Trace-Image to Fiction-Image: The Unfolding of Theories of Photography from the '80s to the Present*

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As *What Is Photography*, the 2015 exhibition by Clément Chéroux and its accompanying catalogue, makes abundantly clear, the inquiry into the nature of photography did not begin yesterday and is in no way limited to contemporary works of theory. But though this inquiry may have its own more or less unrecognized history, manifested by an incredible diversity of approaches, thoughts, and practices, it is nonetheless the case that a properly theoretical movement involving meditation on photography developed with a singular force—and even attained its hour of glory—only in the 1980s. These were the years that witnessed the emergence of the notion of the *photographique.*

The Effervescence of the '80s

After the incredible impact of the posthumous publication of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* in 1980, we saw, throughout the decade, a great number of more or less theoretical books, of special issues of journals (as well as new journals), of French translations of important texts, and countless colloquia on this theme, all of which bear witness to the extraordinary moment of vitality of this period at the end of the Structuralist years, a period that opened onto essentialist, phenomenological, and even ontological questions.[1] It was, we could say, a period of invention of "photography as theoretical object." It was also during these years that the model of the image in general, which is to say the regime of visuality, came progressively to take precedence over the model of the text, the

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*   This text was given during the conference "Where Are the Theories of Photography?," organized by the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, on May 27, 2015.

1.   *Camera Lucida* was preceded ten years earlier by René Lindekens's totally forgotten book *Éléments pour une sémiotique de la photographie* (Brussels: AIMAV, 1971). Lindekens expanded upon his work in 1977 with *Essai de sémiotique visuelle (le photographique, le filmique, le graphique)* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1976). As indicated by their purely semiotic and very technical titles, these two works by Lindekens are thus posterior to or contemporary with the more semiological essays on photography already published Barthes in the 1960s and '70s, "The Photographic Message," *Communications* 1 (1961); "Rhetoric of the Image," *Communications* 4 (1964); and "The Third Meaning, Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 222 (July 1970). These three essays were published in English translation in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

regime of textuality, which had dominated the preceding Structuralist years of triumphant semiology, the 1960s and '70s.

   To give just a small idea of the turbulence such a shift from image to text produced, one can cite a few examples, in chronological order, of the major publications of the '80s in France: the journal *Les Cahiers de la Photographie,* created in 1981;[2] Franco Vaccari's *La photographie et l'inconscient technologique*, translated in 1981;[3] Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, published in French translation in 1982;[4] Denis Roche's *La disparition des lucioles* (The disappearance of fireflies) in 1982;[5] the more "pop" *Philosophie de la photographie,* by Henri Van Lier, in 1983;[6] *La photographie créative,* by Jean-Claude Lemagny, the curator of the Bibliothèque national, in 1984;[7] and Gaston Fernandez Carrera's *La photographie, le néant* in 1985.[8] In 1986, André Rouillé founded the journal *La Recherche Photographique*,[9] and the following year Jean-Marie Schaeffer published *L'image précaire*,[10] doubtless the most rigorous and focused book of this period, even if a bit austere. Finally, the great American art critic Rosalind Krauss published *Le photographique: Pour une théorie des écarts* in French in 1990 (there is no American edition).[11] My own book *L'acte photographique* (1983) is thus inscribed in the burgeoning of this movement.

2.   *Les Cahiers de la Photographie*, which appeared from 1981 to 1990, was the first French journal dedicated to critical and theoretical essays on photography. Its founders—Claude Nori, Bernard Plossu, and Gilles Mora—would later be joined by Denis Roche and Jean-Claude Lemagny. The *Cahiers* published special issues on "l'acte photographique" and "l'oeuvre photographique" (the fruit of two large colloquia organized by the journal), as well as on Roche and Robert Frank.

3.   Franco Vaccari, *La photographie et l'inconscient technologique* (Paris: Créatis, 1981). This was the French translation of *Fotografia e inconscio tecnologico* (Modena: Punto e Virgola, 1979).

4.   *On Photography* anthologizes six essays written in English between 1973 and 1977. It was published in French as *Sur la photographie,* trans. Philippe Blanchard (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1982).

5.   *La disparition des lucioles* (Paris: L'Étoile/Cahiers du Cinéma, 1982) gathers together a group of texts on photography by the writer and photographer. Roche would go on to publish five more volumes about photography: *Conversation avec le temps* (Paris: Le Castor Astral, 1985); *Photolalies* (Paris, Argraphie, 1988); *Ellipse et laps* (Paris: Maeght, 1991); *Le boîtier de mélancolie* (Paris, Hazan, 1999); *La photographie est interminable* (Paris, Seuil, 2007).

6.   Henri Van Lier, *Philosophie de la photographie* (Paris, Les Cahiers de la Photographie, 1983). Van Lier also dedicated a second work to photography, *Histoire photographique de la photographie* (Paris: Les Cahiers de la Photographie, 1993).

7.   Jean-Claude Lemagny, *La photographie créative* (Paris: Contrejour, 1984). The book was awarded the Prix Nadar in 1985. Lemagny also published *L'ombre et le temps. Essais sur la photographie comme art* (Paris: Nathan, 1992).

8.   Gaston Fernandez Carrera, *La photographie, le néant* (Paris, PUF, 1985).

9.   *La Recherche Photographique* was a weekly journal of theoretical research into photography published from 1986 to 1997 by Paris Audiovisual and the University of Paris VIII. Under editor-in-chief André Rouillé, the journal published twenty special issues.

10.   Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *L'image précaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

11.   Rosalind Krauss, *Le photographique: Pour une théorie des écarts*, trans. Marc Bloch and Jean Kempf (Paris: Macula, 1990). Krauss also published in the catalogue *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (London, Arts Council, 1986).

This historical moment represented the discovery of a new theoretical domain, virgin territory to be decoded and constituted, a terra incognita of the meditation on images. One felt an explorer's excitement. The map of images (with its different categories, its regimes of visuality) was seen as staking out a new domain, one that must be given a powerful profile. It led to the constitution of the concept of the *photographique*, which distinguishes the photographic from other forms of images, both those long in existence (painting, for example) and more contemporary ones (such as cinema). This discourse on specificity (What is photography? What does it have more of—realism?—or less of—movement?—than painting or film?) is always essential when a category of thought is being invented, above all at the point when it is linked to a *dispositif*[12] (another major notion of the period). Because it must never be forgotten that the novelty of the *dispositif* and the thought it launches are not the same thing—an idea I will return to later.

On the other hand, this conquest of virgin territory took place in a moment of transition in which the primordiality of the text (and of language) was contested by aestheticians and elaborated by the progressive affirmation of the image, finally taken into account for itself. The image (of painting, of film) is thus no longer read (as a text) but seen (in its properly visual dimension). We tend to recognize the principle of a "thought specific to images," of "visual thought"[13] that is not channeled through language (and its rationality) and that doesn't presuppose that the visual sense uniquely depends on its translation into words, but instead reflects on the cognitive value of (plastic) sensation, of (phenomenological) perception, and of (aesthetic) contemplation. It is a movement that doesn't cease affirming itself by the outcome. The essential book was Lyotard's *Discours, figure*, which as early as 1973 launched the concept of the figural as the intrinsic power of the image, overwhelming the forms of discursive rationality and assimilating Freudian desire to Merleau-Pontian phenomenology. Barthes obviously contributed to this as well through his famous notion of the punctum. Indeed, Barthes's punctum and the idea of the figural have many points in common, even if they are not equivalents.

12.   The notion of the *dispositif* was constituted at the same time (the '70s) both in the field of cinematic studies, which was then in full theoretical bloom, and in the new history of disciplinary societies (e.g., prison, school). The foundational texts for cinematic studies are Jean-Louis Baudry, "Cinéma: Effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil de base," *Cinéthique* 7–8 (1970), and "Le dispositif: Approches métapsychologiques de l'impression de réalité," *Communications* 23 (1975). These two texts are recalled in Baudry's book *L'effet cinéma* (Paris: Albatros, 1978) and in Christian Metz, *Le signifiant imaginaire: Psychanalyse et cinéma* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1977). In history and philosophy in the social sciences, see Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), as well as *Dits et écrits*, vols. 1 and 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994–2001); Gilles Deleuze, "Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?," in *Michel Foucault philosophe: Rencontre internationale, Paris 9, 10, 11 janvier 1988* (Paris: Seuil, 1989); reprinted in *Pourparlers 1979–1990* (Paris: De Minuit, 1990); and, more recently, Giorgio Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?* (2006), trans. Martin Rueff (Paris-Genève: Payot & Rivages, 2007).

13.   Cf. the Gestalt theory of the 1920s (Rudolph Arnheim, *Art et perception visuelle: Une psychologie de l'œil créateur* [1954]; *La pensée visuelle* [1969] [Paris: Flammarion, 1976]) and today's theorists of the figural (Jacques Aumont, *À quoi pensent les films?* [Paris: Séguier, 1996]).

There is a third feature that characterized the decade of the *photographique*: the affirmation (sometimes peremptory, sometimes illusory) of the autonomy of this category, of its *ipseity* as a kind of in-itself. That is to say, it is the discourse itself that comes to essentialize (or, worse, ontologize) the new category. The movement toward this ontologization is well known, and I invoke it only as a reminder of three categories: first, the idea of a *noeme* of photography (a term used by Barthes to propose an essence of the medium), which could be summarized by the formula "that has been" [*ça a été*]; second, the concept of the index (or indice, in contradistinction to the icon and the symbol)—a notion borrowed from the American semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce and successively invoked by myself, Krauss, Van Lier, Schaeffer, Brunet—which was significant not least because its usage was massive, even if not altogether mastered, for more than ten years; and, third, at the end of the decade, this movement is cemented once and for all by Rosalind Krauss as category in-itself and for-itself.

The Crux of the '90s and the Resurgence of Theory in the 2000s

The 1990s were, I would argue, not very rich in new theoretical approaches to the *photographique,* with some exceptions—François Brunet, for example, with his *Naissance de l'idée de photographie*, published in 2000. The turn of the century, however, witnessed another wave of important books on photography published in France, this time on the basis of historical studies, in which the uses of photography were foregrounded, as opposed to the principle of the *photographique* as a category in itself. The question "What is photography?" gave way to another primary question—"What can photography do?"—and, with it, questions like "What ends does it serve?" and "What are the values it supports and those we attribute to it?"

In 2002, with *La photographie contemporaine*, Michel Poivert relaunched the theoretical movement in a novel and promising manner from the point of view of a historical vision totally open to the aesthetic.[14] In 2005, André Rouillé turned toward the past with *La photographie. Entre document et art contemporain*, revisiting the thought of the '80s.[15] Then there is Dominique Baqué, with *Photographie plasticienne, l'extrême contemporain* (2009), which examines photography's relations with contemporary art through a formalist method;[16] Clément Chéroux, who begins his immense enterprise of revalorization of vernacular photography;[17] and André

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14.   Michel Poivert, *La photographie contemporaine* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002).

15.   André Rouillé, *La photographie: Entre document et art* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

16.   Dominique Baqué, *Photographie plasticienne, l'extrême contemporain* (Paris: Regard, 2009).

17.   Chéroux has edited such exhibition catalogues as *Mémoire des camps: Photographies des camps de concentration et d'extermination nazis, 1933–1999* (Paris: Marval, 2001); *Le troisième œil: La photographie et l'occulte* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); *La photographie timbre: L'inventivité visuelle de la carte postale photographique* (with Ute Eskildsen) (Gottingen and Paris: Steidl and Les Éditions du Jeu de Paume, 2007); *Diplopie: L'image photographique à l'ère des médias globalizes, essai sur le 11 septembre 2001* (Paris: Le Point du Jour, 2009). See also his *Vernaculaires: Essais d'histoire de la photographie* (Paris: Le Point du Jour, 2012).

Gunthert, who passes from historical research (on the snapshot, on Étienne-Jules Marey) to visual culture such as it is exists on the Internet.[18]

Each of these theoreticians focused on the particular uses of images in a perspective that was historical, pragmatic, and at the same time modeled after that of visual culture. Throughout the 2000s, one finds a diversification of the theoretical approach, in which the object of study is less photography (or rather the *photographique,* as one terms an epistemological category) in general than certain specific uses of it in other relatively determined or more specialized fields (the plastic arts or contemporary art, visual studies and Internet culture, the political or social fields). Study of the *uses* of the image supplanted the study of the ontology of the *dispositif.*

From the beginning of the 2000s, the field of photographic studies has had to confront the question of the digital turn. This turn is, of course, not specific to photography; it affects all the other forms of technological image (cinema, video, television, and even older images both pictorial and graphic), since the digital institutes generalized reproduction—this is the first of its essential features—and, obviously, the socialized forms of communication made possible by these technologies. The digital allows (or forces, according to one's point of view) one to approach the field of the theory of photography simultaneously from the ontological point of view of the image and from that of the pragmatics of uses.

To start with, there is the basic acknowledgement that the digital, as a *dispositif,* has flattened, erased, annulled the differences of nature between the different kinds of image (painting, photography, film, video, etc.)—and even between texts, images, and sounds, all of which are now lodged under the same undifferentiated digital label of reproduction and the transmission of "signals" of information. Farewell to the map of types of image; there is no longer any terra incognita to chart. From the digital point of view, there is no difference between a text, an image, and noise. They are all data, no more than digitally encoded signals. And if one wants to rediscover differences, one must climb to a higher substratum, a tiny step (at least) toward the "original," to the image before digitalization—when there is digitalization, that is, since sometimes the images are directly generated by this new *dispositif* (as with images said to be numerical). This change is fundamental, as much for thought about the ontology of the image and of its *dispositifs* as for thought about the uses and practices of the image. The theoretical field hereby becomes denser, more intense, more complex, but also less clear, less defined, less structured, for henceforth everything is digital.

The change is radical, first of all because the theories of the *photographique* of the '80s rest on the principle, primordial because genetic (tied to the genesis of

18.   Gunthert, who founded and edited the journal *Études Photographiques* in 1996, edited (with Michel Poivert) the reference book *L'art de la photographie* (Paris: Citadelles et Mazenod, 2007) and has published *Paris 14–18: La guerre au quotidien. Photographies de Charles Lansiaux* (Paris: Paris Bibliothèques, 2014). He also edits the Lhivic (Laboratoire d'histoire visuelle contemporaine) and founded the collaborative website Culture Visuelle (later Hypothèse).

the image, to its very process of constitution, to its *dispositif*—which is why it was ontologized), of the trace, of the imprint, of the "that has been," of the index. It was this genetic principle of an organic link to the real that became the foundation of the supposed identity of the medium—its "natural" specificity—and it is clear, in its very concept, that the digital attacks this link between the image and its "real" referent directly. The digital image is no longer the photochemical (analogical) emanation of the world, it is no longer generated by it; it no longer benefits from the "transfer of reality" (as André Bazin described it)[19] from the thing onto its representation. And from then on, everything changes; everything tips over; everything is called into question.

In the '90s, we dramatized this basic overthrow and took this severing of the image from the world as tragic, developing the discourse in two directions—one euphoric and one apocalyptic—apparently opposed but reconnected by their very extremism and embodied early on by '80s thinkers like Philippe Quéau, Jean Baudrillard, and Paul Virilio. For Quéau—an engineer and essayist, a research director at the National Audiovisual Institute, and the founder of Imagina, a festival of synthetic images—"the future will be digital (or will not be at all)."[20] Facing a "Copernican revolution" that will "change everything," we must "forget the past" (which is to say the analog) and enthusiastically turn, body and soul, toward the radiant and enchanting future of the "wholly digital." "Even our dreams will be digital," he says. And he, Philippe Quéau, will be the "new Plato" of these new forms of representation.[21] At the other extreme, we find the inverse in the discourse of Baudrillard and Virilio: For them, the new technologies are a kind of devil that insinuates himself everywhere, infiltrating the tiniest image, the slightest sound and representation, whatever and wherever it may be. The world itself is now nothing but a series of images—the simulacra that constitute our very life—threatening to drown us in a fraudulent universe that suspends all ties to the real and dissolves the world in simulation. It's the apocalyptic version of software/hardware. In fact, these two discourses—caricatured a bit here perhaps, but not as much as one might think—lead to the same place. It's the all-or-nothing discourse so characteristic of the '80s and '90s, which we have learned to relativize since then.[22]

19.   Bazin: "This automatic genesis radically overthrew the psychology of the image. The objectivity of photography conferred on it a power of credibility absent from every pictorial work. Whatever the objections to our critical idea, we are obliged to believe in the existence of the represented object. . . . Photography benefits from a *transfer of reality* from the thing onto its reproduction." Bazin, "Ontologie de l'image photographique" (1945), in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, vol. 1 (Paris: Du Cerf, 1975), pp. 11–19.

20.   Among others, see Quéau, *Éloge de la simulation: De la vie des langages à la synthèse des images* (Paris: Champ Vallon/INA, 1986); *Le virtuel: Vertus et vertiges* (Paris: Champ Vallon/INA, 1993); *La planète des esprits: Pour une politique du cyberespace* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2000).

21.   The following quotations by Philippe Quéau are taken from a televised debate between Quéau and Paul Virilio (as well as Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet), organized by *Le cercle de minuit* and broadcast on the television channel Antenne 2 on February 18, 1997.

22.   On this, see my introduction to the book I co-wrote with Gérard Leblanc and Frank Beau, *Cinéma et dernières technologies* (Brussels: De Boeck, 1998).

If we cease fantasizing the "digital" as god or devil, if we return to the reality of things, to the technical *dispositifs* and the effective uses of photography, it is clear that the situation today is not as catastrophic nor as wonderful as one imagined it. One could say that in relation to the theory of the *photographique* what has changed is that the genetic question of the index, of the "that-has-been," of the trace, no longer holds—and thus neither does all the philosophy, at times epiphanic, that has been derived from it (be it the "emanation of the real" [Barthes] or the "transfer of reality" [Bazin]) and elevated (above all in the field of cinema) to the principle of the image as revelation of the world, which in any case was an ontological abuse. I would say that the onset of the digital rightly allowed one to relativize, to put back in its place, this theory of the '80s, limiting it to its genetic dimension. The digital onset returned one to this simple moment of the process of making the image and revealed that its ontologization was at the very least a disputable extension, a sort of epistemological blinding, an attempt at theoretical epiphany by absolutization, the glorification of nothing but a technical process.

The relativization of the ontological discourse on photography as trace, its reduction to a simple (genetic) moment of process that it agrees not to essentialize, is, then, the first aspect that characterizes the theoretical transformation produced by the digital turn. It's a form of return to immanence that allows one to put an end to the idea that the identity of the medium lies in its origins.

The second aspect of this transformation is a consequence of the first: When photography is no longer defined in its originary principle as a capture of the real, when its identity no longer depends on its nature as a simple sample of the world but instead on something that makes it a representation that *might not correspond to a real thing*, which is to say a representation that *might* (this is nothing but a possibility, not a necessity) have been "invented" (in whole or in part) by an image machine—then the question becomes: How can we think this kind of image? How can we think the image once the supposedly real that it represents is no longer necessarily given as a trace of "what-has-been"?

Digital Photography and the "Theory of Possible Worlds": The Image as Fiction

The answer that I would like to propose resides in the idea that the so-called post-photographic digital image can be thought of as the representation of a possible world and not as a necessarily real having-been-there. Which is to say that theories of possible worlds seem the best way to grasp the status of the contemporary photographic image: no longer something that *was* (there) in the real world but something that *is* (here), in front of us, something one can accept (or refuse to accept). The photograph is no longer a trace of something that was but of what it is, or, more exactly, of what it shows itself to be, a possible world, neither more nor less, that exists parallel to the "real" world, an "a-referential" world, to use Gunthert's expression, a plausible world with its own logic, coherence, and rules, a world apart, as acceptable as refutable, without criteria of fixity and which exists in

its very manifestation, present and presented, without being necessarily the trace of an attested, contingent, and anterior world. An image thought as a world of fiction and no longer as a universe of reference.[23]

As we know, the theories of possible worlds cover a historically expansive domain of thought—theoretically diversified and relatively well constituted, they originated with Leibniz and were subsequently developed in the domains of analytical philosophy (Nelson Goodman),[24] modal logic (David Lewis),[25] and semantics (Saul Kripke).[26] From the '80s to the present, they have been powerfully constituted and organized in the field of literary theories of fiction, notably through the studies of Thomas Pavel,[27] Lubomír Dolezel,[28] Marie-Laure Ryan,[29] and Françoise Lavocat.[30] Today these theories have begun to spread to the domains of the image (photography, cinema) and of visual culture (Jean-Marie Schaeffer,[31] André Gunthert,[32] Alain Boillat[33]). Without wanting or being able to enter into the details of these sometimes complex or still uncertain theories (particularly those that concern the image), I will simply cite several general aspects, allowing them to outline the whole in relation to the field that interests me and above all to

23.   Here I reply to a fundamental and clearly defined opposition by one of the principal theoreticians of fiction as possible world, Thomas Pavel, in his reference work *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); translated into French as *Les univers de la fiction* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).

24.   Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978); translated into French as *Manières de faire des mondes* (Nîmes: Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 1990).

25.   David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (London: Blackwell, 1986); translated into French as *De la pluralité des mondes*, trans. Marjorie Caveribère and Jean-Pierre Cometti (Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat, 2007).

26.   Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972); translated into French as *La logique des noms propres*, trans. Pierre Jacob and François Recanati (Paris: Minuit, 1982).

27.   Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*.

28.   Lubomír Dolezel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

29.   Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds: Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

30.   Françoise Lavocat, *La théorie littéraire des mondes possibles* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 2010), from the seminar "La théorie des mondes possibles: Un outil pour l'analyse littéraire?," organized by Paris Diderot University, 2005–06; see also, by the same author, "La typologie des mondes possibles de la fiction: Panorama critique et propositions," fabula.org, November 10, 2005; as well as "L'oeuvre littéraire est-elle un monde possible?," fabula.org, July 15, 2009.

31.   Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Pourquoi la fiction?* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

32.   Many of Gunthert's recent works were produced within the frame of the Lhivic and are accessible on the Internet platform Hypothèse (formerly known as Culture Visuelle) and on his blog L'atelier des icônes.

33.   Alain Boillat, *La fiction au cinéma* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), and above all *Cinéma, machine à mondes* (Paris: Georg, coll. Emprise de Vue, 2014).

draw from these possible-world theories the implications of the changes that affect contemporary theories of the photographic image. Tracing such implications will allow us to put the theories of possible worlds into a close relation with theories of the post-photographic.

If we admit that the photographic image has changed its status today, that it has lost its genetic character as image-trace in favor of the "being-there" of the image-as-possible-world, is this enough of a reason to conclude, once and for all, that the only image we are dealing with is an *ontologically fictive* one? Can we not now replace the principle of the image-trace—that principle that, at least since the '80s, has dominated the theory of the *photographique*—with the principle of an "image-fiction" (in the sense that this use of "fiction" has acquired in various theories of possible worlds)?

If the criterion of reality (which is to say, of reference to the existence in the real of what has been the source or cause of the image) is no longer a pertinent and exclusive criterion for thinking about the image, then could one conceive that in its place (or at least next to it) is a criterion of fictivity that permits a redefinition of our new relation to the photographic image? Is it this that would make it possible to speak of the "post-photographic"? And what exactly would be the constitutive parameters of this criterion of fictivity?

Furthermore, can this new relationship with the (post-)photographic image as image-fiction produce this feeling of disquietude in front of the representation so often referred to? Would the image-fiction in its very principle (and not insofar as it pretends to represent a fiction) presuppose a "natural" and "spontaneous" suspicion when faced with photography? This is one of the theses that Catherine Grenier elaborates in her work *La manipulation des images dans l'art contemporain*.[34]

How does this suspicion in front of the photographic image affect the question of mimesis? More specifically, what happens once photography no longer reproduces the world as we perceive it but as it "invents" it, once it makes us see things that are in their very definition outside the reference of our perception of the apparent world? Does the old idea of resemblance (mimesis), which was still superimposable on the idea of the index, remain a criterion compatible with the image-fiction, and if so, at what price?

As we see, it is clear that theories of possible worlds and the criterion of the fictivity of the contemporary photographic image would have to connect in a very significant, productive, and inevitable way. This conjunction opens globally onto new theoretical fields (at least in the realm of photographic studies) and to poten-

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34.   Catherine Grenier, *La manipulation des images dans l'art contemporain* (Paris: Édition du Regard, 2014).

tially vast horizons of thought, as for example that of the truth of fiction: the world of fiction versus the fiction of the world; the possible versus the plausible; belief versus believability; authenticity versus falsifiability, etc.[35]

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To return to more specific and particular questions with regard to the field of (post-)photography, I will end this simple argument with a series of inquisitive openings onto some aspects of this change in the regime of photographic visuality. I will point to four of them, among many others.

1) The matter of the document as archive.

What happens if the image invents itself as document, if it becomes a fabrication of imprints? Could it lead to the constitution of fabricated archives, and would these be necessarily false? What becomes of the criterion of the truth of the image outside the real (with its corollaries: facticity and falsity, fiction and lies)? From this point of view, a deeply interesting and remarkable case is that of the Lebanese photographer and artist Walid Raad and his Atlas Group, which invents imaginary archives that are more "true" than the truth in giving an idea of what the wars in Lebanon represent.

2) The matter of stock and flow.

What happens if photography is no longer stored somewhere, if it is no longer material, if it no longer has a place? If it is only ephemera, an infinite mass of givens that infinitely travel on digital circuits, a purely fluent memory that is made, unmade, and remade at every moment in a continuous and limitless manner? An example of this could be represented by the evolution and logic of the Web site Flickr, which since its creation in 2002 has become an immense virtual space for the sharing of photos and videos, both institutional and personal, with billions of images in circulation and millions of members of the "community." And what about social networks like Facebook and Instagram, with their private/public pictures in permanent and infinite circulation?

3) The matter of the spatiotemporal unity of the image.

What happens if the image is no longer a block of space and time, made once and for all, at the moment of the shot (an instantaneity)? If, for example, it

35.   A series of problems at the heart of the contemporary forms of photography (and of art in general) could thus be examined from the angle of possible worlds: for example, the fraudulent, the fake; remaking, recycling, reenacting, restaging; theatricalization, the documentary aesthetic, expanded reportage, etc.

results from a collage of assembled elements, a composite image made up of het-erogeneous materials from different sources that nonetheless retains an appear-ance of the whole that alludes to unity and totality because the stitches are invisi-ble, masked, dissimulated? The question is equally applicable to film: In the era of digital special effects, of compositing and motion-capture, what becomes of the famous notion of the shot, this indivisible unity, this block of space and time that was thought of as the core of the cinematographic language?

4) The matter of the immobility of the image.

What happens if the photographic image is animated, if it seems to make us see movement, if it is fabricated by a long, enduring, evolving time? Could there be a photography that moves, a photography that lasts, a photography that is given in (by, with, through) movement, etc.? It's the whole matter of the temporal elas-ticity of contemporary images that is in question here, that is, the question of the disappearance or the obsolescence of the old opposition between photography and film—both considered as theoretical models of time—which is in play here. In thirty years, the theoretical landscape has radically evolved in this respect. In the '70s and '80s, things seemed clear: On one side, Barthes imposed the con-cept of the punctum in playing the photo off against film (with all the corollaries about the pose/pause, the dead time, the stop *in* image, the deadening effect of the pose, etc.). On the other side, the Bergsonian-Deleuzian philosophy of film demanded the concepts of "movement-image/time-image," which still rested entirely on the idea that film is a regular march of images reproducing apparent movement (with its own corollaries: the flux, the drive, the speed of images, and the difficulties this imposes on the analyst of film—for how is he to stop this flood?). It was as if the one and the other, the mobile and the immobile, the stat-ic and the moving, could only exist in a relation of reciprocal exclusion. And as we well know, one had to choose one's side.

But in the decade between 1990 and 2000 (it is only today that we can take the measure of all the theoretical dimensions here), the temporal regimes of images were considerably elasticized, rendering the old divisions less and less distinguishable. It is doubtless one of the major characteristics of contemporary modes of the image to change speed ceaselessly, to pass from one regime to the other with suppleness, through continuous variation, without end or any change in nature. Today the fluid scrolling of film no longer radically opposes itself to the freeze frame, as if it were no longer a matter of two contradictory worlds. One is no longer in the old game of "photography versus film"; one is beyond that. One is always between the two. In the forms of images (postmodern?) that outstrip this cleavage of the last century, we have passed into the era of perma-

nent change of speed. We are, for example, in the mobile stasis or in the systematic, accelerated slowing down. Of course, these are not new forms. Only today do they seem to have become a norm. What is at play here is not the extension of the (post-)photographic toward (expanded) cinema; it is not a problem of value (even less of mode or of delegitimation) that would de-specify photography to the profit of an invasive, dominant model of "all cinema." Rather, it is more that *photography* and *cinema* are no longer good terms, good theoretical categories, to think the matter of time (and of movement) along oppositional lines.

So many inquiries seem to arise when one is faced with the (post-)photographic image. Of course, it would be necessary to take them up again and develop them seriously, articulate them in the frame of a theory of fiction-image clearly distinct from the theories of the trace-image. The work remains to be done.

—Translated from the French by Rosalind Krauss