

Nostalgics and powerless: city life, photography's surveillance and the influence of Foucault*

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1 Photography and the Foucault's heritage

Photography's theory and criticism has been dominated, in the last 3 decades, by the reflection about ideological mechanisms of image production and the power they serve. Some of the most interesting approaches, in this context, are Alan Sekula (1989), Victor Burgin(1982) and John Tagg(1988). This interest in ideological and political axes of photography comes, as we can see, mainly from an anglo-american context, and its big theoretical influence are the works of Michel Foucault, mainly his widely spread books "Discipline and Punish" (1975) and "The archeology of knowledge" (1969). Curiously,

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in French theory of photography this influence is almost completely absent¹.

Foucault analyses in "Discipline and Punish" the Panoptic model of prison, designed by the utilitarian Jeremy Bentham (1791) and he ties it to the rise of what he calls the *disciplinary dispositive*. The influence of Foucault lays in part upon this work, leading to an approach between what Foucault calls the "disciplinary mechanism", or "the panoptical politics" and photography mechanisms and uses.

Foucault analyses along his various works the rise of institutional organization and of its tools, and shows how hospitals, schools, prisons come from a new order and find a support in the new scientific discourse, which settle in powers of observation its most desirable tool. Discipline was born, Foucault concludes, from "Lightning" and French Revolution.

Photography is invented in a such epistemological context, faced with realism and naturalism in the arts, at the same time that the positivist philosophy is being stated. As a technology that reproduces perceived image

¹ Cf. Ph. Dubois (1992), Frade(1993), J-M.Shaeffe, (1987), F. Brunet (2005), A. Rouillé (2005).

of objects, photography has become a companion of scientific observation in exact sciences like optics, botanic, chemistry, astronomy, geography, which are constructed upon laboratory and naturalistic observation. 1839, the official year of the invention of photography, is also the year of Darwin Beagle's Diary publication, and one of the continuing publication of "Positive Science" (1832-40) by August Comte. As Samuel Rodhie as already pointed out, "the visual and the directed observed challenged conventions, confronted speculation with natural science", having, because of that, "a disruptive effect in contemporary knowledge"².

Talbot, one of the pioneers, is mainly in love for botanic, chemistry, and maths. In the millions of letters he left, passion for botanic and chemistry are really dominant, and plants and flowers are some of the very first to have its face turned into a photographic drawing. In a letter to Sir John Herschel, who was living at Cape Town, he suggests him to put a gardener for his account to plant for him some unknown specimens³.

Photogenic drawings of leaves and flowers was also the means by which he made his invention known, sending them to several botanists between 1830 and 1840. Following Graham Smith, the first to see the samples of the new art was Antonio Bertoloni, who

² Sam Rodhie, "Geography, Photography, The cinema/ Les Archives de la Planète", in <http://www.haussite.net/haus.=/SCRIPT/txt2000/01/geoall.HTML>, p.2

³ "I almost think of troubling you with a request that through your means I may be enabled to employ some gardener or labouring man of intelligence in collecting seeds and roots in different parts of the Colony which I may afterwards hope to see flourishing in my greenhouse in Wiltshire", 9.3.1833, in <http://www.foxtalbot.arts.gla.ac.uk>.

by that time received about 36 photogenic drawings; the idea, says Smith, was also to show the interest of this process for botanists⁴. Also Anna Atkins used photogenic drawing for her book, published in 1843, of British coast specimens, "British Algae: Cyanotype impressions".

Photography emerges then in public space as a precious tool for scientific mind, in a century strike by inventions such as electricity, gas, train, telephone, telegraph, just to name a few that marked considerably the life in big cities.

In 1859, writing about the "Salon des arts" of Paris, Baudelaire battles the idea of an artistic photography: photography must remain as a scientific and technical tool he says, and an use of it as art just would satisfy obscene minds: "Poetry and progress are two ambitious that hate each other with an instinctive hate, and, when they meet in the same way, is necessary that one serves the other"⁵. Baudelaire only can see (and accept) photography as observational realism.

Scientific rationality, of the first half of XIX century and after, will spread over social and institutional, as urban centers grow. Human will be turned, definitely, as a scientific object, subject to the same observation and detail analyses, parallel to the social organization of the human environment.

Let's see how Foucault describes the social and disciplinary discourses.

"A criterious observation of detail, and at the same time a political sense of these little things to control and use by men grow in classical age, bringing with them all a set of techniques, all a set of procedures and kno-

⁴ Cf. Smith 2001

⁵ Baudelaire 1859: 255

wledge, descriptions, recipes and data. And from these nothing, with no doubt, born the modern humanism.” (Foucault 1975:123).

Nineteenth century saw also the rising of detective science, with the same attention to details (Conan Doyle, Edgar Poe), to the unsuspected evidence on the *too obvious mystery*, as in “The stolen letter” by Edgar Poe.

Photography also assumes that detective look to give full-details, mostly moved under the idea of inventory. This idea of detail is very close to some of the comments about photography that were made in the beginnings. Talbot refers, in a comment to Queen’s College of Oxford, which is part of “The Pencil of Nature”:

“This magnifies the objects two or three times, and often discloses a multitude of minute details, which were previously unobserved and unsuspected. It frequently happens, moreover —and this is one of the charms of photography — that the operator himself discovers on examination, perhaps long afterwards, that he has depicted many things he had no notion at the time” (Talbot 1844, n.p.)

This one, photography, was seen as a privileged eye on the way to “discipline” daily life experience. It serves to demonstrate, to classify, to name, to fix, due to his “positive” nature. It is useful as a support for inventory and social surveillance, as different authors have already and long ago underlined. So, when we read Foucault saying that discipline:

“must become the tool of a permanent, exhaustive and omnipresent surveillance, able to turn everything visible under the condition of becoming itself invisible”; or that

discipline “must be a glance without a face which transforms the entire social field in a visual-field (Foucault 1976: 215-216), it would be necessary a great push not to recognize the parallel with the ways in which photography had been used and thought since the very beginnings.

Photography criticism lead upon Foucault analysis seems to be justified, and reminds us an expression of Martin Kemp in a recent conference⁶, who talks about “structural intuitions”, which work as shared ideas by different areas (like science, art, politics, philosophy). If we follow Kemp, we could think about the idea of *inventory* as an appropriate term to name scientific and artistic context of XIX century first half, in particular inside British empiricism: nature’s inventory (botanic, zoology, paleontology), social inventory (Comte, Marx), criminal inventory (Bertillon, Gall), history inventory (Charcot), art *as* inventory of nature (Courbet, Balzac). This inventory of reality is mixed with surveillance mechanisms that Foucault connects with discipline, because this one, as he states, is not just a concept that aims repression and order, but also *productivity*; and so, it can be also associated with technologies of vision that since 1800’s produce the *real look of things*.

2 Beyond Foucault

However, the ideological role and power of the photographic image shouldn’t contribute to leave in the shadows the approach of individuals emotional relationship to photography, in an epoch where individual per-

⁶ Conference given at Montreal and published on line, in www.hoa.ox.ac.uk/staff/kemp.htm, 22.6.2006

ception, intimacy and desire were as becoming subjects of theoretical approach. In this sense go the works that have been published more recently by Geoffrey Batchen⁷.

Although photography was invented in a scientific context, before its invention images were already being used for some decades as an illusion tool, namely in the context of show business. Magic Lantern sessions started in the seventeenth century with Thomas Walgensten (later commercialized by John Reeves in 1663) and Daguerre's diorama was exhibited in Paris in 1822 for the first time and in London one year later. So, by this time, the process of human subject as a contemplative being, caught by the power of imagery and whose attention is taken by images, had already started, and it had a whole industry interested on it.

But these inventions were also described in words like these: "Diorama is the most perfect representation of nature: with its color combinations from transparency to opacity that vary in effects of light and shadow."⁸

So this observer who looks for reality, also looks for illusion, someone divided between the scientific positivism and the social practice and beliefs in occultism, spiritualism and magical and illusionary phenomena⁹, as many authors have been more recently des-

⁷ Geoffrey Batchen, "Burning with Desire...", 1997; "Each wild idea...", 2001; "Forget me not", 2004.

⁸ John Timbs, on 'Diorama and Cosmorama', in his *Curiosities of London*, 1855, pp. 252-3, cit. In http://www.midleykent.fsnet.co.uk/diorama/Diorama_Timbs.htm, 30.5.2006

⁹ Cf. Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations..."

Indiana University Press, 1995.; Laura Mulvey, "Death 24x a Second..." Reaktion Books, 2006

cribing it¹⁰. It means that photography was since its beginnings between naturalism and magic, reality and fiction. But why such an ambiguous ontology?

We must remember what kind of subject who is at work in first half of xix century in the city milieu.

During the XIX century, the process of a weakened "self" had started, namely along with Romanticism and the advance of scientific and institutional procedures that measure both Nature and Man, and mainly determined by big cities growing, like Paris and London. "The Fall Of The Public Man" by Richard Sennett, published in 1978, can be an interesting tool to the understanding of photography beyond a naturalistic frame and panoptical politics, especially when photography's marketing starts to grow within the context of individual and familiar use.

Let's see what Sennett tells us for a while. According to him, the impact of city expansion in early xix century introduces a strong change in public life. Until 1800's, theatrical conventions are imposed to set limits to identity, as the public man, corresponding in certain ways to man in the Ancient Regime, melts street and theatre into one. The idea of "emotion exhibit" is particularly important: presenting an emotion towards the exterior is a relation of non-representative drama, it is set up to public convention and not to the private life of this "public persona". Based on objective conventions, communication in the eighteen-century is theatrical in its essence; the subject is signifying and not symbolic, representing nothing but a mask.

¹⁰ Cf. Jennifer Green-Lewis 1996; Tom Gunning 1995; Helen Groth 2003; Geoffrey Batchen 1997 e 2001; Liz Wells 2005

Differently, the idea of an *expressive* appearance connected to our *inner* feelings as a *sign* comes to take place during the nineteenth-century, and, connected with feelings of shame and fear of the public opinion, appearance becomes an individual process.

“Bearing a secret” becomes extremely important to communication as the new “private” self takes the former place of the “public man”. Escape and compulsive intimacy are therefore linked to the idea that feelings shouldn’t be shown involuntary to others. As Sennett describes, “the effort to penetrate into one’s defenses and force them to communicate is immense, therefore the extreme importance of a simple expression of an emotion, a sign.” (Sennett 1978:122). According to Sennett, even fashion in the nineteenth-century becomes inexpressive and extremely controlled, fearing the expression of inner feelings, as we can find in Balzac’s novels. Balzac talks about a *gastronomy of the eye*.

“Madame de la Chanterie” is a story included in Balzac’s “L’envers de l’histoire contemporaine” (1806-36), where the writer describes a character that in order to change a life of shame should start with the change of his appearance, namely his wardrobe.

Mme de la Chanterie is an ex-aristocrat, now living in social reclusion by renting out rooms to some people that, like her, share a “Christian Spirit”.

As our heroic character goes to see Mme in order to rent himself a monastic bedroom, she looks at him with contempt and informs that the room she has might not suit him... But as the young man shows his interest in participating in the Christian life of this group, he proofs himself capable as well of sincere abnegation and, by doing so, will

be fully accepted in the house. It is this idea of sincerity that is new. Each mask is a face (a *symbol*, according to Sennett) and therefore each individual is a prisoner of his own personality, turning impossible a stability and independence of personality. Therefore, a relation is produced between involuntary showing of personality and the instability and the immanence of feelings.

“As people’s personalities came to be seen in their appearances”, Sennett says, “facts of class and sex became matters of real anxiety”; so, “closely tied to a code of personality immanent in public appearances was a desire to control these appearances through increasing one’s consciousness of oneself” (Sennett 1978:168). Therefore the strong connection between the *voyeur* as a passive character, hiding a secret, and the consequent social anguish being produced by this fetish (of the eye).

So, during the eighteen-hundreds, and parallel to the moment when an *external* and objective surveillance is starting to take place in society, namely based on photographic records, there is an *inner* surveillance taking place as well, building a new relation within the subject and his self-conscience¹¹.

The invention of a technique allowing re-

¹¹ For more on the rise of the subjectivity and the rising of self-awareness, see: Doris Kauffman, “Dreams and self-consciousness/ From *ame* to *moi* to *le moi*”, in Lorraine Daston, *Biographies of Scientific objects*, The Univ. of Chic. Press, 2000, pp. 67-86; Fritz Breitung, “The invention Of Trauma in German Romanticism”, in *Critical Inquiry* 32, aut 2005, pp. 77-101. As Breitung underlines, at the beginning of 1800’s, “to observe one’s past means first of all to frame the past within an observatory, within some stable structure from which the past can be monitored, repeated, tested.” (op.cit. p. 82)

alistic images to be produced is, therefore, an extremely important response in a context where identity is fluid and uncertain and lived in a frame of constant self-awareness.

But the most interesting contribution in Sennett's analyses for us to think the impact operated by photography in everyday life would be yet another: the idea that, from the nineteenth-century on, man is in constant *re-examination* towards his past, based on his perception that action may exist before conscience.

The autobiographical writings is a style that seems to fit perfectly with this time where "truth via introspection" is taking form. This matches with a vision of the present as shifting, fugacious: "in the past", Sennett argues, "one was "really alive" and if one could make sense of the past, the confusion of one's present life might be lessened" (Sennett 1978: 168). For Sennett, psychoanalytic therapy, built on anamnesis, comes out of this Victorian sense of *nostalgia*.

Photography is therefore contemporary to this nostalgic movement of the self towards its past, where personal history and the remembrance take place in the construction of a self-made narcissism.

In Jean François Chévrier's book "Proust et la Photographie" the author makes reference to the importance of seeing as an observation of the other in Proust's "A la recherche du temps perdu". According to Chévrier, the description of the kind of seeing helps to set the psychological construction of the narrative – 'at glance' on the *public promenade* and 'distant', at the church, are such examples.

3 Image and Self: the contribution of Donald Winnicott

Photography possesses, since its beginnings, some characteristics that must be understood under certain concepts that come from individual psychology, as well as social and ideological analysis. The analysis of the rising of the Self, as a concept which also contemporary of the medium seems to be an important one. As Alan Sekula already pointed out, "photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the *other*, to define the *generalized look* — the tipology— and the *contingent instance* of deviance and social pathology"(Sekula 1988: 345). Although this statement refers to institutional uses of photography (in police departments, in phrenology, in anthropometry), it can be generalized to the system of relationships that urban environment impresses in individuals.

In the forward he wrote to his album "The pencil of nature" (1844), Talbot describes the origins of his invention, connecting it with the need to fix an experience of visual perception, and the need to fix into images the true experience of contemplation of the world around him, so that he could store that mental images and thoughts:

"And this led me to reflect on the inimitable beauty of the pictures of nature's painting which the glass lens of the Camera Obscura throws upon the paper in its focus — fairy pictures, creations of a moment, and destined as rapidly to fade away.

It was during these thoughts that the idea occurred me... how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natu-

ral images to imprint themselves durably, and remain fixed upon the paper! And why should it not be possible? I asked myself". (Talbot 1844, n.p.)

There is the nostalgia, that Sennett speaks about. Which also leads us through other interests of Talbot, dealing also with nostalgia: the deciphering of cuneiform and hieroglyphic writing. As we can expect, this was one of the uses upon which Talbot, and others (as Roger Fenton, under Talbot demand), led photography. As Sennett argues, and Walter Benjamin also pointed out, the man of this secular city of the nineteenth century is tied to images as a support of his identity. And a simple calotype of a cuneiform fragment is not just a photographic document; it is also a support for a fragmented Self, an atomized Self, living through a secular life. Archeological images are twice nostalgic: they reflect a lost unity of the Self and a time that only exists now as a fetish.

This nostalgic relation is very typical of the expansion of daguerreotype, mainly in the United States, where studios multiplied in the fifties, intensifying the production of portrait. In 1850 there were about 10.000 daguerreotypers in America. As we can infer from an historical note published in 1896, in McClure's Magazine, daguerreotype had become an essential object between people's relationship, an object which introduces a *reparation* in time and space separation, being used as a continuity element in long separations or in death of relatives. In this newspaper, the author talks about the farewell of the gold miners:

"The discovery of gold in California was a great boom to the daguerreotypers, as

every embryo miner embarking for the golden shore must have several portraits taken to leave with his family and friends."¹²

But this increment of portrait has also enormous performative issues, because the journalist comments:

"And whether he was going across the Isthmus or around the Horn, he must be pictured with his entire kit-kettle, frying-pan, knife, fork, cup, pick-axe, shovel, and the invariable two revolvers in his belt. He must also carry with him pictures of parents, wife, children, and friends..." (Ibid.).

And portraits were made for both parts, as the miner also carried family portraits, "destined to be his sole companions in his rough mountain cabin, from which he would hardly part for all the gold in California" (ib.).

Photography is so a kind of *fetish*, with properties that transcend widely its eventual materiality and which contribute, in a certain way, for this last one can never be definitely fixed.

But what seems central to us is this self-structural support that emerges from photography, and which allows the subject to control the lost feeling that comes from the "private" society. The control given by visibility is by this way constructed in a polymorphic way: if on one hand positivism comes tied with naturalistic representation, allowing photography to be an observatory tool, as we saw, on the other hand, portrait

¹² In *McClure's Magazine*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (November 1896.), cit. in <http://www.daguerre.org/resource/texts/davis/davis.html>, 18.6.2006

and private photography (family, traveling and so on) encounters this new romantic subject, strike by inconstancy and fragility, by the rising of the concept of “Self”, or “Ich” with its need of “real things”. But this is possible too, because of the truly naturalism of the image. Philip Hone writes in his diary:

Every object, however minute, is a perfect transcript of the thing itself; the hair of the human head, the gravel on the roadside, the texture of a silk curtain, or the shadow of the smaller leaf reflected upon the wall, are all imprinted as carefully as nature or art has created them in the objects transferred; and those things which are invisible to the naked eye are rendered apparent by the help of a magnifying glass.¹³

And in an account of daguerreotype invention, in Mac’Clure’Magazine of November 1896, Mr Davis quote, from a 1839’s “Knickerbocker”/Washington Irving’s Magazine issue :

“Their exquisite perfection almost transcends the bounds of sober belief. Let us endeavor to convey to the reader an impression of their character. Let him suppose himself standing in the middle of Broadway, with a looking-glass held perpendicularly in his hand, in which is reflected the street, with all that therein is, for two or three miles, taking in the haziest distance. Then let him take the glass into the house, and find the impression of the entire view, in the softest light

¹³ In *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851* Ed. by Bayard Tuckerman (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1889) pp. 391-392.
<http://www.daguerre.org/resource/texts/hone.html>

and shade, vividly retained upon the surface. This is the daguerreotype. The views themselves are from the most interesting points of the French metropolis. Who would throw up their business and their dinners, on a voyage to see Paris or London, when one can sit in an apartment in New York and look at the streets, the architectural wonders, and the busy life of each crowded metropolis?”¹⁴

The popularization of daguerreotype and calotype and in the fifties the glass plates emerges in this nostalgic scene, once it can help denying the feel of the lost sense of reality. Photography analogical ontology makes possible to take it as a tool that helps for mourning upon absence, as it can be used as the desired object’s substitute; but at the same time it can also work against this, because of the intense visual proximity between image and absent object, helps to growing of the nostalgic and melancholic feeling, in the sense that Freud remarked. At the same time as it can work as a support for absence, it can also work against forgetting, a process which is vital to our perception-conscience system.

The rhythm in the big city leads to a fragmentation of daily life, and makes the fugacity of perception impressions as a recurrent theme: the public promenade is one of the big cities figures, argued by Sennett as introducing the fugace glance, the ephemeral social event — and intensely described by Proust at the end of the century.

And this is one of the reasons of such a popular success of photography: what we cannot really see, because is moving fast, or be-

¹⁴<http://www.daguerre.org/resource/texts/davis/davis.html>

cause it is too far, we can examine with delay in a photograph. For Chévrier, the will of Proust in fixing images, in “revealing, illuminating impressions, is tied with his enchantment with shadow: forgetting as the place of invisible movements of memory”. That’s why, Chévrier argues, Combray sats out of forgetting: because it is the illuminated scene of first separation drama (that of the child who is going to sleep without having been kissed by its mother)¹⁵.

At this point it will be useful to introduce some psychoanalytical concepts designed by Donald Winnicott. (Winnicott 1971: 13). Winnicott brought us the concept of *transicional object*, an object which is manipulated in childhood (a bear, a swaddle, a sheet) and which is invested with phantasy and emotions related with an absent object. They are not “internal objects” (which means a mental concept) but “something one possesses” (1971: 9).

Winnicott argues that this transicional object, as an instrument that allows to supply an absence by the means of a substitute, works as an intermediate between what is subjectively and what is objectively perceived. And it is in this context, of allucinate and illusory repetition, that transitional object can allow the elaboration of the absent — which Freud already had associated with the Fort-Da game.

Nostalgia can be referred, upon Winnicott, to the precarious relationship between subject and intimate representation of the lost object (Winnicott: 1971: 23). It means that this nostalgic feeling consists in some kind of a fixing to a lost, from which the subject

¹⁵ Jean-François Chévrier, *Proust et la Photographie*, Paris, Éditions de l’Étoile, 1982, p.115

doesn’t recover, and which regulates his relationship with external world and other people.

This seems to be what happened with photography: it seems to have come to encounter this ‘Victorian sense of nostalgia’ which dominates life, mainly in big cities, since XIX century, becoming then a paradoxal object, which functions at the same time as an intermediate for the subject to a reality each day more shifting, and as an object that feeds the idea of a “truth retrospectively obtained” (Sennett: 53).

Maybe images are such *transicional* objects, that allow the subject to live between the borderlines, mixing itself upon them, denying loss and separation, allowing the allucination of reality.

To Winnicott, the sense of individual self-assurance comes from the possibility the child can get of mirroring itself in the face or faces of those who are around since its birth — and, after Lacan, of recognizing its own image in the mirror.¹⁶

The impossibility of this mirroring act impeaches the maturing of the Self, namely the increasing of the “reality” feelings: “Becoming real is more than existing; is to find out

¹⁶ Cf Jacques Lacan, “Le stade du *Moi* comme formateur de la fonction du *Je*” (1949), in *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1972: L’assomption jubilatoire de son image spéculaire par l’être encore plongé dans l’impuissance motrice et la dépendance du nourrissage qu’est le petit homme à ce stade *in-fans*, nous paraîtra dès lors manifester en une situation exemplaire la matrice symbolique où le *je* se précipite en une forme primordiale, avant qu’il ne s’objective dans la dialectique de l’identification à l’autre et que le langage ne lui restitue dans l’universel sa fonction de sujet.” In <http://perso.orange.fr/espace.freud/topos/psych/psyssem/miroir.htm>, p. 3. 20.6.2006.

a way to exist as an autonomous Self, and have a Self in which to trust”¹⁷

This conceptualization that refers to individual psyche should be calls back what Sennett called the “failure of the Self”, facing the growing of big cities. For the big cities become, since 1800’s, the space of the *stranger*, with thousands of unclassified individuals, with a new *inform* class, which will produce self-insecurity and uncertainty.

In this sense, photography, portrait in particular, but also social and ethnographic documentalism that was incremented around the 1870’s, will represent that mirror function, once “public space” no more exists. If, upon Winnicot, the most important thing of this image is its “response” side, it means, the fact that it consists in other’s look devotion in which the child sees itself, photography can also be considered as means of obtain some kind of “others” look: who sees an image (of himself, of the world around, of the *other*), sees also a glance over his own Self.

The “production of the visible” by photography *inventory of the real* (Rouillé 2005) would have then a sense: to give the subject a place in an original mirror, because image is always coming to and from the pre-verbal dimension. In the place of the modernist commonplace that “an image is more than thousand Words”, we should be saying that images are *before* thousands of words. . . Here is at least one reason why text that surround images in XIX century photographic illustrated books are always so laconic and extremely technicians; they refer the conditions of image production, they pay attention to details that show the superiority of image com-

paring with empirical look or they are limited to some kind of museographic note, in which they describe the object we see. Image is always *before* language.

But let’s return once more to Winnicot. He displays 3 functions that are crucial to the child’s development: 1) holding; 2) handling; 3) object presentation:

“A baby is held, and handled satisfactorily, and having this for granted he can face an object not having his legitimate experience of omnipotence destroyed. The result can be the baby be able to use the object, and feel that that object is a subjective object, created by himself” (Winnicot 1971: 112)

This theorization of Winnicot is also very suggestive when we think of photography in the 1800’s urban environment. Photography emerges side by side of big industrial novelties, as one of its products and as one of its supports. Georges Simmel, in “Metropolis and Mental life”, the first chapter of his work “The philosophy of money” (1903), underlined then the speed of stimuli in big metropolises as a conditioner of a new mode of thinking, of a new psychology:

“The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli. Man is a differentiating creature. His mind is stimulated by the difference between a momentary impression and the one which preceded it. Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which

¹⁷ Winnicot 1971: 117

take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts—all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates.” (Simmel 1903: 3)

This *new psychology*, Simmel argues, implies a constant intellectual response (a new “organ”, according to him) and causes the fragmentation of experience. It’s why Simmel begins his book with the statement that “the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life” (Simmel:1903: 1).

In this sense, and returning to Winnicott, we should say that the man of the big city has lost his sense of self-assurance (the *holding* and the *handling*) which allowed him to face objects, because now he has to deal with a permanent moving world, provoking him impotence feelings and leading him to lose a sense of intimate reality. As a response to this ephemeral life, photography offers the stability of a representation of the real that we can handle or upon which we can rest our eyes. It is in this stability offered by the mother’s gaze that Winnicott sets the creative feeling. Photography allows *holding* and *handling*, even if any photographic image is at sometime a mirror of death and shall become a melancholic object. And we now can say that a *regressive* desire of con-

templation is held as response to a life progressively centered in immanence (Sennett) and, for that, more anxiousgenic.

The photographic image offers, finally, what the metropolis man really needs: it can be seen just as product of science and rationality, a scientific inventory of the appearance of the world, offering the reliability that no one can find again in the constant shift of daily life. As Talbot sustained:

“A picture, divested of the ideas which accompany it, and considered only in its ultimate nature, is but a succession or variety of stronger lights thrown upon one part of the paper, and of deeper shadows on another” (Talbot 1844: n.p.).

This ‘positivist’ perspective as Talbot puts it is very a convenient idea, because photography returns to the subjects such a melting-pot of feelings, that is always convenient to keep some distance. . . . But it is just because it goes much more over that scientific reception that photography became an object so intensely discussed¹⁸.

The influence of Michel Foucault in photography’s criticism is a very important one, and has led to very signifying writings, some of them we shall reread and discuss; but if we want to understand the success

¹⁸ For more and decisive texts on the paradoxically nature of photography see the pioneering books of Geoffrey Batchen, referred above. And also: Tom Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations”, in Patrice Petro, *Fugitive Images*, 1995; Marien Mary Warner, *Photography and Its Critics: A Cultural History, 1839-1900*. (Cambridge Perspectives on Photography) Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997; Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x a Second/Stillness and the moving image*, London, Reaktion Books, 2006

of photography in the context of the new cultural values (as nostalgia) and figures of XIX century, it doesn't mean an antagonism between the psychological and cultural approach and that which has been made systematically (in a more or less implicit mode) between photography, discipline and ideological gaze. On the contrary, and I think my research will lead me over that, we have to think about photography as a wide *discursive formation*, a field crossed by very different forces and interests, one of the less important is not the relation between photography and the rising of the nostalgic feeling.

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