

Photography and Other Menaces to Nineteenth-Century French Literary and Artistic Traditions

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When the news of the invention of the daguerreotype left the halls of the French Academy of Sciences in 1839, it fell on the ears of an eager and receptive public, spellbound by the miracle of such an invention. The rapid popularization of the daguerreotype, and subsequently, of less time-consuming photographic processes, forced critics and artists alike to vehemently defend a definition of art that either categorically excluded the new medium or open-mindedly included it within the ranks of a modern or industrialized art. If one maintained, as many did, that the nature and essence of art/literature can be clearly defined and that this definition must be grounded in tradition, coming to terms with what photography was and where it rightfully belonged required either a staunch reaffirmation of one's beliefs about aesthetics or a reassessment of those beliefs. In either case, photography functioned as a disruptive element that did not cause but contributed to an (already existing) artistic movement in which the integrity and solidity of aesthetic definitions and orthodoxies were being questioned and tested. In the minds of those apprehensive and suspicious of the new medium, industrialization, as well as political and social change, had already begun to sound the death knell for art as it had traditionally been conceived. If art/literature had become contaminated by industry, technological advancement and democratic principles, the conservative French nineteenth-century thinker saw it as his duty to save the former from certain destruction. "Saving" art/literature required a fundamental reinforcement of the belief in the closure and soundness of aesthetic definitions whose truth tradition had supposedly guaranteed. Uncovering the presuppositions behind aesthetic definitions that claim to speak in the name of tra-

dition, self-evident truths, and even the nature of man is an endeavor worth pursuing because this manner of thinking leads to a kind of tyranny that has as its goal the suppression of questions, critical inquiry and thus, independent thinking. This study seeks to examine a small part of French aesthetic theory during a period in which change, instability and revolution became almost commonplace. The reactions of conservative artists and critics to post 1840s literary and artistic practices will be scrutinized in order to unveil the deep-seated fears and beliefs that found conservative backlashes to that which is referred to as “new” or “progressive.”

Aaron Scharf, in his *Art and Photography*, points out that, by 1860, photography and its flood of images “were accused of having caused a decline in artistic taste. . . .”¹ Ample evidence exists to support this statement, but I would argue that long before the popularization of photography on a grand scale, many literary and artistic critics from diverse and even opposing backgrounds agreed that French art and literature were in a state of decay. This decline was often attributed to the ill effects of industrialization.² Literature, according to Gaschon de Molènes in an 1841 article, was suffering from “the destructive influence of the *feuilleton*.”³ The proliferation of the “roman-*feuilleton*,” according to de Molènes, gave rise to a kind of literary production that appeared to be factory made:

Apparently some machine shops have found a way of organizing their work so that it is easier and faster to do. . . . In seeing certain literary works that even call themselves works of mind, we are truly tempted to believe that there exist literary factories that make use of these same techniques.⁴

Three years later in the same journal a satire called “The Literary Racket” mocks this “*littérature mercantile*”:

They’ve applied steam power to the art of writing.
Their pen is a machine or a locomotive propelling
The driver who activates it to his goal;
They produce a book an hour; their brains
Have a hundred twenty-five horsepower.⁵

Paulin Limayrac, addressing the problem of disorder in literature, traces the cause of that disorder to the alliance of literature and commercial interests.

The novel has become a game played at the back of the newspaper to attract clients. . . . And the novelists themselves, hoisted without protest onto the complacent columns of the nearest *feuilleton*, are signing their own death warrant.⁶

Charles de Mazade echoes his agreement by asserting that: "It would be difficult to deny the contribution made to the general contemporary cultural disorder by the tremendous growth of advertising, especially as it affects literature."⁷ According to de Mazade the union of literature with advertisement (that is, when literature, in the form of the serial, is used to sell newspapers) can only bring forth unhealthy offspring: a weak, base literature that is forgotten like yesterday's news. Sainte-Beuve laments that money has become the new god of literature and fears the spread of immorality and depravity through this new, popularized medium.⁸

The visual arts were hardly immune from this kind of criticism. In his review of the Salon of 1844, Louis Peisse claims that the very institution of the salon was being transformed into a bazaar; it had become a kind of vehicle for "advertising." "Art, in order to satisfy demand, has had to take on the look of an industry and to satisfy the two most basic requirements of industrial production, that is, rapid production and low price!"⁹ In 1841 Peisse had already made the following statement:

It is easy to predict the consequences that such an order of things will have on the work of artists. Since the purpose of an artist's work will be little more than to show and then sell it, these two considerations will in large manner determine the choice of subject matter and the manner of execution.¹⁰

The placement of art or literature within a marketplace setting, where gain and increased production are the accepted goals, signals to many nineteenth-century conservative critics the extent to which traditional beliefs were being overturned. The so-called commercialization of art and literature necessarily sullied the purity of a human endeavor thought to be outside of baser, mundane concerns: "Art is its own aim. . . . Its mission is to capture beauty wherever it appears, to separate it from all that is not beautiful, and to present it in all its splendor."¹¹ Just as menacing, however, is the fear that, in an environment of "mass production," the identity and integrity of the individual artist/writer as creator are threatened with disappearance. In "Les Trafiquans littéraires" (cited earlier) direct reference is made to works whose paternity cannot be definitively determined because authorship is viewed as a collaborative venture:

Formerly an artist did his own work;
To do it by oneself was a point of honor.
Now the work's gone about completely differently;
Each artist has his assistant and and his hodman; . . .

The godfather of the work and the putative author
Are never the father or the actual author.
There are only lies, phony signatures,
Depredations, deceptions, prevarication. . . .¹²

One can only be held accountable for one's creative works if identity is traceable through the signature and the proper name. When that identity is put into question, the task of assigning responsibility becomes a difficult one. At stake here, however, is also the definition of the author or artist as sole, creative agent interested only in making a contribution to the great works of art and literature. Collaborative writing, according to the author of this satire, has gained popularity because speed and profit have become more important than fulfillment through artistic creation.

Some accused the changing social and political climate brought about by the upheaval of two revolutions. Mediocrity, the child of democracy, was seen to invade all areas of human thought and production. "Democracy . . . lowers and distorts; it employs the destructive force – and nothing more – of a revolutionary idea."¹³ Under attack were such works as Sue's *Les Mystères du Peuple* for shamelessly fostering corrupt tastes and morals. Even Lamartine was accused of having lost sight of that ideal "esprit littéraire" by promoting vulgar and perverted sentiments through his main characters (in his *Raphaël*, for example).

According to this way of thinking, the democratization of a society destroys the established order without replacing it with a system capable of "properly" governing and sustaining all of the different components of that society. When democracy invades the domains of art and literature, it is believed, the very means by which one can judge and establish value, truth, beauty, etc. are abolished. When this occurs, decadence is seen as inevitable: "morally objectionable" novels are freely published, the hierarchy of genres is no longer respected (that is, the novel usurps the throne of tragedy and poetry), and novelists, accepting and contributing to the dissolution of traditional ideals, become slaves to facts and details since they have no aesthetic principles to guide them in their writing. This "littérature nouvelle," or what is usually termed Realism, according to Emile Montégut, is both "empirical and experimental" – two terms that become extremely pejorative when used to describe literary and not scientific practice.

It is empirical because its productions are based on no guiding principal, no overarching idea, no system, no *social faith*. It develops haphazardly,

with no preconceived goal, no itinerary, and its discoveries are but the products of chance and luck. . . . Themselves committed to nothing, lacking a fundamental idea, our young novelists latch on to the first details that strike their fancy, which they would never have done had they been motivated by a moral principal or a firmly held view [*parti-pris*] on life.¹⁴

“Democratic” authors, therefore, unable to distinguish between details of primary and secondary importance, fill their books with purposeless lists of facts and lengthy descriptions. Having no “*parti-pris*” or system they are impersonal wanderers in a field of visual data. According to A.A. Cuvillier-Fleury, “In today’s novel, with its technique of photographic reproduction, man disappears inside the painter: all that’s left is a steel plate.”¹⁵

On a very basic and fundamental level, the devalorization of tradition-based practices is a devaluation of authority. When figures or structures of authority are put into question, the system founded and dependent on that authority risks disruption if not destruction. In such an unsettled environment, a kind of lawlessness can take hold because long-established codes and rules no longer seem applicable. We may speak here of aesthetic systems as well as political ones because the two are intimately interrelated.¹⁶ Even though Sainte-Beuve, Planche, and others are horrified by the notion that art could serve a cause other than its own, they nonetheless openly admit that traditional conceptions of truth, beauty, art, are necessarily rooted in a political system based on a centralized source of power (a monarch) and the separation of social classes. This kind of socio-political system epitomizes reason and orderliness according to Sainte-Beuve and those of his ilk; they, lamentably, must suffer through the chaotic and discordant nineteenth century: “We were born not under a single star but an ever shifting sky and were forced to grow up under all kinds of vacillating, halting regimes.”¹⁷ Sainte-Beuve finds it unfortunate that the nineteenth century is not guided by the likes of a Louis XIV who, by the very authority he personifies, could offer his patronage to the true men of genius and thereby maintain “*la balance des arts*.”¹⁸

Thus, well before 1860, literary and artistic production was considered by most conservative critics to be in a dangerous predicament. For those critical of the influence of industry on the arts, a depreciation of history and tradition (and the political authority upon which it depends) was blamed for giving birth to an art and literature with no sense of meaningful direction and no substance.

"The instinct for the beautiful, the passion for truth, the respect for the sacred things of the mind, no longer dominates and enriches our intellectual life."¹⁹ The crisis in contemporary art, the conservatives said, centered around the fact that this so-called free, modern art was of suspect origins and had commercial ends; following no established aesthetic codes, it was lawless and out of control. Some maintained that literature had to be "saved" by concerned critics who could guide future generations back to the path of good taste and moral thought.

Criticism can do a lot to speed the recovery. It must continue, with intelligence and restraint, to attack the spirit of disorder in all its guises. Slowly but surely the dissipation will diminish, the air will grow cleaner. . . . Beyond the clouds, at the edge of the horizon, lies the coming generation; it is they who must be saved, at any price. . . .²⁰

The menace that photography posed to the late nineteenth-century French art world can best be understood as an outgrowth of the fear that the arts were indeed in the hands of outlaws and that industry had irreversibly damaged the purity of art. Opponents of photography reacted against those who heralded the new medium as an art unequalled in its ability to mimetically capture reality by manipulating natural elements (light and chemicals). In M.L. Figuiet's article, "Histoire et progrès de la photographie," the daguerreotype is praised for having mastered light itself: ". . . the light itself becomes the brush. . . . The hand of man is everywhere banned. The powers of natural instruments will take the place of the artist's trembling hand, his uncertain eye, the insubordinate instrument."²¹ By claiming that the trembling hand of the artist has been substituted by the photographic apparatus, Figuiet seems to be calling for a new world order in which technological advancement displaces the individual, creative agent. This point of view signaled to conservatives the realization of their worst fears. Even Lamartine, who first described photography as "an act of plagiarism against nature committed by optics"²² changed his mind after viewing the work of Adam Solomon and concluded that "it is better than an art, it is a solar phenomenon in which the artist collaborates with the sun."²³ Although Lamartine continues to emphasize the role of the artist, the individual creative act is nonetheless displaced from its strict, traditional conception because the artist, in a very material and concrete way, is dependent on nature and on a mechanical apparatus that seemingly anyone can learn to operate.

The disappearance or devalorization of the "artist" mentioned with respect to the production of serials and realist novels now serves as proof to conservative thinkers that a photographer is nothing more than an efficient, unimaginative machine operator. It should also be pointed out that the popularity and accessibility of the photograph and of photographic equipment contributed significantly to the increase in number of its adversaries. According to Gisèle Freund in *Photographie et société*,

The vogue for photographic portraits only reinforced photography's bad reputation with the world of artists, since the principal aim of most of the photographers was merely to get rich as quickly as possible. . . . Photography, the knowledge of which was originally limited to the intellectual elite, spread, in the 1860s, to large sections of the bourgeoisie and even the petite-bourgeoisie. The first defenders of photography thus became its most bitter adversaries.²⁴

Baudelaire, for example, frequented the studio of the photographer and marginal intellectual, Felix Nadar, as did other writers and artists. But when photography studios turned into small, profit-driven image factories, many artists became disillusioned with the new process. Photography, progressively more and more accessible to all, becomes the great democratizer. "The most beautiful prints, which were once only found in the drawing-rooms of wealthy art lovers, will soon be seen hanging in the humble homes of worker and peasant."²⁵ As noted earlier, the democratization and industrialization of art, according to conservatives, inevitably leads to the dissolution of aesthetic values. By examining the kinds of attacks to which photography was subjected, we can reveal the presuppositions and fears founding aesthetic beliefs that resisted this new, mechanized form of representation. No matter how strongly it is rejected, photography succeeds in putting into question the strength and durability of dogmatic aesthetic systems.

As mentioned earlier, many critics called for a restoration of order within the domains of art and literature. Such a task entails arresting the displacement of art/literature by industry in order that the place, boundary, and definition of art become a clear and uncontested truth. With this end, Planche summarizes the difference between art and industry in the following way: "The pursuit of the useful is the sole aim of industry . . . the useful and the beautiful are but one and the same thing."²⁶ Those who categorically refused to assign to photography any artistic value in its own right, continually underlined its usefulness to art and science. As long as

photography remained a tool or servant, as long as it knew and kept its place as recorder of facts, it posed little threat.

Photography, originating only in fact, begins and ends with fact. Photography accepts reality as it presents itself, appropriates reality without trying to control, develop or in any way restrict it; this blind fidelity is the extent of its activity. Photography does not exist outside of this unflagging act of assimilation.²⁷

The view that photography's only purpose was to appropriate visual reality through the image in a rote and mechanical manner, led some to compare the photographic apparatus to the printing press.²⁸ According to Baudelaire, for example, photography must be the dutiful and humble servant of science and of art, "like printing and stenography, which have neither created nor replaced anything."²⁹ For photography to forget its subservient position, that is, for photography to proclaim itself as an art form dependent on but not completely defined by a mechanical apparatus, would be tantamount to maintaining that a printing press, on its own, could compose a literary text. The printing press did not replace the writing of literature but merely made possible its dissemination. The camera, however, was an apparatus that threatened to replace both visual and textual forms of representation. Paul Gruyer, in his book *Victor Hugo photographe* makes the following remarks:

And suddenly a new invention, as stupefying as the printing press, appears on the doorstep of the nineteenth century; just as the latter established and spread the Word, so photography will establish and multiply the image; an image that will today again begin to kill the Word.³⁰

It is one thing to say that photography has a language of its own, but quite another to propose that the photographic image will eventually do away with the written text. Gruyer later clarifies his statement by saying that, as far as the documentation of facts is concerned, books without photographic images are dead. "While the book described, we want to see for ourselves."³¹ Since photography allows us to "see for ourselves," words become only helpful additions, ways of further illuminating the photograph. It is precisely this propensity to supplement both word and image with the photograph that compelled Baudelaire to vehemently react against what he perceived to be the malevolent powers of photography. Once again, photography becomes a menace when it does not stay in its place.

In his essay, "The Modern Audience and Photography"

Baudelaire launches an attack against realist artists (and their public) who see in photography the answer to all of their mimetic prayers. "If photography is allowed to replace [suppléer] any of the functions of art, then it will soon displace and completely corrupt art. . . ." ³² The verb "suppléer" in French has to do with both the acts of replacing or filling in and of compensating for a lack. In the way that Baudelaire has used it, his fear that photography will "suppléer" art is clearly a fear that photography will render art useless and shamelessly put itself in art's place and define itself in art's terms. For Baudelaire, the absence of the critical role of the imagination from all photographic endeavors condemns photography to an existence outside the boundaries of art. "And if it is allowed to infringe on the domain of the impalpable and the imaginary, on all that has value only because the human being adds a bit of his or her soul to it, then woe to us!" ³³ Photography, the "dangerous supplement," becomes threatening for Baudelaire precisely when it claims to stand in the place of art. At that moment photography plays the role of the charlatan because the image it offers is the image of a false presence – a sterile, dead representation which has not been fashioned by the imagination or the human hand but passes itself off as human or artistic handiwork. ³⁴ As Jill Kelly explains in a recent article:

The camera objectified for the conservative critic all the sins of the realists: all the excesses of observation, of the use of the details of physical reality, of the indiscriminate cataloguing of the visible, of mechanical impersonality, of the immoral use of base materialism as subject. ³⁵

To bestow on photography the label of art is to, in effect, reject the definition of the artist as the translator and decipherer of nature, of the real. "What then is a poet (I use the word poet here in the broad sense) if not a translator, a decoder?" ³⁶ In photography as in realist art, according to Baudelaire, human creativity becomes enslaved to the referent. The stakes in the battle between art on one side and photography and realism on the other are high indeed because the growth and development of a medium of representation that "bows down to reality" entails the death of the imagination, and consequently, of the artist.

Artists who actively used photography to aid them in their work, fervently maintained that strict limits should be put on its use. Many were all too aware of what the British painter, Sir William J. Newton, called "the seductive nature of the practice of Photography." He admonished young painters not to be seduced

away from their studies of "the true principles" of art by an apparatus that seemed to promise instant professional success.³⁷ Eugène Delacroix reacts against those painters who fail to understand that photography's usefulness resides exclusively in its role as visual support or aid: "The daguerreotype should be seen as but a translator whose job is to acquaint us more deeply with the mysteries of nature. . . ."³⁸ Photography, by translating nature into a framed, mimetically perfect representation, permits the artist to see details and subtleties he normally would not or could not see. We would be too hasty to conclude that Delacroix, by ascribing translating abilities to the photograph, disagrees with Baudelaire's definition of the poet or artist as translator. Photographs, Delacroix would say, offer useful but inferior translations precisely because the photograph duplicates perfectly; such exactitude emphasizes the "monstrosities" and imperfections of nature usually missed by the naked eye. He would categorically disagree with Disdéri's notion that a photographer's translation of phenomenon is a function of his particular personality and style.³⁹ If we pursue this analogy between photography and translation we find that Delacroix is especially critical of those artists who

. . . instead of seeing the daguerreotype as a kind of counsel or dictionary, take it for a painting itself. . . . Their work is therefore nothing but a necessarily cold copy of this copy [the daguerreotype] that is itself imperfect in other ways. In brief, the artist becomes a machine hitched to another machine.⁴⁰

Jean Sagne, in his book *Delacroix et la photographie*, also quotes Delacroix as having said that "Nature is but a dictionary."⁴¹ It is not difficult to understand how both nature and the daguerreotype could be substituted one for the other here, given the mimetic capabilities attributed to the latter. Baudelaire, also fascinated by Delacroix's analogy, attempts to explain it:

In order to understand the full implication of this phrase, we must first consider the numerous ordinary uses of the dictionary. In a dictionary we can find the meaning of words, the generation of words, the etymology of words; we can even extract all the elements that make up a phrase or narrative structure. However, no one has ever mistaken the dictionary for an artistic composition. Painters who obey their imagination seek in their dictionary the elements that best accord with their conception; still more, by adjusting them with the use of art, the artist endows them with a completely new character. Those without imagination copy the dictionary.⁴²

Photography, from what we have been told, would appear to be a kind of transparent language that captures and frames nature or the referent and brings it within the artist's or writer's reach for the purposes of observation and study of its parts. Ultimately, certain selected pieces of the photograph will appear in the artist's composition after a final translation has been performed into the artist's own representational style. The dictionary, then, serves to nourish, sustain and even regenerate the work of the imagination.

The menace to this view of artistic creation appears when the possibility is shown to exist that a "servant" of the creative process can venture outside the boundaries of its servility. The role and function of the dictionary, for example, may be viewed in a way that Delacroix and Baudelaire had not fully intended. I cannot help but call to mind here Roland Barthes' thought-provoking description of the dictionary in a preface to the Hachette dictionary:

. . . the dictionary overflows with its "utensilness" [*utensilité*]. We think of the dictionary as an indispensable tool of knowledge, and that is true; but it is also a dream machine that, so to speak, gives birth to itself, from word to word, in the end merging with the power of imagination.

Not a composition in the poetic sense, as Baudelaire says, the dictionary is nonetheless a powerful source and generator of words and images. Although we open the dictionary with the intention of learning the meaning, history or application of a word, we are inevitably referred to and confronted with other words and expressions, some new, exotic or esoteric, others old and familiar. The dictionary goes beyond any simple notion of utility and in effect opens the door to the imagination by allowing the new association of words and ideas to take place. In all fairness it must be pointed out that Delacroix had given much thought to the production and purpose of a dictionary since he himself had outlined a project for a *Dictionnaire des Beaux Arts*. He emphasized both the pleasure and instruction this kind of work provides:

The mind, which has such a difficult time penetrating and following with the necessary attention the long flow of developments that leads to the classification and division of material, can take solace in the dictionary. We can pick up and put down a dictionary as we please. Opened haphazardly, we may even discover, after reading only a few fragments, material for long and fruitful meditation.⁴³

If a collection of photographs is indeed like a dictionary, we may legitimately wonder if photography can also move beyond its

“utensilness” (*utensilitéé*), engendering image upon image, limited only by the level of technical advancement of its equipment. In Delacroix’s photographic dictionary images are examined and analyzed in order to find clues about the secrets of nature. But by Delacroix’s own admission, photography’s unique ability to capture reality and thus influence vision and perception must force the artist to reassess aesthetic principles upon which artistic vision finds its support. In his journal entry of May 21, 1853 Delacroix relates an experiment to which he subjected some dinner guests:

. . . after having examined a group of photographs featuring naked models – some of whom were quite unattractive, with unappealing, oversized parts – I laid before them some of the engravings of Marc Anthony. At their sight we experienced a feeling of involuntary repulsion and even disgust because of the inaccuracy of the engravings, because of their manner, their lack of naturalness; and this in spite of the high quality of the style (which was the only thing that we could – but didn’t, at this moment – admire). In truth, if a man of genius were able to make use of a daguerreotype in the way it ought to be used, he could soar to artistic heights that we have not yet seen. . . . Until now this machine art has only rendered us a most niggardly service: it has ruined our masterpieces without itself completely satisfying us. . . .⁴⁴

Photography must be a singular tool indeed if it can alter one’s appreciation and judgment of existing works of art, even those dating back to the sixteenth century. Although Marcantonio Raimondi’s style is said to be admirable when his work is separated from the photographs in question, Delacroix finds fault with this artist’s skills of observation. The nineteenth-century artist has the advantage of being able to use photographs in order to correct “the errors of the eye.” For Delacroix, among others, a fine line exists between the exact and thus vulgar representation of nature (the direct copy of the photograph), and a representation that is not true enough to nature (Marcantonio). By proposing that photography plays a role in instructing both the eye of the artist and of the critic, Delacroix raises this representational medium above its servant status.

The photographic dictionary, like its lexical counterpart, feeds and supports the imagination. Photography made it possible, for example, for artists and writers to envision and represent faraway places to which they had never travelled. Through the proliferation of the photograph, a vast catalogue is composed over time, a catalogue displaying a limitless assortment of images: faces, land-

scapes, buildings and monuments executed by photographers of diverse talents and interests. The existence of this hypothetical catalogue/dictionary more than suggests that perception itself is a complex and multi-faceted process, that a Nadar does not approach his subject in the same way as a Durieu. But as we have seen, the use of the photographic dictionary initiates a shaping of the eye such that a certain "standard" of the real is wanted and expected. Jonathan Crary, in his ground-breaking study of vision in the nineteenth century, claims that, as early as 1820, certain discourses and practices began to locate vision within the body as a physiological event, thereby defining the observer as an active producer of visual experience. Considering art and science to be part of a single, interlocking field of knowledge and practice, Crary examines the growing awareness in the nineteenth century that "perception depends on the physical structure and functioning of an empirically constituted human organism and that there are techniques of the body or practical procedures for externally modifying perception. . . ." The eye, rather than being a neutral device of pure transmission, becomes a sensory organ whose activity is now inextricably mixed with whatever object it beholds.⁴⁵ Delacroix's "experiment" had in fact brought attention to the notion that perception, or more specifically, the artistic vision required for painting and drawing, relies on the training of the eye and not always of the mind: ". . . in brief, perspective must be placed not in the mind but in the eye of the student."⁴⁶ His essay, "On Teaching Drawing," quoted above, is a review of Elisabeth Cavé's publication, *Le dessin sans maître (Drawing Without a Teacher)*, in which she delineates her method for enhancing visual memory. One of the principle messages in Delacroix's discussion is that only the study of the daguerreotype succeeds in completing the education of the artist precisely because it instructs the eye and not the mind or the hand. ". . . if done correctly, the study of the daguerreotype can itself alone remedy any gaps of education. . . ."⁴⁷ Although it is the hand that draws and allows the artist's talent to manifest itself, it is the eye and its clarity of vision that enables the artist to discover those "mysteries of nature" that will provide him with "that source of inspiration whose fecundity is absolute."⁴⁸ The daguerreotype, like a microscope or telescope, not only makes up for the limits and deficiencies of the eye, it shapes and controls, to a certain extent, both the act of seeing and the memory of what was seen. ". . . for a person who paints from memory the daguerreotype offers *instruc-*

tion of incalculable value" (my emphasis).⁴⁹ Delacroix does not say that one no longer has to draw or paint from memory because photographs or daguerreotypes are widely available but rather that one's visual memory has been enhanced by the availability of photographs. This enhancement comes by way of instruction and practice. The eye is an organ that can be exercised and taught to see; the lessons of photography grant it access to the vast potentialities of vision. So important are the resources that photography offers that an artist's work can be radically redefined by it:

How sorry I am that such an admirable invention arrived so late . . . I can only judge the potential influence that the study of its results might have had on me by the utility that this study still has, even though I have so little time to devote to it.⁵⁰

Delacroix's attitude toward photography (shared by many artists) can best be characterized as fascination and respect mixed with apprehension and circumspection.

Photography, then, has been permitted to step outside the confines of its servility by one who insisted that it know and keep its place. To admit that photography plays a role in fashioning and molding vision is to grant it a status superior to that of a mere tool or implement. Although this is by no means an acceptance of the new medium as art, it is nonetheless a destabilization of what conservatives have defined as the inflexible, tradition-strengthened boundary between art and products of industry or science, between endeavors that strive for truth and beauty and those that search only for the useful and the practical. In the minds of certain critics, artists and writers of the late nineteenth century, openly conceding that photography could, under certain circumstances, be considered art, would be tantamount to admitting that violence may be done to tradition, that the definition of artistic creation must be broadened, and that art could have a multiplicity of ends. Such an admission can only be expressed if one is prepared to participate in the dismantling of aesthetic foundations thought to be impermeable to change. The conservatives, witnessing the decay of their aesthetic ideals, called instead for a return to the simplicity and purity of art (by emphasizing the rigidity of its definition), thereby attempting to distance and render invalid all theoretical questions one could rightfully address to an art or literature created within an increasingly industrialized and mechanized world.

Excerpts translated from the French by Thomas Epstein.

Notes

1. Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (London: The Penguin Press, 1968): xiv.
2. One striking exception to this is Maxime du Camp. Fully agreeing that literature was indeed in a state of decay, he sought to revitalize it by advocating its modernization: "While science creates wonders, while industry accomplishes miracles, we remain impassive, indifferent, scornfully plucking the warped strings of our lyres and closing our eyes so as not to see, or persisting in looking only toward a past for which we have no real reason to yearn. . . . Its (literature's) job will be to formulate the new dogma; it will have to displace science from the clouds in which it delights, it will direct industry, because – and the dreamers be damned – the century is in the hands of planets and machines." "Les Chants Modernes: Préfaces d'un volume de poésies," *Revue de Paris* 24 (1855): 324, 335.
3. Gaschon de Molènes, "Revue littéraire," *Revue des deux Mondes* 28 (1841): 1002.
4. de Molènes, 1002.
5. Amédée Pommier, "Les Trafiquans littéraires," *Revue des deux Mondes* 8 (1844): 896.
6. Paulin Limayrac, "De l'ésprit de désordre en littérature," *Revue des deux mondes* 6 (1844): 805.
7. Charles de Mazade, "Des oeuvres littéraires de ce temps," *Revue des deux mondes* 2 (1846): 1016.
8. Sainte-Beuve, "Quelques vérités sur la situation en littérature," *Revue des deux mondes* 3 (1843): 13 and 14.
9. Louis Peisse, "Le Salon," *Revue des deux mondes* 6 (1844): 340. Rosalind Krauss makes the following observation about what Walter Benjamin has called the "exhibition value," of the work of art: "Aesthetic discourse as it developed in the nineteenth century organized itself increasingly around what could be called the space of exhibition. Whether public museum, official salon, world's fair, or private showing, the space of exhibition was constituted in part by the continuous surface of wall, a wall increasingly unstructured for any purpose other than the display of art. . . . It was also the ground of criticism, which is to say, on the one hand, the ground of a written response to the works' appearance in that special context, and, on the other, the implicit ground of choice – of either inclusion or exclusion – with everything excluded from the space of exhibition becoming marginalized with regard to its status as Art." ("Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View," *Art Journal* 42.4 (Winter 1982)).
10. Louis Peisse, "Salon de 1841," *Revue des deux mondes* 2 (1841): 10–11.
11. Gustave Planche, "L'Art et l'Industrie," *Revue des deux mondes* 10 (1857): 203.
12. Pommier, 898.
13. Charles de Mazade, "De la démocratie en littérature," *Revue des deux mondes* 5 (1850): 904.
14. Emile Montégut, "La Littérature nouvelle," *Revue des deux mondes* 32 (1861): 1010.
15. A.A. Cuvillier-Fleury, "Madame Bovary," *Journal des Débats* (May 26, 1857). Cited in Jill Kelly, "Photographic Reality and French Literary Realism: Nineteenth-Century Synchronism and Symbiosis," *The French Review* 65.2 (December 1991): 202.
16. In his book, *Paraesthetics*, David Carroll raises an important point: ". . . for the place given to art and the way the question of the aesthetic in general is approached affect not only theories of art (aesthetics in the narrow sense), but also the theories of all the fields art relates to, even if at a distance." (New York: Methuen, 1987): 24.
17. Sainte-Beuve, 12.
18. Sainte-Beuve, 12.
19. Charles de Mazade, 905–906.

20. Paulin Limayrac, 815–816.
21. M.L. Figuiet, "Histoire et progrès de la photographie," *Revue des deux mondes* 24 (1848): 128.
22. Alfonso de Lamartine, *Cours familial de littérature* (Paris: Léopold Robert, 1858): 6: 410.
23. de Lamartine, 7: 43.
24. Gisèle Freund, *Photographie et société* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974): 76–77.
25. *La Revue française* (1839). Cited in Gisèle Freund 209.
26. Planche, 205.
27. Henri Delaborde, "La Photographie et la gravure," *Revue des deux mondes* 2 (1856): 622.
28. Oliver Wendell Holmes, in his essay, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," sees instead a relationship between photography and the art of printing: "Such are the stereoscope and the photograph, by the aid of which form is henceforth to make itself seen through the world of intelligence, as thought has long made itself heard by means of the art of printing." Cf. Beaumont Newhall, ed., *Photography: Essays and Images* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980): 57.
29. Charles Baudelaire, "Salon de 1859: Le Public moderne et la photographie," *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1961): 1035.
30. Paul Gruyer, *Victor Hugo photographe* (Paris: Charles Mendel, 1905).
31. Paul Gruyer, 36.
32. Baudelaire, 1035. Because of Baudelaire's opinions on photography and on progress in general, I have categorized him, for the purposes of this study, as a "conservative thinker." Progress, for him, is a grotesque idea "that bloomed on the rotten ground of modern fatuity, releasing each person from his duty, delivering every soul from its responsibility, separating the will from all the ties to which the love of beauty bound it. . . ." Baudelaire laments the fact that the superiority of the human mind is measured by the symbols of progress (electricity, steam) and not by the activity of the artistic imagination. As far as Baudelaire's poetic works are concerned, however, he most certainly could not be considered conservative. The artist, according to him, must search for "la modernité": ". . . the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, this is half of art; the other half is the eternal and the immutable." His poetry, condemned by a conservative, conformist bourgeois society, seems far removed from traditional, aesthetic principles and in fact effectuates a rupture with that tradition.
33. Baudelaire, 1035–1036.
34. Had it not been for Jacques Derrida's well-known and often debated study of the supplement in *De la grammatologie*, Baudelaire's use of this term may have passed almost unnoticed. There exists a rather bizarre parallel between Derrida's discussion of writing and Baudelaire's warning that photography cannot be permitted to supplement art. Derrida points out that, in Rousseau for example, writing is considered to be a supplement to speech, the "natural" state of language, and is necessarily dangerous because, by ruse or artifice, it makes present that which is absent. "But the supplementary replaces. It is only added in order to replace. It takes its place where "in place of" begins; if it fills, it fills a void. If it represents and creates an image, it does so because of a prior lack of presence. As replacement and accessory, the supplementary is an auxiliary, a subordinate instance that takes the place of. As a substitute, it does not simply add to the positive quality of a presence; indeed it produces no outline but is assigned a place in the structure by the presence of a void. Nowhere, nothing can be filled by itself; this can only occur when it allows itself to be filled with a sign and a procurement. The sign is always a supplement to the thing itself." (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967) 208. Art itself is a supplement (to nature). Photography, then, becomes the supplement of the supplement since it seeks to mechanically, and thereby artificially, replace a representational medium defined by the attainment or revelation of an ideal only the imagination,

according to Baudelaire, has the permission to supplement (other mental faculties) since its origin is divine (Baudelaire 1039).

35. Jill Kelly, 203–204.

36. Charles Baudelaire, "Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains," *Oeuvres Complètes* 705.

37. Sir William J. Newton, "Upon Photography in an Artistic View, and its Relation to the Arts," *Essays and Images* 80.

38. Eugène Delacroix, "De l'enseignement du dessin," *Revue des deux Mondes* 7 (1850): 1143.

39. See Disdéri, "L'Art de la photographie" (Paris: chez l'auteur, 1862) 53. "By his choice of types, by the way in which he illuminates them, he (the intelligent camera operator) endows a material image with the living trace of his personality. . . . Ultimately the photographer is permitted to translate, by the means inherent to the medium, a considerable number of phenomena in the external world. . . . Photography is thus a language."

40. Eugène Delacroix, "De l'enseignement du dessin," 1143.

41. Jean Sagne, *Delacroix et la photographie* (Editions Herscher, 1982): 92.

42. Charles Baudelaire, "L'oeuvre et la vie d'Eugène Delacroix," *Oeuvres Complètes* 1119–1120.

43. Eugène Delacroix, *Journal*, 3 vols. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1932): 3: 252.

44. Eugène Delacroix, *Journal*, 2: 58–59.

45. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990): 84, 72.

46. Eugène Delacroix, "De l'enseignement du dessin," 1142.

47. *Ibid.* 1143.

48. Quoted in Jean Sagne, 27.

49. Quoted in Jean Sagne, 27.

50. Quoted in Jean Sagne, 27.