

The Imagination of Resemblance. Landscape and Mimesis in Contemporary Painting

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ABSTRACT

The representation of the landscape in contemporary painting calls into question a renewed figurative image. Bound to an imagery largely belonging to a reality different than the natural one, the mimetic rendering is nevertheless predominant. The landscape is characterised by the restriction of space in the framework and the relationship with the human figure inside, hiding the dissolution of the subject. Both, the natural restriction of the space and the flatness of the image as well as the *mimetic* elision of the subject are elements already identified by Michel Foucault in Manet's paintings and in the post-Renaissance *episteme* exemplified in a representation by the concept of *imagination of resemblance*. Manet's spatial conception traces a common thread all the way to the greatest landscape painter of the contemporary age, David Hockney.

KEYWORDS

Painting, Contemporary arts, Mimesis, Imagination, Resemblance

1. Introduction

In 1867, Émile Zola wrote about Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*:

Ce qu'il faut voir dans le tableau, ce n'est pas un déjeuner sur l'herbe, c'est le paysage entier, avec ses vigueurs et ses finesses, ses premiers plans si larges et si solides et ses fonds d'une délicatesse si légère; c'est cette chair ferme, modelée à grands pans de lumière [...], ce coin de la nature rendue avec une simplicité si juste. (Cachin 1994, p. 53)

With this work Manet completely disrupted the relationship between the human figure and the landscape within the painting. Great rejected at the *Salon des Refusés* in 1863, the scandal was not so much the nudity of the woman in the foreground among the bourgeois well-minded of the time, as has often been believed, quite the opposite: Manet represented a scene outside of history and inside of nature, in a more complex meaning than the mere in-

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clusion of the characters into a forest landscape. The figures are deprived of all academic, historical and mythological references. They do not evoke any allegories; they do not convey any messages. They are themselves, transparent to the gaze of the observer, rendered in strong shades that “penetrate the eyes like a steel saw” Eugène Delacroix would say (Cricco Di Teodoro 2012, p. 1581), silhouetted against the background with “a rawness that no compromise softens” (*Ibid*). The scandal arrives of course at the stylistic level too. No perspective, just a flat integration of landscape, human figures and objects. In the background, in the middle of the trees, one even can see a boat. In Fried’s brilliant interpretation of Manet we read that in the *Déjeuner sur l’herbe* “he brought together a wide range of genres, including landscape, in a single composition that may be thought of as either transcending [...] individual genres as such” (*Id* 1996, p. 403). Not surprisingly Manet represents a sort of pictorial *universality* for Fried.

What is the connection between the landscape inaugurated by Manet with *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* and the contemporary one? Closer than expected. The relation is useful for understanding its characteristics. In the contemporary pictorial representation of landscape, the human figure is incorporated into it, often without any perspective. The flatness of the picture space and the *mimetic* disappearance of the subject emerge, leaving anyway, a figurative trace. Both features were inaugurated for the first time by Manet.

Looking at the international art scene we see a trend in which figuration is taking the lead over abstraction and landscape has a decisive place in the scenario. There are many examples. In the Main Pavilion of the 60th International Art Exhibition a mimetic type of landscape combined with the proportional disappearance of the human subject inside has returned to the spotlight after years. This can be seen in the works of artists never exhibited before in any Biennale edition such as the painter Kay WalkingStick with her majestic views of the Grand Canyon, Glacier National Park and Sun Valley (2013-23) inhabited by stitches of Cherokee decorative motifs, trace of the human history or those by the Lebanese artist Aref El Rayess. The series *Deserts* (1988) depict desolate dunes with completely unnatural, rarefied, dreamlike colours, creating settings hardly with a space for the figure. But examples can also be found in recent years. The exhibition *Mixing It Up* in 2021 at the Hayward Gallery in London reconstructed the decomposed, technological nature of contemporary painting in line with an over-saturated image. An image nourished by the virtual and overflowing with concepts possibly recomposed and ordered by the observer’s gaze,

confirming the replacement that has taken place between natural and virtual *mimesis*. Finally, the exhibition *Pittura italiana oggi* at the Triennale in Milan (2023-24). Here one could find different unnatural mimetic landscape views such as those by Francesco de Grandi or others more artificial and surreal bordering on the digital as Agnese Guido's ones. Descendants and genealogies developed into contemporary forms but having the same constitutive principles as those throughout 20th century and especially already shown by Manet. Michel Foucault's theory about him is one of the few to realise the decisive role played by the artist in pictorial representation. He wrote: "It seems to me that Manet made possible not only Impressionism, but all subsequent painting, all 20th century painting, the painting within which contemporary art is still developing today" (*Id* 2005, p. 20) – the reason why Manet is in Fried's interpretation too, the founder of the modern painting (*Id* 1996) –.

Placing landscape at the centre of Foucauldian considerations on painting, we easily get to the case of the greatest of contemporary landscape painters David Hockney. Even his probably best-known painting *A Bigger Splash* (1967) is paradigmatic in Foucault's sense. It sets the disappearance of the subject from the painting and the very long period – never concluded – of the *Landscapes*, a veritable obsession with the representation of the topic. In Hockney's landscapes space appears not only narrow and flattened but inhuman. The restriction of the space, its flatness and the elision of human figure inside are three elements found in Manet's works by Foucault. His considerations on the pre-impressionist also meet with his entire theory on painting, demonstrating unique features for the medium. Furthermore, we can say they anticipate Fried's theory on Manet.

In the background of the debate, it is possible to identify a guiding concept, first appeared in paragraph 5 of the well-known chapter III on representation in *Les Mots et Les Choses* (*Id* 2021). Here Foucault bonds imagination with resemblance, a combination particularly fruitful for reading the relationship between human and landscape in contemporary painting. As Manet, obsessed with the representation of sceneries that he defined as 'sincere' as they appeared to the eye – "Je rends aussi simplement que possible les choses que je vois. Ainsi l'Olympia [...] Il y a des duretés, me dit-on. Elles y étaient. Je les ai vues. J'ai fait ce que j'ai vu" (Cachin 1994, p. 61) –, as Hockney who aimed to "see things more clearly, clearer and clearer, even clearer" (Gayford 2012, p. 32). Two cases demonstrating the need to mimetically render reality through painting but only from the prolific imagination of its forms.

2. Manet-like?

David Hockney is the contemporary painter who between the end of 60s and the beginning of 70s in a scene dominated by Pop Art trends on one hand, by performance art on the other, most addressed the problem of representing the landscape with its peculiar relation with man. In the 60s, we find the human presence insinuating into Hockney's works almost as if it were absorbed by the space of representation, leaving traces of its disappearance as in *A Bigger Splash* (1967). Starting from the end of the 90s, the artist's priority for landscape grows, in some ways already one of his favourite pictorial subjects from the very beginning. For Hockney this is not an absolute return to the landscape genre – even a concrete one: he moved from Los Angeles to the Yorkshire countryside where he was born and where he had been missing since 70s – but a meticulous, cognitive visual exploration of it. Recently embraced the constitutive *technological function* (Rugoff 2010, p. 6) of the pictorial medium even in practice using digital languages and media, “Hockney traces hills on paper, with an iPhone or iPad, painted and finally filmed simultaneously with nine high-definition digital cameras” (Gayford, p. 8). The artist achieved results unimaginable for the history of landscape art and at the same time, he clarified two intentions: 1. He tacitly accepted confirming it more than ever by the technique the *flatness* of the image and before that of the space of representation; 2. He took the visibility of the landscape to extreme consequences by means of completely unnatural, altered mimetic reproduction, replacing natural mimesis with digital one.¹ Turning to the first of these aspects, what is interesting is the type of flattening Hockney's mimetic and landscape reproduction aims at, not new to the medium of painting. It takes us back to Manet's pre-impressionism and the so-called *flatness* consecrated by Impressionism, juxtaposed in Fried's (*Id* 1996) interpretation with that of *facing* which is considerable in Manet's direct line with French realism. Manet's pictures are *sincere*: “It's the effect of *sincerity* to give to works a character that makes them appear an act of protest, when the painter has thought only of rendering his impression” he wrote in 1867 (*Ivi*, p. 23). The effect described by Fried combined with a French ‘style’ in painting would bring out *the sense of truth* (*Ivi*,

¹ See *Bigger Trees Near Warter* (2007). The largest landscape painting ever made by Hockney is composed of fifty canvases. Hockney used a mix of artistic media, including both digital photography and outdoors painting. The physical fragmentation of the work emphasises the *hyper-visibility* of landscape engulfing the artist and viewer. Its composition inevitably reminds the pixel-like fragmentation of the digital image.

p. 85). The elision of the subject too, consequence and effect of the restriction of the space seems in the light of the authoritative Friedland reading, prophesied by Foucault much earlier. Fried, on the other hand, sees in Manet the intention to legitimise the role of the observer, to recognise it placing it at the same level of concreteness of the painting: “Manet sought to acknowledge, not negate or neutralise the presence of the beholder [...] the painting as a painting, that is, as a *tableau* – facing the beholder as never before” (Ivi, p. 266).

In Foucault's writings on Manet, the restriction of the space of representation into the painting emerges demonstrating his decisive role in the transition to a kind of picture he did not hesitate to define ‘contemporary’ (Id 2005, p. 20). In Manet's work the flatness corresponds to a *mimetic disappearance* of the subject within it. In the work *La musique aux Tuileries* (1861-62) the characters stand out against the wooded landscape in the background almost as if they were incorporated into it. The bodies are confused with the trunks of the trees alternating between object and figures. They are as if smothered by the rectangle of the painting; they become a *flat frieze* (Ivi, p. 24). The same thing, a mutual relationship-confusion between background-landscape and human figures, occurs in the other paintings analysed by Foucault – *Argenteuil* (1874) and *Dans la serre* (1879) –. By reinventing the space of the canvas restricting it, Manet anticipates the Impressionist effects and that flatness persisting in the representation of landscape today and inevitably consecrated in Hockney's paintings. An outcome that not surprisingly flows into a second perhaps far more decisive aspect: the *hyper-visibility* of the painted landscape. Impressionist *en plein air* painting would set as the main goal the most sincere, empirical rendering of the landscape and the meticulous, sensitive impressions arising from it by the detailed layering technique, a process of creating the artwork by titanic efforts which restored the naturalness of the perceptions-impressions originated by the view. Along with this, Manet appears to be the transition point from naturalism to impressionism and leads us directly to Hockney's conception of pictorial landscape representation. Over a century apart, comparing the two painter's point of views about nature is significant. Says Hockney:

Nature is *endless*. One can always see more. When I first settled in Bridlington, the hedges of shrubs looked like a jumble to me [...] One day J.-P. was driving, I told him to stop and I started drawing different kinds of plants. I filled the album in an hour and a half. Afterwards, I was able to see everything more clearly. After I had drawn the shrubs, I was able *to see* them. (Gayford, p. 32)

The *hyper-visibility* achieved in painting was an obsession for Manet too, constantly concerned about paint only what he had seen in order to achieve that effect of *sincerity* continually quoted (Seymour 1977, p. 14). He told Proust history disinterested him at all: “Reconstituer des figures historiques, quelle bonne plaisanterie! Il n’y a qu’une chose vraie: faire du premier coup ce qu’on voit [...] Tout le reste est de la blague!” (Cachin, p. 25).

The *instantaneousness* (Fried, p. 266) of the vision in painting itself inaugurated by Manet declined in Fried’s *flatness* and *facing*, together with the character of universality – a key element in Manet’s painting according to the art historian – matches to the birth of modern painting and consequently to that vision of the landscape which Hockney is the paradigm. If, however, Foucault centralised the disappearance of the subject in the painting, Fried who also recognises in the ‘sincerity’ and ‘coldness’ of Manet’s characters (*Ivi*, p. 284) a kind of disappearance of subjectivity, focuses instead on the observer’s one. The gaze understood as singularity disappears on the surface of the canvas. Thus, the difference introduced by modern painting remains. The narrative and psychological elision remains too, but the point of view changes:

the quasi-corporeal merger in the act of painting by the painter is now conceived as the painting’s first beholder or painter-beholder, with the painting itself. At least with respect to that beholder the painting would ideally escape beholding entirely: there would be no one before it looking on because the beholder who had been there was not incorporated or disseminated within it (*Ivi*, p. 264)

The *hyper-visibility* characterises the landscape representation of both Manet and Hockney. We are going to identify the reasons.

3. *The Imagination of Resemblance*

To understand the mimetic reproduction device of the landscape in contemporary painting, we need not only the Foucauldian theory on Manet, but a peculiar notion captured in chap. III of *Les Mots et les Choses* (Id 2021, pp. 83-7). Here the theme of visibility emerges in the context of a more unusual problem, the imagination combined with resemblance which, Foucault writes, imposes into the representation a “barrier of identity” (*Ivi*, p. 40). The classical epoch is characterized by the necessity that “in the things represented lives the insistent murmuring of resemblance and at the same time, in their representation, the always possible folding of the imagination” (*Ivi*, p. 85) (my transl.) To the impression, “an involun-

tary background constituting a kind of mechanics of the image of time” (*Ibid*) Foucault follows up as a requirement of representation, a confused analysis of similarities broken up and mixed:

How can one explain that things present themselves in an overlapping, in a mixture, in an interweaving, where their essential order is disrupted, but still visible to surface in the form of similarities, of vague analogies, of allusive occasions for a memory in alarm? (*Ibid*) (my transl.)

The *episteme* of representation described by the combination of imagination and resemblance highlights the persistence of the mimetic criterion with the original notion of *mimesis* deeply modified from the inside. It brings into play the cognitive function of the imaginative faculty, a missing piece in the original meaning of the concept. In the ancient world Aristotle ascribed it to *phantasia* in which resemblance, although related to the *mimesis physeos* and *praxeos*, had a very different meaning from the imagination born under the modern Kantian meaning: “The work of resemblance arising from *phantasia* is quite different from the work arising from *mimesis*” (Guastini 2016, pp. 144-5) (my transl.)

Foucault’s conception of the imagination-resemblance relation is clearly assimilated to the Kantian productive imagination considered in its freedom in aesthetic judgement.² It gives us the opportunity just to note such a philosophical not well explored relationship as that one Kant-Foucault, treated instead by Han (*Id* 2002). Through the categories of *historical* and *transcendental* she legitimises in Foucault a method aimed not only to discover the general conditions of knowledge, but rather the historical conditions that make it possible: “The overall importance of Foucault’s interpretation of Kant is strategic rather than theoretical and is played out within the Foucauldian corpus. (*Ivi*, p. 33). Back to the imagination-resemblance relation, presenting a sensation through a representation within mimetic boundaries is a mechanism that has much in common with Kantian cognitive mechanism. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the imagination is the faculty of representing an object in intuition by determining its sensation *a priori*.³ In the Third Critique it becomes crucial in the aesthetic reworking of the categories provided by the intellect, the key to the determination of the judgement of taste.⁴ The representations provided by the imagination are ideas that tend to something laying “beyond the limits of experience” and that “seek to approximate a presentation

² Cf. Kant 1999, pp. 76-7.

³ Cf. *KrV* §20, Kant 2019.

⁴ On the notion of imagination cf. *KdU* §§ 9, 17, 26-8, 42, 49.

of concepts of reason” (Kant 1999, pp. 314, 192) (my transl.). In §63 of *KdU* Kant expresses in these terms about the all-human possibility of adapting reasonably nature to ends to which he himself was not naturally predestined, establishing a *harmony* – one reads in Garroni’s Italian translation (*armonia*) (*Ivi*, p. 202) – “with his own arbitrary inspirations”:

For the human’s reason knows how to bring things into correspondence with his own arbitrary inspirations, to which he was by no means predestined by nature. Only if one assumes that human beings have to live on the earth would there also have to be at least no lack of the means without which they could not subsist as animals and even as rational animals [...] (*KdU* 5:368) (Kant 2000, p. 240)

The Italian word *armonia* can render man’s agreement with that relative conformity to purpose in nature in which the teleological judgement traces the purpose in living organisms based on objective and not subjective principles. Kant said that the form of nature contained within it its own constitutive principle, its possibility. The goal in teleological judgement was in short constituted as an objective principle, but it fulfilled man’s cognitive predisposition. The objective conformity of the teleological judgement might initially seem at odds with the subjective conformity triggered by pleasure in aesthetic judgement and the Kantian equivalence natural beauty-artistic beauty. If we would place the *imagination of resemblance* in this horizon, somewhere between the objective finalism of teleological judgement and the subjective finalism of aesthetic judgement, we might meet a different conception of nature.

The value of the Foucauldian imagination of the *episteme* of representation in chap. III of *Les Mots et Les Choses* is charged with the value of resemblance in the creation of imaginative representations already identified in the post-Renaissance paradigm where man has become “saturated with analogies” (*Ivi*, pp. 36, 66-7). Foucault’s imagination of resemblance appears to be a particularly useful concept for understanding contemporary pictorial mechanism at the centre of which stands the return to *mimesis*. Alienated into the analogy, the observer feeds inside the painting the obsessive search for mimesis by means of the imagination, placing the infinite representational chain of impressions generated by sight within an extremely diversified imaginary, but still orderable by a mimetic criterion. Contemporary painting pursues this kind of device to extreme in the representation of the landscape, imaginatively attempting similarity, but starting from a reality that is

no longer natural.⁵ On the background of the proclaimed elision of the subject coined by Manet in Foucault's opinion especially in the landscape, Wollheim's point of view (*Id* 1987) also goes in the same direction, but from psychological perspective. Manet's characters are alienated, "absent from the world" (*Ivi*, p.141). Anyway, in a psychologically way, an opposite viewpoint from Foucault's one and even Fried's (*Id* 1996). According to Wollheim, a precise psychological subject-matter relating to the *mood* of the protagonists of Manet's paintings is identifiable (*Ivi*, p. 149) which abstracts them from the representational context they are placed into.⁶ David Hockney's work is also a bright example⁷ of the kind of *self-absorption* Wollheim speaks about (*Ivi*, p. 144). He came to the semi-exclusive representation of landscapes after a period in 70s defined by the artist as 'naturalism'. The presence of human figures declined later giving way to a vision of nature moving far from the natural mimesis. In the meantime, sometimes characters remained as absorbed by the painting's background, resembling figures seemingly in contrast both with abstractionism and formalism. We see a renewed figurative image, different from that cognitive one of Greek mimesis, a repetition of an already pre-existing reality (Guastini 2021, p. 67). We see an image shaped by the role of the imagination looking for mimetic correspondences of sensible intuitions in a reality in which the disjunction between resemblance (*ressemblance*) and similitude (*similitude*) is almost definitive.

4. *Paysage photogénique or post-photographique*

The concept of representation by imagination of resemblance in relation to the pictorial image is most clearly in Foucault's writing *La peinture photogénique* (*Id* 2001), a short text for the artist Gérard Fromanger's solo exhibition in 1975 at the Galerie Jeanne Bucher in Paris. Here the debate on the imagery-similarity relationship linked to the disappearance of the subject in the painting gets a climax. Starting with the pictorial rediscovery of photography at the end of the 19th century and the relation between painting and photography, Foucault describes the characteristics of Fromanger's hyperrealist image. The painter (1939-

⁵ Foucault spoke not coincidentally of *analysis of nature* and an *analysis of imagination* (*Id* 2021, p. 85).

⁶ Wollheim quotes Manet's iconic *Déjeuner dans l'Atelier* (1868), *Jardin d'Hiver* (1879) and all the single-figure compositions by Manet (*Id* 1987, pp. 141-60).

⁷ See also *Pool and Steps*, *Le Nid du Duc* (1971), *Nichols Canyon* (1980), *Garrowby Hill* (1998), *Felled Trees on Woldgate* (2008).

2021) active in the same years as Hockney, literally incorporated the photographic image into the pictorial material, a technique in vogue in 60s. In Fromanger's paintings,⁸ vague, flat silhouettes stand out against aseptic, multicoloured cityscapes. By the most extreme appropriation of figurativeness brought about by painting, the artist was not aiming at a realistic reproduction, on the opposite: the subject disappeared behind a *pure* image reaching its autonomy, in the same way as Manet's "painting-object" (Foucault 2005, p. 23). It was therefore not a "retour à la figuration, une redécouverte de l'objet, avec sa densité réelle, mais [...] un branchement sur la circulation indéfinie des images". Painting totally lost the characteristic of representing figures and objects and became "une manière de peindre leur image et de la faire valoir, dans un tableau, comme image" (*Id* 2001, pp. 1575-83). The case of Fromanger is a pretext to return to Hockney's conception of landscape who, in the same 70s, spoke in these terms about photography:

In what I was doing, there was something wrong – I called it 'obsessive naturalism', but I didn't know exactly what it was. Photography was the cause; I had started taking photographs. I then wanted to get out of it because it was a trap and I said so. I wanted to stop [...] the camera sees the world in geometric terms. We don't [...] We measure the world psychologically and subjectively (Gayford, pp. 50-2)

In the later landscape-dominated paintings Hockney's mimetic photographic criterion (the use of photography will remain central to his work especially combined with the use of technology) blends with the psychological need to create a painting that can, in his words, "engulf the viewer" (*Ivi*, p. 65): "It is not a painting that makes you think, 'I'd like to go into it'. Your mind is already there. The painting is swallowing you up" (*Ibid*). In 2007 the painter realised *Bigger Trees Water*, the largest landscape work in the history of art, 12 by 4.5 metres of English landscape composed of fifty small canvases made completely *en plein air*, but from a careful studio work on photographs. Not surprisingly, the work will also have a second title, *Peinture sur le motif pour le Nouvel Age Post-Photographique*. The subject is a group of trees, with another grove in the distance and a large mountain maple tree with a tangle of branches in the foreground. Below are yellow daffodils, to the right two houses and to the left a road is lost behind the curve of the dense tangle of branches. Reaching

⁸ See Violet de Mars (1972), *En Chine à Lo Yang* (1974) or the most recent *Peinture-Monde* (2015).

for the desired *infinity of nature*, as he calls it, Hockney mashes up mimetic forms in the pictorial rendering of the landscape – a need that is still ‘obsessive’ as the naturalism he wanted to take distance in 70s – reinforced by the imaginative reworking enacted by the work of resemblance. It is not a coincidence that he was greatly influenced by late 19th century painting, in which Manet’s pictorial innovations converge. Flatness, restriction of the space in the painting, alienation of the subject from the representational context, disappearance of any narrative and, in addition, a *photogenic-photographic* character are all characteristics shown by both Manet’s and Hockney’s vision of landscape. About the first one, it should be noted that the closeness to a kind of painting defined as *photographic* arises precisely at the same time as the historical developments of the medium. The concept of the ‘bright’ vision inaugurated by Manet, one might say, fits with the birth of photography. Hockney’s own study on the use of lenses and mirrors in the technique of the Old Masters (*Id* 2006) tells a lot. The painter’s thesis is that artists from Renaissance to the beginning of the Avant-garde period extensively used optics such as camera lucida⁹ for the realisation of their masterpieces. In his opinion camera lucida is in fact “perfect for drawing landscapes” (*Ivi*, p. 28).

Hockney’s *infinity of nature* is incredibly close to the concept of *wholeness* repeatedly evoked by Fried about Manet’s painting (*Id* 1996). It has, moreover, much to do with Fromanger’s very modern photographic effect and it leads us thinking of another aspect inaugurated by Manet’s paintings and found in Hockney’s too: “His combination of strong digital gestures and drawing with abrupt, almost photographic chiaroscuro promoted an experience of instantaneous stamping – or cropping – of the image as a whole [...]” (Fried, p. 405).¹⁰ Hockney’s view confirms a pictorial image in which there is no longer any real place for the subject in the painting – nor for its observer, one might say, in the case of *Bigger Trees Water* – just as Manet had already shown, as Foucault gave us to see and in Fried’s point of view: “The personages in Manet’s paintings were found to be inexplicably blank, opaque, noncommunicating, without psychological interiority of any kind” (*Ivi*, p. 282).¹¹

⁹ *Camera lucida* originated in 1807 as an optical device. It is basically a prism mounted on a small structure that allows to see the image of the object we are looking at on the surface on which we want to reproduce it.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ivi*, pp. 291, 294.

¹¹ As already noted, Fried’s opinion is opposite to Wollheim’s one (*Id* 1987).

5. Conclusions

Contemporary painting takes on the guise of a new visual ‘technological’ expedient among the most effective in the field of art, “the most relevant technology for *making* art” (Rugoff 2010, p. 6). It becomes a particularly powerful medium in the generation of heterogeneous imaginative layers in which a semiotic economy allowing the painter to create within his pictorial scheme, a correspondence between resemblance and imagination in the elements on the canvas apparently unrelated. The mimetic landscape representation in which the human figure tends to elide itself as in Manet’s figurative manner, is a pretext for associations compulsively self-generated at the sight of the framework, links in the variegated and apparently senseless horizon of meaning shaped by an altered even digital imagery. This one, as Hockney’s use of iPads and iPhones demonstrates, becomes a primary source and a term of comparison for the renewed pictorial image. In contemporary rendering of landscape, the subject aims to elide itself respectively to the restriction of the space of representation. The result is a very concrete exercise. The painting shows itself as the object that it is, as a *tableau* (Fried 1992, p. 166). The characters, when depicted, are constricted inside the frame and out of all perspective. The depth of a limited visual window is privileged. A game consisting of “suppressing, erasing, restricting space in the sense of depth” (Foucault 2005, p. 40). The Foucauldian reading of Manet exemplifies this trend, the beginning of the end of realistic representation in the painting but without renouncing to figuration, which on the contrary, enhances the inevitable dissolution of mimesis in the classical sense. The sole protagonist of the painting is today the Foucauldian *vision of the invisible* already ascribed to Manet’s pre-impressionism. Not surprisingly, the character of flatness of the image characterised by the departure from the representation of space in painting is a modernist element found up much later and ranging to the present day. From this perspective, one might say, the big mistake of the opposite tendency to mimesis, formalism, in Greenberg’s eminent interpretation (*Id* 1982) was to exclude the subject from the picture as a figure being an element contaminating the *integrity of the picture plane*. Contrary to the formalist thesis, what Foucault found in Manet’s painting is indeed the elision of the subject inside the painting, but precisely starting from the representation of the human figure, a “presence of absence” as Paul Valéry would say (Cachin, p. 75). Hockney’s work is a paradigm of the modern pictorial effects inaugurated by

Manet. At least, we can say they are definitively realised. Hockney himself sees in Manet the rise of the modern age and the end of the 'optical' vision promoted from the 15th century, instead of a new *sincere* one. He speaks about "a return of 'awkwardness' to European painting" (*Id* 2001, p. 187). The landscape genre with its peculiar characteristics confirms. Furthermore, Hockney's case proves that the foucauldian *imaginary of invisibility* born with the exchange of natural reality with digital one supported by the advancement of technology is today a reference point in the pictorial conception of the landscape. Painting manifests the need to emancipate itself while not renouncing to resemblance, having the function of "removing the ground under the feet of the traditional metaphysical oppositions" (Pinotti 2021, p. 75) by the imaginative faculty adapted to man's mimetic need. The urge to imagine resemblance, even natural one, remains, but in an altered perspective in which the realistic rendering of landscape is a symptom of the disappearance of the subject into the framework, as well as the drastic change in its mimetic representation. Foucault foresaw this coming when he wrote that "on aimait peut-être moins les tableaux et les plaques sensibles que les images elles-mêmes, leur migration et leur perversion, leur travestissement, leur différence déguisée" (*Id* 2001, pp. 1575-83). In the light of Foucauldian considerations, we can therefore trace a genealogy of the renewed mimetic pictorial image, motivating its return or rather its persistence, not a nostalgic regression to figuration, but a recognition of the new mimetic function of painting.

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