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Trompe l'oeil: Photography's Illusion Reconsidered

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Trompe l'oeil: Photography's Illusion Reconsidered by Stephen C. Pinson

Les mensonges sont continuellement nécessaires, même pour arriver au trompe l'oeil.
- Baudelaire, Salon of 1846

The designation of a popularly favored, and thus "vulgar," illusionist art, in opposition to the rise of an avant-garde, self-reflexive art is a frequently recurring subtext in accounts of the history of modernism, in which the narrative leads from an art of transparency to one of opacity.[1] In cases where this narrative incorporates mid-nineteenth-century Realism as a precursor to modernism, writers must be careful to distinguish between Realist art and popular, illusionist art, which is often thought of in terms of "realistic" imitation. Clement Greenberg tackled this problem by differentiating between purely illusionist art and art, like that of Gustave Courbet, which he thought aimed at "realistic imitation" but that nevertheless revealed the materiality of the paint with which the illusion was created.[2] Still, historians may encounter additional problems due to the fact that critics in the last century who were hostile to the Realist program often compared its art to the simple imitation of photography, the rise of which has also been invoked repeatedly in relation to a nineteenth-century popular taste for "realistic," or "illusionist," art.[3] "Realism" and "illusion" are thus particularly troublesome terms, especially when the discussion moves from modern art per se, to the role of photography in the development of modern art.

For example, Michael Fried, like Greenberg, has noted a difference between Courbet's Realism and photography but not in terms of any self-awareness on the part of Courbet vis-à-vis a modernist project of representation.[4] Instead, Fried believes the difference to reside in the willed, even if unconscious, nature of painting as opposed to the inescapable "automatism" of photography.[5] Fried places Courbet in a long tradition of antitheatricity in French painting, in which automatism (as a system of self-enclosed representation) might be considered thematically important to the artist. He believes, however, that Courbet's inability to give up the representation of the "will to paint" clearly marks the opposition of his painting to the *inherent* automatism of photography.[6] At the same time, Fried maintains that a "deep connection [existed] between Realism and photography in the 1850s and after" and that both were rooted in "the same historical conjuncture." [7] Because Fried does not set out to define this "historical conjuncture," the concept of "realism" floats freely, and the reference to the automatism of photography can be taken to rehearse an ontological argument, in which photography maintains an inherent connection to a predetermined reality. Other critics have employed variations of this ontological argument of photography and photography's connection to popular illusion in their respective theories of modernism.[8] According to such arguments, the photograph functions as a model of modern consciousness and perception, but the understanding of photography relies on a still loosely defined model of realistic imitation, or representational illusion (as opposed to the willed representation of painting).

In the space of this paper, I cannot sort out all the issues underlying the recurrent impulse to identify a degenerate pole of popular art and the contingent ramifications vis-à-vis the history of photography, but I would like to address the historical question of the "illusion,"

or lack thereof, of the photograph. I am specifically interested in the visual antecedents of photography that may have led to its consideration in terms of "illusion" or "reality." I hope to show, in the process, that these two terms cannot be simply equated. Rather, the figuring of photography's inherent realism grew, in part, from an initial struggle to define the new invention in terms of existing aesthetic categories of illusionist and trompe l'oeil painting.
[9]

Other historians have recognized similarities between the early discourses of photography and trompe l'oeil but have not pursued a sustained investigation. For example, Lindsay Smith asserts that photography "radically altered the trompe l'oeil of painting" and that prior to the invention of photography, "painting's potentiality for verisimilitude had other determinants."^[10] Smith's recognition of the "complex reciprocal interchange" between photography and painting is a much needed corrective to the plethora of art-historical accounts that rely on a notion of photography's inherent "realism." Moreover, her call for more careful consideration of optical devices and precursors to photography incites equal questions about the ways in which such accounts coopt spectacles like the Diorama into "modern" vision.

Unfortunately, Smith is concerned strictly with discursive similarities between Pre-Raphaelite painting and stereoscopy. She therefore does not probe her provocative assertion about the radical crisis instigated by photography as "an unprecedented term of reference, an innovative analogy" in visual experience.^[11] In fact, her generalizing remarks threaten to rehearse the very art-historical accounts she wishes to criticize by drawing a superficial ellipsis between the trompe l'oeil of painting and photography. I want to pursue this conjuncture more closely, as background to that "historical conjuncture" identified by Fried. In tracing early accounts of the daguerreotype and looking back at reviews of the Diorama and trompe l'oeil painting, I hope to show that preexisting discourses on painting led to the eventual characterization of the photograph as the "real," whereas the lack of an artist's touch functioned as the initial, serious point of contention between art and photography. Because so many "rhetorics" existed in the nineteenth century, I will follow the course of the debates generated by Daguerre's invention in France, concentrating on the initial reports in *L'artiste*, and the reaction of the Swiss aesthete Rodolphe Töpffer. This method, while necessarily limited, will give a general idea of both the variety and the recurrent themes surrounding the introduction of the photograph in the last century.

The first notice of the daguerreotype in *L'artiste* appeared early in 1839, soon after Jean-François Arago's disclosure of the process to the Academy of Science on 7 January of that year.^[12] The reporter of "Revue de la semaine" reveals the "excellent news" that Daguerre, painter of the diorama, has invented an apparatus that will produce "the firmest drawings, and the most varied and vigorous effects of light."^[13] The "process of reproduction" invented by Daguerre, moreover, is reported to be especially suited to architecture and still lifes. At this early point, no mention is made of the camera, and Daguerre's procedure is apparently placed among mechanical devices and drawing aids, as its products are identified as "drawings" and described in specifically artistic terms.

In the review that follows here, however, the newly baptized "Daguerotype" is differentiated from both "true art" and drawing aids.^[14] In a review of illustrated books, including

Gavard's *Musée de Versailles*, an unidentified writer states that Daguerre's invention threatens to replace Gavard's *diagraphie*, a drawing device used to accurately copy paintings in correct perspective.^[15] Introducing the use of the camera, the writer then overstates the effects of the daguerreotype, asserting that it reproduces not only the lines and contours of an object but also its modeling and color by "fixing" the object's reflected image in the camera obscura. The only disadvantage of the process is that unlike engraving, the daguerreotype cannot be reproduced; once this limitation is overcome, however, the "barren skill of the burin engraver will be suppressed . . ."^[16] Here, Daguerre's invention, apart from its uniqueness, is characterized as comparable—even superior—to graphic processes. Still, caution must be expressed with this assertion, because the paragraph on the daguerreotype follows a pointedly sarcastic review of M. Thénot's tract on perspectival drawing, *La morphographie*, in which Thénot states that an artist can draw perfectly well without being a *morphographe*.^[17] The writer's position regarding drawing aids, and the daguerreotype, thus remains unclear.

However, the tone of the next review, Jules Janin's better-known "Le daguerotype," is impossible to mistake.^[18] Upon Arago's report of the daguerreotype, submitted to the Chamber of Deputies on 3 July 1839, Janin praises Daguerre's invention, which he heralds as a replacement for drawing and engraving. Janin begins his article with a description of two paintings, *Vallée de Goldau* and *Messe de Minuit*, from Daguerre's Diorama, which he describes as "something a little beyond painting."^[19] Concentrating on Daguerre's command of light in the creation of changing effects in his paintings, Janin re-creates in words the scenes in front of which audiences claimed to believe themselves physically present: an avalanche in the Swiss Alps and the arrival and departure of a church congregation for Midnight Mass. According to Janin, Daguerre's research into the effects of light led him to chemistry and ultimately to the "mysterious goal" of the daguerreotype, in which the sun itself acts as both impetus and agent in the reproduction of objects in front of the camera. Employing the terminology of drawing and printmaking, Janin attributes the superior detail of the daguerreotype to the fact that the process does not rely on human agency—the artist's hand—in reproducing objects:

[A]ll things, big or small, which are equal before the sun, instantaneously engrave themselves in a kind of camera obscura that retains all impressions. Never have the greatest master draughtsmen produced such drawings. If the massing is admirable, the details are infinite. And to think that it is the sun itself, this time introduced as the all-powerful agent of a completely new art, which produces these incredible works. This time, it is no longer the uncertain, distant regard of man that discovers shadow and light, it's no longer his trembling hand that reproduces the changeable scene of this world, transmitted through empty space, onto an unstable paper.^[20]

Later in the article, Janin extends his artistic metaphors to include the mirror, memory, and the process of reproduction itself: "It [the daguerreotype] is an engraving accessible to each and every one; it is a pencil as compliant as thought; it is a mirror that preserves all impressions; it is the faithful memory of all monuments, of every landscape in the universe; it is inexorable, spontaneous, tireless reproduction."^[21] Janin ends his effusive article by recommending that the government support Arago's proposal to award Daguerre, the "author of universal engraving," a lifetime pension for the daguerreotype.^[22]

Two shorter notices follow Janin's article. In the first, a section of "Fait divers," the scientist Herschell's son, John, visits Arago and claims Daguerre's invention to be superior to the paper process of Fox Talbot.[23] According to the report, Herschell calls the talbotype "hazy" in comparison to the daguerreotype, stating the difference between the two products to be like that between the sun and the moon.

In the second article, a separate notice entitled "M. Daguerre," we learn of the unanimous vote of the Chamber of Deputies to accord a pension to Daguerre.[24] The article complains of the large crowd gathered to see the daguerreotypes; especially bothersome are those "most alien to the fine arts," an admonishment warranted by the description of the daguerreotypes as "fine engravings, precious products of light." [25] This characterization is immediately qualified, however, in order to distinguish the fidelity of the daguerreotype, as compared to traditional art, to what is represented: "It is not an engraving, it is a mirror. In this magic mirror, nature is reflected in its naïve and somewhat bleak truth; all the great monuments, all the great sights, all the favorable landscapes thus will be reproduced from now on without rival." [26] Continuing in the vein of Janin, daguerreotypes are thus compared to the art of engraving as far as the reproduction of nature is concerned, but they are distinguished in terms of their almost magical fidelity to what is reproduced and in their original debt to light rather than human agency.

In Janin's next article, "La description du daguérotype," such unmitigated praise is complicated, if not lessened, by Janin's synopsis of Arago's description of the technical production of Daguerre's invention.[27] As described by Arago in a speech to a joint meeting of the Academies of Art and Science on 19 August 1839, the process seems so complicated, so open to error, and the daguerreotype image itself so fragile, that Janin cannot help but feel that initial reports of the facility of the invention were deceptive. He also remarks upon the lack of color in the images, the bulky apparatus, and the inability of reproduction. Janin is disappointed mostly in relation to the process of production itself, however, and his estimation of the products remains high. For example, the uniqueness of the plates is more a reflection on the substandard process of engraving, to which the daguerreotypes must be entrusted for copying, than on the "beautiful plates of the Daguérotype, of an unequalled finish, a perfect exactitude." [28] Janin thus asks, "[B]ut who is the engraver in this world, is he called Raphaël Morghen, who could ever reproduce, or even come close, to this ideal perfection, this sky, this water, all this living and serene nature, softly illuminated by this Elysian light?" [29]

Again, Janin links the perfection of the daguerreotype, "in which light plays the principal role," to Daguerre's Diorama.[30] Midway through his account of Arago's description of the development of the invention, Janin stops to reiterate that Daguerre, simultaneously with his experiments in photography with Niépce, was astonishing all of Paris with various paintings ("some of his discoveries related to light") in the Diorama.[31] This excursus not only serves to link the two inventions but fills a gap in Janin's narrative of the development of the daguerreotype, the smallest details of which, he maintains, would be too difficult, and even impossible, to know. By alluding to the mysterious spectacle of the Diorama, Janin adds to the fantastic nature of the daguerreotype and establishes it within a tradition that, if not considered wholly within the realm of art, was certainly recognized as bearing artistic merit. Just as the Diorama was "a little beyond painting," the daguerreotype, too, was outside

and above engraving and drawing. Janin then employs the artistic origins of the invention to rationalize the newly discovered complication of the process. If the daguerreotype can no longer make a claim as a process of "universal engraving," it is only because it requires an artistic temperament and cannot be employed by any *vulgaire* who has neither attempted to render nature nor to understand it from his soul.[32] This does not mean that actual artistic manipulation is required, however, for the daguerreotype operates rather as a dream of reproduction, as if by "enchantment":

The plate lights up with a soft clarity; the lights separate from the shadows; life reveals itself in the still uncertain lines; all the depths of light reveal themselves one by one. You witness, actually, a true creation, a world emerging from chaos, a charming, accomplished, cultivated, constructed world, as full of dwellings as of flowers. Yes, this is a solemn instant of poetry and magic, with which nothing in the arts can compare.[33]

In the final article from 1839, "Le Daguerotype: nouvelle expérience," Daguerre himself (supposedly in response to Janin's second article) demonstrates his procedure to the "critics," "men of letters," and "dreamers" of *L'artiste* to assure them of its ease.[34] The result, even though Daguerre's audience is naturally "clumsy" and has never made anything by hand, will be the now common refrain of "a beautiful drawing so exact, so true, so limpid, that Raphael himself could never produce one as beautiful." [35] The writers are convinced of the facility of the procedure at the end of the session and blame the apparent complexity of the process on Arago's report, stating that the daguerreotype will indeed be as easy to use as the *diagraphie* after all. The sole remaining complaint is against the high cost of the apparatus (450 francs), which will prevent its use among poor artists.

At the end of its first year of existence, then, the daguerreotype maintains its status as an artistic tool, the product of which (the "fixed" image of the camera obscura) is most often characterized as a drawing or an engraving that exceeds the average representational fidelity of conventional manual arts, largely because the creation of the daguerreotype image itself is not manual.[36] Furthermore, this lack of dependence upon an artist's hand was employed to support the daguerreotype's eventual universal usage and, when its facility was questioned, to compare its manner of representation to memory, a magic mirror, or a dream imagined by an artist.[37] In this fantastic guise glossed by the language of spectacle, the daguerreotype shared with Daguerre's first invention, the Diorama, (fig. 1) a status of mystery as well as a dependence upon light and the distinction of being an art beyond "art." Yet at the same time, as I hope to show, the lack of artistic intervention into the daguerreotype prevented its designation by the specific artistic tradition to which the Diorama belonged—that is, the art of "trompe l'oeil." [38] Indeed, because Janin, especially, concentrates on the non-manual aspect of the daguerreotype to distinguish its perfection over engraving and drawing in the reproduction of what is seen, he stops short of equating the photographic image with that obtained by the *hand* of Daguerre in the Diorama. His descriptions linger on the effects of light and the magical qualities of the two inventions in terms of their accuracy. By looking back at earlier reviews of the Diorama, I hope to show how such rhetoric played itself out in Janin's criticism of the daguerreotype. In addition, I will assert that by avoiding the specific concept of illusion, Janin leaves out the negative criticism of the Diorama (and trompe l'oeil painting in general) that is taken up later by certain opponents of photography.[39]



Fig. 1, L.J.M. Daguerre, diorama painting behind the altar of the church St. Gervais-St. Protais, Bry-sur-Marne (1842) [\[larger image\]](#)

Contemporary reviews of the Diorama frequently spoke of Daguerre's spectacle in terms that prefigured the daguerreotype's accuracy of representation. Upon the opening of the Diorama on 12 July 1822, *Le miroir des spectacles, des lettres, des moeurs et des arts* reported, "[n]ever has a representation of nature so deeply effected us."^[40] So strong was the impression, in fact, that the Diorama seemed to present the imitated object itself rather than an imitation: "Until now, according to us, we had not arrived at this point of reality, which could lead to the belief, not after a summary inspection of the works, but after a long study of their different parts, that we were looking not at imitations but at the imitated objects themselves."^[41] Other reviews discuss the Diorama in terms of "fidelity of representation," "the most natural truth," "masterpieces of detail," and "the almost perfect imitation of nature."^[42] The single most common reference regarding the Diorama, however, was to its "illusion,"^[43] which was often invoked along with the magical play of light.

A review of the *Valley of Sarnen and Chapel of the Trinity* in the November 1823 issue of *Ackermann's Repository of Art*, for example, states that "there is, by some ingenious contrivance for letting the light fall upon the picture, a power obtained of giving, in silent, and almost imperceptible gradations, all the varying hues of the atmosphere, distinguishing them with the most natural truth, and one succeeding the other with the most forcible illusion."^[44] A later review from *L'artiste* is even more explicit about the function of light in the creation of Daguerre's "perfect illusion," which is based on "the change affected in the colors, as the light that illuminates them is transmitted by reflection or refraction, and on the fact that this light itself is variously colored."^[45] No matter how detailed the description of Daguerre's process, though, the accomplishment of the Diorama's illusion (that is, deceiving the viewer as to what is seen) is ultimately attributed to the hand of Daguerre: "the picture representing the *Chapelle de la Trinité* (cathedral of Cantorbéry), is a masterpiece that could only have come from the brush of a man of talent and genius."^[46] Yet it was precisely Daguerre's role as an artist that led to critical debates over the primary goal of the Diorama to trick (*tromper*) viewers as to the nature of what was represented. The Diorama's illusion, figured as the result of Daguerre's painting skills and the carefully orchestrated play of light, was frequently praised in so far as it was seen as the result of art. The illusion was criticized almost as often, however, when reviewers felt that deception was the unique goal of the

spectacle, or when they felt that art was superseded or obfuscated in the service of pure illusion.

An 1826 article in *Le Globe* recapitulated these arguments, first by stating the view in defense of painting, the principal goal of which is not to render a complete illusion, but only a *conventional* illusion, to reproduce nature "in its own way":

The painter is careful to render an incomplete illusion, first by surrounding his painting with a painted or golden border, then by making no mystery of the processes that he employs: the eye can approach the canvas, see it from behind and from the proper vantage, perceiving the touch of the brush; what difference does it make to the artist? He does not attempt to trick his audience.[47]

The article goes on to justify the illusory nature of the Diorama, in which the painter's art is occluded from the viewer in the production of a "counter-proof [*contre-épreuve*] of reality,"[48] by aligning Daguerre's spectacle with industry and artifice:

But at the Diorama, everything is very different: art alone does not dominate, it is mixed with industry, or, if you will, artifice. There, the concern is not reaching the spectator's soul, of arousing in him admiration or any other artistic sentiment; it is about rendering him gullible, making him mistake a copy for the original.[49]

If the *Globe* article mounts the argument in defense of Daguerre, however, it was only because the Diorama was continually identified with popular, common, and vulgar taste, which cared nothing for the artist's expressive touch, or *faire*. This *faire*, according to the *Journal des artistes*, along with taste and spirit in composition, purity in drawing, and harmonious color, seduces people of an enlightened taste; whereas "illusion by itself seduces the crowd." [50] A later article in the same journal drives this point home by maintaining that all fine arts (drawing, painting, engraving, and sculpture) involve certain concessions in the very manner of their production that prevent the complete imitation of nature,[51] and good taste as well as academic doctrine demand that such limitations be respected.[52]

In his writings on the daguerreotype, Janin leaves this debate out of his allusions to the Diorama and instead concentrates on the rhetoric of accuracy used to describe the spectacle. Although light and Daguerre's command of it were seen as primary factors in both the Diorama and the daguerreotype, the latter process involved no human agent in the creation of the reproduced image.[53] Without an artist, there was no question of artistic deception, and thus the daguerreotype was not figured in terms of "illusion" per se but only with reference to the rhetoric of fidelity surrounding illusion. Daguerreotypes were characterized in terms of qualified ("accurate," "faithful") drawings or engravings. Daguerre's process, then, was seen as equal to art in terms of the representation of nature but more accurate in its depiction, because the daguerreotype was not dependent upon the artist's hand.[54]

The frequent references to the daguerreotype's superiority to conventional art, especially the graphic arts, were duly met by opposition.[55] Although the painter Paul Delaroche, who was a powerful member of the Academy of Fine Arts, issued his famous statement to Arago

in support of the process, the Academy itself turned down a meeting with Daguerre.[56] The Academy preferred the paper photographic process of Hippolyte Bayard, invented almost simultaneously, which it likened to more conventional forms of art.[57] The popular press also issued multiple barbs against Daguerre, Arago, and the French government. Théodore Maurisset, whose caricature ranks among the most memorable attacks, displayed a group of engravers hanging themselves in the wake of the encroaching wave of "Daguerréotypomanie." [58] An article in *Le charivari* even presented the government's support of the process as a political attack against art and French culture as a whole.[59] Such defensive polemics against the encroachment of photography upon the domain of art, however, were not formalized until 1841 by the Swiss artist and critic Rodolphe Töpffer.

Töpffer, in reaction to the publication of Noël Lerebours's *Excursions daguerriennes*, wrote a lengthy and complicated article in which he questions the artistic pretensions of photography.[60] In the process, Töpffer turns Janin's presentation of the daguerreotype on its head and makes the daguerreotype the property of the very *vulgaires* whom Janin claimed incapable of using the invention. Töpffer contrasts what he calls the simple "identity" of the photographic representation to art's more subtle "resemblance." According to Töpffer, the daguerreotype reduces representation to simple identity, or "accuracy itself, completely physical and material." [61] Although a painter may similarly aim at the imitation of objects, Töpffer insists that painting also includes expression through the artist's *faire*, or handling, and the painting's "mode," or style. The daguerreotype, on the other hand, can achieve imitation only. Such imitation, moreover, is not even perfect, because the daguerreotype lacks the ability to reproduce colors. Even if its imitation were perfect, Daguerre's invention would still be capable of reaching only the eyes of viewers, whereas true art touches the spirit. Töpffer defines this ability of art in terms of *resemblance*, which he likens to an abrogated sign or symbol. It is this symbol (more like the "idea" of an object than the object itself) that speaks to the spirit, whereas the daguerreotype, as pure sign, speaks only to the eyes.[62]

Certainly, it is tempting to read Töpffer's pure "sign" in terms of photography's uncoded message, as an early instance of semiotic theory,[63] but Töpffer was not really interested in distinguishing between modes of representation. In fact, he finds a similarity between all forms of representation, so that a mirror image, for example, is no more similar to an object than an artist's *croquis*. [64] The difference, for Töpffer, lay in a distinction that, as we have seen, already existed in an aesthetic discourse between imitation and expression, in which imitation, or identity, was equated with a low form of art:

Identity, the primary product of [the artistic] process, is thus the image of the object, without any expression beyond the image itself; resemblance is the freely expressive sign of something other than the image. Identity is only capable of reproducing a double of the object." [65]

For Töpffer, then, the daguerreotype functioned as a kind of substitution for the imitated object, a "double," reduced to physical sensation, whereas art was addressed to the human spirit. The daguerreotype was thus recast in terms of the degenerate, deceptive illusion of the Diorama (the "counter-proof of reality"), as opposed to the reproductive capacity of art, a distinction Janin avoided. Töpffer accomplishes this move, in part, by transferring the negative rhetoric of illusionist painting concerning the occlusion of *faire* to the lack of

artistic manipulation of the daguerreotype. Without such manipulation, Daguerre's invention is seen as a purely mechanical process (just as the Diorama was thought to mix industry with artifice).

Töpffer clarifies his prejudice against the mechanical nature of the daguerreotype the following year in a parodic article about the fantastic claims of a new apparatus that can reproduce paintings "by purely mechanical processes."^[66] The "machine" Töpffer describes, however, is merely a complicated process of reproduction, similar to monotype, in which the only mechanized step is the application of pigment. Beginning by carefully drawing upon a plate the painting to be copied, the user of the new process then placed "cylinders" of color—which Töpffer compares to vermicelli—in locations on the plate corresponding to the colors of the original painting. The operator then placed the plate in a press against a prepared canvas and repeated the process several times to produce "an abominable mosaic." Finally, the operator used a brush to complete the details and assure similarity to the original.

In the second part of the article, Töpffer relates the news of a Viennese scholar who has invented a process for using daguerreotypes as etching plates for typographic reproduction, a process already used in a book on anatomy.^[67] Töpffer seizes the opportunity to warn both anatomists and forgers, implying, along with the first half of his article, that the new processes of reproduction invented in the wake of Daguerre are comparable to artistic forgery. The "purely mechanical" processes actually involve forgery in a double sense because they require, according to Töpffer, the touch of an artist to complete. The new processes thus falsify their own claims as well as forge true works of art.

Here, I believe, Töpffer is also reacting to the rise of the *arts industriels* (such as Charles Gavard's *diagraphie* and Achille Collas's reproductions of bas-reliefs and sculpture) during the nineteenth century. As mentioned above, critics initially grouped the daguerreotype with such mechanical devices, and an article in *L'artiste*, "Revue des arts industriels," preceded the announcement of Daguerre's process in 1839. This article helped to set the stage for the debates I have been tracing, as the industrial arts are viewed as both popular, in the sense that they are available to "the multitude," and as a replacement for conventional handmade arts.^[68] *L'artiste* recommends the process of Collas, for example, because it fulfills the "double condition" of useful inventions: "It substitutes the even action of a machine for the arm of man; it renders identical reproductions of the most beautiful works of art, imitated in all their purity, accessible to everyone."^[69]

In his condemnation of the artistic pretensions of the daguerreotype, then, Töpffer employs concepts borrowed from both the industrial arts and the Diorama and pushes the envelope in terms of the lack of manual intervention that allows photography to be seen as a "popular" invention. For Töpffer, the claims of Janin and Lerebours are insufferable because they threaten the traditional, nonmachine, arts and, in so doing, trivialize and corrupt the realm of high art. Such defensive tactics were not new to Töpffer, either. Even before the invention of the daguerreotype, he was defaming the "trivial truth" of genre paintings that failed to carry on the "sublime" tradition of history painting begun by David.^[70] According to Töpffer, history painting should be more like literature in the sense that painters should compose and not simply *raconte*, or relate.^[71] In a separate article, Töpffer even adopts the

voice of the public in order to reveal the bad taste of popular art: "The importance of a painting? It is the size. Truth? It is the trivial or a trompe l'oeil."^[72] Töpffer, then, employed the critical language of trompe l'oeil many years before the invention of photography. He was, in fact, personally associated with the negative rhetoric of trompe l'oeil that developed in France around the beginning of the nineteenth century.^[73] A brief look at this history reveals even more information about the "popular" roots of the daguerreotype.^[74]

In French, the word *tromper* first was associated with illusion, in the sense of a false appearance or perceptual error, in the 1760s.^[75] The specific term *trompe l'oeil*, as applied to painting, however, did not appear until the turn of the century.^[76] The expression initially may have been printed in reference to the work of Louis-Léopold Boilly's entry to the Salon of 1800, *A Collection of Drawings*, which was described in reference to both illusion and trompe l'oeil. *Le citoyen français* merely commented on the crowds attracted to the painting; "The cit.[oyen] Boily [sic], painter, has just exhibited a new trompe l'oeil, around which the crowds gather."^[77] In a letter dated 24 September 1800 detailing his visit to the Salon, M. Magnès, in fully describes the painting and employs the term *illusion* both in the sense of a perceptual error (the painting has the appearance of the actual objects depicted) and in the older meaning of "mockery":

This painting . . . represents a pot-pourri or an assemblage of drawings placed one over the other, and imitated, which produces an illusion. Over these drawings he has painted a broken glass, and the pieces of glass placed one on top of another produce the most perfect illusion. One of the drawings represents the portrait of the author who seems to laugh and mock all the ninnys [sic] who come to admire this joke of art.
^[78]

This combination of popular appeal and mockery was bound to offend critics who viewed the Salon as an arena of public enlightenment and the bastion of academic tradition. One such critic was Philippe Chéry, who vented his spleen in a letter to the *Journal des batimens, des monumens et des arts* about the subsequent "degeneration of the arts."^[79] Chéry lambasted "the crass ignorance of people with money, who, far from encouraging true talent, to the contrary grow ecstatic, like lackeys, before this kind of painting that one calls trompe l'oeil, which is [only] suitable to decorate the Pont-Neuf."^[80] Chéry makes it clear that it is not simply the identification of trompe l'oeil as popular that is disdainful but the fact that even the seemingly cultured and moneyed visitors to the Salon are attracted to Boilly's painting. In other words, the same mixture of classes attracted to the paintings displayed along the Pont-Neuf and to the theatrical spectacles (predating the Diorama) in areas like the boulevard du Temple, could now be witnessed in the Salon.^[81] And the blame lies with artists like Boilly, following in the footsteps of Oudry and Chardin, who pandered to public taste.^[82]

Long before the daguerreotype, and even the Diorama, paintings and popular spectacles existed that were characterized variously in terms of their magical use of illumination, veristic reproduction of nature, and optical illusion. In London in the 1780s, Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg advertised his *Eidophusikon* (a miniature theater employing stained glass, painted models, and lighted lamps) as an "imitation of Natural Phenomena."^[83] Gainsborough was so impressed with these productions that he created his own versions, using mobile glass plates painted with landscape scenes, illuminated from behind with

candles, and viewed through a magnifying glass.[84] His biographer Fulcher referred to this invention in 1856 as "a perfect image of nature." [85] Smaller, more portable optical amusements were also popular at the beginning of the nineteenth century, including the *vue d'optique*, a device in which reversed prints appeared in proper perspective when viewed in a mirror through a lens; and the *boîte d'optique*, or *Guckkasten*, in which prints were illuminated by both reflection and transparency.[86] The latter device prefigured the sale of "dioramic" or "protean" views—painted prints viewed by transparency—which were popularized in the wake of the Diorama.[87] Such small illusionist works not only helped to determine the "spectacular" and veristic language of the daguerreotype but also, in their eventual association with the "popular" trompe l'oeil painting of more serious artists like Chardin and Boilly, paved the way for Töpffer's negative criticism of the daguerreotype.

Daguerre, who moved between popular theatrical painting and the official Salon, troubled the waters of this critical discourse. By the time he first exhibited, in the Salon of 1814, criticism was often leveled against forms of painting associated with all types of optical instruments. Delpech, for example, appreciates the general "illusion" of Boilly's painting but finds that the overall effect lacks substance and that his backgrounds are too gray and somber, a defect that he qualifies through the artist's use of the camera obscura.[88] During the Salon of 1822, Mély-Janin complains of what he calls the "descriptive genre" in painting, which leads artists to "reproduce all the illusions of the *optique*" and to paint "with a microscope." [89] Armand-Denis Vergnaud goes so far as to proclaim that the preoccupation with optical effects—what he calls the genre of the camera obscura—has led to the death of history painting.[90] In the wake of troubadour painting and the genre of interiors, critics found it increasingly difficult to distinguish imitation that approached illusion from outright trompe l'oeil. One of the most eloquent witnesses to this problem is Adolphe Thiers. In his review of the interior views of the Salon of 1824, Thiers is at great pains to describe the difference between truth in imitation and the illusion of trompe l'oeil, which he admits is almost impossible to explain. His point of departure is Daguerre's *Chapel of Holyrood*, with which the public was already familiar through the much larger version exhibited in the Diorama.

Everyone experienced a kind of illusion at the aspect of the Chapel of Holyrood; but at the Salon, where all optical artifice was suppressed, the illusion was no less great, and connoisseurs of beautiful technique, after approaching the painting of M. Daguerre, had the additional advantage of rejoicing in his execution, so firm, so broad, and so deft in the details. Apart from the merit of superb execution, it is certainly impossible to display on a canvas a more magical effect, a more powerful illusion. But many people have wondered if this is the kind of merit to which a painting should aspire and if it is not a question of *trompe l'oeil*, rather than great painting: there is a singular effect in the arts that, thus far, has always seemed inexplicable to me but that exists nonetheless.[91]

Thiers goes on to invoke the academic doctrine of imitation, which was later seized upon by Töpffer to criticize the "identity" of the daguerreotype, in order to explain the problematic nature of trompe l'oeil.

The goal of art being truth, the greater this truth is, the eyes should be all the more satisfied. However, as soon as truth achieves illusion, the imagination is repelled. It

appears annoyed with that by which it is meant to be fooled. It seems to find this pretension puerile, and it lowers the picture produced with this intention to the rank of *trompe l'oeil*, a kind of work that is always relegated to the lowest class of art. Rather than seeking to replace the presence of objects themselves, the imagination prefers that objects be imitated, with truth no doubt but without the pretense of trickery; and that instead of this vulgar pleasure of illusion, that of the ideal be provided, which is to say a pleasure obtained through a selection of objects, picturesquely arranged. The imagination desires to be given not nature itself, the presence of which can never be entirely simulated, but a chosen nature that reality does not always offer.[92]

By the time Daguerre announced the daguerreotype, as we have seen, the rhetoric of verism and fidelity, figured in terms of illusion, had come to pose a double threat: not only the popularization but also the mechanization of the arts.[93] An astonishing letter from Eugène Viollet-le-Duc bears witness to this opinion. He writes the letter in October 1836 in response to his father's account, the previous month, of Daguerre's ability to chemically fix the reflection of a camera obscura. Even if it were possible to thus fix the image of the camera obscura by a "chemical, alchemical, or even magical process," Viollet-le-Duc insists that such a process would remain inferior to art because it lacks an artist's touch.

Happily Providence has placed in all mechanical means an imperfection, or rather a regularity, that has and will always render preferable to them this most delicate, most poetic instrument, the obedient slave of thought, the capricious minister of our soul that serves us constantly and which we still refer to today as a hand.[94]

To seal his argument, Viollet-le-Duc goes on to renounce any artistic pretensions of the Diorama, as well as Daguerre's manifestations in the Salon.

M. Daguerre's dioramas, made to produce an illusion, a successful machine bringing the spectator as close as possible to nature, the dioramas, I ask, have they ever had a fourth of the vogue of a good painting at the exhibition? Because the diorama stinks of the machine, and man, fortunately, is horrified by the machine. . . . No, no we do not like mechanisms enough yet for M. Daguerre to be able to penetrate our beautiful France, which is still too full of dreams and poetry to listen to the musings of a chaser of the philosopher's stone who has long become a bore.[95]

This characterization of photography, however, initially had little to do with the perception of an inherent tie to reality. Rather, the daguerreotype provoked the extension, in often contested terms, of preexisting aesthetic discourses used in the service of history painting, industrial arts, and popular entertainment. Claims made in 1839 about the spontaneous, mechanical, or nonmanual production of the daguerreotype image opened up a hole in the already strained debates of deception, imitation, and expression. Without an artistic agent, the daguerreotype fit imperfectly into the rhetoric of *trompe l'oeil* and illusion, and its defenders and critics wielded parts of the existing discourse to their proper goals.[96]

Beginning with the debates over the Realist movement in 1850-51, however, the figuring of photography in terms of the "real" became an increasingly common means by which to fill the rhetorical gap of photography's "illusion." Artist-photographers who desired to distance themselves from the equation of photography with pure imitation recast their work in

terms of expression, or even Töpffer's *ressemblance*, in opposition to *réalité*.^[97] These debates were soon followed by a backlash, though, in which photographers such as Eugène Durieu and A. A. E. Disdéri attempted to define photography's own proper domain and so reclaimed the language of imitation. Durieu wrote about photography's "special conditions" and took a position against retouching photographic prints, thus revising the nonmanual nature of photography in a positive light.^[98] In 1862 Disdéri rehearses the comparison of the reproduction of photography and art as the imitation of nature. In his wish to define a quality specific to photography, however, he differentiates it from painting through the lack of an intervening agent in photographic reproduction. According to Disdéri, a photographer, unlike a painter, "is tied to reality, cannot rid himself of it, and is condemned to exact imitation in execution [of a photograph]."^[99] Here, then, photography is ultimately defined in terms of an inherent link to reality but only in opposition to painting and only after a decades-long rhetorical struggle that predated the invention of the daguerreotype.

Looking back on these developments, we might be tempted to say that photography has always been considered an automatic process and thought of in terms of popular illusion and the imitation of reality. Yet, the uncritical application of any of these terms leads to the suppression of the complicated history that I have only partially revealed here. Faced with the scope of this history, critics often have acted like the original befuddled operators of the daguerreotype, who were interested solely in the end result and were highly impatient to achieve it. As the writers of *L'artiste* remind us in yet another rich photographic metaphor, however, the process is similar to the recipe for chicken fricassee—it looks complicated on the surface, but the directions are fairly simple and the results are good: "Indeed, to borrow a comparison which is just, if trivial, open *The Bourgeois Cook* and read the recipe for chicken fricassee. It is hardly difficult to make, and yet in reading only the details of the preparation, there is enough to stop all novice cooks in their tracks."^[100] The original point, like mine, was made tongue-in-cheek. Such parody, as we have seen, was often the result of a perceived lack of artistic taste among adherents to the rising field of what we now consider "popular culture." We must keep in mind, however, that such perceptions sometimes comprise important points of criticism in the aesthetic debates over illusion. If current criticism equally seeks to ply "illusion" as an aesthetic category, which my discussion at the beginning of this paper suggests, then we should not continue to define it merely through recourse to a preconceived "reality." To effect a more complete understanding—as in properly following a recipe—we must get beyond superficial detail. Otherwise we remain "novice cooks," servants to illusion and susceptible to its lies.

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Notes

- [1] For a discussion of the transparent and opaque modes of pictorial representation, see Shiff 1991, pp. 131-32.
- [2] Greenberg 1986.
- [3] See, for example, many of the essays in Charney and Schwartz 1995, for the equation between nineteenth-century popular "realism" and the "illusion" of cinema.
- [4] Fried 1990, esp. pp. 278-83.
- [5] Fried (ibid.) borrows the notion of photography's mechanical origin and lack of human agency, its "automatism," from Cavell 1977. Snyder (1993) addresses the issue of automatism in terms of the nonmanual aspect of photographic production. For a useful analysis based on the problematic nature of the "machine" in the production of the photographic image, see Frizot 1983.
- [6] Fried 1990, p. 280.
- [7] Ibid., pp. 280-82.
- [8] Rosalind Krauss, for example, has employed photography's ontological tie to reality as the basis for her theory of the "index" (borrowed from the semiotic category of Charles Peirce) that functions both as a motivating force for postmodern art and as the characteristic that prevents photography from being considered as a conventional art form (art and photography have their own separate "discursive spaces"). See her seminal essays, "Photography's Discursive Spaces" and "Notes on the Index, Parts 1 and 2," in Krauss 1986, pp. 131-50, 196-219. She also develops the notion of photographic "automatism" in terms of surrealism; ibid., pp. 86-118. Jonathan Crary (1990), while not buying into the position of photography's inherent relation to the "real," does see the "referential illusion" of photography as a holdover from older perceptual codes, a fact that allows modern observers to maintain a false belief in free subjectivity. Crary is more concerned with "illusion" in terms of theories of vision and optical illusions. Both Krauss (1986, pp. 136-39) and Crary (1990, pp. 97-136) incorporate optical "antecedents," like the stereoscope and popular spectacle of the Diorama, as precursors to the foundation of modern perception as heralded by photography.
- [9] I addressed the issue of photography's "realism" vis-à-vis graphic processes in my M.A. thesis (Pinson 1995). I would like to thank Joel Snyder for his careful reading of that paper and the subsequent conversations that led to this line of inquiry. For a provocative reading of the "pictorial culture" that influenced the images by Talbot and other early photographers, see Snyder 2001.
- [10] Smith 1989, p. 85. More recently, Geoffrey Batchen (1997) has questioned the supposedly "natural" character and inherent realism of photography.
- [11] Smith 1989, p. 85.
- [12] *L'artiste*, ser. 2, 2 (1839), p. 116.
- [13] "Les dessins les plus fermes, les effets de lumière les plus accidentés et les plus vigoureux"; ibid. All translations are my own unless otherwise specified.
- [14] The word *daguerreotype* went through several changes in spelling in the first couple of years after its invention.
- [15] "Révue des éditions illustrées" 1839.
- [16] "L'aride métier de graveur au burin est supprimé"; ibid., p. 142.
- [17] The writer makes his point by alluding to the philosophy professor from Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*: "On peut dessiner très-correctement sans être un savant morphographe, de même que M. Jourdain faisait de la prose depuis vingt ans sans le savoir, de même qu'il prononçait U fort distinctement, avant de savoir qu'il faut pour cela avancer les deux lèvres et faire la moue." Ibid., p. 142.
- [18] Janin 1839a.
- [19] "quelque chose un peu au-delà de la peinture"; ibid., p. 145. The Diorama, opened by Daguerre in Paris in 1822, was a theatrical spectacle in which an audience in a darkened theater faced a large canvas. The painted scene was lit by natural light from the front and from behind by transparency and reflection.
- [20] "[T]outes ces choses, grandes ou petites, qui sont égales devant le soleil, se gravent à l'instant même dans cette espèce de chambre obscure qui conserve toutes les empreintes.

Jamais le dessin des plus grands maîtres n'a produit de dessin pareil. Si la masse est admirable, les détails sont infinis. Songez donc que c'est le soleil lui-même, introduit cette fois comme l'agent tout-puissant d'un art tout nouveau, qui produit ces travaux incroyables. Cette fois, ce n'est plus le regard incertain de l'homme qui découvre au loin l'ombre ou la lumière, ce n'est plus sa main tremblante qui reproduit sur un papier mobile la scène changeable de ce monde, que le vide emporte." Ibid., p. 146.

[21] "C'est [le daguerotype] une gravure à la portée de tous et de chacun; c'est un crayon obéissant comme la pensée; c'est un miroir qui garde toutes les empreintes; c'est la mémoire fidèle de tous les monuments, de tous les paysages de l'univers; c'est la reproduction incessante, spontanée, infatigable." Ibid., p. 147. The mirror was closely connected to the science of catoptrics, or the study of the reflection of light, and was frequently related to the camera obscura in the nineteenth century. I discuss the use of mirrors, cameras, and other optical instruments in the representation of nineteenth-century landscape in my paper; see Pinson 2000.

[22] Janin 1839a, p. 148.

[23] "Fait divers" 1839.

[24] "M. Daguerre" 1839. The bill to accord Daguerre's pension was passed by the Chamber of Deputies on 9 July 1839; Archives nationales 1839, C800, no. 30.

[25] "Les plus étrangers aux beaux-arts"; "ces fines gravures, précieux produits de la lumière"; *ibid.*, p. 181.

[26] "Ce n'est pas une gravure, c'est un miroir. Dans ce miroir magique, la nature se reflète dans toute sa vérité naïve et un peu triste; tous les grands monuments, tous les grands aspects, tous les beaux sites, tous les heureux paysages seront donc reproduits désormais avec une vérité sans égale." Ibid.

[27] This second article (Janin 1839b) has not been discussed along with Janin's first article in most of the historical literature.

[28] "Belles planches du daguérotype, d'un fini sans égal, d'une exactitude parfaite . . ."; *ibid.*, p. 279.

[29] "[M]ais quel est le graveur de ce monde, s'appelât-il Raphaël Morghen, qui puisse jamais reproduire, même de loin, cette perfection idéale, ce ciel, ces eaux, toute cette nature vivante et sereine, doucement éclairée par cette lumière élyséenne?" Janin (*ibid.*) again lapses into overstatement, as water and especially the sky were almost impossible to photograph in 1839. Raphaël Morghen was particularly known for his engravings after Raphael, whose drawings were also compared to daguerreotypes. Interestingly, twentieth-century print connoisseurs criticized Morghen's engravings for lacking the "poetic essence" of Raphael's facture; see Mayor 1971, p. 580.

[30] Janin 1839b, p. 279.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 280. Daguerre's ability to obtain the image of the camera obscura first was announced publicly in 1835 and was directly related to his chemical knowledge of the reactions of paint and light; see *Journal des artistes* 2, no. 13 (27 September 1835), pp. 202-4.

[32] This required some equivocation on Janin's (1839b) part, as the very process of universalizing art, or *vulgarisation*, was itself often considered *vulgaire*. It is this slippage that led to the diverse aesthetic discourses about photography.

[33] "La planche s'illumine d'une douce clarté; les jours se détachent de l'ombre; la vie se montre dans ces lignes encore incertaines; toutes les profondeurs de la lumière se révèlent une à une. Vous assistez, à proprement dire, à une création véritable, c'est une monde qui sort du chaos, monde charmant, accompli, cultivé, construit, chargé d'habitations autant que de fleurs. Oui, c'est là un solennel instant de poésie et de magie, auquel on ne peut rien comparer dans les arts." Ibid., p. 282.

[34] "Le daguérotype: Nouvelle expérience" 1839.

[35] "Un beau dessin si exact, si vrai, si limpide, que jamais Raphaël en personne n'en a fait un si beau." Ibid., pp. 1-2.

[36] These are recurrent motifs, found outside *L'artiste*, and France, and from very early on. See, for example, "Self-Operating Processes" 1839, pp. 341-43.

[37] A remarkable example of the allusion of the daguerreotype to memory and the artistic imagination comes from Goupil-Fesquet, who borrowed the example of the daguerreotype as "un modèle théorique et un schéma mental" to explain the creative process of Horace Vernet, who "fait naître sous son pinceau un épisode, . . . il voit son sujet comme un rêve qu'il fait durer à volonté." Quoted in Rouillé 1989, pp. 56-57.

- [38] For the nineteenth-century definition of trompe l'oeil, see, for example, Larousse 1866-90, vol. 15 (1876), p. 536: "Trompe-l'oeil. Peinture exécutée de façon à faire illusion sur la réalité matérielle des objets qu'elle représente."
- [39] My reading contrasts sharply with that of Buerger (1989), who rightly asserts the importance of the Diorama to our understanding of photography but maintains an equivalence between the "illusion of nature" in the Diorama, the "realism" of photography, and the "Realism" of Courbet.
- [40] "Jamais aucune représentation de la nature ne nous avait frappé si vivement"; "Diorama-Ouverture" 1822.
- [41] "L'on n'était pas arrivé, selon nous, à ce point de réalité qui peut faire croire, non pas à une première inspection des ouvrages, mais après un mur examen de leurs différentes parties, que la vue n'est pas reposée sur des imitations, mais sur les objets imités eux-mêmes." *Ibid.*, p. 179.
- [42] The quotes "fidelity of representation" and "the most natural truth" are from "The Diorama" 1823. "Chefs-d'oeuvre de détail" is from "Vue du Village d'Unterseen" 1826-27. "La presque parfaite imitation de la nature" is from "Vue prise à Thiers" 1827.
- [43] "Illusion," borrowed from classical Latin rhetoric *illusio*, or "irony," took on the sense of "mockery" in Christian Latin as well as *erreur des sens*, or *tromperie*. "Illusion" in French was first used with the intention of "mockery" but then as false appearance, or perceptual error, as in *illusion d'optique* (1756) or *illusion optique* (1761), and then in the sense of "tromper" (1767); see Rey 1993, p. 996. Trompe l'oeil and illusion were thus closely related in French usage, especially regarding the fine arts. Note, for instance, the similarity in the artistic definition of "illusion" to "trompe l'oeil": "Illusion. Se dit particulièrement d'un effet artistique combiné de façon à donner le sentiment d'une réalité saisissante." Larousse 1866-90, vol. 15 (1876), p. 569.
- [44] "The Diorama" 1823.
- [45] "La différence qu'éprouvent les couleurs, lorsque la lumière qui les éclaire est transmise par réflexion ou réfraction, et que cette lumière elle-même est diversement colorée." "Diorama: Une messe de minuit" 1834.
- [46] "Le tableau représentant la *Chapelle de la Trinité* (cathédrale de Cantorbéry), est un chef-d'oeuvre qui ne peut être sorti que du pinceau d'un homme de talent et de génie." "Diorama--Ouverture" 1822.
- [47] "Le peintre prend soin de rendre l'illusion incomplète, d'abord en entourant son tableau d'une bordure peinte ou dorée, puis en ne faisant aucun mystère des procédés qu'il emploie: l'oeil peut approcher de la toile, la voir à l'envers et à l'endroit, apercevoir la touche du pinceau; qu'importe à l'artiste? il ne cherche pas à tromper son monde . . ." "Vue du Village d'Unterseen" 1826-27.
- [48] Tellingly, Nièpce also referred to photographic negatives as *contre-épreuves*.
- [49] "Mais au Diorama, tout est bien différent: l'art n'y domine pas seul, il y est mêlé d'industrie, ou, si l'on veut, d'artifice. Là, il ne s'agit pas de toucher l'âme du spectateur, d'exciter en lui l'admiration ou tel autre sentiment qui appartient au domaine de l'art; il s'agit de le rendre dupe, de lui faire prendre une copie pour un original." "Vue du Village d'Unterseen" 1826-27, pp. 181-82.
- [50] "Vue prise à Thiers" 1827.
- [51] "Des concessions" 1830.
- [52] The debates over the representation of the Diorama are certainly related to the maintenance of what Lebensztein has called "neo-classical" theories of imitation. According to French academic theory in the early part of the nineteenth century, as espoused by Quatremère de Quincy, art aimed not at the pure imitation, or copy, of nature, but at an ideal representation of nature based upon an internal model derived from extensive study. See Lebensztein 1990, especially pp. 101-32. Whereas the Romantic notion of imitation as symbol (the unmediated representation of nature) provoked a rupture in this long-standing aesthetic theory, photography's nonmanual imitation (magically both a pure and ideal copy) provoked and attracted both schools of thought. The Diorama is a signal figure in this "crisis" of imitation.
- [53] The daguerreotype's reliance on and reproduction of light was often enumerated along with references to its accuracy. So, although described by *The Spectator* as "lifeless" and "monochrome," the daguerreotype also achieves an "accuracy of form and perspective, minuteness of detail, and a force and breadth of light and shade, that artists may imitate but cannot equal"; "Self-Operating Processes" 1839.

- [54] At this point, references to "reality" in relation to photography should be read in opposition to "convention," as when Arago speaks of the "real" hieroglyphs that will be possible due to photography (as opposed to those artistically rendered); Arago 1839.
- [55] For the rhetorical debates between photography and lithography, see Pinson 1998.
- [56] For Delaroche's letter, see Cromer 1930. In October, Daguerre made an overture to the Academy of Fine Arts, offering to demonstrate his process, but the Academy had already determined, after Arago's speech, that the daguerreotype did not warrant their official consideration "in relation to art"; see Archives de l'Institut, "Procès-verbaux de l'Académie des Beaux Arts, Séance du samedi 24 août 1839," p. 172, "Séance du samedi 19 octobre 1839," p. 193.
- [57] The Academy also studied the photographic processes and proofs of Talbot and Alfred Donné. On Bayard, see Keeler 1991.
- [58] Maurisset 1839.
- [59] "De deux nouveaux partis politiques" 1839.
- [60] Ibid. The prints of *Excursions daguerriennes*, which included etchings with aquatint, lithographs, and two prints made directly from the daguerreotype plate by "Fizeau's method," were first issued in sets, or *livraisons*, beginning in 1840 and later collected into two bound volumes containing a total of 111 prints (published 1841-42). Like Janin, Lerebours saw the daguerreotype and his books as an extension of artistic printmaking.
- [61] "La fidélité même, toute physique et matérielle"; Töpffer 1841, p. 237.
- [62] Ibid., p. 239.
- [63] For the photograph as the message without a code, see Barthes 1977.
- [64] Töpffer 1841, p. 243.
- [65] "L'identité, produit brut du procédé, sera donc l'image de l'objet, sans autre expression qu'elle même; la ressemblance sera le signe librement expressif d'autre chose encore que de l'image. L'identité ne pourra reproduire qu'un double de l'objet." Ibid., p. 248.
- [66] Töpffer 1842.
- [67] The nameless "savant" Töpffer refers to here is Josef Berres, who first published his results in the booklet *Phototyp*, 31 August 1840.
- [68] The article, however, is careful to distinguish this multitude from "la classe encore grossière et malheureusement trop nombreuse qui végète au bas de l'humanité"; "Revue des arts industriels" 1839, p. 83.
- [69] "Il substitue l'action régulière d'une machine au bras de l'homme; il met à la portée de tous des reproductions identiques des plus belles oeuvres d'art, imitées dans toute leur pureté." Ibid., p. 83.
- [70] Töpffer 1829, p. 34.
- [71] This distinction is similar to that made by Töpffer in his 1841 article on the daguerreotype, where he compares an artist's *faire* to a poet's style.
- [72] "L'importance d'un tableau? C'est sa taille. Le vrai? C'est le trivial ou un trompe l'oeil." Töpffer 1832, p. 61.
- [73] Larousse (1866-90, vol. 15 [1876], p. 536) quotes Töpffer on the low artistic value of trompe l'oeil: "Le trompe l'oeil est un des plus bas échelons de l'art."
- [74] Here, the scare quotes around *popular* signify its evasive meaning during this period. For example, Töpffer himself has been identified with the "popular" art of Courbet, due to his defense of the naivete of children's art. See Schapiro 1994, pp. 61-62. In this instance, Schapiro's "popular" is tied to peasants and laborers in the French countryside, and is related to imagery such as Epinal prints. Töpffer's defense of naivete, though, could also be seen as a defense of spontaneity, and thus originality, in art, which has little to do with the "popular" as it was conceived in France during the first part of the century, when the term was meant to designate the rising class of the bourgeoisie, who were blamed, even in their own day, for the denigration of art, through popularization and industrialization. For the mutability of the "popular" during the Second Empire, see Clark 1984, especially pp. 205-58.
- [75] Rey 1993, p. 996.
- [76] According to *ibid.*, p. 2175, *trompe l'oeil* was used as a painting term in 1803. In *Trésor de la langue française* 1994, however, a citation is given from 1800 in *Le citoyen français*.
- [77] "Le cit.[oyen] Boily [sic], peintre, vient d'exposer un nouveau trompe l'oeil, autour duquel la foule se presse." *Le citoyen français*, no. 329, 18 vendémiaire an ix, 3b, reprinted in Quemada 1971-, p. 248.

- [78] Magnès' letter is reproduced in de Montaignon 1888 and quoted in Siegfried 1995, p. 191.
- [79] *Journal des batimens civils, des monumens et des arts* 1800, p. 2.
- [80] Quoted in Siegfried 1995, p. 192.
- [81] For more on street spectacles in nineteenth-century France, see Gasca 1980.
- [82] Changes in eighteenth-century artistic styles in relation to the development of a Salon public is the subject of Crow 1985; see especially pp. 86-88 (on Oudry and Chardin).
- [83] See the introductory essay in Joppien 1973.
- [84] Dimier 1925, pp. 19-20.
- [85] "Une parfaite image de la nature"; *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
- [86] *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
- [87] *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
- [88] "Onzième revue," in Delpech 1814, p. 149.
- [89] "Nous en sommes maintenant, en peinture, au genre descriptif. On ne s'attache plus à peindre les passions, à faire passer sur la figure de l'homme l'expression des sentimens de son âme; on s'étudie à rendre avec une fidélité scrupuleuse de petits détails, à faire glisser la lumière sur un parquet, à reproduire toutes les illusions de l'optique, à représenter avec exactitude la poussière d'un atelier; c'est de cette manière que l'on obtient le succès. Il est malheureusement vrai que c'est aussi de cette manière que l'on perd le goût des grandes choses et que l'on tombe dans les infiniment petits. S'il ne nous est pas permis de nous élever à ces vastes compositions qui fatigueraient notre patience, nous nous faisons admirer par la ténuité des lignes et le maniement du pinceau; nous peignons au microscope." Mély-Janin 1822, p. 222.
- [90] Vergnaud 1827.
- [91] "Tout le monde a éprouvé une espèce d'illusion à l'aspect de la chapelle de Holyrood; mais au salon, où tous les artifices d'optique étaient supprimés, l'illusion n'a pas été moins grande, et les appréciateurs du beau-faire, en s'approchant du tableau de M. Daguerre, ont eu de plus l'avantage de jouir de son exécution, si ferme, si large et si adroite dans les détails. Il est certainement impossible de déployer sur une toile, outre le mérite d'une superbe exécution, une magie d'effet, une puissance d'illusion plus grande. Mais beaucoup de personnes se sont demandé si c'était là le genre de mérite auquel devait prétendre un tableau, et si ce n'était pas ici du *trompe l'oeil*, plutôt de la grande peinture: il y a dans les arts un effet singulier qui, jusqu'ici, m'a toujours paru inexplicable, mais qui n'en est pas moins réel." Thiers 1824, p. 4.
- [92] "Le but de l'imitation étant la vérité, plus cette vérité est grande, plus les yeux devraient être satisfaits. Cependant dès que la vérité va jusqu'à l'illusion, l'imagination est repoussée; elle semble s'irriter de ce qu'on veuille la tromper; elle semble trouver cette prétention puérile, et elle rabaisse le tableau produit avec cette intention au rang des *trompe-l'oeil*, espèce d'ouvrages toujours relégués dans les dernières classes de l'art. Au lieu de chercher à remplacer la présence des objets eux-mêmes, elle veut qu'on les imite, avec vérité sans doute, mais sans prétention de la tromper; et qu'à la place de ce vulgaire plaisir de l'illusion, on lui procure celui de l'idéal, c'est-à-dire du choix des objets, de leur disposition pittoresque; elle veut que, sans prétendre lui donner la nature elle-même, dont on ne peut jamais simuler entièrement la présence, on lui donne une nature de choix que la réalité ne lui offre pas toujours." *Ibid.*
- [93] That is, it posed such a threat to those looking for it. Different people reacted to the new invention in different ways, and even within aesthetic discourse, as we have seen, there was a range of characterizations. The publisher Charles Philipon, for example, reacted somewhat ambivalently to the "threat" of the daguerreotype; see Pinson 1998, pp. 4, 10.
- [94] "Heureusement la Providence a mis dans tous les moyens mécaniques une imperfection, ou plutôt une uniformité, qui leur aura fait et leur fera toujours préférer cet instrument si délicat, si poétique, de l'esclave soumis à la pensée, ce capricieux ministre de notre âme toujours à notre service qu'on appelle encore aujourd'hui une main." Viollet-le-Duc 1971, letter of 14 October 1836, pp. 166-67. I thank Laure Boyer for providing me with a photocopy of this letter.
- [95] "Les dioramas de M. Daguerre faits pour produire l'illusion, heureuse machine pour faire arriver le spectateur le plus près possible de la nature, les dioramas dis-je, ont-ils eu jamais le quart de la vogue d'un bon tableau à l'exposition, pourquoi? Parce que le diorama sent la machine, et que l'homme, heureusement, a horreur de la machine. . . . Non, non nous n'aimons pas encore assez la mécanique pour que M. Daguerre puisse percer dans notre belle

France, encore trop pleine de rêve et de poésie pour qu'elle veuille bien écouter les rêveries d'un chercheur de pierre philosophale qui l'ennuie déjà depuis longtemps." Ibid.

[96] By 1876 this debate had become so ingrained that in Larousse's definition of trompe l'oeil, the artist and the camera are set in opposition around the issues of taste and imitation. Note again, however, the indirect association of photography and trompe l'oeil: "Imiter la réalité de manière à faire illusion, à tromper l'oeil du spectateur, tel est, pour le vulgaire, le but suprême de l'art. Les gens de goût exigent autre chose: ils veulent que l'artiste frappe l'esprit autant que le regard, qu'il exprime et évoque des idées, qu'il fasse sentir son âme, sa personnalité, dans toutes ses oeuvres. . . . Si le but suprême de l'art était l'imitation purement matérielle des objets, le photographe serait le premier des artistes. . . . L'artiste est donc autre chose qu'un instrument passif; il a donc une faculté active, antérieure à la sensation des objets." Larousse 1866-90, vol. 15 [1876], p. 536.

[97] Most of these arguments were formalized by Francis Wey in the pages of *La lumière*, in which he tried to promote the more artistic qualities of paper photography, as opposed to the overly detailed daguerreotype; see "La ressemblance n'est pas le reel" (1851), in Rouillé 1989, pp. 117-21.

[98] Rouillé 1989, p. 15.

[99] "Est lié à la réalité, ne peut s'en débarrasser, et, dans l'exécution est condamné à l'exacte imitation." Ibid., p. 17.

[100] "En effet, pour nous servir d'une comparaison qui est juste, mais triviale, ouvrez *La Cuisinière bourgeoise*, et lisez l'article Fricassée de poulet. Ceci n'est guère difficile à faire, et pourtant à lire seulement les détails de cette préparation, il y a de quoi arrêter l'essor de tous les cuisiniers novices." "Le daguérotype: Nouvelle expérience," p. 2.

Illustrations



Fig. 1, L.J.M. Daguerre, diorama painting behind the altar of the church St. Gervais-St. Protais, Bry-sur-Marne (1842) [\[return to text\]](#)