

# **Positions through Iterating**

## **Written Response**

Siqi Hu

### **Part 1**

#### **Annotated bibliography**

##### **2 texts from the reading list:**

**Rubinstein, D. and Sluis, K. (2013) 'The Digital Image in Photographic Culture: Algorithmic Photography and the Crisis of Representation', in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 22–40.**

The book explores how algorithmic processes in photography—like those used in image editing software—are reshaping our understanding of what images represent and how they function in digital culture. I was inspired to think more critically about the relationship of images to reality and the implications of my experiments. I experimented with layering images. By printing a modified version of the image on transparent paper and placing it over the original, the distinction between a 'real' image and a fabricated one becomes blurred. This fusion shifts the audience's perception of the image, thus initiating new dialogues.

**Miller, J.A. (1994) 'Pictures for rent', *Eye Magazine*, 14, pp. 68–77.**

The text mainly explains how the history of photography often focuses on inventions, genres and influential photographers, but ignores the relationship of the medium to graphic design, as well as the ubiquitous but less fashionable "stock photography". Stock photography breaks through the limitations of various types, effectively challenging class distinctions of graphic design. It is neither an award-winning piece commissioned by top art directors nor a heartfelt grass-roots expression. Stock photography provides a way for me to study images through process. Since we need to do 100 iterations, the moves must be small and focused. I chose screenshots as my experimental medium. It provided a lot of inspiration for my later design experiments.

##### **2 texts found outside the reading list:**

**Wuqi, 2023. *The Issues Issue*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature & Art, pp.42-58.**

The text mainly discusses how the rise of the Internet led to the birth of the Internet identity. In the virtual world, people tend to have more than one identity. Interestingly, someone's multiple online identities are not identical. This reflects a shift in recent trends where people are steering clear of using their own photos as profile pictures on social platforms. Perhaps babies could also represent our digital selves as well. So I

invited my friends to use baby photos as their profile pictures and engage in discussions with me. We talked about retirement and found the contrast between the adult concept of retirement and the innocence and simplicity of babyhood was very strange but interesting.

**Ekman, P., 2003. Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life. New York: Times Books.**

The book provides deep insights into how emotions are universally expressed and interpreted through facial cues, guided by Ekman's groundbreaking research. It introduces the Facial Action Coding System (FACS), which categorizes how facial muscles represent emotion. This greatly helped me in the process of analyzing the performance videos to capture the subtle and genuine emotions of the babies, so as to use their facial expressions as a visual language more accurate and detailed way.

## **2 design practices/projects :**

**Boring Angel (2013) Available at: <https://vimeo.com/82021800>**

This music video uniquely narrates a story, relying exclusively on the transformation of emojis to convey its narrative, tapping into the rich potential of modern emoji-based communication. This creative approach inspired me to view the facial expressions of babies not just as cute gestures but as a groundbreaking communication tool. Enthused by this insight, I began experimenting with infants' expressions, attempting to use them as the content for engaging dialogues and crafting compelling image narratives. This exploration into non-verbal communication could open new pathways for storytelling, where even the subtlest facial changes offer profound insights into emotions and interactions.

**Same Paper (2023) Closing Ceremony. Available at: <https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/same-paper-closing-ceremony-photography-publication-211123>**

The publication highlights the power of smile and emotion in photography. Photographers seek to transcend traditional photographic boundaries and use their practice as a language. What caught my attention was that the team mentioned that they took a lot of serious portraits while hanging around New York, but then they used smiling filters to enhance them. This motivated me to use AI to modify the serious expressions of the babies and exaggerate their "compliant" features. The layout of the magazine is also striking. Unlike traditional photography magazines, which take a minimalist approach, they have created a 'mix' that allows the images to interfere with each other, creating strange but intriguing conversations. This also affects the way I organize my work.

## **Part 2**

I selected a snippet from the Methods of Translating project for further iteration. I have previously translated the performance videos from a the mother's perspective, and now I aim to interpret the video from the baby's point of view. One notable detail is the remarkable compliance of the babies. So my first 100 iterations were

captures of 100 baby facial expressions and gestures, and my publication seems like a reference manual to expressions for talented baby actors. I wanted to use a humorous and subversive approach to highlight the obedient nature of these little performers. I then delved deeper into facial expression. I started a new round of iterations around "how to use facial expression as a communication tool?" and "how to use facial expression to achieve a dialogue beyond the original purpose?". I experimented with various methods drawn from the digital and physical world to address these questions, such as changing my avatar on social platforms to different baby expressions based on my mood and status, placing the baby photo in front of a distorting mirror to observe expression changes, and crumpling the picture to change the baby's expression, etc.