

Cities of Poor Images

Translation of Hito Steyerl's ideas from *In Defense of the Poor Image* (2010)

Referencing Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972)

The City of Circulation

Images are restless tourists in this metropolis. They travel without passports and lose their original skin every time they are transmitted. The walls are formed of compressed pixels, and the streets are lined with deteriorated memories. Here, an image is a migrant, conveying revolution in its own deterioration rather than a monument.

"Observe how an image changes," says the archivist. Its strength increases as its quality decreases.

In response, the theorist says, "Degradation is not loss, but liberation."

The Trading City of Resolution

Consider a market where pictures are worth money. Worn banknotes were passed from hand to hand instead of immaculate coins. Every artefact tells a tale of cultural and economic interchange, and every compression is a trade. The likelihood of radical communication increases with decreasing resolution.

The Archivist claims that "these images speak the language of the underground."

The Theorist responds, "They whisper what official channels cannot."

The City of Digital Memory

Images are ghosts in this context; they are transparent, movable, and enduring. They move between high and low culture, as well as between government archives. They become performative creatures, no longer rooted in their original environment. Compared to a crystal-clear original, a pixelated trace has greater political potential.

"See how it moves?" the archivist asks, tracing the path of a compressed image.

With a nod, the theorist says, "Movement is its truest form of existence."

The City of Resistance

Degradation is a feature rather than a defect in this landscape. Pictures circulate, proliferate, and compress. They acquire a collective voice but lose their aura. Every pixel is a digital whisper that turns into a collective roar, a moment of shared defiance.

"Quality is a prison," says the Archivist.

Theorist continues, "And circulation is the key."

The City of Forgotten Archives

Rejected photos find refuge in a city of deserted pixels. In this case, low-resolution pieces serve as archives for the under-represented. Each pixelated wall is a witness to untold tales, and hazy records of peripheral histories pile up like unstable structures.

The Archivist murmurs, "These images are the memory of those without monuments."

With a nod, the theorist says, "Invisibility is its own form of visibility."

The Thin City of Compressed Emotions

Emotions reduced to the most basic information. Emotions condensed into their most basic pixels. Joy, grief, anger—compressed, communicated, and changed. Every picture is an emotional algorithm that gains global resonance while losing fidelity.

"See how feeling travels," the archivist remarks.

"Not through perfection," the Theorist continues, "but through connection."