

WHAT POWER HAS AN IMAGE?

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TO RE-COMPOSE - TO APPROPRIATE - TO QUESTION - TO TESTIFY

... why then, since man is man - is he an iconophile, and does he feel the need to leave images, to always compose and recompose, to appropriate, interpret and reinterpret the world?

Basically, this quest remains open to an endless questioning, an infinite mystery, which never finds a definitive answer. This gaze, always astonished and always renewed, expresses the very strangeness of being-in-the-world.

The photographer doesn't take a photograph just for himself; he also does it as a guide to witness, for others, for future times, hence collecting traces from the past, traces (authentic or not) of past memories, as if to make sure that these events have indeed taken place, that these people have indeed existed. Is this a palliative to the fear of disappearing - an ontological concern? Is leaving a trace (graph) akin to a victory over the inevitable? Consequently, a presence - photographic - survives. And yet the image proves nothing.

FLOAT AND FLOWS

The uninterrupted flow of visual images - three billion images shared every day on social networks in 2015 – today, favours a form of anaesthesia, standardisation, disenchantment, desensitisation, by force-feeding.

Annie Lebrun, art historian, from the *musée Jeu de Paume* is insisting on the link between image and economy, in one of her texts she claims: "What happens in museums is the same as what happens in large supermarkets: everywhere in the world we see the same codes, the same brands, the same products, the same artists. »¹

So, how can you let yourself be approached and touched by an image? How can we re-sensitize the vision? And what does the image say about our gaze, perception and understanding of the world? Beyond the gaze, all the senses are concerned; the deprivation of contact and tangible experiences generates a form of dependence on images, favouring a form of virtual confinement and alienation. Susan Sontag also pointed out that: "The production of images also provides an ideology guiding. Desired social change is replaced by image change. The freedom to consume a plurality of images and goods is identified with freedom of oneself. Restricting the freedom of political choice to the freedom of economic consumption requires producing and consuming unlimited quantities of images. »²

FORGERY AND USE OF FORGERIES

The images are retouched, in particular through the use of filters and other manipulations. This process is nothing new. But the density and omnipresence of these images in our environment - notably via screens - eventually give us a sublimated, magnified, poetic virtual world, which ends up replacing the real world. The image is thus the support par excellence of the imaginary, draining dreams, fantasies, and other projections.

¹ <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-grande-table-2eme-partie/la-grande-table-2eme-partie-du-mardi-12-juin-2018>

² Susan Sontag, *Sur la photographie [1973-1977]*, Paris, Christian Bourgois, 2008, p. 241-244.

Thus, just as bodies are remodelled, modified by aesthetic surgery, just as heritage is transformed into shopping centres or places of entertainment, just as food is tampered with - the image is also falsified, to the point where we can no longer distinguish between the "true" and the "false". Images have become the site of a supra-real world, which has become more important than the real and the everyday, as if the latter were no longer enough. Intimacy is exhibited, erasing the boundary between the private and the public.

There is also the question of the omnipresent, urgent need to "make an image": why is everyone led to witness (exhibit) through the production of images of their daily life, their intimacy, even in the most anecdotal facts, the most insignificant gestures as an aestheticisation of existence, in the perspective of a digital ontology. How can we explain the absolute necessity of an assiduous presence on social networks? And why, conversely, does not submitting to this social injunction, in order to preserve one's intimacy, make an individual suspicious? Is this not an illustration of the culture of suspicion, thought by Foucault, taking root in a surveillance society?³

Dans quel monde vivons-nous désormais ? S'agit-il d'un déni de réalité, d'une fuite en avant, nourrissant une illusion construite sur des désillusions et l'espoir d'un monde plus beau ? Comment faire la différence ? La notion d'authenticité est-elle encore pertinente ? D'autant plus qu'aujourd'hui, la majorité des images sont produites par des machines pour d'autres machines, et non plus par l'être humain ; autrement dit, des images produites totalement artificiellement, sans avoir recours à l'appareil sensoriel humain⁴.

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

What is visible? Is it so obvious to look at a picture? How do we look? Does seeing and looking mean the same thing? What is the difference between seeing and perceiving? And how has this gaze - raw, astonished, seeing everything, without any judgment - been initiated, shaped, influenced, to the point of selecting only a part of reality, which will capture its attention?

Then there is what the image shows, and what it does not show. There is what the images capture, and what is invisible. The image is inhabited by other images (sometimes outside the frame, outside the image), which we can explore, which we don't feel, but sense. It does not only split the world, it contains the representation, but at the same times a meta-image. Paradoxically, therefore, by its power of invocation, it can show and evoke exactly what it does not show at first glance. There are therefore many images beyond the image. The image, the photograph, engenders worlds, revealing what was unknown, or hidden: "The photographic 'shock' consists less in traumatising than in revealing what was so well hidden".⁵

From then on, the image can be used to invoke that which does not exist, or no longer exists: imaginary, past, memories - but also fables, fictions, inventions. It transcends temporality and space - and the real, to bring to light the image of what we hope to glimpse. Originally, the term *imago* referred to death masks, moulded on the face of the deceased in order to preserve their features.

In this, the image - like the work of art - is already mediation between the objective and the subjective, an artificial reproduction more or less resembling the real. As an access to the visible and invisible worlds, it offers a possibility of knowledge (or imprint) of the latter. As a fragment-sample of the world, it allows us to see it better: "Zola, who, as early as 1901, said: 'you cannot claim to have really seen something until you have photographed it'..."⁶

As viewers, we interpret the visible, the image, in a singular and collective way. Our perception will always be our own, but it is never neutral: it will also be influenced by learning to read the works, and by a form of conditioning. The viewer adds an added value of meaning.

In reality, the image carries an infinite potential of infinity of images in its matrix: there is the image created through the eyes of the creator and the medium, as many images as seen by a number of viewers, and the

³ Michel Foucault, 1993. *Surveiller et punir*, Paris, Ed. Gallimard.

⁴ Peter Szendy, « Voiries du visible, iconomies de l'ombre », in *Le Supermarché des images*, Paris, Jeu de Paume/Gallimard, 2020, p. 18-20.

⁵ Barthes, *La Chambre claire – notes sur la photographie*, Cahiers du Cinéma, Gallimard Seuil, Paris, 1980.

⁶ Sontag 1977, p. 112

image on its support, infinitely reproducible and manipulable. It reveals itself, at each stage, at each glance, as a constellation of images.

WHAT THE IMAGE CAN - OR CANNOT - DO

Can an image - potentially, escapes the will of its creator, as well as that of the viewer. It seems likely that as soon as it is invested with power, strength, quality, it loses them: it is impossible to predict the power and impact of an image on an individual or on an audience. It is therefore impossible to predict the power and impact of an image on an individual or on an audience. Is it then possible to think that the image has a "life" of its own, beyond its history and the context in which it appears? That the image "speaks" and "thinks"? That it "touches" us? And that it creates itself, autonomously, beyond the will of some - creators - and others - viewers?

Or perhaps it also has nothing to assert, nothing to say, other than what we want it to say.

The image can, unquestionably, only act: if it mobilises and activates forces - emotions, desires, reflections - if it summons a power, which places itself in a position of rupture, of claim; if it transgresses or stands up against something. It can also be used in a completely different way - manipulated, even diverted - to support a discourse, an idea, propaganda ...

The image is unpredictable.

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MDA- HAS

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