

WHAT MEDIUM CAN MEAN

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I will present some remarks here on the use of the notion of medium in art theory and the light cast on this notion by the case of photography. The notion of medium is in fact much more complex than it appears at first. Theorizations of medium as the crucial element of artistic modernity bring two apparently opposite senses of the word into play. First, we understand the word ‘medium’ as ‘that which holds between’: between an idea and its realization, between a thing and its reproduction. The medium thus appears as an intermediary, as the means to an end or the agent of an operation. Now, modernist theorization makes ‘fidelity to the medium’ into the very principle of art, inverting the perspective. This medium to whose specificity one must be faithful is no longer simply the instrument of art. It becomes the specific materiality defining its essence. This is certainly the case in the Greenbergian definition of painting as that which is faithful to its own medium—the two-dimensional surface and the coloured pigment—and thereby delivered from the servile tasks of representation. The medium, then, is no longer the means to an end. It is properly speaking that which prescribes this end. But the thesis which identifies the essence of art with the law of its medium can be read in two opposite senses. On the one hand, it says that art is art when it is freed from the tasks of mimesis, when it becomes simply the execution of its own idea in its own specific material. This is the statement that is usually remembered. But the thesis can also be stood on its head as follows: art is art when the constraints of the material and the instrument free it from itself, free it from the will to make art. The separation of art from mimesis, then, is also a separation of *technē* from itself: the separation of *technē* as the execution of an idea, or implementation of a type of knowledge, from *technē* as the law of the material and instrument, as the law of that which does not pertain to art.

The thesis about the medium thus states two things simultaneously: the first is that art is art when it is only art; the second is that art is art when it is not only art. These two contradictory propositions can be synthesized in the following way: art is art insofar as it is possible that what is art is simultaneously not art. It is art when its productions belong to a sensory milieu in which the distinction is blurred between that which is and that which is not art. In short, the ‘means’ [*le moyen*] is also a means to achieve something other than its own end. It is also the means of participating in the configuration of a specific milieu. The tension between the medium as neutral means and the medium as specific substance, between the medium as instrument of realization of an idea of art and the medium as that which resists both idea and art resolves to a third term, a third idea, namely the medium

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as milieu: the milieu in which the performances of a determined artistic arrangement come to be inscribed, but also the milieu that these performances themselves contribute to configuring. Suspending art from the law of the medium amounts to postulating the recovery of both milieus. It amounts to postulating a law of adequation between, on the one hand, artistic performances that are ‘true to their medium’ and, on the other, a new milieu of experience, a new technical world that is simultaneously a new sensory world and a new social world.

Within this view, photography plays a privileged role. The photographic apparatus is, on the one hand, the pure instrument, the automaton at the service of any will, and in particular at the service of art insofar as it is the realization of a will to create art. But it is also the instrument which, by itself, executes the previous task of art, namely representation and so delivers the one who employs it from the concern to create art and from the pretention of being an artist. It is *the* technology of *mimesis*: and further still is often invoked as being the very technology that liberates art from *mimesis*, but also the one that liberates *mimesis* from art, that enables things to have themselves seen, freed from the codes of representation, from coded relations between visible forms and the production of meaning-effects. Walter Benjamin and Jean Epstein alike celebrated this machine-operated liberation—whether photographic or cinematographic—that gives access to a truth or an unconscious of the visible. If photography, which is the matter that concerns us here, is par excellence the medium that gives access to a new sensory milieu, then the photographer as artist who is ‘faithful to his medium’ is the one who captures this new sensory milieu, who inscribes the performances of his camera in its configuration. As Jean Epstein went on to say, the camera is the veridical artist. But the role of this veridical artist can be understood in two ways, as can the relation between its artistic power and its veridicality. On the one hand, the camera is the artist, because it produces a kind of writing, and more precisely because it has an impersonal power in it—the light—which writes. The sensory milieu, then, is one in which light and movement constitute a new writing. Yet, on the other hand, it is a veridical artist insofar as it does not write anything, insofar as all it yields is a document, pieces of information, just as machines yields them to men who work on machines and are instrumentalized by them, to men who must learn from them a new way of being but also domesticate them for their own use.

The first idea is perhaps illustrated by an exhibition which took place in 2005 and marked the move of the *Centre National de la Photographie* in Paris to its new location at Jeu de Paume. The exhibition was called *Eblouissement*. Spectators were able to see, in one and the same room, the following: Charcot’s clinical photographs of the ill, a picture from the *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, Man Ray’s solarizations, a double exposure by Maurice Tabard, a photogramme by Raoul Hausmann, photographs by Brassai, a ‘decomposition’ and a ‘moire’ by Eric Rondepierre and photographs of the Serpentine Dance by Loïe Fuller. So it exhibited nothing but photographs, but photographs of very different natures and statuses: photographs taken with or without camera, documentary photographs and artistic photographs, simple and elaborate photographs, and possibly extracts taken from other supports. This seemingly heteroclit collection was unified by a specific idea of the photographic medium: the photographs gathered together in it all attested to the discovery of another sensible world, to the world of captured movement and of light which writes itself, a world that machines had discovered inside the world of ordinary everyday experience; an interior of the sensible, but also the new lived world of movement and electricity; a world where there is continuity between the light of the street lamps and the flash of Brassai’s camera as it discovers the hieroglyphs of dreams on walls. It is this identity between a new *physis* and a new lived world that is composed by gathering together Loïe Fuller’s luminous dance, Brassai’s nocturnal fairytales and Man Ray’s rayograms or solarizations. The photographic medium is the means of recording this new world of machines but also of contributing to its formation: a world of technology, but one where all technologies are indifferenciated: a calligramme by Apollinaire or a painting by Boccioni would have been equally at place in it. Indeed, the idea of the medium clearly exceeds the idea of the apparatus. And there is no doubt that rather than speak of medium, it would be better to speak here of *mediality*, understood as the relation between three things: an idea of medium, an idea of art and an idea of the sensorium within which this technological apparatus carries out the performances of art. The mediality envisaged here implies the immediate unity between the power of an *organon* and that of a *sensorium*. Photography—including in its cameraless forms—and cinema are the arts of this new sensible world where light and movement are directly and simultaneously both experimented upon and experimenters: a world of intensities and speeds where matter

is spiritualized into a luminous and driving force and where thought and dream have the same solidity as the matter that is instrumentalized. The medium as milieu in fact absorbs the medium as instrument. The apparatus—photographic or other—creates a new sensory world inasmuch as it denies its own specificity within a world of generalized experimentation. This indifferenciation, this de-technologization of technology, is the fundamental operation at stake in the names of various schools: simultaneism, futurism, surrealism and others.

In clear opposition to this view there is another way of thinking both the role of artist-machines and the relation between technological medium and sensible milieu. What, according to this other way, the technological instrument produces are not the epiphanies of a new sensible world, but instead documents, traces and signs that have to be observed, read, interpreted and utilized. Benjamin, in particular, takes this position in his *Little History of Photography* and in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility*. This unfortunate reproducibility, of which, paradoxically, Benjamin spoke very little, has been laden with tons of commentaries, and its counterpart, the aura, has been laden with tons more. It was thus forgotten that the core of the demonstration bears not on the effects of serial reproduction, but instead on the decomposition of unity, on its fragmentation into a series of operations, operations which have the value of tests, of inquires into reality. For Benjamin, the important thing is not that the photographs of Atget or Sanders are infinitely reproducible. The essential thing is that they are products of the machine age, the age of mass existence and the man of the masses; and, moreover, that these products are also ways of training contemporaries how to decipher this new lived world and orient themselves in it. Here again, but from another perspective, the privilege of technology is linked to an indifferenciation of technologies: cinema first and foremost consists in a series of ‘tests’ into our world; Atget’s photos are signs to be interpreted; and Sander’s collections are ‘exercise books’ to be taught to combatants engaged in social struggles for the purpose of identifying allies and adversaries. The products of reproductive technologies are thus the means of a new education in the sensible, the educational instruments of a new class of experts in art, in the art of interpreting signs and documents. It is for this reason that Benjamin makes a declaration about photography’s insufficiency and its need for a legend by which to interpret it. And also about the status of arts of mechanical reproducibility being no different to that of Brecht’s epic theatre—theatre which is simultaneously a school and a parliament, where one must learn by playing, observing, discussing. It is necessary that the men who work on the machines of mass production and who live amidst their products learn to seize the means and products of mass technology. It is a matter of forming, in the heart of this global sensorium called mass being, the particular sensorium of the men of the masses able to read social signs and appropriate mass production for themselves.

I have quickly mentioned these two views of photography’s ‘milieu’ in order to present the thesis that I wish to defend: namely, that the idea of the medium’s specificity is always an idea of mediality. It is a way of linking three things: a technological apparatus, an idea of art and the formation of a specific sensible milieu. These materials and instruments of art, invoked in the name of the medium, are in effect always more than materials and instruments. In fact they are endowed with the aesthetic function of establishing one mode of sensible presentation instead of another. As thought, the medium is always simultaneously a conception both of art and of the sensorium that it contributes to forming. In this way, that flat surface staked out by Greenberg is much more than a way of negating the illusions of three-dimensionality. It proclaims the elimination of times gone-by when new art was identified with limitless sensible experimentation; it proposes another link, a remote link between the production of art forms and that of forms for a new lived world. In this sense, the ‘law of medium’ is much less a rupture than it is a particular form, a form seized by the twofold requirement that constitutes the aesthetic regime of art: that aesthetic experience involves autonomy and that art is always simultaneously something other than art.

On this basis, it is possible to analyze the variant ways of thinking the medium as forms of transformation of that twofold requirement. I would like to do this by considering two analyses of the photographic medium that have marked the understanding of photography over the last quarter of a century and which are also two ways to settle photography’s accounts with the idea of a new common world.

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The first is illustrated by Barthes' arguments in *Camera Lucida*, in which he introduces a well-determined idea of medium: this idea involves an identity between technological materiality and sensoriality. This identity can be explained in three points: first, photography's technological materiality is the negation of art. Photography is not art; it is no skill involving the mind or hand. It does not strike us as being the realization of an artist's performance. Secondly, however, this negation of art also negates the idea of any specific performance of technology. It is inscribed by way of contrast to what is usually meant by the 'negation of art', which is to say the trivialization engendered by multiple reproductions or the prosaization which commands a view of photographic productions as being simple documents about reality. Barthes's arguments turn the camera itself into a milieu, one through which the singularity of a body is projected towards me, happens to reach me, and even to injure me. For him, the photographic operation is a medium transport. In some sense it refers back to the idea that light writes and to the revelation of the new sensible world behind it, an idea from the age in which spiritists saw in photography a means for communicating with spirits. It is the *having-been* of the body which itself comes to form an impression on a sensitive plate and, from there, strike us without mediation. This second thesis, which obviously dates from before the digital age, is articulated with a third: the milieu of reproduction, for Barthes, is the exact contrary of what it was in avant-garde views, namely a common world, a world of trivialization of signs and collective experimentation. Technology, on the contrary, is absorbed in an essence of the sensible, the sensible as absolute singularity.

But there are two ways to understand this singularity. In a first sense, to be singular is to be incomparable or unrelatable with anything else; it is to have no meaning. It is therefore said that there is no reason why photography appeals to the gaze and engenders affect, or rather that it does so by virtue of this very absence of reason. This is summed up in the famous opposition between the *studium* and the *punctum*: in contrast to the photo that provides information and demands an interpretation stands Lewis Hine's two retarded infants, the small boy with his Danton collar and the girl with a tiny bandage on her finger. Barthes' pointing up these two details obviously amounts to evacuating the photo's social and political context, that is, the activity of a photographer who systematically used his camera to explore sites of exploitation and imprisonment, of a witness whose pictures summon the appreciation of Benjamin's new experts of the mass age. The Danton collar makes it possible to parry all that, to settle accounts silently with this mediality, which ties appreciation of the photographic performance to a new 'expertise'; in other words, the experimentation with a new sensible world. The only sensible world to which the photo attests is the relation of absolute singularity between the spectacle and the absolute singularity of the gaze. Avedon's photograph of the old slave presents us with a similar case, but here the procedure is inverted: no detail diverts us away from a socio-political reading. On the contrary, the photographed subject's mask bespeaks nothing other than the slave's condition. But the effect is the same: it is slavery in person as historical singularity which is given, in its entirety, by the singularity of a single face. Decreeing that slavery is present in person, before our eyes, between our hands, in fact amounts to effacing the singularity of other photographs which speak to us of what has transpired between the abolition of slavery and our present, such as, for example, the John Vachon photograph that only shows us the sign *Colored* nailed very high to the trunk of a pine, alongside what is probably the object pertaining to its discrimination, namely a tap. Concentrating the 'having-been' of slavery into a single face is one way to settle accounts with the great number of forms that racial discrimination takes on in sensory existence. In the name of fully transmitting a phenomenon in its past as a whole, it amounts to cancelling out the form of collective experience called history, which had previously served as a support for interpreting images and for practices with images. The opposition between the *punctum* and the *studium* makes it possible to clear away this tradition of practice with and on images. But there is no achieving this suppression without remainder. Singular distortions happen to enter, in return, into the use of both notions.

The best example of this is provided by a photograph of a young man in a cell. The young man is beautiful, Barthes tells us, but such is the *studium*. The *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. The problem is that this *punctum* is not localizable on the body with which we are presented. It is not an event of the image, only an external piece of knowledge that is not visible on the photograph unless we already aware that it is of Lewis Payne, sentenced to death in 1865 for attempting to murder the American Secretary of State. The *punctum*, in its supposed

immediateness, is in fact constituted by the conjunction of two things: on the one hand, a knowledge about the history of a figure; and, on the other, the very texture of the photograph, its colouration, is indicative of the fact that it is an old photo from the past, a photo of someone who, in any case, is already dead as we view it.

So 'singularity' takes on another meaning entirely. More than incomparable being, what constitutes it is the fact of having been there, therefore of no longer being there. The singularity of photography, then, is that of the Latin *imago*, of the effigy of the dead, which with Barthes, becomes the effigy of death. Photography becomes a messenger of the beyond. And this determination falls back on the medium relation alone, which produces the real affect of the photograph: in the case of Lewis Payne, not the knowledge that he will die, but on the contrary a non-knowledge. At first sight, we do not know who he is, why he gazes in this way. And even if we know who this young man is, we are still unable to know the thinking that animates this gaze, which expresses neither fear nor revolt, neither resignation nor repentance. Similarly, we are unaware of what the photographer was thinking, and whether it was at his request that the detainee is seated on the border of light and shadow, his gaze turned intensely toward the camera. When all is said and done, the affect of this photo comes from the impossibility of establishing any determinate relationship between the modality of this gaze and the imminence of death, between the present of the way in which it affects us and the age of the photograph, between singularity and anonymity. The 'having-been' in fact decomposes into a plurality of relations whose indefinite relation renders, for us, the aesthetic quality of photography. Now, Barthes folds this plurality down onto the sole image of death. Death becomes a name for the Unique and is the medium power of photography because it is the pure relation of that which is to that which no longer is, a power on which that dimension of collective sensible experience referred to as history came crashing down.

The second way of understanding the law of the medium that I mentioned above, leads to another form of reduction. On the face of it, however, this way is the exact opposite of Barthes' view. It maintains in effect that the medium is an instrument, a means of reproduction and nothing else. The artist who uses it does so specifically as such, which is to say he utilizes its resources *qua apparatus*, without pretending to turn it into a milieu or a sensorium. This thesis defines an idea of photography which is encapsulated in the title of an exhibition and accompanying publication, edited by Jean-François Chevrier and James Lingwood: *Another Objectivity*. Their text redefined the specificity of the photographic medium as its 'ontological poverty', as the absence of any strong ontological consistency required for the medium to become a milieu. The photographic apparatus, on this view, is a means of providing objective and reproducible information about what is placed before the lens. So seen, the essence of the medium condemns two other uses of photographs: the virtuous use based on 'subjective availability and visual equality' and which associates the apparatuses ability for immediate reception with the artist's ability to grasp the visual event, which marks his mastery; and the emotional use that puts affect in the place of information, as in 'humanist photography'.

This twin prohibition, ascribed to the medium, is enough to show that this idea of objectivity is itself also an idea of art, a way of defining the adequation between the essence of photography and that of artistic 'modernity'. Only the problem is that there is more than one idea of modernity. And the idea of photographic objectivity oscillates between two ideas of its own specificity, which themselves also amount to two ideas of modernity.

On the one hand, the specificity of the medium is assimilated to its reproducibility. To be faithful to the medium is then to be faithful to its multiplying essence. But it is hardly an easy matter to discern the specific quality held by an image due to its being reproducible. It is indeed even less so insofar as the very existence of photography makes every image infinitely multipliable and comes to us massively in the form of copies. The same holds, from this viewpoint, for the young English noble painted by Holbein as for the Italian apprentice photographed by Paul Strand. With Chevrier and Lingwood, too, this multiplying essence is displaced from the idea of multiplying a one to that of the multiple unit. Reproducibility thus becomes seriality. Whence the exemplarity of Becher's works, which comprise series like August Sander's. The problem, however, is that Sander's series constituted typologies. For Benjamin their value involved the formation of physiognomist meaning. These series of German social types were means of identification and struggle, enabling the combatants to know who they

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had before them and to get used to the reverse. Obviously no such service is to be expected from the Bechers' series of water towers and disused industrial sites. Benjamin's critique would actually have no difficulty in trapping these series in its purview: the photos of factories say nothing about the social relations manifest in them. The interest of the series therefore cannot reside in what it is they have us understand about social relations. It consists essentially in the ethical virtue that is granted to the multiple as such, insofar as it parries the conjuring tricks of the one and the aura, of the unique instant and ecstatic contemplation. This principle is a purely negative one, just as with Barthes, even if its meaning is the exact inverse. Its artistic 'positivity' therefore comes from a second way of thinking about the medium's 'objectivity'. Chevrier and Lingwood capture this way with the single notion of 'form-tableau', as exemplified by Jeff Wall's luminous backlit photographs. But what relation can we conceive between these great scenes in the form of history tableaux, and the rectangles which make the sight of the Bechers' blast furnaces resemble teaching boards? None, perhaps, except for the Greenbergian idea of the surface which encloses the artist's performance and prohibits it from going out of itself, from showing empathy for its subject or from taking itself as a form of social experimentation. In this sense, the Bechers' abandoned industrial sites are a way to ward off the dreams of artists—those engineers and builders of factories in the age of Peter Behrens—just like Barthes' fascination for the Danton collar served to repress the engagement of photographer Lewis Hine alongside those doomed to factory work or to living in hospices. Here the 'essence' of the medium is once again a way of settling accounts with the period in which the medium was conceived as the organon of a new collective world. The only thing being that this settling of accounts is more complex in case of the Bechers' and the theoreticians of 'objective photography': the expulsion of the constructivist dream also amounts to an assertion of fidelity to the values linked to the industrial universe and to worker struggles; the sobriety of the documentary gaze which repels humanist pathos, the formal principles of frontality, of uniform framing and presentation-in-series serving to link scientific objectivity with the effacement of artistic subjectivity.

It remains that what this objectivist bias fundamentally presents us with is an absence: instead of classes and social types, it presents disused edifices. It is possible to interpret the photographing of absence in two ways: first, as a way of showing the programmed departure of the world of industry and workers; but also as a way of playing on the aesthetic affect of disuse which takes us back to Barthes' 'having-been'. This tension of the 'objectivist' idea of the medium is even more palpable in a series made by a follower of the Bechers, Frank Breuer. Here I am thinking chiefly of his series of containers presented, along with those of warehouses and logos, at the *Rencontres photographiques d'Arles* in 2005. His medium format prints were presented in the transept of a former church. Seen from afar they looked like abstract paintings or reproductions of minimalist sculptures. By drawing closer, however, these rectangles of colour on a white background could be seen to be containers piled up on a large deserted space. The impact of the series obviously dwells in the tension between this minimalism and the meaning it conceals. These containers were to be, or to have been, filled with merchandise and unloaded in Anvers or Rotterdam, products that were probably produced in a faraway country, perhaps one in the Asian South East, by faceless workers. In short, then, the containers were filled with the absence of these workers, an absence which also is that of every worker occupied with unloading containers and, more distantly, of the European workers replaced by those distant workers.

The medium's 'objectivity', then, conceals a determinate aesthetic relation between opacity and transparency, between the containers as brute presence of pure coloured forms and containers as representatives of the 'mystery' of the commodity, that is, of the way in which it absorbs human labour and conceals its mutations. It consists in the relation of a presence to an absence, in the twofold relation of a visible form to a signification and to an absence of meaning. The idea of 'ontological poverty', then, must be carried through till the end. It does not mean that photography's lot would be its 'poverty in being' as that which determines its artistic possibilities. It means, conversely, that it falls under no law of specific ontological consistency that would be linked to the specificity of its technological apparatus, that it therefore take part in ideas of art which are part of a history that is in excess of it. We can understand this through an analogy with Eisenstein's analyses on cinematographic montage. His analyses show us how montage accomplishes something that other arts have either dreamt of or else realized with their own means, for example, painting in Serov's portrait of the actress Yermolova: the

motionless image of painting must translate, in the artist's portrait posing before the painter, the energy of the actress in action. The painter accomplishes this by including, thanks to the mirrors and trimmings in the room, several different framings for the parts of his body, several 'shots' in a single one. Cinema makes explicit, thanks to the technique of montage, a power of signification in time that painting approaches through the fragmentation of its space. Photography authorizes an achievement of the same order by realizing, conversely, a power of motionlessness by which literature strove to suspend the movement of its phrases or a power of the involuntary that painting has to recreate through the artifice of the distribution of dashes. Photography's 'poverty' permits it, in short, to effectuate this inclusion of non-art, which literature and painting were obliged to mime using artistic means.

This can be illustrated by a photograph that is situated in the interval between Barthes' 'having-been' and the objectivity of the Becher school. This photograph, by Walker Evans, presents a detail in a kitchen on a farm in Alabama. First, then, it performs a documentary function, a function it took on as part of the major inquiry that had been commissioned by the Farm Security Administration. However, something more is going on in the photo, something that goes beyond our merely being informed about a situation of misery: a kitchen with neither sideboard nor dresser, tinplate cutlery in a makeshift rack, a thin lopsided wooden plank nailed across a wooden wall made of disjointed and worm-eaten boards. What retains our attention is a certain aesthetic disposition marked by unevenness: the parallels are not parallel, the cutlery is haphazardly arranged, and the objects on the plank up high (which functions as a shelf) are dissymmetrically placed. This dysfunctionality composes a harmonious dissymmetry whose cause remains uncertain: is it an effect of chance, of the fact that things just happened to be arranged in this way before the lens? Is it an effect of the photographer's gaze, of his choosing a frame honed in on a detail, thereby transforming a completely random or simply functional arrangement into an artistic quality? Or else is it the aesthetic taste of one of the premises' inhabitants, creating art with the available means by hammering in a nail or placing a tin here rather than there? It may be that the photographer had wanted to show the misery of the farmers. It may be that he simply photographed with he found before him without any particular intention, and that his photo thus benefitted from the beauty of the random. It may be that he took pleasure in seeing in it a quasi-abstract minimalist canvas or that he wanted, conversely, to underline a certain beauty of the functional: the sobriety both of the horizontal plank and the rack in fact can satisfy an aesthetics of design, one that is fond of simple and raw material and the arts of living and doing that simple people pass down from generation to generation. The photograph's aesthetic quality resides in short in a perfect equilibrium, a perfect indecision between the two forms of beauty that Kant distinguished: the beauty which adheres to a form adapted to its function and the free beauty of finality without end.

Before our gaze there henceforth lies neither simple, objective information about a situation nor the wound of *this has been*. The photo does not say whether or not it is art, whether it represents poverty or a play of straight lines and diagonals, of weights and counterweights, of order and disorder. It says nothing about what was in the mind of the person that arranged the boards and cutlery, or about what the photographer had wanted to achieve. This game of multiplied gaps provides an exemplary illustration of what Kant designated with the name 'aesthetic idea': 'that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e., concept, being adequate to it'. The aesthetic idea is that indeterminate idea which links together the two processes left disjointed by the destruction of the mimetic order: the intentional production of art which pursues an end and the sensible experience of beauty as finality without end. Photography is exemplarily an art of aesthetic ideas because it is exemplarily an art capable of enabling non-art to realize art by dispossessing it.

I do not want to draw any general conclusions from these rapid reflections for the point of validating or invalidating the thesis that serves as the argument for this encounter: that of a 'technological turn' of aesthetics. But I do think some questions can be drawn from them that serve to clarify what is at stake in this issue. What is at stake obviously is first of all to know what is being referred to as technology. This name in fact designates at least five things. First of all, an ability to produce specific operation; in the second place, the general model of rationality in terms of means and ends; third, the ability of an apparatus to substitute operations for human

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acts; fourth, the form of extension of this substitution, the way in which it works to seize the operations of the hand, the gaze, the brain; and lastly, the lived world correlative to this set of substitutions. To talk of technology, to ascribe it such and such an effect, moment or turn actually consists in effectuating a certain number of displacements between these levels, which it is too simplistic to reduce to some essence or global project such as Heidegger's 'standing-reserve' of beings. Also at stake is the way in which one conceives of the technicality of art, the relation of what we practice, perceive and think as being art with the effectuation of specific forms of knowledge in aid of specific ends. By the 'technological turn' of art and aesthetics can be understood the multiplication of apparatuses that themselves perform the work of the hand, gaze or artist brain. But there are three ways to think through this multiplication and its art-effect.

First of all, it is possible to conceive it as the multiplication of instruments 'on call', enabling art to be free of its ends, alone with its materials and instruments. This thesis is called modernist (but not without misuse of the term, since there are several modernisms and this type was rather a modernism of tomorrow). This thesis stumbles upon an old Hegelian objection: the one who is alone with his materials and instruments has no reason to make this rather than that. The response to the objection, exemplarily furnished by Adorno, requires that the material be furnished with a specific will, that is, when all is said and done, that the autonomy of art be presented with a technological destiny, which is achieved by postulating an *impetus*, immanent to this materiality, which challenges the simple instrumental model.

The second way involves conceiving the technological turn of art as the capture of its operations in the power of a new sensible world – the world of machines, of energy, of electricity, and then later of information and communication. Technology then appears as the global process in which the specificity of art is dissolved. It in fact annuls its pretention to be more than a technology, more than a way of modifying the energies of the world, or than an instrumental practice of recording things and mobilizing energies. It realizes art by suppressing it, by turning its forms into forms of life. It is this view, properly speaking, that merits being qualified as modernist. But, as we saw, this modernism has two major versions. The first absorbs the manifestations of art in the vast ensemble of intensities, speeds and dynamisms which make up the new sensible world. The second turns these manifestations into documents about this world or into instruments to interpret it and orient oneself in it. This is the version that today is reduced to the platitude of demystification whereby the illusory differences of art are referred back to the generality of forms of technology and the commodity.

But there is yet a third way to conceive the effect produced by the multiplication of apparatuses. Accordingly, the multiplication of instruments is seen less as serving the ends of the arts than it is as the end of means by which different technologies are indifferenciated and lend themselves to realizing an idea of art as despecification. This indifferenciation, however, does not signify the suppression of art in a world of collective energy carrying out the *telos* of technology. Instead, it implies a neutralization authorizing transfers between the ends, means and materials of different arts, the creation of a specific milieu of experience which is not determined either by the ends of art or by those of technology, but which is organized according to new intersections between arts and technologies, as well as between art and what is not art. The multiplication of apparatuses contributes, then, to creating zones of neutralization wherein technologies are indifferenciated and exchange their effects, where their products present a multiplicity of gazes and readings, of zones of transfer between modes of approaching objects, of the functioning of images and of the attribution of meanings. In this way, mediality can be conceived as that which escapes every teleology of the imperious end or of the means which consumes the end, as that which renews neither an idea of the sovereignty of art, nor one of the dissolution of art in the world of technology.

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NOTE

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