

Global affects, identity effects **The ghost in the machine, Thomas Ruff**

by Teresa Arozena

Without any doubt, one aspect that clearly distinguishes Thomas Ruff's works in general is that sort of anxiety or discomfort that one feels with his work. He is probably the most *uncomfortable* of all the exponents from the German school of the '80s and '90s, that generation of photographers characterised by a cold, controlled and absolutely conceptual use of the photographic medium.¹ It is precisely from this uncomfortable feeling that makes his production unique. It becomes more distant and impossible to frame it in the mass photographic practice registered under a certain label, from which a productive approach can clearly be achieved in his work as a whole, characterised by tenacious questioning of the properties of this medium.

This meant that in the last quarter of the past century and at the beginning of this one, his works pose a whole series of questions and renovating views about images and the contexts for reading it. How do we look at images? What is the potential of the medium in itself, above the *content*, beyond –or nearer– the *depth of the tale* that an image is able to offer? In a certain way these questions, if taken into consideration, rather *spoil* the image, even for well-weathered art adventurers. Like having a bucket of cold water thrown in your face to snap you out of the hypnotic visuality of the mediatic trance, depriving you of the evasive pleasures of that *visual candy* and its perceptive conditioning, by those who operate the mechanisms of social power. Red pill. Ruff's difficult course roams along throughout his entire production, constituting a tenacious trajectory, investigating the rhetoric of the models that represent our very own contemporary societies.

In his persistent questioning of the photographic medium and its contexts of reception, it is also clear that Thomas Ruff finds the ideal place for his travels and far-removing exercises in that immersive, flowing space. Series of photographs of Mies Van der Rohe's buildings, collaboration in Herzog & de Meuron's buildings, or more to the point, that great format that he homes in on in his work, inescapably tying them to a profoundly spatial and corporal experience, to a *tactility path*. Perhaps this is derived from the way in which the architectonic space brings together that paradigm of *diffuse experience*, reception of the work of art in the *dissipation* that Walter Benjamin described as a new perceptive model in the photographic age, the political and social

¹ A heterogeneous series of photographers –Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky, Axel Hütte, Candida Höfer, and Thomas Ruff himself– who have come from the breeding ground of Kunstakademie Dusseldorf, under professors Bernd and Hilla Becher.

implications of which are even more immense and fully applicable today.² On this occasion, at the request of OHL, the construction company that is in charge of the building works of TEA (Tenerife Arts Space), and at the suggestion of the architects Herzog & de Meuron, with whom the photographer has worked on many occasions, Thomas Ruff has proposed a series of 10 large-format pictures, to be displayed on the great East wall of the library in the new building. Nine of these pictures form part of his *JPEGs* series, commenced in the year 2004, and the tenth belongs to his *Sterne (Stars)* series, created between 1989 and 1992, consisting of an enormous repertoire of giant prints of night skies in the Southern hemisphere, made from negatives in the archives of the European Southern Observatory (ESO).

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The photographic medium has its origins and development within the complex field of modernity and its intense industrialisation and technification process. Therefore, it is not surprising that the search for a specific photographic language quite often entails a close relation with the idea of a *machine development*, as a sort of constant that emerges in the different attempts to sketch the history of this medium. Thus, it could be said that *technical images* evolve along a road that is protected by a great shadow, cast by the concept of a machine that is a *mirror-image* of humanity, and within the field of *complete desire*, it is that point of tension where man can be *perfect*, beyond his very self. But clearly the 20th Century is not time oriented to that state that is infinitely approximable to the ideal. Instead it is more of a space of marked tensions that drive forward the set of contradictions that nourish our social substrate of the present-day. This is doubtlessly the result of those dystopian scenarios that frequently lead us to *sci-fi* mythology and its prospective thinking, which often explores other darker and more complex spheres of that *machine dimension*, in which the social body penetrates irremissibly, from modernity to our day.

There is no doubt that these concerns, as a whole, were particularly present in German thought and aesthetics during the course of the last century, from the revealing clarity of the *New Vision* and its faith in mechanisms, or the happy slogan coined by Walter Gropius, "art and technique: a new unit", to the threatening chiaroscuro of *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), where we see how the massive, industrial logic of machine production of equal series is applied to manufacturing individuals as machines, to the idea of rising automatism, from August Sander's stringent project of classifying social types, to the Bechers' serial drive and their pop grids of nostalgic *retro* machines. In this respect, Thomas Ruff's production radicalises this search to an extreme, transferring his own experience towards the difficult frontier that hangs between human and

² Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" , *Discursos Interrumpidos I*, Taurus, Madrid, 1973.

extra-human, a delicate relationship that, at the end of the day, simply points to the problems surrounding the subject, a look, and language.

In the context of his *Porträts (Portraits)* series, Ruff himself explained how his generation, interwoven in a kind of strange *futurity*, curiously awaited the coming of 1984, Orwell's year, and as a result, over the course of the eighties, he developed a long serial sequence of face portraits by playing with the rhetoric of surveillance cameras in a panoptical-transformed society.³ Thus, if Ruff's photographic exercises offer a multi-dimensional, complex reading that cannot be reduced to interpretational formulas, then it is clearly possible to observe the way that radical investigation into the vision of the machine as the incarnation of rationality, a field of absolute objectivity, emerges as a recurrent element throughout his production, always supported by an operation founded on the purest machine-like seriality. Self-similar iteration without purpose or function, anti-narrative; the last conjugation of repetition and difference.

Thus, the notion of archive and catalogue in Ruff, his accumulative, logical order, is always a rhetorical effect - and doubtlessly for this reason, his works look particularly good in a catalogue format. It is a call for the accumulative logic of the market that belongs to a capitalist system and its technological process of standardisation in production; it is a record of the world after the *rebellion of the simulations*, that was to execute its sentence on the original throughout the 20th Century, dissolving the model, throwing us into the impossibilities of the identical. Likewise, it is a call for that discreet system of equivalences that belongs to positive thinking, that organises the interpretative reticle of the world that we know, the world of our machines.

Long series of large-format portraits, likened to police identification pictures or photo booths, an authentic conceptual undercurrent of the genre in a controlled society, empty and repetitive urban scenes taken with a night-vision device—*Nächte (Nights)* (1992-1996)— like those used by the military for the war. Ruff's work appears to call on the *prosthetic, amplifying powers* of the vision machine developed during the 20th Century. In *Sterne*, he balances models representing the scientific field of astronomy and his project on the reticulation of the skies using the enormous collection of images captured by the telescopes at the European Southern Observatory. In *andere Porträts (Other Portraits)* (1994-1995), he builds strange ghost faces segregated by a *Minolta Montage Unit*, which is a device used by the German police in the seventies to build mug shots by blending four different images on the grid of a single negative. It shows a sort of *robotic other* emerging, strange subjectiveness looking at us from far-off faces, pure virtuality, pure effect, just a code in a machine. In all of them, the machinistic, as an iterative process thrown out for transformation, to

³ Bernd M. Scherer, "Interview with Thomas Ruff", *Thomas Ruff. Identificaciones*, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes / Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, México D.F., 2002, p. 55.

randomisation in time, appears to reveal a gnoseology of the un-identical.

Perhaps these *Other Portraits* particularly show up the way in which the rational objectivity that Ruff works with, in all its bluntness, often ends up developing beyond any intention, completely ambiguously, and perfectly subjectively. "I don't need to transcend the device; if I let it work with its own logic, the device will transcend itself."⁴ It is this deeply abstract aspect of the machine and its production, of the automatic and the serial - that extreme indeterminacy that clearly has an *extra-human* something to it, possibly capable of operating the opening of a thought from beyond - where Ruff's work perhaps has its greatest power, in that type of contradiction or interference in which, on a parallel with the absolutely objective operation that sketches a certain context in photographic criticism - distance and observation - there is a sort of allegorical noise attached, that, as Joanna Lehan points out, in relation to his most recent series, *JPEGs*, strangely affirms a zone of experience and subjectivity.⁵ Like those robot ghosts, pure rhetorical effect of visuality as a language, where a subject-in-process always appears - more so the more machine-like it is - a *subject like an effect*.⁶

JPEGs, a series from which nine out of the ten pictures that Ruff proposes for this occasion come from, was commenced in 2004. It should be considered within the context of the globalised and post-apocalyptic scenario of the world after 11-S, where the *state of exception*, the background noise of a permanent global war, the notion of ruin and disaster, are revealed as the substrate of a spectacular world, transformed into an image. As in earlier projects, the pictures in *JPEGs*, are derived from work on an already-existent archive, which, in this case is as big and ubiquitous as it is commonplace: the Internet. Thus, the name of the series refers to the well-known compression standard for digital photographs (the abbreviation for Joint Photographic Expert Group), in very common use in Web environments.

The ready-made logic - that type of silent, clandestine production that Duchamp would reveal after the simple act of taking an object out of its context, pointing towards the notion of consumption as an absolutely abstract fact - determines the operation of this series, in which Ruff makes us ask ourselves about the way in which the expanded field of photography is today clearly being experienced as a phenomenon of consumption, in that new *connective imagination* that Internet represents. There is nothing new in this appropriation procedure. History of art in the 20th Century is constructed on work with pre-existing materials, in other words, in that field that Nicolas

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵ Joanna Lehan (ed.), *Tomas Ruff jpeg's*, Aperture Foundation, New York, 2009.

⁶ José Luis Brea, "Fábricas de indentidad (retóricas del autorretrato)", *EXIT. Imagen y cultura*, nº 10, Madrid, 2003.

Bourriaud brought together under the term *post-production*.⁷ Furthermore, Ruff himself, in his career, has constantly used images extracted from different iconic repertoires, always passing the act of looking to each *reader*, as his or her own particular responsibility. If, in general, serving oneself with an object clearly means interpreting it, Ruff in this case uses the images taken from a type of *global electronic unconscious* that Internet produces, to demand us to interpret it ourselves, digging once again into the social and technological rhetoric of the medium and its uses.

Ruff shoves us into the dilated field of photographic pictures in the era of electronic distribution - or reminds us that we are submerged in it - challenging us to reflect on the way in which we experience and consume it, on the conditions of receiving it in an image-developed world - *unconditioned simulation*, as Baudrillard would coin it - strengthened to an extreme now in the thousand screens that connect our daily world, giving a shape to that *photography being* in the world, with its discontinuity and fragmentation, its amplifying look and artificial instantaneity; omnipresent eye, mediatic drive, that constantly edits the world and its *decanted reality*, in the age of digital manipulation.

But already, since the end of the '90s, Ruff has been experimenting with the potential of digital pictures, turning back on the material surface, towards the *body* of these pictures, to their deeply abstract and pictorial aspect. In particular, his substrates –*Substrats*–, commenced in the year 2001, clearly respond to a notion of *electronic body* of the image, as a pure surface, a vehicle of stimuli directed towards the visual cortex, where the assumption of the *screen* as a new ambit in the imaginary field becomes totally patent.

A surface where information replaces nature, the *screen* - that physical-technical device - which replaces the traditional “window of representation” in the 20th Century. In that screen the pictures no longer describe any reality; they are the vehicle of neurological stimulation, they are information. And if the kingdom of the visual nothingness, of the abstraction of meaningless images, is a field that has been well-furnished already by modern art, and its commitment for absolute material superficiality, from the area of photography, Ruff is aware that this, similarly, can only attain the surface of things. This can be seen in his tenacious resistance to *psychologising* images - projecting what we *want* to see in them - in his constant reference to the medium itself, as a way of focusing attention on the material body, on that *shell* that so often only looks to us like the outer *wrapping* of the image, of what we have before us. Going against the current of the diverse uses assigned to the medium throughout its history, Ruff

⁷ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproducción: la cultura como escenario: modos en que el arte reprograma el mundo contemporáneo*, Adriana Hidalgo editora, Buenos Aires, 2007.

is interested in the *body* of photography.

It is a body that is definitively electric, in an age of mediatic convergence of all screens, of the ethereal immateriality of tele-technologies. It is not so unusual, if one looks back on the Walt Whitman's famous song anticipating the new 20th Century,⁸ celebrating with satanic force that multitude of superficial effusions, waves and infralight particles that make up bodies, "all that abundance of the impalpable", that value amongst surfaces –as Foucault would say.⁹

On the other hand, if one considers how the photographic horizon is now connected at a molecular level to daily life, if one observes how it widens across the disperse experience of the domestic landscape, it will clearly be simple to understand the corporal quality that photography has today. For now, more than ever before, compressed and hyper-functionalised, a photograph is an *object of use*, housed in the folds of custom. Today, a photograph is lived with, made at home, caressed, desired, consumed, wielded, used for whatever, having fulfilled the Walter Benjamin promise, that *way of tactility* that the technique opened, modifying the perceptive modality for ever. Now, more than ever before, in the electronic flow of the network, a photograph is transformed into a body.

In this respect, back in 1999 in his *nudes* series, citing the traditional photographic genre of the nude, Ruff delved into the iconic universe of online pornography. An entire ethnography of audiences, where the artist already manifests that *dimension of use and daily consumption* of the image, again showing a catalogue of types, as a sort of standardised grid based on categories, where collective libidinal desire is registered at large. But, in a second post-production phase, the artist digitally manipulates the chosen *images-labels*, and they are subjected to a process of synthesis - techniques to put out of focus, eliminate details, making darker - that lead to an eminently pictorial result, thus creating a deliberate perceptive ambiguity. His attention then lies in that electronic archive of the Web, that *connective imagination*, upon which he also bases his *JPEGs* series, which is the series that the pictures he has produced for Tenerife come from.

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It is clear that the notion of the *great electronic archive* of the Internet differs substantially from the idea of a traditional archive, in the encyclopaedic or documentary sense of collection or catalogue. Its fluent character, constant

⁸ Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric", *Leaves of grass*, 1855; translated by J.L. Borges, "Yo Canto al Cuerpo Eléctrico", in Walt Whitman, *Hojas de hierba*, Lumen, Barcelona, 1991.

⁹ Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum", in Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, *Theatrum Philosophicum seguido de Repetición y diferencia*, Anagrama, Barcelona, 1995.

variability - permanent unfolding in cross-circuits establishing new connections - clearly bears a closer relation to the darker, less illuminated notion, of a *technological unconscious*, the persisting fluctuation of which marks an endless exercise of that which is *yielded* from what is known, experimented, exchanged, spoken, shown. The image of the gigantic sheds where the Google search engines operate, as evoked by José Luis Brea in his work called *cultura_RAM*,¹⁰ appears to be completely suggestive in this respect; strange rooms continuously orchestrating the flow, administrating the speeds in the drift of content. Unusual transitional places, virtual architectures that perhaps can only be dreamed on an unimaginably dark night, a night to nourish the innumerable sci-fi inventions that project an irremediable dimension of futurity in our daily existence. Brea offers a powerful image of the Google distributor monster, transformed emblem of the Net; organic architecture, gigantic abstract, virtual, ethereal machine of never-ending tunnels and crossed labyrinths, that distributes out the innumerable nerve endings of a quasi infinite section, “the absolute virtual totality of all existing knowledge, in an ubiquitous yet interconnected dispersion of places without privileges, without qualities, delocalised and homotropic.”¹¹

Places without privileges. This network memory, as a flowing construction, largely determines the form of imagination in the globalisation era, which is also the era of dispersion and delocalisation. For in the post-modern capitalist space of flows, the “total urbe”, as a completely coded space, gives us back a homogeneous extension of places in a series; standard places. *Dejá vú*, as an immanent condition, an over-illuminated reality, where “I’ve seen it all” already, as Björk sang in Lars Von Trier’s film. A world that flows through the grid of *label*, beacons for the search engines. Thus, the great electronic archive of the memory-machine of the computerised universe, matching the capitalist spatial process, offers us a *hyper-non-place*, that - in Marc Augé’s sense of the word - lacks history, its own memory.

This is clearly the feeling that emerges when one first looks at the pictures that Thomas Ruff has chosen under the *Tenerife-label*. Images of the world as an expression without author; generic and collective, images as *media*. Any old places spewed up by a blind search engine; the singularity dilutes into the un-identity, the anonymity - the same way that his police portraits clearly reflected the profound anonymity of the subject. Immediately after that we are thrown into a strange perceptive ambiguity, caused by the blurred nature of the pictures, that have undergone an enlargement process beyond their resolution limits. At close quarters we penetrate the pixelated volumes, abstract shapes and colours that play with our eyes. The velvety feeling of softness contains a clear

¹⁰ José Luis Brea, *cultura_RAM. Mutaciones de la cultura en la era de su distribución electrónica*, Gedisa Editorial, Barcelona, 2007, p. 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

summons to the painting. From pointillism to Turner's atmospheres; but also the *images-label* that Ruff has picked out from the global electronic unconscious deliberately suggest a game of references to the romantic topic of portentous ruin, of the grandeur and illegibility of nature. In a sort of far-removing exercise, Ruff again demolishes any old remains of faith in the photographic medium as "natural evidence", by moving it along, throwing the photographs before our eyes as absolute cultural products.

The undercurrent of the ruin and abstraction of *JPEGs* is none other but contemporary ambiguity, a contradictory space where the need for subjective romantic affection lives side by side with a whole series of modern, analytical needs. Just as in the case of the electronic bodies in *nudes*, the blurring effect from enlargement that is applied to each photograph, collapses the difference, extracting the content of their individuality, abstracting the reading from the narrative fact. A scaling game. That juncture formed by zooming in and out that Ruff proposes in order to provoke fluctuation between abstraction and figuration deepens in the visual nothingness that underlies every technical image - something that had been used in his earlier series of *Substrats* and *nudes*.

As has already been seen in Antonioni's metareflexive film *Blow-up*,¹² if you enlarge a photograph too much, if you get into it, the image dots will always reveal the structure of the decomposition, the vacuum that eats away the sense. Illegibility and final decomposition as the intrinsic condition of any technical image, constructed, as Vilem Flusser described,¹³ on the pointillism system belonging to scientific language. But the grid on which the digital image is constructed - those *numerical images*, also called *bitmaps* - is infinitely more solid, precise and manipulable, and on the grid, the immersive character that every enlargement process involves, becomes completely integrated and accepted in the naturalness of the device. Perhaps that expanded time of work or post-production that the digital device offers, that dilated relation with the skin of the photographic image, permits us to get closer to it than ever before, as Benjamin described, as a surgeon that operates penetrating the thickness of the visual.¹⁴

Zoom, macrovision, travel into the interior. The represented thing tends to disappear. Every reference, every tale fades away to show us the abstract, tangible surface of the image, in an intrinsically pictorial process. Digital

¹² Michelangelo Antonioni, *Blow-Up*, 111 min., colour, Bridge Films, United Kingdom, 1966.

¹³ Vilém Flusser, *Una filosofía de la fotografía*, Síntesis, Madrid, 2001.

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Discursos Interrumpidos I*, Taurus, Madrid, 1973, pp. 42-43.

pieces, pixels. In this respect, and formulated perhaps more provocatively, every digital image houses a modern reticle in its interior, and in its extreme, a Malevich black square - imposing black pixel - that radical caesura of sense, triumph of anti-narrative, empty from over-exposure, like an implosive bomb with a timer that only gives us a fleeting breath of appearances.

However, this could also be said of any photographic image, ghosts that loom up over the emptiness of sense. The vocation of every photographic image has always been to be enlarged until decomposition, or, to put it another way, the modern look is built on an immersive, perceptive model, depending on its capacity for being enlarged, for penetrating reality to its limits. A look that is language, capable of illuminating and coding - almost - all that is visible.

This is always the ultimate object of defamiliarity used by Ruff, who continuously tries to establish an analytical relationship with the image, perceiving images as pure language. However, observing the *JPEGs* series, it is likewise impossible not to feel the burden of affection that the series inevitably irradiates. Subjective emission, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, that *ghost in the machine* that arose in the positivity without determination of the repetition and the series, unavoidable effect of the look as a language. In the case of *JPEGs*, it is felt as emanation of a cumulus of *global affects* that recall a blurred collective sensation of political disorientation in a world that is wearing away, subjected to an on-going low-intensity war, where thoughtlessness filters into *connected homes*, establishing a new class of daily ruin.

But, how does the *Tenerife-label* fit into this post-apocalyptic atmosphere, that brand that carries an eminently tourist and holiday definition to it? To a great extent, the operational logic of *JPEGs* puts forward terms of modern contradiction, the great modern myth. Nature versus technology, progress versus destruction, secularity of the positivist world versus the category of the sublime or extraordinary, God's last stronghold. This way, the landscape experience sold by the *Tenerife* brand, which is supposed to be particularly sublime, appears to spontaneously join the repertoire of natural landscapes that the series presents, silently accompanying the other images, of war and destruction.

Although these latter images clearly refer to the state of crisis that we are immersed in, as an essential part of the administration system of global capitalism post 11-S, it is, however, remarkable that these perceptions present a particular oneiric key in the series, a specific, unquestionable ghostlike presence. The preventive and permanent war of the market and its inexorable logic of profit flocks to us through the emanations of that machine-like unconscious of the world, which appears to vaguely evoke, through a mellow dream, the nightmare of a supranational technocracy that makes use of force

and war, perpetrating a *state of exception*, constructing a global society of insecurity. This situation unavoidably appears before us today as the perfect scenario of the instrumental rationality that governs the ideological apparatus of power.

Going through the set of spectral spaces of JPEGs, it is almost impossible not to think of the Ballardian waste,¹⁵ that always presented the oneiric density of a psychic adventure. Imposing twilight landscapes of collapse and extinction that project interior transformation in the course of time, beyond any human scale of values. The shadow of the nuclear mushroom cloud of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in Ballard, and also in Ruff's *JPEGs*, is a ghost that accompanies the devastating landscapes created by technological development and its environmental, social and psychological effects. A shadow that nourishes modern dystopia, a dystopia that the artist extracts from the Internet, that daily, familiar form, to give it back to us as a strange thing. Universe of contrasts. Amongst this darkness, the machine-like unconscious interpolates natural, silent spaces that evoke a time that is parallel to uniqueness. Fragments of paradise. This is exactly what the *Tenerife* label is selling, under its slogan, *a unique land*.

Originality, the original myth in its full sense, functions within the efficacy of the market as an essential claim; the necessary power of locality and peculiarity in a standardised world. Identity effects. Travel to paradise, travel to the origin, to see things in their essence. That is the programme offered by every tourist destination, the invention of any leisure trip in the post-colonial age.

And it hardly needs to be said that the trip can only be a tourist trip, in a world where there does not appear to be anything new to discover. It is that *dejá vú* world; nothing new to see on a horizon that is over-illuminated by the media. Deleuze warned us about this some time ago, with an accurate, worrying statement: travel is television. The majority of trips only consist of checking the state of the television.¹⁶ Today, in the post-television era, the Web is that virtual ocean that is absolutely inherent to travel. It is an enormous digestive system that constantly regurgitates a silent film in its *typicality*. Let us think about those thousands of *image-labels* that make up the machine-like unconscious of the net. That enormous, moving archive from which Thomas Ruff extracted his samples. The way in which it is upheld in a sophisticated system of categories or classes to represent the world.¹⁷

¹⁵ These powerful, decadent scenarios are a reflection of the contemporary pathologies that James Graham Ballard created with a visionary mode throughout his stories and novels.

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, "Optimism, pessimism and travel (Letter to Serge Daney)", *Conversaciones. 1972-1990*, Pre-textos, Valencia, 1996, pp. 113-131.

¹⁷ Without the unique system of representation and access to information in that other network superposed on top of the World Wide Web, the *Semantic Web* or *Data Web* –which adds the

Power of typicality, which is not just an essential factor in information representation systems, or likewise, the claim of the tourist industry. Doubtlessly it has also been the great vocation of the photographic medium throughout the 20th Century, a perfect instrument at the service of the bourgeois power as a tool for colonial expansion - colonisation of the world under the universal visuality of the *system-capitalist world* and its labelling logic.

Thus, the profound travel-substrate of photography, its absolutely determinant role in travel mythology, largely responds to the way in which, with a close connection between language, technology and power, the medium has found a place for itself since the very beginning in the positivist enterprise of cataloguing all that is visible. The whole world. In this respect, a photo is always a souvenir of a bourgeois trip, a colonial trip. It will inevitably try to verify a *type* within the interpretative grid.

Power of typicality therefore, in the world of places without privileges, in that non-place on the planet, and its new symbolic machines to produce identity effects. Beach, palm tree, laurel forest, sunset, rock, foam, sea. Photographs as records. With them, readers will construct their own dense and complex interactive image. Using their own cultural code, they will compress the scenario, encode their individual experiences. An incarnate reality that must completely forget the vacuity of the record.

This is something that Ruff's tenth selected photograph appears to remind us of, that black framed vacuum of space, a fragment of nothing, where the extraterrestrial silence of the stars, inhuman to an extreme, brutally frees us of any interpretative reception. The Ballardian crises often implied abandonment, stopping being *human*, to become another thing. Perhaps today, in the *capitalism of identities* - where singularities as *profiles*, and differences as *typicalities*, constitute the very vein of the new forms of economic power - we should perceive as a gift that profound anonymity, that *any-arity* of all things, which appears through the matrix of pixels that the machine offers us as a body.

additional information or metadata to the content-, Internet would clearly offer a chaotic journey in a confused sea of information, in whose waters we would err like Ulysses.

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