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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article traite des différences entre la photographie, la peinture et les images digitales, en rapport avec les discours institutionnels qui ont été partiellement déterminants dans leurs régimes visuels respectifs. Prenant comme point de départ la question de l'ontologie dans les écrits de Bazin et d'Agamben, l'auteur analyse d'abord les implications de l'autonomie relative de la technologie photographique, en mettant l'accent sur l'action (*agency*) du sujet dans la production de l'image moderne. Ensuite, l'auteur compare ce dispositif avec « le musée imaginaire » de Malraux, un modèle institutionnel qui exploite le dédoublement photographique pour conserver une conception instrumentale du médium.

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the differences between photography, painting, and briefly, digital images in terms of the institutional discourses that have been partially determinant of their respective visual regimes. In a comparative reading of Bazin and Agamben, the author first analyzes the question of ontology in relation to photographic technology's relative autonomy in the production of the modern image, underlining its implications for the viewing subject's agency in the modern image's production. This is contrasted to Malraux's imaginary

museum, an institutional paradigm that harnesses photography's uncanny doubling to maintain an instrumental conception of the medium.

The imaginary of the end has no end, and is not an end in itself. Its only end is to be a means, a medium that draws an image into the cultural landscape. It traces the border between the interior space of the image's framed contents and the exterior space occupied by a viewing subject, a limit that varies with the nature of the image that emerges into sight on the horizon of visual history. With the variations of this framing, at times bold, at others nearly imperceptible, disparate images confront their own conditions of possibility in the form of other visual regimes. The border running along one regime and another delineates the threshold that defines each image, an end of the imaginary that reflects and reproduces the imaginary of the end.

Thinking about the imaginary of the end and the end of the imaginary requires working through their relation to language, discourse, and the institution. This hinges on two premises. The first is that the image is a privileged point of access to the imaginary, the second, that a qualitative difference between images, a difference of substance and essence, reflects a corresponding difference between imaginaries. It is not only possible to distinguish an imaginary of the end from one of progress and continuance, for instance, but also, beyond this mythic or psychological content, to find many imaginaries of the end, each with its own history and moments of rupture, modalities of mediation, and subjective constitution. The various imaginaries of the end are best discerned by analyzing the intrinsic qualities proper to them, the limits and borders marking their historical landscape, the images and words that draw their vanishing.

A sketch of the differences between painting and photography provides the wide historical scope necessary to any understanding of the contemporary practices that institutionalize the image, and particularly the digital image, which some have recently heralded as the harbinger of an "era of the postvisual."[1] Such a scope is indispensable for the digital novelty, whose short

history makes it difficult to confirm the advent of a new era, and which arrives in an imaginary field that the museum has deeply striated to harness and control its predecessor's technologically produced image. To understand the role of the museum and other institutional discourses in controlling the photographic imaginary, I focus on two conceptions of the medium in its relation to subjectivity and signification.

Taking as a point of departure André Bazin's history of the plastic arts, I first discuss photography as a medium that traces the limits of modern subjectivity along lines of agency and visual culture, marking the "ends" of an imaginary. Underlining the linguistic indicators that constitute subjectivity—a discussion that leads to questions traditionally belonging to metaphysics—Bazin shows how the medium's doubling resists a form of signification that can be mastered absolutely. This doubling circumvents the conception of the medium as an instrument, a prosthetic extension of subjective identity, and a memory aid that informs the universal reach of the imaginary museum. I find this second understanding of photography in André Malraux's work, which marks the culmination of specific notions of artistic expression in relation to the museum and the modern subject. If André Bazin shows how photography's doubling threatens the museum's imaginary, eliminating the artist from the creative process to produce an image whose perfection effaces the difference between image and model, André Malraux reclaims photography for an imaginary museum that can use this doubling to maintain the notion of origin.

In "Ontologie de l'image photographique," André Bazin argues that the history of the plastic arts traces humanity's metaphysical struggle with time in the masks it has used to contemplate death as an object. Attempts to save being through appearance shift from the religious expressions of Egyptian embalming and medieval spirituality to the technical expressions that surface with the methods of camera obscura perspectivism. By the time these methods reach their apogee with the Baroque, the cultivation of an imaginary eternity has split into an aesthetic aspiration to express spirituality and a psychological need to replace the outside world with its imitation. Photography's exact

reproduction of the model is the culmination of the age-old quest to overcome death with the perfect imitation of life in plastic representations.

Although Bazin seems to conceive of photography's technical precision as a direct descendent of perspectivism, his arguments in fact question such an ancestry with a sustained meditation on problems of agency, technique and technology, as well as expression and enunciation. The coherence of his famous essay's central thrust depends not on its superficial historiography but on the more profound implications that the medium has for the constitution of viewer subjectivity. As a look at the history of Western metaphysics shows, Bazin's reference to the image's "ontology" is far from a kind of "naïve realism," and in fact touches on a central problem of subjective constitution in confrontation with the medium.

To look at the photograph is to be in the world:

> Ce reflet dans le trottoir mouillé, ce geste d'un enfant, il ne dépendait pas de moi de les distinguer dans le tissu du monde extérieur; seule l'impassibilité de l'objectif, en dépouillant l'objet des habitudes et des préjugés, de toute la crasse spirituelle dont l'enrobait ma perception, pouvait le rendre vierge à mon attention et partant à mon amour (Bazin 1999, p. 16).

The camera frames objects or moments that we cannot judge as we would the human interpretation of an idea, as no standard exists to evaluate mechanically produced images that show us the peculiar existence of *this* reflection or *that* gesture. It is precisely in showing us this or that instant, without significant commentary, that the photograph becomes accessible to our gaze. Our communion with the object pivots on photography's demonstrative function, on the specificity of the *this* which impassively situates us there in the tissue or text of the world. Unlike painting, a spiritual form of inner expression, photography indicates the series of exterior relations that constitute the gaze as a locus of enunciation. Its enunciative force repeats that gesture of an infant who without speaking points beyond the frame, who shows deictically what cannot be said according to

the specific discursive parameters of the plastic image. The deictic ambivalence doubles the world, pointing to the border between the intelligible and the mysterious.

The modern image's deictic potential is a propaedeutic that opens Bazin's theses to theories on linguistic mediation. A long tradition of thought on the division between saying and showing clarifies its fundamental role for any speculation on the ontology of the image. The importance Bazin attributes to deictic particles reminds us that the demonstrative pronoun's lack of an objective reference in the world has long made it a problematic category in studies of language, grammar, and logic. Passing from Aristotle to the Stoics, Saint Thomas and the medieval grammarians, *deixis* or *demonstratio* arrives to modern linguistics as a category that signals a subject's appropriation of language at a given instance of discourse. Émile Benveniste and Roman Jakobson have outlined the implications of these pronouns for sense and subjectivity.

For Benveniste these pronouns and other indicators of the utterance—I, you, here, there, now, then—are correlative terms that refer to the present speaker: "There is no point in defining these terms and demonstratives in general through *deixis*, if we do not add that *deixis* is contemporaneous with the instance of discourse that bears the indication of the person."[2] Only when the subject appropriates language does it constitute itself as such—only by divesting itself of all substance and thus identifying with the empty signifier "I" can it accede to language, which speaks through the essential neutrality thus assumed. Other terms follow from this initial presence: "In fact, as soon as, through the same expression, this relation of the indicator to the single instance that reveals it is no longer in sight, language looks to a series of distinct terms that correspond to the symmetry of the first. These no longer refer to the instance of discourse, but to real objects, times, and 'historical' places." Roman Jakobson calls these particles "shifters," whose meanings change with their appropriation by each new speaker. This shifting, the terms' correspondence and symmetry to an instance of discourse, is a temporal value that constitutes and is constituted by language. It sets a matrix of correlative terms into place.

Bazin's repeated reference to photography's deictic potential is instrumental to his argument for an "ontology" of the image, corresponding to the Benvenistean reality of discourse that lies at the foundation of all subjectivity, an essential neutrality through which language speaks in a process of appropriation and counterappropriation. This process hinges on the deictic references indicating that language takes place. In a study of the relation between language and death, Giorgio Agamben refers to this taking place as "the event of language," the opening of a locus in which something can be signified. Having started with the young Hegel's question "What is the *This*?," Agamben shows that Heidegger's distinction between the ontological and the ontic corresponds to the distinction between the opening of the event of language and what is said and signified in that opening. He notes, finally, that modern linguists "define this dimension [the event] as the putting into action of language and the conversion of *langue* into *parole*. But for more than two thousand years, throughout the history of philosophy, this dimension has been called *being*, *ousia*" (Agamben 1991, p. 25).[3] If Agamben's genealogy of modern linguistics is correct, Bazin evinces a profound intuition of a central problem in the history of Western metaphysics.

Agamben's study clarifies why Bazin repeatedly uses deictic particles to underline photography's force, and helps us understand how this relates to the discourse on the modern image's ontology. The difference between showing and saying at the heart of the problematic is the pivot for its translation into the realm of the image. If with *deixis* language looks to its own taking place and shows the limits of its intelligibility, it speaks through the subject who momentarily appropriates it to say something meaningful. Photography's indexical presence, its *thereness*, stands apart from the iconic or symbolic signification that places the image into a relation of analogy or resemblance with elements of a preexisting social discourse. Where the framing shows the potential of an image-language, the content of the photo, its composition of line, light and color, gives sense to that potential *after* its communion with a viewing subject. Bazin's ontology is the framing—not the *frame*, but the act situ-

ating it—that makes an image and a viewer correlative terms in a matrix where a visual language takes place. As an imaginary of the end, it indicates the limits of modern subjectivity.

For Bazin, the viewer's engagement with the photograph's demonstrative, with its virginal *this*, is an instance of discourse that establishes the conditions necessary for a visual language. Responding to Pascal's condemnation of painting's vanity, Bazin notes that photographic technologies sidestep the problem of imitation on the one hand and that, on the other, "le cinéma est un langage." Cinema, the completion of photography's objectivity in time, is a movement that makes possible the distinction between sequential deictic terms—*this* gesture and *that* moment, now and then—and the inclusion of the viewer in their correlative matrix. Such indicators mark the labile site for the viewer's appropriation of the medium, for the passage from a ubiquitous image that potentially covers the world's surface to one that is contextually specific, for the entrance of the divine into the pedestrian. Photography's demonstrative *this* indicates the subject's relation to the symmetrical performance of language. *This* is the event of language that precedes the designation of real objects, times, or "historical" places.

Bazin's concern with photography's indexical function anticipates the conclusions of another article, where he claims that cinematic language evolves in a constant oscillation between poles of enunciation and expression.[4] He notes two recurring tendencies in the history of the cinema. The first unerringly guides the viewer through a narrative sequence, juxtaposing images to produce effects of drama, psychology, and spatial verisimilitude, while the second encourages the viewer's active intellectual participation in long uninterrupted sequences that preserve reality's "mystery" and the image's "metaphysical" quality. The ambiguity of the enunciative *plan-séquence* is meaningful only insofar as it incorporates the plasticity of montage into its depth of field, thus attaining the status of expression: how could the *plan-séquence* not preserve editing, asks Bazin, without returning to a "primitive stammering"? Cinematic language's evolution is a record of how the mystery of reality, its secret and silence, passes into the temporal order of a narrative that can be

read as expression. It is a record of how reality moves through the subject of an enunciative matrix and into a world of sense or, conversely, of how reality's mystery initiates the viewer into a historically meaningful discourse.

Other film theorists have adapted linguistic theory to the cinema with mixed results. As is well known, Christian Metz has made the most exhaustive attempt, appealing first to de Saussure's distinctions between *langue* and *parole*, and later to Jakobson's shifters and Benveniste's theories of enunciation and discourse. Yet he fails to appreciate the deictic movement between the image's framing and the subject thus constituted. In *L'Énonciation impersonnelle* he claims that the cinema only produces a "simulated" *deixis*, since *fixed* and immutable film images cannot shift with the viewer. His further claim that every viewer sees a different film because each intercalates disparate personal "dream" images to those on the screen betrays a psychological understanding of a viewing subject that exists prior to the enunciative instance. The notion of the "impersonal" eclipses the problem of subjectivity. Following a line of thought that extends from Descartes to Husserl, he posits an *I* that transcends the correlation of terms which indicates the taking place of language. The priority of a subjective identity elides the ontological dimension of the medium's indexical function. If our reading of Bazin and Agamben is valid, then Metz and the narratologists who follow him have missed the mark.[5]

The mystical quality of the photographic image stems from the indication of its limits for human understanding, which may decipher its expression but which cannot objectively grasp its enunciation. Like Benveniste's observations on subjectivity in language, the fluidity of the agent's boundary before the photograph's *deixis* challenges the modern predicament of an acting subject before a fixed world picture. The technologically produced image manifests another presence that the notion of pure agency manipulating an instrumental medium cannot account for. Photography's agential independence is irreducible to the parameters developed for painting, since our faith in the photo's preservation of the person represented hinges on the automatic repetition of the mechanism, on the lens' "essential objectivity,"

and on the absence of individual expression. This challenge to painting's epistemological relation arises consistently throughout the history of photography, starting with pioneer Fox Talbot's claim that every photo contains unknown and foreign elements that their maker discovers in the finished product.[6] His experimental observation, one of many, shows a sensibility to the limits of the artist's creative control that is unthinkable in the tradition of academic painting, where the master commands every stroke of the brush. Whereas the artist-genius' hand and mind wholly determine the image on the canvas, a photo's perfection derives less from the precision of its contents than from the removal of human control over the creative process.

In the discourse on photography, the limits are more significantly manifest in the perennial presence of the figure of death. Bazin uses this figure to trace a history of human efforts to "save being by appearance" with the plastic arts. Yet photography differs from previous attempts because it fails to preserve life through the *expression* of the individual whose image it captures, and succeeds only in seizing a moment that it fixes arbitrarily, indifferent to the contents in the frame. Although the medium's perfect imitation may herald the victory over the decadence of time, its mechanical force shows the limits of human agency along lines of *enunciation* that reintroduce the figure of death into the image's interstices. Bazin's use of the figure is hardly fortuitous, deriving both from the relation of death to mediation observed by Agamben and from social conventions that have shaped the perception of the new images' outlandish precision. The intuition of their otherness surfaces as early as Carlyle, who, upon receiving a photograph of Emerson, beseeches his friend to replace the image of a "shadow from the valley of Death" with a sketch drawn by a human hand.[7] Hardy, Hawthorne, and Proust will use a thematics of death to describe the photograph before this motif resurfaces with Roland Barthes, who relates photography's value as *memento mori* to the viewing subject's loss of identity before the image, which this subject enters in a state of *extase photographique*. Finally, Noël Burch uses this discourse in his discussion of photography and cinema, showing how film's institutionalization as a narrative

medium aligns it with bourgeois conceptions of aesthetics and subjectivity that expunge death from the screen and give "life to those shadows."

Where discourse of death marks the limits of agency, it also signals a resurgence of the physical body in the interface with the image. Although perspectivism once implied a specific corporal placement before the image, its gradual perfection and institutionalization led to an effacement of this bodily presence and therefore to a gradual "disavowal of deictic reference" (Bryson 1983, p. 89).[8] Photography's enunciation challenges the camera obscura's disembodied spirit, which transcends the world to enter the eternal time of the museum's walls. Photography offers an implicit affirmation of the body by showing the ends of the Cartesian subjective identity and rejecting the "crasse spirituelle" that covers the viewer's gaze. The universal perspective of an enunciative locus that remains outside the image cedes to photography's *deixis*, which partakes in the same nature as the viewing subject that it folds into its constitutive expression. The undivided expression of painting's universal vanishing point, to which I return below, gives way to a double nature that exists in and for itself, beyond the subject's detached understanding.

Photography doubles the world. Bazin, as we have seen, attributes this capacity to the medium's enunciative potential rather than its iconic perfection, following up his well-known statement that "the image is the model" with yet another deictic reference: *ces ombres grises*. Its image repeats the given, doubling the object to become a part of the world: "Par là, elle [l'existence de l'objet photographié] s'ajoute réellement à la création naturelle au lieu de lui en substituer une autre" (Bazin 1999, p. 16). On this point he concurs with Walter Benjamin, for whom photography implies a different agency surfacing with the given, magically repeated: the medium does not give the artist a different picture of nature, rather a different nature *opens itself* to the camera.[9] With the medium's framing and the unique here and now that it situates, identity of both subject and object divide into indistinguishable parts.

Photography's duplication marks the end of the singular painterly imaginary precisely where it marks its own imaginary

end. Its perfect image not only cancels itself as an imitation—its etymological meaning—but also obliterates the independence of the model, which becomes virtually contingent to the double it brushes against on the ontological hinge: the image *is* the model. The hinge lies between the two natures, the copula shown by the enunciative force that places us at the limits of being, a differential fold between identical figures. In Bazin's view, the ontological threshold between the image and the model is a sign of the imaginary's end, where another agency erupts before the subject. This contingency is irreconcilable to the institution's order of priority. It cannot be put into a sequence that would place either image or model first, for it is precisely the pivot, hinge, or transition between them that is of the essence. Nor can this contingency be articulated in terms that distinguish the inside of the image, or nature, from the perspectivist locus beyond or exterior to it, the cultural nexus of a well-defined subjective identity. This *event* is of a different order, a difference that divides the identical spheres of origin and imitation at their evanescent point of contact. In the Bazinian paradigm, the doubling shows the enunciative limits of a moment, a spatiotemporal border given flesh in the charred greys of the image. This doubling, as well as the consistent resurgence of the figure of death, betray the subject's loss of control over the materialization of imaginary production, and suggests that a kind of "imaginary of the end" inhabits or is otherwise intrinsic to the medium.

In a history of the media, photography's violent clash with the logic of the images that precede it also signals its value as the end of an imaginary. The rupture with painting becomes clear if we follow Bazin's claim that the essence of photography is the agential independence of the technology that produces its images. It also makes clear the institutional controls deployed to suture the break, the ideological apparatuses that subdue the technology's uncanny doubling with narratives of permanence and continuity where the medium is an instrument in the hands of an able identity. The established discursive economy reacts against this emergent imaginary, institutionalizing the new image to shelter the subject from the technological medium's

heterogeneous constructive agency. Discourses of institutional knowledge emanate from the museum and the university to maintain the modern subject's integrity by reinscribing the double into an order of origin. While these discourses of course take many forms, they are consistently underlined by a preoccupation for the continuation of a certain measure of control, at once agential, pandering to the illusion of (artistic) mastery, and institutional, inscribing the medium into a bourgeois aesthetics. The inscription of film and photography into antecedent histories—the c*amera obscura*, narrative literature—is in keeping with a control of the imaginary that, with variations, has long differentiated a legitimate discourse that institutes the modern subject from illegitimate ones that are nevertheless partially constitutive of it.

The perspectivist tradition that dominates painting from the Renaissance to the mid-nineteenth century is a practice that, according to Alberti, replicates God's divine gift with an exact imitation of natural vision. An image that the artist organizes with geometric tools, the Renaissance canvas makes "man" the measure of all things, centering the world on a vanishing point that coincides with the position of the subject. The precise calculation of the extended field gives the viewer the illusion of sharing a common space with the figures that populate the image. This configuration enhances the viewer's identification with the pictured ground, while gauging the value of the represented objects only in relation to the subject towards which they turn. The rational image is a neutral mirror that reflects the source of quality and intent, the subject that projects itself onto nature. "Narcissus was the inventor of painting," writes Alberti, adding that "man lives a long life" through this immortal image. An anticipation of Cartesian space, perspective is also coeval with the rational techniques cartography begins developing in response to Europe's nascent colonial enterprise, where the subject's projection of the self onto the (Other) object articulates a political program of civilization, progress, and development.[10]

Photography threatens the imaginary that is proper to this instrumental control over the extended field, and has, in turn, been hedged into an institutional model used for other images.

Its break with the codes of verisimilitude and *mimesis* developed with painting is also a break with practices of memory and history that represent the past through writing. Baudelaire feared that the photograph might "répandre dans le peuple le dégoût de l'histoire et de la peinture" and urged that its use be limited to the reproduction of the archive's printed books, documents, and manuscripts. His plea for history and painting issues from his aversion to photos depicting historic events, but is also an appeal for the preservation of the narrative framework that binds these terms together, the Albertian *istoria*. With *mimesis* sabotaged by the image's mechanical genesis, its ancient Platonic rival *diegesis* inherits the task of reinscribing the medium into the humanist order of agency and expression. Beyond the narrative configuration of its images—for Burch, *the* organizing element for film's eventual institutionalization—the medium is made to serve the *grand récit* of a continuous history. It functions as an objective guarantee of the institutional record, a neutral memory aid that extends the archive's reach across barriers of language and time, preserving and disseminating it according to the parameters of knowledge proper to the imaginary museum.

The mnemonic apparatus deployed to control photography's imaginary of the end—as well as its indication of the end of the painterly imaginary—is pushed to its logical conclusions by André Malraux, for whom the medium can "resurrect millenia of human history" expressed in the crafted artifacts of every epoch. His museum without walls has conquered ubiquity, expressing universal history without the architectural site specificity of its venerable predecessors. A blanket of images on the surface of the world, the museum substitutes static global space for the deictic specificity that Bazin finds in the death and difference of the photograph's "embalmed time." It follows Baudelaire's instrumental notion of the medium, appropriating photography's potential to magically double the given for an institutional system of organized knowledge. The museum attempts to control photography's identical doubling by inscribing it into the Albertian paradigm that conceives of the image as an expression of history, continuance, and resurrected life—a

representation of the subject's projection onto the mirror of nature. In this institutional tendency, photography's peculiar repetition is pressed into the service of a linear model where the image represents an originative nature.

The modern museum's universal ambitions derive from its role as an apparatus with a centralizing function in collective organization. Malraux takes its inner order to an inexorable conclusion: to reproduce every work of art, and to make the copy available everywhere on the globe. And this, we should recall, he conceives as a triumph of and for art history as a discipline. Malraux wants to keep photography's doubling of the world without having to relinquish the model of subjectivity, the mastery over the medium, or the linear history of the universal museum. His goal is to recuperate the medium's doubling potential for an institutional program. Yet the doubling necessarily compromises the constellation of elements that accompany the subject's monocular vision, including an epistemological network that embraces other institutions and discourses. For Bazin's "ontology," the doubling dovetails with the question of agency, indicating the point where the technology's *framing* and its fundamental role in the formulation of a contingent subjectivity plays itself out in the quality of the image. It draws an end to the subjective locus outside the processes of mediation, anticipating the work of scholars like J.L. Borges and Guy Debord who conjecture on the consequences of the loss of a cultural space that remains exterior to the neutral nature it frames. The fault line that surfaces within the visual regime runs through other fields that press the potential of doubling the world into the service of a knowable grammar and an instrumental form of knowledge.

Critics from many fields show that this doubling is the sign of decay for modern disciplines, challenging their universal aspirations with the actualization of totality. In a series of poetic verses under the title of "Museum," J.L. Borges criticizes the will to ubiquity with a brief, and by now well-known, parable on the "Rigors of Science." Pushing their cartographic discipline to perfection, imperial geographers trace a map that exactly overlaps the territory, matching the empire point for point

before being abandoned to the inclement weather. An allegory of imperial decline, it speaks of neither map nor territory, but of the invisible collapse of certain institutional modes of representation. The map, without an outside in relation to the territory, indistinguishable from the model it represents, presents a different dimension of a global culture that will eventually harbor marginal figures—beggars, animals—in an inhabitable virtual space. While the map is certainly a simulacrum, the essence of the matter is clearly to be found in the microevent that destroys the map, the slow shift of history's tectonic plates that spells the death of the modalities of knowledge proper to geography's instrumental precision. As with the rest of Borges's œuvre, it is the threshold of change between the image and its identical model that is essential, the collapse of one moment into the next.[11]

The irony directed at modern institutions' disciplinary drive for a totalizing vantage point resurfaces, although perhaps unwittingly, in other fields that attempt to cover the world with sense. While Borges's imperial cartography offers a literal portrayal of the ambition to ubiquity, the somewhat less mythical discipline of semiotics also attempts to understand the world by doubling it as a sign in a signifying system. P.P. Pasolini shows this tendency, by way of the absurd, when he proposes a semiotic Code of Codes that will record all social and semantic values for every "kineme" that enters the frame, convert all of nature into culture and "all of existence into a discourse." Such a total work is of course impossible, as the project would have to account for its own existence with another code book, which would then need its own supplement, and so on. Semiotics, which has long attempted to build a science of signs where images are an intelligible unit of a knowable grammar and where their potential for expression buries the unyielding force of their enunciation, forever misses this supplementary threshold.

Institutional modes of knowledge overlook the hinge between image and model, map and territory, semiotic system and existence. As stabilizers of disciplinary regimes, institutions such as the museum or the university oversee the doubling of the world, incorporating the threshold into established parameters of

knowledge. These parameters have also been deployed towards understanding the new images produced by digital technologies. Having analyzed photography's divergence from painting, we can now evaluate the *discourse* on these novel images, which brings together the questions we have been following: agency and instrumentality, but also the institution, visual culture, and doubling as a part of established knowledge.

Visual semioticians have recently proposed that digital technologies are ushering in an "era of the postvisual," suggesting that its new images introduce a rupture with photography as significant as photography's break with painting. Yet the place of digital technology in the history of the image is difficult to predict, and its epistemological implications are by no means clear: the new image has no history of its own, and a look at the history of the plastic arts offers only an inkling of its potential to transform our way of seeing. Its break with photography is moreover misunderstood as a break with the *camera obscura*, as if the two could be categorized together within a greater history of visual regimes. A glance at the elements of verisimilitude and agency that Bazin and others use to differentiate painting from photography reveals that technology's alien contribution to the image's production remains ever present despite greater possibilities for manipulation. While digital technology gives the artist a degree of control akin to that of the master painters, its images add little to the precision and likeness of photographic reproductions.

The strongest argument for a digital revolution is that its potential for manipulation allows us to create images *ex nihilo*, without a model. Yet this new image enters a virtual world where the model has been divested of its value as an origin. It touches down on the double ground originally opened by photography's replication of the universe of painting, where the model and the image (as imitation) have been obliterated by their virtual contingency. Furthermore, it circulates in a visual landscape that determines the image's value as interface and communication, and that has long been striated by institutional parameters that have reined the double into an order of origin. If digital technologies create images of perfect verisimilitude

without an existent model, these images nevertheless emerge in a world where the model has always already been eclipsed by its virtual doubling, and where institutions have harnessed this repetition to produce knowledge.

From an institutional perspective, what is most interesting about the digital image is how the discourse of the "postvisual" constructs it, and how this discourse reveals *nolens volens* the duplicity at the heart of the institutional matrix. Recent conjecture about the advent of a "new era" is more instructive of the way the university produces knowledge about the image than it is informative of the new image's essential nature. If the historical implications of the digital image are impossible to discern, the notion of the postvisual evinces a clear consciousness (or fiction) of a salient historical break. In fact, the institutional discourse deploys an *imaginary of the end* to think the potential of the new image without a chronicle of change or a field of experimentation.

This leads to two conclusions. First, this discourse repeats, rather than diverges from, certain elements that are proper to photography. The notion of the postvisual *coincides* with the discourse of photography, doubling its "dégoût de l'histoire" and repeating the imaginary of the end intrinsic to the older medium's ontology. The supposed transition from photo to digital redoubles the multiple worlds opened by photography's rupture with painting, extending the reach of the simulacrum without differing from it in nature. Second, and more significantly, visual semiotics repeats photography's imaginary of the end *as a sign* that it presses into the service of organized knowledge, continuing the rational impulse to convert the medium into a controlled instrument. Put otherwise, with the postvisual semiotics not only doubles the image as a sign in the manner of the imaginary museum, but also doubles the event of photography—the limits of its intelligibility, where enunciation brackets expression—as a sign within a historic framework. The temporal prefix "post" is hardly contingent to this process, as it structures the two moments of rupture along a historiographic trajectory that makes the second the sign that the first has passed. There is a nostalgic impulse here, a search in history for a clear break

whose institutionalized modalities can be recycled to understand a new image. This calls for extended research to which the following conclusions provide only a brief overture.

In institutional terms, it is clear that "the postvisual" does not follow from "the visual," but that both surface simultaneously on a horizon first opened by the term "postmodern." Since establishing itself throughout the humanities, the prefix "post" has become a commonplace, the key *topos* of a new rhetoric, a hard currency for exchanges in the marketplace of ideas. Ironically, the "imaginary of the end" that emerges with the hypertrophy of "post" theories has become an example of the very "theoretical discourse" that Fredric Jameson (1984) shows to be a "significant symptom of postmodernist culture" rather than its explanation. Although he leaves undeveloped the implications that this may have for a map of institutional knowledge, the step has since been taken by David Harvey and, more recently, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, all of whom interpret postmodernity as a phase of capitalist accumulation that accompanies the new dynamics of the contemporary world market. According to Hardt and Negri, theories of the "post" and their corollaries of difference, hybridity, and the antibinary play across boundaries are symptoms of the passage to the capitalist phase they call Empire. If postmodernist and postcolonial theorists point to "the *end*" of the modern predicament, their criticisms nevertheless reinforce emergent capitalist dynamics that depend on difference, diversity, and the absence of "modern binaries and modern identities" (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 143—original emphasis) to carve new consumerist niches into a highly saturated market.[12]

This accurately describes the discourse of the postvisual, which attacks photography as part of the regime proper to camera obscura perspectivism, a binary machine. Yet, as we have seen, photography's ontological hinge pushes into crisis the binarism that distinctly separates the viewing subject from the objectively framed image. While Malraux attempts to inscribe photography's double into an order of origin, riding roughshod over its pivotal essence, the discourse of the postvisual attempts to reinscribe photography into the originative matrix that it

takes as its target. Like Malraux, although in a different manner and with other intentions, this discourse seeks to place itself after or outside the photographic imaginary, to trace the end of photography's imaginary with an imaginary of the end. As is already clear with the Bazinian image that adds itself to nature, or with Borges's map, there is no more outside, and the possibility of finding an exterior space that would allow for a clear delineation of a cultural economy's inner workings is becoming increasingly problematic. Hardt and Negri have underlined this loss as part of the passage to Empire by following Guy Debord's analysis of the society of the spectacle[13]—an analysis that gives us our conclusions concerning the role of the museum in doubling the world.

Debord (1992, p. 184) writes that all works of art can be included in today's museum, where they cannot lament the loss of their own conditions of communication precisely because they swim in an environment that has made communication generally impossible. The premise of a difference between the framed image and the perspectival sense no longer holds in a world without exterior. Instead, we wander in a world from which we have been dispossessed: "Le spectacle est la carte de ce nouveau monde, carte qui recouvre exactement son territoire" (Debord 1992, p. 31). The map that covers the world does not replace it but, like the photograph, adds itself to nature as another component of its new order. It traces an end of a world imagined as separate from nature, just as it constitutes the imaginary of an end or limit confronting the subject in the event of mediation.

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NOTES

1. I presented an earlier version of the pages that follow at the Congrès mondial de l'Association internationale de sémiotique visuelle of October 2001, entitled "Le visuel à l'ère du postvisuel."

2. I have culled the two citations in this paragraph from Giorgio Agamben's *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* (Agamben 1991, pp. 23-24), and follow his argument on *deixis* in the pages that follow. Another Benveniste quote that underlines the demonstrative pronoun's implications for subjectivity, also cited in Agamben

(1999, p. 159), reads as follows: "[…] c'est dans l'instance de discours où *je* désigne le locuteur que celui-ci s'énonce comme 'sujet.' Il est donc vrai à la lettre que le fondement de la subjectivité est dans l'exercice de la langue." I again follow Agamben's use of Benveniste in the brief reference to Descartes and Husserl below; see *Infancy and History* (Agamben 1993).

3. See especially "The Third Day."

4. See "L'évolution du langage cinématographique," in Bazin 1999.

5. See Metz 1991.

6. S. Kracauer discusses this briefly in the opening chapter of *Theory of Film* (Kracauer 1997, p. 22).

7. Carlyle writes these lines in 1846 (quoted in Rabb 1995, p. 18). According to Martin Jay, Emerson uses the same discourse of death to discuss photography in 1841.

8. See "The Gaze and the Glance" for the progressive effacement of *deixis* from Alberti to Vermeer.

9. Benjamin says this in his famous "Work of Art" essay (in Benjamin 1969, p. 236). He uses the same phrase in his "Little History of Photography" (in Benjamin 1999).

10. Martin Jay coins the term "Cartesian perspectivism" to discuss the convergent tendency of that period's various visual arts and their coincident anticipation of Descartes. He also offers a comprehensive overview of the vast literature on the subject.

11. In his reading of Borges's parable, Jean Baudrillard misses the importance of the hinge between the two moments, a key figure in stories such as "The Aleph" and "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and in many of his critical essays. J. Crary offers a general criticism of how Baudrillard gets caught in his own simulacrum (see Crary 1984, pp. 290-291).

12. Hardt and Negri follow Arlif Dirlik, whose criticism of postcolonial and postmodern discourse launched a debate on its political effectiveness, or lack thereof.

13. In a section entitled "There is no more outside," Hardt and Negri (2000, pp. 186-190) also follow Jameson's insights on the end of nature as an alterior space for the definition of culture. Their call to reread Debord does not contradict the criticism that Crary offers in his article on the eclipse of the spectacle, which is directed at points other than those we borrow from the analysis of the society of the spectacle.

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