trace this act of introducing paper currency, Murakami silver-plated a copper coin to create a fake silver coin. On second thought, the work also suggests that Murakami's practice is a form of "counterfeiting." The reenactment of the origins of the silver-halide print and daguerrotype erodes the boundaries between technique and creativity, truth and fiction, and past and present.

As Jonathan Crary reports in *Suspensions of Perception*, fin-de-siecle visual culture was eroded by phantasmagoria such as sleep and trance.[2] In this sense, Murakami's exploration of the origins of imaging technologies accurately expose the presence of dubiousness as well as trance-like dreams and occultism within the beginnings of these technologies, as seen in Daguerre's exposure to mercury poisoning. It is within this "dubiousness" that the search for images' origins and Murakami's practice as "counterfeiting" co-exists. And it is in this same place that the correctness of Murakami's artistic interrogation of images' origins must be secured.

Murakami likely addressed Veronica's Veil in this solo exhibition because the sacred veil marked with the "trace" of Christ is a prototypical model of the image and points to its most primitive existence, and, because the veil's authenticity is itself shrouded in mystery. Scientific verification has shown that the Turin Shroud, marked with the stained trace of Christ, was made by coating its surface with a special chemical, wrapping a human body with it, and "exposing" the fabric in sunlight.[3] Shockingly, the technician who created the Turin Shroud was aware of the principles of photography before the invention of the medium. The Shroud is hence the earliest example of the use of photographic technology and the technology was used at its inception with the aim of creating a fake. The origins of photography was thus always already "counterfeiting."

This process exhibits the exact same conditions as the production of Murakami's work. The image will occur in an anecdotal space perceived through an illusion that slowly eliminates the distinction between the real and the fake. The speculations that take place within this anecdotal space is precisely what is spoken by the image. The history of images is the history of what the images themselves speak.

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[2] See third chapter of Jonathan Crary, translation supervised by Atsushi Okada, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, Modern Culture*. (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2005).

[3] Lynn Picknett and Clive Price, trans. Masayo Arai, *The Turin Shroud: How Da Vinci Fooled History*. (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1995).