

自己理解/無我:
写真家 高倉大輔氏とAtle Blekastad氏の
作品から見る自我の不確実性についての考察

Know Self/No Self:
Examining the Instability of Self through Photographic Works
of Daisuke Takakura and Atle Blekastad

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The self is one of the oldest and most enduring concepts of consideration in philosophy, historically evidenced by the fact that the maxim “Know thyself” was already a widely known piece of wisdom when Plato had his character of Socrates repeatedly use it in his dialogues. Pausanias attributed the saying to the pre-Socratic Seven Sages, such as Thales of Miletus, who enshrined it at the Temple of Delphi as one of the lessons they viewed as the most valuable pieces of wisdom for humanity (Pausanias 10.24). However, it is also believed that the instruction was already available amidst the numerous proverbs housed in the Temple of Luxor in Egypt (Wikipedia contributors). While the “Know thyself” aphorism’s original author may never be conclusively known, the logic of it as a fundamental notion continues to motivate both philosophical investigation and ontological frustration. While the understanding of self is still considered crucial to much of philosophy, psychology, ethics, law, politics, etc, it can also be said that the subject continues to serve as something of a paradoxical maze, giving birth to swarms of doubt that unsettle as much or more than the wisdom it develops offers back in ontological clarity. Looking to understand the self quickly spreads into a need to explore and contextualize everything else. The simple instruction of “know thyself” automatically begs questions such as what is self? Where is self? When is self? What isn’t self? Etc. This seemingly most intimate target of inquiry inspires the investigation and intense examination of everything considered outside of or connected to the self, every physical, psychological or otherwise contextualizing factor in and beyond the physical world, and Time to boot. But, of course, wrestling with the question of self is not limited to philosophy and other investigations of logic. The history of art and most all forms of storytelling—including drama and

film--regularly question and explore the nature and stability of self and self-knowing. Like markers through time pointing at the same unanswered query common to all ages of human beings, dramatic characters ranging from Oedipus and Hamlet to Beckett's tramps waiting for Godot and innumerable characters in films, serve to make us confront the fragility and slipperiness of what is and can be known about the self. Thinkers at work in creative and other investigative practices enact scenarios that undermine the foundations of being that we use in order to construct ourselves as stable and individuated entities of identity. In line with this vast theme, artists and philosophers continue to explore and examine the self in new and expanding ways. In this article, I will examine works by two photographers as a means to explore modes of imagining and questioning self through film making/marking.

The first group of photographic works I will examine is by the Japanese artist Daisuke Takakura, from his September, 2016 exhibition at Tezukayama Gallery in Osaka. Takakura showed two sets of works entitled, "loose polyhedron" (figure 1) and "monodramatic" (figure 3). The two sets are closely related but differ in ways that caused them to inform and refract each other. The second work I will examine is a video/slideshow by the Norwegian artist Atle Blekastad. Blekastad's work, entitled "42" (figure 2), was projected as part of a musical performance in October of 2016 at an art space called MIIT House in Osaka. The works by these two artists offer interesting contrasts that inspire different perspectives relating to the instability and duration of self.

First, let me describe "loose polyhedron." The work consists of 10 color photographic prints featuring female and male actors in their mid to late 20s. Each print is made up of five different super imposed images of the same woman or man. Each of the five images expresses a different emotional state, with the foregrounded central and most focused image conveying a "flat" emotional state by way of a non-expressive face. All the emotional states of the four background images have a strongly dramatic quality, so a viewer can easily read the various emotions being conveyed, ranging from expressive happiness to mild amusement to anger, sadness, frustration and etc. Beneath each work is a color-coded (pastel pink or blue) polyhedron-shaped graph with five different emotional conditions used as the range-meters on a scale from zero to five. The five emotional conditions measured are Flat, 喜 :Pleasure, 怒 :Anger, 哀 :Sorrow and 樂 :Delight. The

indicated measurements of the five emotions are made visible as a pink or blue pentahedron-shape of differing dimensions.

All of the men and women pictured are dressed in simple but stylish clothes, something one might find in a casual fashion magazine or a clothing catalog. All the clothes seem rather new and clean. They convey a feeling of freshness. As well, the clothing conveys a neutrality--as in not expressing any particular occupation or character-quality. There is nothing particularly meaningful we are being asked to read from the clothing. No social status or power position or occupation. Unless, perhaps, this neutrality is specifically what we are supposed to read. A message of no message. While we might read the clothing as costumes, they are the costumes for the typical young everyman/everywoman on the stylish streets of a Japanese big city, most likely Tokyo as each work's title is coded with that model's initials and the word Tokyo, presumably where the photo was taken. The clothing seems purposeful, but without expressing any particular group identification or particular passion/interest. There are no band names, fashion icons or particularly personal tastes expressed. The uniformity of the clothing's neutrality serves to intensify the viewer's focus on the contrasting five faces of each model. In this way, the composition of the images strongly focuses the viewer's attention on the differences of appearance facilitated by different emotions.

The five appearances of each model in each print look quite different from one emotional state to another. The five images in each work show a clear range of different emotional states. While the clothing and hair styles in each particular piece stay strictly the same, an individual model's facial expressions can be sometimes so different that it is difficult to recognize that all five of the images are of the same model. The images become a study in comparison and contrast, and as a viewer I spent a fair amount of time checking back and forth between faces to find recognizable details to confirm that they are actually of the same person. Something in one face becomes absent in another as the emotion changes. There are energies that make the emotions identifiable as anger, joy, sadness, etc. while at the same time suspending the connective continuity of the individual model with his or her various selves, making the model almost unrecognizable from one emotion in the picture to another. Disorientation is added to this by the fact that the five images of a model are placed as though they are standing next to each other and appear to be possibly

interacting with each other. Selves communing with selves. This multiplying of an individual, layering one person into five different “copies,” intensifies a sense that some new sense needs to be used to make sense of what is being portrayed. To examine this more deeply, the pieces partly accomplish their disorienting effect by bringing about a compression of time, by juxtaposing images from different points in time into a mutualized moment--a moment in which time is lacking duration, by which I mean we can't see the connections between the state of one image and others. We sense there must be an ordered continuity, but the duplication of things that are inherently assumed to be unique and singular, confounds a logic that somethings just don't go together. Both the individual person portrayed and Time are expected to always be singular. Thus, the duplicated model causes confusion, but also our expectation of Time is confused, in particular regarding duration. Duration is what we use to bridge the gaps between one time and another, to orient the series of events that structure the chronology of life. Duration contextualizes how long an event is, but also orients when some event happened in relation to now and other events. But, with the five images mingling, we can't see what happened to bring them together. They are simply, paradoxically, all present at the same time without a quality of time to orient them.

Typically, we take it as logical that there can be only one time at a time. Time appears to us as an experienced point within a flow. While we can only be truly aware of the particular point of the present, memories of past moments and how they are assembled into experiences of change, cause and effect relationships, etc., give us a sense of time flowing. Memory links points of the past together with each other and to the present, and these connections from various past moments to the present moment that we experience give us a sense of duration, how long each thing or event was, has been, is, isn't, etc. However, this description I have given here presents duration as something of a static calendar, passively keeping memories organized for purposes of orienting amounts of time. In this, memories are dead entities used to hold places of reference in time.

But, the multiple and mingling “loose polyhedron” images portray different emotional states--various moments of an individual life--happening at the same time. As duration requires there to be difference in time, how can we make sense of this merging of pasts into a shared present?

Henri Bergson describes duration with a more dynamic and animated nuance than the

typical static calendar model I presented above. Bergson states, “the continuous life of a memory...prolongs the past into the present, the present...containing within it in a distinct form the ceaselessly growing image of the past.... Without this survival of the past into the present there would be no duration, but only instantaneity” (11). The “loose polyhedron” pieces appear to show such an instantaneity of distinct states of a self crowding together in shared disconnectedness, and thus the sense of disorientation that they convey. However, reading Bergson closely brings out a different aspect in the photos. Bergson portrays duration not as a passive orienting system for time, but rather as the enduring and active means by which memories grow, live and change. In Bergson, duration, via memory, connects distinct moments of time, and one incident of recognition with another. But, there are no static dots of time. And, memories are not merely unchanging and isolated stable completions of dead moments that are stored and organized. Rather, a memory has a continuous life. Memories reach into the present and live on in ways that continue to grow and layer the connections with the past. Duration is not merely a recollection of what was, but rather the presence of what was coiling and roiling in connection to what is present. Memories reside and live in the present time, contextualizing and contrasting the now like echoed images of our self walking through our experience in the present moment, appearing and vanishing but actualizing themselves in the layered crowd of individuality. With this as a lens through which to examine the “loose polyhedron” pieces, we can read the images as embodiments of duration, the unrecognizable faces of our selves undermining a stable sense of distinct presence that might exist separated off in our unique point in time. We look for ourself and don’t find a clear and completed being, but rather a blurry layering of shared becoming. Memories wrestle us for survival, keeping the habit of self-making in flux. In this way, the “loose polyhedron” photos open up spaces for questioning the idea of a stable uniformity of self.

While Takakura’s “loose polyhedron” photos present us with clusters of separated faces of the same person which we can imagine layer one another to form a becoming self roiling in the living activity of memories, the Norwegian artist Atle Blekastad takes a contrasting and more literal approach towards what can be interpreted as representing similar destabilized results. Blekastad’s work, entitled “42,” is a 25-minute black/white slideshow/video of the faces of 42 people arranged in order by age from infancy to old age. Blekastad used a still camera in a controlled studio

environment and opened the lens' shutter for one-minute for each of the 42 people, meaning his images capture 42 literal one-minute durations of these individuals' lives. Some faces are sharp and focused for the minute--meaning these people kept their heads still--while other faces are clouds of movement's blur. The faces are of children and adults, women and men, people of several different races--each with his or her different and distinct facial features and hairstyles. In contrast to Takakura's five images, these faces are clearly different from each other. Each of the 42 has its own appearance: an equality of diversity. Blekastad asked his participants to meditate for the minute of the shoot, and thus the majority are portrayed with their eyes softly closed, but each is recognizable as him or her self. The images were then edited into a slideshow/video whereby the image of each face very gradually transitions out of and into the faces that precede and follow, dramatically layering each other in these ends of each duration. The effect is just as disorienting as the five faces of the "loose polyhedron" pieces by Takakura, but in a contrasting way.

As two faces layer each other in transition, a third or merged face appears to tentatively appear. Is it there? Isn't it? There is some-kind-of-something happening: the becoming of a visible unknown, something beyond known. A different self appears to arise through a process that Karan Barad would describe as "intra-action" or "an entangled state of agencies" (23). In these transition periods in Blekastad's video, there are extended moments when the learned cues of identity-recognition become suspended and some kind of experimental being seems to be edging into view beyond the categorical limits, as though it is testing out a new--even if ephemeral--form. Or, perhaps its existence has no necessity to be more than short term. How can we recognize what is not abiding by the limits of recognition and presence? Much like how such experimental new forms appear in the transitions, questions about the typical categories used for identification appear in my mind at this stage of watching, but without clear answers. What complex intra-actions spur such questions as, Is this appearance a man? A woman? Old? Young? European? Asian? African? Anything? How can this appearance fit my categories, or does it undermine them? How can one recognize the appearance of a face that is testing the parameters of duration, someone not able or expecting to stay for long? How long does a face need to be present in order to exist? Regardless of the instability of its ontology, the appearance still inspires my imagining of a previously unknown space suitable for its potential. The unknown facilitates its knowing. As the

typical framing elements that were assumed necessary for recognition lose some of their solidity, I am able to watch a face becoming precisely its temporal self, an identity I might recognize again should that chance and memory arise. In it, I recognize something of myself because like it, I too am an unstable identity assembling through processes of intra-activity, becoming something that categories don't limit. The constructed nature of the self is an equally phenomenal process, charting more of the flowing changes resulting from mingled contacts between equally assembled changing agents than the measurable stability of a particular entity.

In addition, Blekastad's work presents ideas related to faciality and deterritorialization. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari offer a critique of how the face has long served as a symbol and reference of negotiation for dominant White male norms. With the establishment and spread of Western Christian cultural and ideological dominance and orientation over much of the world through colonialization and capitalism during the last two millennium, the orchestrating referent became the White man's face. The Northern Europeanization of Christ's face in painting became a key element. The face of God was established as a White male, regardless of the fact that historically Jesus was surely not. From this, the face of Christ became the model of perfection and the orienting norm off of which degrees of deviation are measured. "Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance to the White man's face, which endeavors to integrate nonconforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves, sometimes tolerating them at given places under given conditions, in a ghetto, or sometimes erasing them from the wall, which never abides alterity" (Deleuze 178).

Expanding on this, Deleuze and Guattari view the face and faciality--as opposed to other aspects of the physical body--as the symbol of the dominating subject, that which takes and holds the central position of power. And, it is true that for each person the face does serve as this key identifier. As Deleuze and Guattari say, "The organization of the face is a strong one. We could say that the face holds within its rectangle or circle a whole set of traits, *faciality traits*, which it subsumes and places at the service of signification and subjectification" (188). Particularly in relation to society, the face signifies, or perhaps even supplants, the self. The face is developed and maintained to have a quality of completion, distinction and authority. People hope to "keep their appearance." Officially, due to the skill with which humans can read the face's individualizing

aspects, the face is used as the primary reference in authoritative identification. Every ID card contains a picture of the person's face. By extension, for mass surveillance, biometric scanners make use of reference points on the face to quickly check individuals, using these biometric ratios for determining identity. The representative role of the face also places it at the center of public control. Our face is the required flesh that each person must provide for public view if we wish to participate in society. To hide the face results in quickly attracting various types of official and casual scrutiny. Ironically, culture more readily accepts one to surgically alter the face--potentially transforming it into an appearance that doesn't look like "the real you"--than to obscure it behind a cloth or mask or hand, each of which conveys some presumption of hiding or guilt.

All of this above is to make clear that the face has long been a location of significant interplay between the self, the social and the historical. And, a central crux of appearance has long been a presumed stability, of looking like yourself, of being recognizable. Thus, Blekastad's work is of interest for both how it undermines a sense of self-stability by implying that the face is in flux and how it expands the commonsense understanding that an individual's appearance changes over time--such as transforming from infancy through childhood, adulthood and old-age--into an potentially radical idea that individuality itself is an assumption we should question more deeply, a fallacy aligned with habituated categorization rather than the more accurate view that identity is a constantly culminating assemblage of influences and intra-actions far beyond our control or ability to quantify. As can be interpreted from Blekastad's video, the 42 faces are a completed whole, a life of multiplied and intra-active durations ceaselessly transforming. The "recognizable" faces (those which are not moving and thus appear to be unchanging) are equally as plural and multiplied as those faces that show the a blur of time. But, also, the 42 distinct images that we see serve as the quantifiable phenomenal agents that we can see intra-acting within the experimental apparatus of the artwork. The number of resulting transitional phenomena are impossible to count or limit. Depending on how each viewer examines the work, there are seemingly innumerable "faces" that can float into appearance. "Human bodies, like all other bodies, are not entities with inherent boundaries and properties but phenomena that acquire specific boundaries and properties through the open-ended dynamics of intra-activity" (Barad 172).

Returning to Takakura's 10 "loose polyhedron" pieces for a moment, we can see that they

set-up a fundamental neutral state in contrast with the “monodramatic” series of works sharing his exhibition at Tezukayama Gallery. As if part of a science experiment, the “loose polyhedron” pieces seem to establish something of a control condition, each cluster of images are laid-out in the same format with a central foregrounded “flat” expression juxtaposed by four other emotionally-ranged images. The way they are laid-out in the photographic space probably echoes the five-sided polyhedron shape. But, the emotions shown in the pieces do not directly or strictly correspond to the five emotional states shown in the polyhedron graph of Flat, Pleasure, Anger, Sorrow and Delight. This graph has been derived from an interview survey done with each model before that day’s photo shoot. As a result of several compositional factors including the uniformity of the five images arranged in a similar way, the shared neutrality of clothing, hair styles, etc., the central in-focus front-facing Flat expression and each image’s connection to the polyhedron graph’s measurements, these “loose polyhedron” pieces feel like something of an emotional science experiment. As stated earlier in this article, the neutral elements in the pieces heighten the dramatic contrast and impact that the emotional facial expressions can have on the model’s appearance. But the compositional neutrality of these pieces also establishes a contrast to heighten the dramatic effect of the nine “monodramatic” pieces sharing the exhibition. The “loose polyhedron” pieces draw us into a very intimate or obscured private world, that world of that particular individual model. But, like their personalities are neutralized, so are the settings where they are located. Each person seems to be doing nothing in no place. Just as very little meaning can be drawn from the clothing and hairstyles, so too very little seems to be expressed from the locations. But, this neutrality is a big contrast to the highly dramatic contexts of the “monodramatic” works.

Each of the nine “monodramatic” pieces uses a single actress or actor and creates a collage of varied clones, a literal crowd of selves. Similar to the “loose polyhedron” works, each model wears the same clothing, but now it clearly is a costume and the actor becomes a character engaged in a dynamic but disorienting drama. Set within the context of a scene with a range of actions being enacted by the same character, the images have a strong energy of storytelling, with a wide range of expressions, gestures and postures conveying the sense of a silent motion picture--but without any movement. Or rather, all the movement has been frozen. But, not merely has time been

stopped, but rather (like with the “loose polyhedron” pieces) the durations of time have been compressed together into one moment. So, when we look at the pieces, we can see that they imply a history of varied activities, but the ordering of the story plot has been removed. We are left with an open narrative: a story that offers us the job of adding the element of time, timing and order to the plot points.

Similar to how the “loose polyhedron” pieces were disorienting due to having time compressed into the single moment of the photographic print, the “monodramatic” pieces have a similar--if also playful--disorientating effect. And, “play” is an optimal word for these pieces. They welcome the viewer to study them and put their stories into motion, to activate the drama by inserting the ordering and durational elements that are lacking.

Each of the nine pieces is set in a different location, for example the audience seats of a movie theater or a path through plants leading down to a river’s beach. Within these settings, there are numerous copies of the same actress or actor in the same clothing actively participating in the scene. For example, in the movie theater scene, numerous duplicate versions of the same young Asian woman with her hair tied back, dressed in a light brown top are seated in various seats in various postures in the movie theater. Each of the images of the woman conveys a different emotion in relation to what is perhaps on the theater screen (something we can’t see) or in reaction to other selves in other seats. One character appears scared while another appears laughing while another is sobbing in sadness while another eats what appears to be a heated meal bought from a convenience store (and perhaps smuggled into the theater). One of the images is sitting alone and engrossed in the film, while a loner glares across several empty seats at a cluster of three of her likenesses apparently chatting more than watching the film.

While each of the figures in the images conveys some particularized emotional response to the activity they are doing, there is also a sense that they are rarely interacting with each other. Even a pair that are sitting quite close in the front row of the theater and have almost the same emotion--as conveyed by their eyes which tell us they are deeply engaged with the film’s action--seem to be existing in different states or times or worlds from each other. There is a feeling that all these entities are possibly existing at different moments in a series of differentiated moments, moments that have just enough duration removed between them as to be disconnected.

They become a collection of instantaneities. Almost like watching an animated flip-book film with many of the pages stuck together, there is a feeling of stuttered flow and connection but also skips in time. Cause and effect can only be guessed at, which is an element which makes the viewing quite interesting. Without a strict narrative that is oriented in linear time, we can start our viewing of this layered-frames film at any point and the action then derives from our selective ordering of the events, using our own invention of time in order to bridge connections between causes and effects which subsequently become the causes of other effects and outcomes. The ordering of time becomes a creative event, conveying more of a great variety of potentialities rather than a strict story plot.

All the individual images become charged with equality (rather than neutral), equal parts from which to imagine the plots of potential story lines of a narrative arrangement. And, the “monodramatic” pieces don’t give us many hints about how to assemble an “artist-authorized” story. The images, due to their open-equality, rarely reveal a time order for things that are meant to happen. One piece, entitled “the bridge,” features a woman in a red dress. One of her images is laying on the pavement, perhaps dead after a fall from said “bridge.” Another of her images is reaching tentatively out towards her fallen self’s foot with a twig. These two images within the work provide a small connection based on time. Obviously, the fallen woman must be there before the other reaches out to either prod herself into consciousness or to check if there is any reaction. The result of this test could indicate how serious the situation is and perhaps what has taken place. But, such results are left to the viewer to imagine. This is similar to how memories do not allow themselves to be relegated to a quiet death or passivity in the past, but rather they play a part in the present and entangle the latest self in intra-active self-collaboration. Life becomes a monodrama of living with ourselves, wrestling, rejecting, studying, shaming, befriending, trying to awaken and sharing secrets with these that are our most intimate we.

In conclusion, what can be said to be real, and when? Inspirations and connections that arise in my mind from intra-actions with phenomena presented via these images are as tangible as ideas coming from entities that some might categorize as more “real” because they are flesh-and-blood human beings or hard-and-fast objects in the world. But, art is not less, nor more, real. Everything is phenomenally equal in terms of reality. Art works, such as these photographic pieces, present

their reality in a different way than sitting across from a loved-one at a dinner table. All are being shaped by me and my perceptive abilities and prejudices, my mode of intra-acting with them as an aspect of this experimental apparatus defined and refined as becoming. Nothing can escape participation, but within this total context, there are smaller contexts. Art is just such an experimental context, a “machine assemblage” (to borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s term) that enables us to change the speed and conditionality of things resembling things we take seriously: the self, for example. By engaging in this type of experimentation with art, we can see what isn’t art in different ways. Similar to how we might place selected atomic particles within a highly controlled experimental condition to learn about not only their behavior, methods, conditionality and ontology, but also our own role in influencing/deriving their behavior, methods, conditionality and ontology through our own behavior, methods, conditionality and ontology, art serves as a viable means for understanding more about complexity and being. As Karen Barad states, “Reality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena” (140). By humbly but passionately engaging existence in the spirit of collaborative becoming we can intuit our momentary flash of self within this totality of singularity.

Figure #1



Title: MT@Tokyo



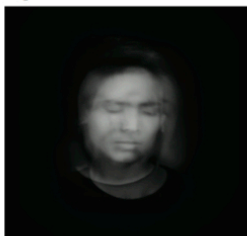
Title: TM@Tokyo



Title: NH@Tokyo

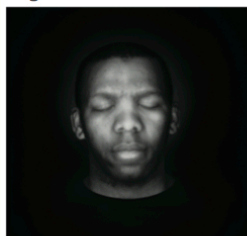
Photograph series: loose polyhedron, 2016 Artist: Daisuke Takakura
Images: Courtesy of Tezukayama Gallery, Osaka <http://tezukayama-g.com/en/daisuke-takakura/>

Figure #2a

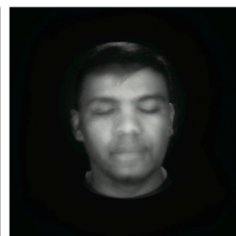


4:48

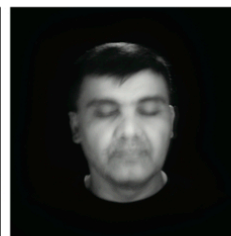
Figure #2b



10:50



10:57



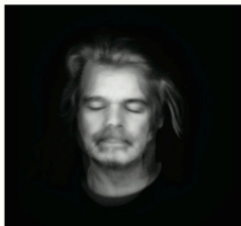
11:04

Title: 42
Artist: Atle Blekastad
Stills from Slideshow/Video
Images: Courtesy of the artist
<http://www.atleblekastad.com/>

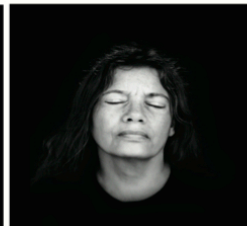
Figure #2c



15:30



15:37



15:42

Figure #3



Title: The Bridge



Title: Magic Hour

Photograph series: monodramatic, 2016 Artist: Daisuke Takakura
Images: Courtesy of Tezukayama Gallery, Osaka <http://tezukayama-g.com/en/daisuke-takakura/>

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