

Copy

Kathleen Williams

A photocopier is resistant and receptive to a body at the same time. Its interface is just above hips, its relatively smooth plastic panels become a home for resting arms or books or failed copies. But the boxiness of the photocopier defies a body fitting entirely alongside it or in it. The top panel that holds in the light resists anything with dimension.

Then there is the body of the machine, the endless paper chambers that defy logic, that remove the paper from sight, encouraging a reading of magic; how does it do that? Like a very procedural magician, the white rabbit spits out again and again from that plastic hat.

Technologies of the office – it is hoped by the tech giants – become extensions of ourselves, in which, paradoxically, there are few capacities for self-representation, and many more for slight personalisation. Office workers make small decisions about how to present themselves in systems of surveillance – do I choose a headshot for Zoom? An avatar for Microsoft Teams? Do we set up a back-channel Slack? The tools that we use for communication in these spaces are also designed to track, to create a profile of how we use our allocated hours and minutes, of our ‘productivity’, a time-stamped portrait.

What does it mean to seek out intimacy with the office machine, to replicate the self intentionally, but then to leave the machine-captured self as analogue, as submitted to the historical subject of paper? In the process, the photocopy captures machine noise, makes movement material, and rips open the logic of copying.

Foster places her own head on the plate to be disembodied, pulled; her dragged features defying the gendered relationship between photographer and a woman’s body. Self-decapitating in order to hold your own face to the immense glare of the scanning light – which, unlike paparazzi cameras of the past doesn’t explode on the red carpet, and can instead allow you to copy again and again and again. We see here the offering of a head for the gut chambers of the photocopier to whirl into action, and create an economy of the face in glitch, in noise. The decapitated head haunts the paper tray, the glass plate, and the surveillance cameras. Through surveillance we see Foster’s body without a head, while she bends over to provide an intimate offering to the machine. Make me grotesque; make me beautiful.

Noise has historically been understood as the “unwanted” part of the act of reception. In this work, Foster enmeshes together the various ways of thinking about reception; the noise, the analogue materiality of the act of copying on paper. In surveillance there is noise too. The video camera picks up the noise of human movement, gathering data of people acting in small transgressions outside of expectation, in turn heaping unwanted additions to the archive of videos showing mundane productivity until there is a breach. Reception, too, is where administrative, typically gendered work happens. Where clients are greeted, where calls are made, and where copies of numbers of words of pictures are made again and again and again.

Who is seeing Foster? (Besides herself and the machine.) We lose Foster to the scanner in the copier. That’s where she is staying, where we can watch from another screen, seeing her fold into the technologies, seeping into the glass, becoming one with the copy and its creator.

More reading:

Kristeva, Julia. 1982/2024. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. Columbia University Press.

Kristeva, Julia. 2012. *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. Translated by Jody Gladding. Columbia University Press.

Quicho, Alex. 2023. ‘Everyone is a Girl Online’, *Wired* September 11. Available: <https://www.wired.com/story/girls-online-culture/>

Serres, Michel. 2007. *The Parasite*. Translated by Lawrence R. Schehr, University of Minnesota Press.

3 Translated by Ariana Reines. Semiotext(e).

Tiqqun. 2012. *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young Girl*. Translated by Ariana Reines. Semiotext(e).

Vape and Scanners

Isabella Maria Foster

8 August - 30 August 2026

Copy prints, video, 2025.

Combining old and new media, Isabella Maria Fosters visual practice infiltrates systems of replication and auto-exploitation to explore contemporary subjectivity. This materializes across ink drawings, experimental photography, neon light, performance, and video.