

Babydeer.jpg was published in **Restless Grounds: Speculative Futures on Algorithmic Technologies**, a publication exploring slowness as a speculative, critical, and embodied mode of engaging with algorithmic technologies.



Babydeer.jpg

Scrolling through my Instagram, my thumb freezes. Something makes me pause, and I take a closer look at the image before me on my screen. There it is, lodged between a toothpaste ad and a portrait of someone I don't know. It's a post from one of my favourite Instagram accounts *humans_of_capitalism*. At first, I'm drawn to the small deer, but as I focus on the whole scene, something unsettles me.

A baby deer is curled up against a larger one, its tiny body lying close, almost protectively. The baby deer looks sad, the grass around them trampled. It reminds me of Bambi, or my son, when he's sick, and the only thing he wants is to be close to me. But something is off. The adult deer isn't alive. It has no legs. It's a hollow, plastic 3D hunting target, shot to pieces and fallen over. Its vacant eyes staring blankly into the sky. The baby deer has mistaken it for its mother, curling up against it, mourning.

Perhaps it's the apocalyptic weight of today's world, but the image encapsulates something much larger than itself. It speaks to the ways we attach to what isn't real, the empathy we hold for reproductions and fakes. But also a child sitting by its dead mother. It is as if all the images of the past 1,5 year collapse into this single, low-res image I almost scrolled past.

Images hold so much more than they depict. This is what they do, they serve as portals, linking memories, references, emotions, textures, and colours buried in our minds. They are open-ended, fluid, bending to the gaze of the viewer. Each is an invitation to interpret, to see whatever we need to see. They demand attention, interpretation, confrontation and reflection.

So somehow, in their multiplicity, they slow us down. In a world of instant consumption, we scroll past hundreds of images each day, the apps forcing us to move at an inhuman speed. Yet images have the ability to pause that rush. When unexpected, violent, absurd, or out of place, they can disrupt that rhythm. A single image can freeze your thumb mid-scroll, pull you out of the stream and force you to look more closely and relate and maybe react.

When that happens, something shifts, not just in the feed but in the system itself. The rhythm breaks, and the endless stream fractures. You remain on the platform but are also taken elsewhere: to the images stored in your mind, to questions about what you are seeing and why. In my Master's thesis from 2022 on the impact of automation on photography and image culture, I argued that images have the power to disrupt. Disrupt systems of power, disrupt the speed of progress, and slow things down. They can challenge the flow of the world, making them a weapon in resisting the systems imposed on us by big data. Systems that, disguised as convenience and efficiency, quietly shape our choices, erode our privacy, and deepen biases, reducing us from autonomous beings to mere data points in a machine serving only the most powerful.

In machine learning technologies, images are read, indexed, classified, and fed back like any other object of information. Some of these machines predict representations that are forever changing the way we will see and perceive things. We teach our machines what things look like based on the images we feed them. The dominance of predictable image feeds, like those on Instagram, creates a kind of hypnosis, reinforcing patterns of "normal. A problematic process if you look at the ones running these platforms and feeds. Who gets to decide what is normal and with what intent?

To resist this predictive control, we should slow down the process. Make those machines confused and therefore, and therefore less able to predict. It can slow down the indoctrination of predictive systems, allowing us to reclaim agency and resist the imposition of algorithmic certainty.

Images can serve as a valuable tool in this resistance. They hold power, as visual communication is the universal language of the digital world. The ambiguous, multifaceted nature of images is far from a weakness - it is a strength. Images leave gaps for interpretation, sparking questions, discussions, and even disagreements. These gaps create space for imagination, fantasy, and freedom, countering the boredom and numbness of the echo chamber feed.

The images that flood our feeds today are often high-resolution, enhanced, flawless, and almost disturbingly perfect. Everything is curated and synthesised to look beautiful and commercial. Yet, in saving the strange, uncanny, unwanted, irrelevant, low-quality or even ugly images I stumble across, I find myself preserving something rare: a type of image that is being quietly erased from the digital landscape. There's a quiet defiance in holding onto these low-res relics, a soft resistance to the relentless push for perfection. A longing for a time when taking pictures was more about saving a moment than about selling something. When the moment was more important than the way it was framed. But maybe that's just plain nostalgia.

This archiving of images is central to my practice. The images become characters in my work, but they also serve as representations and reflections of our present and past visual cultures. They are the poetry between the horror, self-promotion, and capitalistic nonsense we submerge ourselves in today.

I take a screenshot of the picture of the baby deer, crop it, and save it. I Airdrop the image to my laptop and accept it. It's saved in my folder labelled input. There, it gets swallowed up by the mess of other images that make up my archive. Countless images. No folders, no order, just chaos.