“If Descartes Saw a Photograph…”:
Half-Cartesian Meditations on an Indelible & Incomplete Idea

Kyoo Lee

Note: Below is my manuscript on the (post-)Cartesian aesthetics of blindness, the main body of which, without footnotes, has been translated into Japanese by Prof. Keijiro Suga of Meijin University, widely-known in Japan for his translations of and writings on Continental Philosophy and Theoretical Humanities. This article is a solicited contribution to the book that celebrates Susan Sontag’s writings on photography, which Profs. Suga and Kojin Kondo (the leading Japanese scholar and translator of Walter Benjamin) edited in 2004. The contributors include Andrei Codrescu, Trinh Minh-ha and Susan Sontag.


Japanese version attached at the end of the article.

1. Why Descartes, Today?

I have a very good reason for offering this text to you, and I am confident that you will have an equally good reason for giving it your protection once you understand the principle behind my undertaking; so much so, that my best of commending it to you will be to tell you briefly of the goal which I shall be aiming at in […] (7: 1/3)

This piece. I have been thinking of and around the title, since it was given² to me like a photograph that arrives in the mailbox, like a snapshot that takes one by surprise. So insecure, I began to ask around, trying to find out whether anyone had ever heard of such

¹http://www.getty.edu/art/collections/objects/o141970.html
²I thank Keijiro Suga for this gift of vision.
a thing or even entertained such an idea. In the process of thinking with others including my alter ego all intrigued or confused, about this, which one bored philosopher clarified helpfully as an anachronistic non-issue, I became certain of at least one thing: “if Descartes saw a photograph,” he would look at it again closely. What is it? What is trying to do to me? He would start thinking and talking about it, “it” inside out, trying to find out where it comes from and what it does to his mental health. He might even come up with a fanciful treatise on the “world” of photography. What relevance does “light-writing” bear on Descartes the thinker of the “natural light” of reason? But given that photographic images are “external,” would Descartes the thinker of interiority be interested in those things at all? My small attempt today to (re-)construct a small Cartesian discourse on photography is an elucidatory specification of a small idea I have that seems, however, worth unpacking: Descartes as a photographer of the mind.

But, wait a minute, can the mind be photographed? Or, is it the mind that one photographs? Or God, in fact?

Today, I find myself consistently fascinated by the photographic—as opposed to painterly—dimension of Cartesianism taken as a phenomenon of philosophical modernity. I am riveted by the Cartesian rhetoric of realism, whether scientific or mundane, and the impulse towards the mechanisation of perception, thematised and legitimatised through the engineering discourse such as The World, the Treatise on Man and the Optics. The early Cartesian eye, in the Optics for instance, as “a transfer station” (Appelbaum 1995: 10) turns the eye socket into the windowpane or the viewfinder. That is, “natural light is seen in the action of—or more neutrally as a movement in—a camera obscura” (Vasseleu 1998: 4, my insertion). It allegories “the eye of a newly dead person” as the lens of the camera, “the hole of a specially made shutter” (6: 115/166) through which light passes. It is the Cartesian eyeball pure and simple, and by extension God’s retina, his CCTV, that scans every detail and follows every move without/before judging: a heavenly panopticon without/installed for hermeneutic authority. But who takes/keeps photos? You may ask. But, why, that is a different set of questions asking: where the viewfinder is; what it selects/discovers; to whom vision belongs; who objectifies, etc. Such a preoccupation with the knowing—the good from the evil—subjectivity of God and by extension man, Augustinian rather than Cartesian (cf. Hartle 1986), and late Cartesian rather than early Cartesian, arises only after the question of what God is has been processed. And Descartes’ definition and understanding of the nature of God is quite consistently

---

1I owe many thanks to Nancy Bauer, Ros Diprose, Jonathan Dronsfield, Deb Tollefsen and Kyle Whyte, who helped me think through some of the issues explored here; special thanks to Brendan Prendeville, from whose expertise in visual arts I benefited greatly, and to Mary Beth Mader, a willing hostage to my reveries.

4“(or failing that, the eye of an ox or some other large animal)”; in his letter to Mersenne in 1637 (1:378), Descartes tells him that the diagram (fig. 3. 2) used in the Optics is drawn from the brain of a freshly slaughtered sheep, adding that the physiology of the visual system is “common to beings and men.”

5‘According to Descartes, Christian moral teaching has not succeeded where the ancient pagan failed. Nowhere in the Discourse does he look to Christianity for guidance in the “conduct of life.” […] Theology does not teach anyone how to go to heaven, nor does it claim to: it is very certain that “the way is not less open to the most ignorant than to the most learned.” And the examination of revealed truths […] would require some extraordinary assistance from heaven. To examine revealed truths successfully, one would have to be “more than a man” (6: 8/114): ‘Descartes’ occupation belongs to “men purely as men (homes purement homes)”.’ (6: 3/112) (Hartle 1986: 152)
mechanical: “pure intelligence” (10:218/5), says an early fragment, and “a perfect machine, the idea of which is in the mind of some engineer” (7:14/10), says the synopsis of the Meditations too, curiously, reiterating the earlier reply to the 1st set of suspicions and objections raised regarding the author’s de facto atheism; the upshot of his defence argument is, the perfect watchmaker cannot be held responsible for an imperfect watch.7

Note also as a case in point of Descartes, the inaugural dreamer of a perfect machine: the article I of Part IV: The Earth, The Principles of Philosophy that concludes from the start, scandalously, that “the world […] was created ready-made by God” (9B: 203/267).

Now more curiously, though, in Descartes’ text, the very machinic materialism, devoid of intentional subjectivity, comes to generate, through the narrative “assimilation of vision to touch” (Wolf-Devine 1993:86), an “incarnational” account of the “close interweaving of the body and soul.” It seems no accident that, of the five senses, touch, “the least deceptive and most certain” (11:5-6/82), receives the first and longest explanation from Descartes (9B: 318-9/281-2) with sight treated at the end (319/283). Why is touch important, even more important than sight, for Descartes the thinker of “clear and distinct ideas,” of reason and intellect? And what kind, sense, of touch is it that he is privileging? The raw “sense” of touch, “infantile/childish” and virginal (7: 438-9/296),8 unfiltered by the uncritical habit or calculating intellect, is still quite literally present in and even formative of Descartes’ sense of vision which we tend to think he intellectualises at the cost of ignoring the physical senses. The “9th and most worrying” point of concern in the 6th set of objections, based, as we will see, on a hasty reading of Descartes’ so-called ocularcentric abstractionism, raises just that issue: “Owing to refraction, a stick which is in fact straight appears bent in water. What corrects the error? The intellect? Not at all; it is the sense of touch” (6: 418/281-2). About this putative case against the primacy of vision, physical or metaphysical, Descartes has this to say:

As a result of touching it, we may judge that the stick is straight, and the kind of judgement involved may be the kind we have been too accustomed to make since childhood, and which is therefore referred as the “sense” of touch. But the sense alone does not suffice to correct the visual error: in addition we need to have some degree of reason which tells us that in this case we should believe the judgement based on touch rather than that elicited by vision. And since we did not have this power of reasoning in our infancy, it must be attributed not to the senses but to the intellect. Thus even in the very example my critics produce, it is the intellect alone which corrects the error of the senses. (6: 439/296, my emphases)

Celia Wolf-Devine (1993: 84-88) reads this passage as exemplifying how the Meditations and thereby Descartes’ later views on vision begin to erase decisively the sense of touch in favour of intellectual judgement. I cannot disagree. But the point I am and will be

---

6 “‘God separated the light from the darkness.’ This text in Genesis means that God separated the good angels from the bad angels. The text cannot be understood literally, since a privation cannot be separated from a positive state. God is a pure intelligence.’

7 “Thus if someone possess in his intellect the idea of a machine of a highly intricate design, it is perfectly fair to ask what is the cause of this idea.” (7:103/75); “Moreover I had already insisted in various places that I am dealing merely with the objective perfection or reality of an idea: and this, no less than the objective intricacy in the idea of a machine of very ingenious design, requires a cause which contains in reality whatever is contained merely objectively in the idea.” (7:135/97)

8 And Descartes himself seems to like to play with—(ab)use?—the child: “Suppose we pass a feather gently over the lips of a child who is falling asleep, and he feels himself be tickled. Do you think that the idea of tickling which he conceives resembles anything present in the feather?” (11: 6/82)
highlighting throughout the pages that follow, à la Descartes above, is that the Cartesian judgement, second-order reflective consciousness, is still based on touch. We shall look into the logical and theoretical background to this seemingly un-Cartesian idea by linking the invisible, originary tactility of Cartesian perception to photographic precision. Such a foundational intrusiveness of tactility is, I am arguing, intrinsic to and even generative of Descartes’ theory of vision as a whole that suffers from “some serious unclarities and inner tensions” (Wolf-Devine 1993: 92). What, and why, ambiguities? Wolf-Devine locates the issue this way: “Unfortunately, his zeal to provide a unified cerebral image of the object led Descartes into unfounded and erroneous physiological speculations as well as on a more subtle level, leading him to see the eye as functioning like a camera” (65; 93) and “the senses as yielding simple snapshots” (94). I must agree; but “unfortunately”? Those internal ambiguities are telling – something else than a mere misfortune.

Taking my cue from Wolf-Devine’s thematic attention to the unfortunate unclarity in Descartes’ theory of vision, I shall also address the question of “vision vs. blindness” in a broader discussion of the generic ambiguities of speculative modernity. Which of the two versions of the mind does Descartes end up favouring? The “imprint on the back of the eye/on the soul” (Optics)? Or the “homunculus, the little observer/judge” (Meditations)? Or does he prefer one to the other? Or did he have to? Or could he? Not quite: that will be my point. Although shifting his attention gradually from, for example, “seeing” to “judging” (differences between the two in perceptual level are clearer in the Meditations) that seems—ambiguously, we will see—to privilege the reflective activism of cogitare, “judging,” over the passivity of sensorial imprint, “seeing”), Descartes apparently remained satisfied with his account of vision in Optics” (Wolf-Devine 1993: 5; 88). For, indeed, “he continues to refer his readers to it throughout his life without any indication that he envisioned any major revisions to it.”10 The problem is “whether both the mechanical and the homunculus models are operative in all perception and whether homunculus model is eliminable in principle” (87). Unresolved is the irreducible materiality of idea and vice versa: the “dumb signs made in the brain” (Slezak 2003: 3-4, Cudworth and Glanvill cited) problem; the “dumb English speaker making out Chinese squiggles while locked up in a room full of Chinese dictionaries alone” (John Searle) problem. How does knowledge happen under such a condition? What and where is the point—or flow?—of transition from the brain’s material contact with informational source to the ideational representation of it, whether in mental or linguistic format? The Early and also to a certain extent later Descartes’ “mechanical” model of perception remains inspirational as much as perplexing. Following the “linguistic turn” of the 20th century post-Cartesian philosophy, J.W. Yolton (1984; 1996, cited in Slezak 2003), for instance, also following Searle, updates mechanical Cartesianism by translating the plug-and-let-it-all-happen causality of sensory processes as “semantic” or “significatory,” which Peter Slezak, following Descartes “a precursor of modern cognitive science” (2003:

9 “In spite of his claim that he is only reiterating what he says in the Optics, the picture presented here is in some respects very different from the one provided in the Optics. For one thing, the role of judgement here is clearly larger than it is in the earlier works. Even perceiving the stick as external (“located outside me”) is said to involve judgement. […] It is, after all, through the sceptical doubts of Meditations that the externality of the things we perceive is thrown into question. All perception of distance, size and shape is now to said to involve “rational calculation,” which is not true in the Optics […]” (Wolf-Devine 1993: 85)

10 The following references are cited: (6:331); (7:435); (9-2:310); (11:153, 156); (11: 337-8); (11-2:15).
11), sees as a nostalgically compromised misrepresentation of the author of the *Optics* who, I agree, is more of a code breaker than an interpreter. Yes, in the *Optics*, we will see, the images, so to speak, see themselves. It is in this sense that we are to understand Descartes’ argument against resemblance: Visual representations are not to be conceived on the model of our external pictures which resemble their referent, since this would require that they be seen by someone. Instead, it is sufficient if the images encode the relevant information about the physical objects. My suggestion is that it is such a notion of encoding [...] best captures Descartes’s concept of the sign relation. (Slezak 2003: 7, emphases added); “Cognitive science is where philosophy goes when it dies.” (2003: 11, Jerry Fodor cited) 11

Likewise, even in the *Meditation* IV (6: 86-7/59-60) the “common sense (sensus communis, le sens commun)” is conceived in flat terms: it is, as both Yolton and Slezak note (Slezak 200: 4-8), that which is appointed by the natural reason to “send a signal” to the innermost parts of the brain, to the effect of producing a certain localised surface sensation such as a pain in the foot, to the nominal “owner” of which, res cogitans, the origin of sensation is invisible. Now, it is the mechanism of photography that illustrates such independence of sensation: if “images are significant surfaces” (Flusser 2000: 8, emphasis added), photographic images are the significant surfaces that “see themselves” instead of, on behalf of, and for the sake of, the photographic viewer attracted to and misguided by the illusion of depth, literally therefore inferior to and metaphorically blinder than the camera. The camera is a machine “because it appears to simulate the eye and in the process reaches back to a theory of optics. A ‘seeing machine’? (23),” is it not?

Apparatuses were invented to simulate specific thought processes. [...] All apparatuses (not just computers) are calculating machines and in this sense “artificial intelligences,” the camera included. [...] In all apparatuses (including the camera) thinking in numbers overrides liner, historical thinking. This tendency to subordinate thinking in letters to thinking in numbers has been the norm in scientific discourse since Descartes; it has been a question of bringing thought into line with “extended matter” constructed out of punctuated elements. [...] Since Descartes at least [...] scientific discourse has tended towards the re-encoding of thought into numbers, but only since the camera has this tendency become materially possible. (Flusser 2000: 31)

Here, the non-mimetic encoding of Cartesian perception finds a photographic expression: photomaterialism is an ironic perfection of idealism; a modernist photograph, for instance. The ambiguity of speculative modernity is in the double knot of materialism and idealism.

Descartes begins his philosophical journey as a materialist focusing on the typography of perception (*Optics*, 1637); undergoes a theatrico-speculative mentalist phase (*Meditations*, 1641), while searching for the topography of the thinking I; and returns to materialism, a certain “natural” (11: 326/327) psycho-somatism (*The Passions of the Soul*, 1649) that seeks to locate an isomorphic, instantaneous link between a passion in the soul and an action in the body, i.e., the pineal gland, which he failed to discover even after “looking thoroughly” into a dead woman’s body (3: 49). While travelling, the modern mind experiences various forms of its automatism, or performative tautology: the mind unfolds with an a-positional auto-inscription, “a brain-watching”; indulges in a positional auto-play, “a mind game”; and discovers its dispositional auto-

---

11 I would like to acknowledge Mary Beth Mader’s timely bibliographic intervention here.
12 This is their, curiously unwitting, contemporary translation of the French original faire sentir.
mobility that shows itself in shifty sentiments such as hatred and generosity. In the Optics, something is photographing; in the Meditations, I am photographed; in The Passions, something photographed is in me. What is/remains to be seen? The photogenetic/graphic survival of the mind. Neither exactly an inert imprint nor merely a static homunculus, the Cartesian man moves somewhere in between: he is a cameraman. He is undead. He is a spectre. He is “someone lying in wait” (Flusser 2003: 33). My task today: find out how the photographically revitalised order of Cartesianism can offer us a tool for destabilising the very order of “Cartesianism.” Let me go on toying with this half-idea; would you?

Josef Sudek, Shell and Eyeball Arrangement, 1956

2. Descartes Today: The Materialist

Descartes today would rely on a photography analogy instead of painting (7: 19-20/13) as the vehicle of his thoughts, when thematising “objective reality” (7: 40-3/27-9), the source of ideas that lies outside the perceptual subject. Today’s Descartes is a materialist. That is my opening hypothesis, another opening in the legacy of Cartesianism.

The idea, of a heat or a stone for example, Descartes argues, must have been “put there” in my head “by some cause which contains at least as much reality as I conceive to be in the heat or in the stone” (4:41/28, emphasis added). Objective reality thus enfolded, with varying degrees of clarity and distinctness, causes images to unfold in the mind with the corresponding degree of clarity and distinctness; the painter draws and draws on what she has already seen even when she, like Hieronymus Bosch or Salvador Dali, fabricates something radically weird that does not seem to exist in this world at all. Installed as such, “the Other is metaphysical” (Levinas 1969: 87); “the cogito in Descartes rests on the other who is God and who has put the idea of infinity in the soul, who had taught it, and has not, like the Platonic master, simply aroused the reminiscence of former visions” (86, emphasis added). “The knowing whose essence is critique,” as Emmanuel Levinas says, “cannot be reduced to objective cognition; it” comes from the Other and “leads to the Other” (85). What is the modality of that originarily foreign link? The Meditations says “innateness,” the divine given-ness of natural reason (4:51/35); the

13 http://www.andrewsmithgallery.com/exhibitions/josefsudek/js5_1097.html
14 “[...] (T)he formal reality of the idea is like the reality of canvas and paint. The objective reality is like the organisation of the paint so that it represents a house, or a tree, or whatever. Assume for the moment [...] that all Cartesian ideas could be represented on canvas using paint. In this comparison, assume that just as all one’s ideas are in the same mind, all images are painted on one kind of canvas, using the same oils. They would then all have the same formal reality, since they are all made of the same stuff. But depending on whether the image is of a house or a tree, the paint is organised differently on the canvas. These different patterns are like the differing objective realities of ideas.” (Hatfield 2003: 159)
existence of God is inferred from the idea of perfection touched by—containing—the essence of God; this is an idealist deduction that deliberately disqualifies sensorial data as proof. Just one step further down the road then: how do we “receive” (4: 51/35) such a gift, “this idea from God”? How, in other words, does the installation of knowledge take place? By inscription: the answer the earlier and later Descartes provide in the *Optics* and *Passions of the Soul*, is that object reality “stamps” its image on the back of the brain; this shows the materialist direction, or origin, of Cartesian scientism, which seems oddly more contemporary, even hip, despite its even more archaic Aristotelian orientation.

If the modernity of painting is wedded to Cartesianism, so is that of photography, even more firmly. That is another way of framing my hypothesis that Descartes today would prefer the photographic model of seeing as an analogy of “clear and distinct” ideas. What is Cartesian about a photographic image is not exactly its evidentiary—use and exchange—value, worthless in itself once the image is treated as an external object of inspection. What is Cartesian is its innate impulse, its “ontological” desire,” as Roland Barthes puts it, whose Cartesian drive (Shawcross 1997: 38) leads him to declare:

I wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was “in itself,” by what essential feature it was to be distinguished from the community of images. Such a desire really meant that beyond the evidence provided by technology and usage, and despite its tremendous contemporary expansion, I wasn’t sure that Photography existed, that it had a “genius” of its own. (2000: 3)

What remains constant and persistent in both the idealism of painting and the materialism of photography is the ontologised rhetoric of the “real, objective, genuine,” rhetoric taken as a narrative orientation of the mind. It is the mind’s urge to relate justice to truth through its attention to the justifiability of truth, “what remains (to be true), whatever the case.” Painting sees; photography shows – including what painting does not and cannot see. The complacency of self-portrait (immortalised beauty) and the cruelty of an ID photo taken hurriedly (immortalised ugliness) are a case in point. Common to both is the rhetorical intent or power of the images to turn the true evident; the justificatory value of photography is, however, higher than that of painting, by virtue of its claimed access not only to evidence but to self-evidence of Being, which explains the coincidental relation between the decline of realist painting and the rise of photographic reproduction of the real. The feat of materialist culture in the late 1900s onwards entails the defeat of the idealist spirit, at least on that level of hermeneutic persuasiveness. The point is: the modernist grammar of photography, still in this age of “postmodernity” that survives on manipulative appropriation, is considered and accepted as a more reliable, although still imperfect or no longer perfect, form of *containing* and processing the real that is

---

15 Estelle Jussim’s remark on the self-reflexive camera as ‘the postmodern condition of the photograph’ is worth noting here: ‘Photographers who have abandoned the photographic modernists’ insistence on “straight photography” (the unmanipulated print), combining words with pictures, painting on prints, or fabricating situations and objects to be photographed, are not necessarily postmodernists. To certify as a postmodernist, a photographer must also challenge the photograph as a reliable, or even rational, system of representation, and deny its aesthetic intent.’ (Jussim 1989: 12)
otherwise fugitive.\textsuperscript{16} In the photographically captured or mediated world where the rhetoric of the real is heightened one step above, the alterity of “the real world out there” ceases to be the secrets of the evil genius that absolute reason must totally summarily demystify through a complete objectification of them. Rather, the radical alterity of the real turns into the externally infinitised measure of truth by which alienated reason gauges its distance, or difference, from what is demonstratively true. What does a photograph do, do better than a painting? It claims a tighter coextensivity between Being and a being it claims to disclose. It is an externalised intensification of the ontological desire of “I see.” Photography does not then destroy or disqualify the inner vision of the \textit{cogito} but completes it; prosthetically, correctly and retrospectively as a mnemonic device that “captures the (otherwise invisible) moment.” It “supplements pure” (Jacques Derrida) vision by inscription. A photographic click: it is an allegory of the blink of an eye. My thinking aspires to reach the level of clarity and distinctness the photographic rhetoric of perfect representation seeks to achieve; and my very aspiration replaces the ideal observer in me with the photographic meister, the pure form of “there is” and “there is what used to be there.” I the photographer must die perfectly; the perfect machine, the eye of impersonal God, stands in for me. The spectrally materialised I thinks nevertheless, and thinks photographically. Jacques Lacan calls it the “gaze” of the \textit{cogito}: “the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which I am photo-graphed” (Lacan 1977: 106). “\textit{Je suis} = \textit{Je suis photo-graphie}.” In the painterly field of cogitation, I am the (hidden) gaze; in the photographic field, I am the gaze outside, of the lens.

Let me turn the clock back, more slowly and tightly. Perspectival painting is modern, for it exemplifies mental representationalism, the “picture in the mind” model employed in the \textit{Meditations} (e.g., 7: 20/18), which turns the thinking I into an ideal observer, situated at the immovable zero point that anchors the act of observation. Yet curiously, the modernity of photography that externalises such “an inner world” by turning it inside out has already been prefigured by mechanical materialism in the \textit{Optics}, the work of an amateur scientist inspired by prosthetic optical inventions such as “those wonderful telescopes” (6: 81/152). More invitingly, the text itself, in the absence of an alternative medium, relies on figural devices such as a ball and a blind man’s stick for the “facilitation” (83/152)\textsuperscript{17} of the reader’s understanding of “the action of light” or rather its “movements” (88/155), viz., refraction and transmission, perceptual beings’ access to which is therefore, so goes the argument, tactile first and foremost rather than “visual.” Internal vision already is a translation—transmission/transcription—of tactile codes:

No doubt you have had the experience of walking at night over rough ground without a light, and finding it necessary to use a stick in order to guide yourself. You may have then been able to notice that by means of this stick you could feel the various objects situated around you, and that you could even tell whether they were trees or

\textsuperscript{16}The textual malleability of photographic images is a separate, although ultimately inseparable, issue, which also necessitates the discussion of socio-political problems such as photographic images as primarily cultural productions and mythologies, and the fundamental superficiality of Bourgeois sign economy.

\textsuperscript{17}“Descartes’ blind man provides a good vehicle by which to approach the neglected matter. His appearance, I have said, is unobtrusive. It threatens no great moment. The sheer weight of avoidance makes an indirect approach mandatory. Otherwise, a monumental resistance to self-examination rears its head, takes precedence, and the stop is secreted away. Besides, the blind man’s character—like the gravedigger’s in \textit{Hamlet}—exemplifies the very experience sought for examination.” (Appelbaum 1995: ix)
strokes or sands or water or grass or mud or any other such thing. It is true that this kind of
sensation is somewhat confused and obscure in those who do not have long practice with
it. But consider it in those born blind, who have made use of it all their lives: with them,
you will find, it is so perfect and so exact that one might almost say that they see with
their hands, or that their stick is the organ of some sixth sense given to them in place of
sight. In order to draw a comparison from this, I would have you consider the light in
bodies we call ‘luminous’ to be nothing other than a certain movement, or a very rapid
and lively action, which passes to our eyes through the medium of the air and other
transparent bodies, just as the movement or resistance of the bodies encountered by a
blind man passes to his hand by means of his stick. In the first place this will prevent you
from finding it strange that this light can extend its rays instantaneously from the sun to
us. (6: 83-84/153, emphases added)

Light is light; the lightness of light “in bodies” is supernatural as much as it is intrusive.
Instantaneously sensed, it is hardly locatable or measurable in any theoretical manner or
vocabulary. It is that precise. The touch of light, the photo-graphic “textuality” (Vasseleu
1998) of “luminous perception,” is neither mimetic nor hermeneutical but crypto-
grammatological. It is antecedent and superior to the recognition of light, for “the contact
with light, the act of opening one’s eyes, this lighting up of bare sensation, are apparently
outside any relationship, and do not take form like answers to question. Light illuminates
and is naturally understood; it is comprehension itself” (Levinas 1978: 22). Like Levinas,
Descartes is noting the super-visual power of those born blind who “see” red none the
less, through “some sixth sense,” as if through speed. The ant starts crawling 18; click.

It is blindness envy, the flip side of Freudian fear, talking. It is as if a super-
sensitive eyeball were attached to the fingertips that seem to see more and better! How do
they do it? How do they see it? Here the sighted are reduced to mere voyeurs. Ironically,
it turns out to be the blind who safeguard—bear witness to—the luminosity of
“photological” (Derrida 1987: 27) reason, democratically 19 installed as such:

You have only to consider that the differences a blind man notes between trees, rocks,
water and similar things by means of his stick do not seem any less to him than the
differences between red, yellow, green and all the other colours seem to us. And yet in all
those bodies the differences are nothing other than the various ways of moving the stick
or of resisting its movements. Hence you will have reason to conclude that there is no
need to suppose that something material passes from objects to our eyes to make us see

---

18 Fear, like affection, is tactile: “the object pressing on us: when we touch something metal or something
wood, the object presses in on us; this pressing-in results in a change, even if very slight, in body position,
a change detected through the sense of balance. […] If we try to attend to the sense of touch alone for a
moment, putting aside what we experience of the object through the other senses, we sense only the body
meeting with a resistance. The object presses my skin inward, and I discover the border between my body
and the world. […] The experience of boundaries […] the exact area of sensation is experienced. When we
take a step, the pressure of the shoe meets the ground in a particular place. Often, the experience of touch is
the experience of location. If I am lying on a warm, sandy beach with my eyes closed, and an ant crawls up
my arm, touch locates the exact position of the ant. In all cases, the sensation of touch gives us the sense of
our body, not as an object but as a living being.” (Sardello 1999: 40-1)

19 Descartes “wishes to present a mechanistic view appealing enough to topple tradition. The view must
supplant the former elitist presuppositions with ones thoroughly democratic. Mechanism, in
counterdistinction to consciousness, supports the impulse to democracy.” (Appelbaum 1995: 22)
colours and light, or even that there is something in the objects which resembles the ideas or sensations that we have of them. (6:85/153, emphases added)

Reached or touched, the Cartesian mind remains photologically-oriented and receptive. This case does seem to exemplify the ocularcentrism, “white mythology,” of Western metaphysics, whether restaged in the manner of revisionary Platonic idealism, or reworked into “mechanised Aristotelianism” (Wolf-Devine 1993: 63) that disconnects and reconnects the soul-body link by binarising the very link. For Descartes, the *lumen naturale*, the master trope of perception (or ultimate hypothesis) that demands evidence, is the very and only reliable medium that enables sceptical doubts, namely, questioning; “I have no criterion for me expect from the natural light” (2: 59/78). As Derrida points out (1982: 266-7), in his debate with Michel Foucault on the extent to which Cartesian rationality exercises its political violence, what is never and cannot be put in question in the Cartesian scene of systematic doubts is that perceptual level, act, of differentiation in which even the mad, not to mention the blind, do and must participate. Now then, what seems more interesting is that the Cartesian thinker, the holder of clear and distinct modern vision, who now “has reason to conclude” as Descartes did, through whom the natural light repeatedly reappears, personifies that obscure intersection—blind, fumbling, boundary negotiation—between idealism and materialism; to the very ambivalence of speculative modernity’s point of origin, does the *res cogitans* remain blind and bound. In this age of technological innovation and hyper-engineered capitalism that constantly converts traditionally transfixed “soul” knowledge into mobile units of stored information, the externalised, manipulated and prosthetically processed/accessed records of real time, namely, the memories/memoirs of the blind, replace the internal gaze of the Archimedean knower, both of which, I have been trying to show, have the Cartesian origin.

3. Descartes So Far: Blind

Blindness envy, I said. For the epistemological drive of Cartesian modernity harbours an ambiguity, the obstinately contagious kind: if the fear of blindness is for losing reliable evidence, falling into the “dark age” all over again, the desire for it comes from a need to secure more reliable evidence, to start all over again. Unclear? Is not the *Optics* written from the viewpoint of a blind man with a stick “wandering onto a stage (cf. Appelbaum 1995; viii)”? Accidental? Precisely! It is the accident pure and simple: the *Meditations*, a temporary suspension of the sense of the world, begins with a remembered panic.
To recall, the text opens with a deliberate self-deprivation of the senses, notably the physical vision, by the once-eclipsed subject. From the start, the author starts to act “as if” (7:19/13) he did not receive any visual information; more precisely, he aborts it as soon as it arrives, as if wishing to protect something (else) from the onrush of such empirical data. He “stops” (Appelbaum 1995). Wilfully, he “turns a blind eye” to what he sees, or more precisely, seems to see; again at the start of the Meditation III,

\[\text{I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false and worthless. I will converse with myself and scrutinise myself more deeply, and in this way I will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself. I am a thing that thinks. (7:34/24)}\]

Beware, here: the dissociation of thinking from seeing does not necessarily amount to the separation of the mental from the physical. The metaphorisation of vision, paralleling the withdrawal of the senses, does not necessarily lead to the virtualisation of ego’s sensorial encounter with being, either. Good old “Cartesian dualists,” against whom I am arguing, tend to jump too quickly here, more quickly than the older man in question. For “the fact remains,” with Descartes we see again, “that at the moment I think, I think something, and that any other truth, in the name of which I might wish to discount this one, must, if it is to be called a truth for me, square with the ‘true’ thought of which I have experience” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 398). The “tacit” or tactile quality of Cartesian cogitation, “the pure feeling of the self” (emphasis added), “the presence of oneself to oneself” (402-404)—as Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, “wanting to finish (this work) (Phenomenology of Perception), [...] struggling blindly on” (369)—is such that “certain ideas are presented to me as irresistibly self-evident de facto,” although “this fact is never valid de jure” (396). That is, cogito, sum: it may not have to be but is the case. For, “a feeling, considered in itself, is always true once it is felt” (378, emphasis added); “I touch myself only by escaping from myself” (408, emphasis added). This is a moment, of pure contamination, of pure empiricism in pure rationalism. The blind know it more clearly. This inscriptive tautology of what Derrida calls “auto-affection,” this voice that keeps silent, “this silent cogito was the one Descartes sought when writing his Meditations” (402); “behind the spoken cogito, [...] converted into discourse and into essential truth, there lies a tacit cogito, myself experienced by myself” (403). I am with him; or them; or it – that which survives the extremely disabling conditions, unuttered, compressed memories. That is what the philosophical vision of Descartes discovers and recovers via “contact with truth,” at the end of his quest for “evidence, the experience of truth” (395):

\[\text{I may well close my eyes, and stops up my ears, I shall nevertheless not cease to see, if it is only the blackness before my eyes, or to hear, if only silence, and in the same way I can “bracket” my opinions or the beliefs I have acquired, but, whatever I think or decide, it is always against the background of what I have previously believed or done. Habemus ideam veram, we posses a truth, but this experience of truth would be absolute knowledge only if we could thematise every motive, that is, if we ceased to be in a situation.}\]

Watch out! A situation: such a topo-graphic sense of touch “here is,” on which the blind rely prosthetically for the mobilisation of their intellect, is generative of Cartesian reflection, a dialectical exercise in seeing and not-seeing conducted in, as Merleau-Ponty
reminds us, an embodied situation. Levinas offers a similar remark on the “localised consciousness of the cogito” (not a hyper-rational meta-consciousness) which reminds me of Descartes’ envy of the blind’s “so exact and perfect,” near-photographic perception:

Thought, which idealism has accustomed us to locate outside of space is […] here. The body excluded by the Cartesian doubt is the body object. The cogito does not lead to the impersonal position: “there is thought,” but to the first person in the present: “I am something that thinks.” The word thing is here admirably exact. For the most profound teaching of the Cartesian cogito consists in discovering thought as a substance, that is, as something posited. Thought as a point of departure. There is not only a consciousness of localisation, but a localisation of consciousness, which is not in turn reabsorbed into consciousness, into knowing. There is here something that stands out against knowing, that is a condition for knowing. The knowing of knowing is also here: it somehow emerges from a material density, a protuberance, from a head. Thought, instantaneously spreads into the world, retains the possibility of collecting itself into the here, from which it never detached itself. (Levinas 1978: 68)

“A material density” of knowing testifies to the de facto universality of modern reflexive reason that, à la Levinas, I would qualify minimally as the pure vigilance of an insomniac: even the blind, the mute and the deaf, observes Descartes, possess the auto-dialogic soul, naturally given to and as reason that there is. But is that all? No, a more poignant point is: especially they do; Zatoichi, the blind swordsman! For “the tacit cogito […] is anterior to any philosophy, and knows itself only in those extreme situations in which it is under threat” (404), in which it experiences—feels—the pure accident that is time, of things time gives. Then the sighted is blinder than the blind to the field of visual experience, of which we all find ourselves as part. How clouded is the vision of the sighted, those who, for example, “watch” TV to the exclusion of the dust on the screen? What is it the sighted see when they see? Do they see at all? The allegory of blindness, described earlier as the memories/memoirs of the blind, runs deeper than what the common sense accepts.

Take Susan Schultet, teacher of English composition, born blind:

Reading is my photography. When I read, I feel the way I imagine people feel when they look at pictures. I become transported to wherever it is that I’m reading about. Reading is my bridge between me and everywhere.

When I read, I hear it and I see it in Braille. When I read a book, like Paradise Lost, for instance, I can see the way the dots look in my head. It’s tactile image, but it’s there. I use the word see because it’s so common. Now I also have a reading machine which runs like a scanner. It provides everything in auditory feedback. I find I remember text auditorily in chunks, and I can reconstruct a whole block at a time, whereas the documents I experience in Braille I remember more linearly, sentence by sentence. […] I get a real warm pleasure when I recall books I have read, like seeing somebody that I love after I haven’t seen her or him for a few years. I get a sense of belonging when I can do that. It’s a nice reminder that there really was a past, and that there is a sense of the future. It’s a wonderful, grounding experience to have a record, a documentation that lives have existed before our own. I’ve always thought that writing and music have the power to say, “Yes, this confirms it—so-and-so was here before.” I need that connection. I think it would be frightening to live only in the present. (1995: 14-7)
Schulter’s story reveals some truths about human perception, the photographic nature of it, already explored in Descartes’ meditations on vision. Two, I am singling out. First, seeing is reading. Photography, “light-writing,” is read rather than seen. The reason for preferring the word read is twofold: it brings to light, à la Benjamin and de Man²⁰ the speculative materialists, the mechanical aspects of seeing as surface scanning rather than hermeneutic processing, which corresponds to “luminous” perception (e.g., 6:84/153)²¹ swept clean, at least techno-ideally²², of selected representations or significations already embedded, however, in “a horizon of significance” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 370, 390); the other sense of reading, more ordinary, applies to agential, interpretative or signifying processes, or the historico-cultural production and consumption of signs, the arbitrariness of which Descartes, too, à la les postmoderns, seems aware when he notes,

[...] Our mind can be stimulated by many things other than images – by signs and words, for example, which in no way resemble the things they signify. And if, in order to depart as little as possible from accepted views, we prefer to maintain that the objects which we perceive by our senses really send images of themselves to the inside our brain, we must at least observe that in no case does an image have to resemble the object it represents in all respects [...]. Indeed the perfection of an image often depends on its not resembling its object as much as it might. You can see this in the case of engravings: consisting simply of a little ink placed here and there on a piece of paper, they represent to us forest, towns, people and even battles and storms. [...] Even this resemblance is very imperfect, since engravings represent to us bodies of varying relief and depth on a surface which is entirely flat. (6: 112-3/165)

Misperception is caused by misreading or overreading. That is the act, schooled habit, of the mind, as illustrated by Descartes’ passing optical—photographic—shot at the “men crossing the square” which, upon reflection he realises or truly “re-sees,” is nothing other than “hats and coats (on the move) which could conceal automaton” (7: 32/21, my insertion); “I judge that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgement which is in my mind”; “It is obvious too that we judge shape by the knowledge or opinion that we have of the position of the various parts of an object, and not by the resemblance of the pictures in our eyes” (6: 140/172). That is how and why sense perception

---

²⁰Perception is Reading.  
Only that appearing in the surface is readable… 
Surface that is configuration – absolute continuity.  

²¹“...I would have you consider the light in bodies we call ‘luminous’ to be nothing other than a certain movement, or very rapid and lively action, which passes to our eyes through the medium of the air and other transparent bodies, just as the movement or resistance of the bodies encountered by a blind man passes to his hand by means of his stick. In the first place this will prevent you from finding it strange that this light can extend its rays instantaneously from the Sun to us.”

²²The 7th discourse of the Optics, “On the Means of Perfecting Vision,” conclusively stresses the need to “train the crystalline humour and the membrane which contains the pupil. [...] Those Indians who are said to be able to gaze fixedly at the sun, without their sight being obscured, must have doubtless beforehand, by often looking at very brilliant objects, trained their pupils little by little to contract more than ours” (6: 164-5). Worth noting is that “those Indians (ces Indiens, Indi)’ refers specifically to the Indian Sages, “the Gymnosophists (Les Gymnosophistes)” (6: 493), whose ascetic wisdom comes partly from their athleticism.
sometimes deceives us. First, it is the soul which sees, not the eye; and it does not see directly, but only by means of the brain. That is why madmen and those who are asleep often see, or think they see, various objects which are nevertheless not before their eyes: namely, certain vapours disturb their brain and arrange those of its parts normally engaged in vision exactly as they would be if these objects were present. (6:141/172)

In order for Descartes to conduct a non-judgemental, almost literal\(^23\), reflection on those things he has just seen or thinks he has seen, he must revisit the scene that is photographically “engraved,” retained and formed “on the back of his eye” (6: 115-28/ 166-7); recalling, an act of retrieving information, is equivalent to developing the negative.

This second-order reflection too, as a corrective event, is photographic. That is my second point: photographing as reading is phenomenological – in the following sense. ‘The act of photography is that of “phenomenological doubt,” to the extent that it attempts to approach phenomena from any number of viewpoints. […] The structure of the act of photography is a quantum one: a doubt made up of points of hesitation and points of decision-making’ (Flusser 2000: 38-9). The zero-point of Cartesian reflection is not fixed in the mind of some homunculus figure fixed somewhere in the cogitative I. Itself mobile, it signifies the act of “leaping” to catch images. The Cartesian zero is not positional but vectorial, not spatial but temporal: “Whenever I doubt something, I am, I am that thing that doubts”; the photographic repeatability of this act, materially secured as such, secures res cogitans’ access to its self-image. I am photographed, therein I am.

Hannah Villiger, Skulptural, 1993/4 (C-Print, Polaroid)

4. Still Cartesian: Regressively Modern

Descartes the modern is the photo of a mischievous child who died too young, too soon.

We know too well Descartes the introverted, pathetic, dogmatic idealist whom we tend to bury, à la Heidegger, in the graveyard of modern subjectivism rooted in solipsism and dualism. “Whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, we have been attending the funeral rites of modernism for many decades” (Jussim 1998: 3). But for whom exactly does the bell toll? At whom exactly do we point a finger? Can “a thing that

\(^{23}\) It is after all the eye that “corrects cultural errors” happening in the eyes of the beholder: “It is just that over a series of long days and long nights the image of the biological-sexual-sensual-genital-nigger has imposed itself on you and you do not now how to get free of it. The eye is not merely a mirror, but a correcting mirror. The eye should make it possible for us to correct cultural errors. I do not say the eyes, I say the eye, and there is no mystery about what that eye refers to; not the crevice in the skull but to that very uniform light that wells out of the reds of Van Gogh […]” (Fanon 1967: 202).
thinks,” let’s call it an “I,” be detached and localised as such? I have always thought it remained obscure and indistinct, for “it still appears—and I cannot stop thinking this—that the corporeal things of which images are formed in my thought, and which the senses investigates, are known with much more distinctness than this puzzling “I” which cannot be pictured in the imagination” (7:29/30). The *cogitans* is a kind of “sticky” knot, a mobile “unit” that keeps drawing the very map on which it situates itself as it moves along (across the uncharted field of blindness) like a disorientated tourist: In one of the two—“I” and “God”—signature moments of the *Meditations*, Descartes writes:

But why do I think this, since I myself may perhaps be the author of these thoughts? *Now, then what (Nunquid ergo)*? Am I not, at least to some extent, something? *But,* I have just said that I have no senses and no body. *This is the sticking point (Hoereo tamen)*: what follows from this? Am I not so bound up with a body and with senses that I cannot exist without them? But I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist? No: if I convinced myself of something (or thought anything at all) then I certainly existed. […] I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist,* is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. (7:24-25/16-17, translation revised, emphases added)

Lastly, in the Sixth *Meditation*, […] the mind is proved to be really distinct from the body, but is shown, notwithstanding, to be so closely joined to it that the mind and the body make up a kind of unit. (7:15/11, Synopsis)

So close: the problem here, the non-identity between the mind and the body poses, is that of not so much primacy as proximity; between the inside and the outside; between a “pure substance” (self-awareness) and a “pure extension” (bodily occupation). The relation between the two, the event of observation and the observed space located as the situation of observation, is what photographic time—halt, wait, gap, suspension—at once swallows and recuperates through a retroactive “development” of the material framed thereof. The author of the thoughts above, the photographic thinker who records each turn, or shot, *punctum*, of reflection (cf. “but, now, then, ?,” etc.), does not exactly privileges the mind over the body; he only distinguishes one from the other, while trying to clarify and arrange the spatio-temporal relations between them geometrically and sequentially. What, upon reflection, becomes clear to the modern subject is then not the difference between the mind and the body per se, which is never consistently maintained in the *Meditations* or anywhere else, but the very border-line idea of the inside/outside, which photographic images temporally digitalise through the performative rhetoric of punctuality; the ensuing acts of measuring, grid-locking, enable every move towards the individuation of thoughts. But what is it that escapes every thought, shot and image? Such is the ontological impulse of Cartesian reflection that remains, à la Derrida, “hauntological”; something immediately “sticks” to someone who thinks … tries to think

24 To paraphrase: “since or if this is the case, in light of what has been said, then, what now?” “Quidnun?” furtively introduces a suggestion which must be considered absurd or unreasonable in the face of the very thing that has been just said (cf. *OLD* notes the self-referentially ironic usage of this word).

25 To paraphrase: “we have reached the sticky point of argumentation, for we can see that, having followed the line of argument, these two problems would always recur alternately in succession.”

26 mirrored in the engineer’s vocabulary of “the very exact demonstration” (7:6/6) that mobilises the *Meditations* e.g., “equally, clearer, more precise, more perfect, more… than, as … as possible, not as… as.”
even a non-thought; “the referent adheres” (Barthes 2000: 6) repeatedly. Why is there the ontological persistence of the referent? As Alain Badiou observes it, who stresses a need to move “towards a new style of philosophy, a style in the school of Descartes for example” (2002: 50), the question that remains as a legacy of speculative Cartesianism is: “how can a modern doctrine of the subject be reconciled with an ontology?” (3)

Descartes, with all his ambiguities, inhabits that intersection between egology and ontology, still left intercut; what Descartes the photographer does is to sharpen that edge.

I, a Cartesian double?, still then believe in the arresting power of the photography, where “the demonstrative proofs ought to be given with the aid of philosophy. […] For us who are believers, it is enough to accept on faith that the human soul does not die with the body” (7:1-2/2:3). It does not die. It will not die. A choice given, I, the postmodern Cartesian still suffering “the crisis of the real” (Grundberg 1999), would remain blind, which seems more, oddly promising. As a fellow Cartesian narrator, now dead, once noted, the photograph “attests that what I see has indeed existed” (Barthes 2000: 82). But rather than “restoring what has been abolished” (82), it marks “what has been” (85) once there and still is: the soul, “what is nonetheless already there” (52). The cogito restores, not only the “material density” of perceptual experiences but, the “temporal thickness” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 398-9) of them; so does a photograph, or more precisely the retroactive punctuality of its syntax that uses the blind man as its straw man/subject.

“Once there is a punctum, a blind field is created (is divined)” (Barthes 2000: 57): this would mean, a photograph blindly marks and keeps time the mortal seer cannot see. The helio-captured soul—à la Socrates the remembered desire of ontology—keeps moving, migrating, through the lightly written presence of an object, akin to stamped images of God that are ineradicable as much as inaccessible. This modern invention, the Camera, reproduces the punctuated inertia of time and space framed into “a/the moment.” Every photographic shot is an unintentional decision of and for ontology touched by the sense of the real, hauntingly real. My own, mere decision to reciprocate this irreversible provocation, “If Descartes saw a photograph….” is that of a gambler in search of a trans-temporal possibility of truth, or a textual materialisation of the question, how and where to locate the site truth eventuates itself “immediately” (Marion 1999: 146) adhesively; “possibly” Rene “is still alive today: but where? How? What a novel!” (Barthes 2000: 83).

Yes, I am being regressively modern. Still, I happen to believe that we have not outlived Descartes in some important sense which I have been trying to articulate; for the last few years since I subjected myself to the process of independent self-indoctrination, I have been seeking to prove that – if only to myself. “I briefly touched on the topics of” (7:7/2:6) Cartesian tactility and affect in essays on somnambulism and the “touch” of imagination/madness, where I suggest we re-read Cartesian self-reflexivity, the “reflex” of the modern mind, somatically or existentially rather than phenomenologically or

27 ‘To sum up, we are restoring to the cogito a temporal thickness. If there is not endless double, and if “I think,” it is because I plunge on into provisional thoughts and, by deeds, overcome time’s discontinuity. Thus vision is brought to rest in a thing seen which both precedes and outlasts it.’

28 ‘The ego affirms its claim to Being right away, if one admits the letter of the formula that places the primal utterance in the Meditaciones – namely, “Ego sum, ego existo.” […] The ego constitutes an ontology immediately, without the assistance of cogitation.’

egologically, which the postmodern critique of the modern subjectivity of consciousness turns into a modernist banality; after all however, the “passions of the soul” (11:323-488/326-404), as the author himself perceives with the “natural” (11:326/327), literalised poignancy of a dying man, are a sure sign of the originary agitation, emotive restlessness, of human being, are they not? “My purpose there was not to provide a full treatment, but merely to offer a sample, and learn from the view of my readers how I should handle these topics at a later date” (7:7/6); the picture of what I am thinking seems still unclear, yet again, I am advancing a version anyway, hoping to have at least some “peace of mind” in the end (6: 74-75/149), which is just what a modern individual must seek “above everything else: tranquillity,” according to the alter ego of this essay. What stops me from not writing, Descartes aptly summarised there for me into two reasons: (1) the need for a publicly tested, not simply privately examined, life and (2) the brevity of life:

Every day I am becoming more and more aware of the delay which my project of self-instruction is suffering because of the need for innumerable observations which I cannot possibly make without the help of others. Although I do not flatter myself with any expectation that the public will share my interest, yet at the same time I am unwilling to be so unfaithful to myself as to give those who come after me cause to reproach me some day on the grounds that I could have left them many far better things if I had not been so remiss in making them understand how they could contribute to my projects.


In a portrait, I’m looking for the silence in somebody.
– Henri Cartier-Bresson
References


  www.arts.unsw.edu.au/hps/sts_core_links/sts_staff_homepages/p_slezak_site/ArticleLinks/Slezak-Descartes-signs.pdf
Photography: A Little Summa

Photographers are particularly adept at revealing hidden
continually pushing forward the boundary of the real.
The camera defines for us what we allow to be "real"—and if
without number of images of what we don't directly experience,
and we are expected to receive and to register an
principal access to realities of which we have no direct
5. In a modern society, images made by cameras are the

In the world, we are told, is in no place more and more,
what we wish to remake—our society, our selves. What is
the idea? If expresses our energy, indeed our right, to remake
instincts us—denies the inherent vanity and complexity of the real.
but it also is the modern way of seeing
our experience, but it also is the modern way of seeing
ideas has the undeniable advantage of giving shape and form to
the long run mixture. To see reality in the light of certain
offering that all boundaries all unfixed ideas have to be
reality is essentially nihilistic, and knowledge is open-ended. It
4. The modern way of seeing is to see in fragments. It is felt that

3. This way of seeing, which now has a long history, shapes what
favor of projects of discovery and innovation.

2. It is the intellectually "modern" way of seeing—produced in

1. Photogaphy is first of all a way of seeing. It is not seeing
10. To know is, first of all, to acknowledge. Recognition is the form of knowledge that is now identified with art. The knowledge—"I need it is knowledge"—does not say, the self, about that, and it is all "human." But what are we to do with this knowledge? May be it the only: exquisitely and that, and that, and number of details, Photographs are details. Therefore, the Savage autonomy of the detail.

5. In the view that defines us as modern, there are no inhumanly unforgettable. Aspirations to the condition of being memorable—this is how people appear.

2. Photography—the supreme form of travel, of tourism—is the antithesis of photgraphs is that, and it is all "human." But what are we to do with this knowledge? May be it the only: exquisitely and that, and that, and number of details, Photographs are details. Therefore, the Savage autonomy of the detail.

The record of photography is the record of change; of the changes of its own appearance.

11. The work of some of the best socially engaged photographers looking at identity as art.

6. In societies both near and far from where the viewer lives.

Photographs of the terrible cruelties and injustices that differ
14. There is no ideal photograph.

Seeing can never be completed.

anything: the seeing, and the accumulation of fragments of

Can be sure about this distinctly modern way of experiencing

13. Call it knowledge, call it acknowledgement—of one thing we