

PHOTOGRAPHY AS THE WRITING OF LIGHT

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
GRAPHIC DESIGN
AND THE INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS
OF BILKENT UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

By

Ulgu Aytaç
June, 2010

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Photography as the Writing of Light

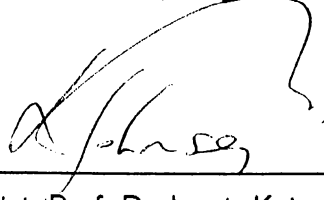
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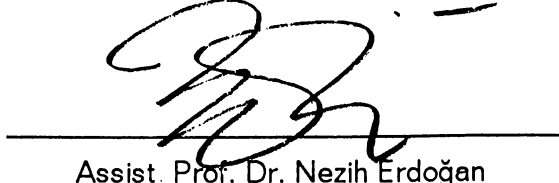
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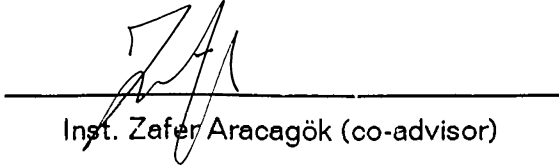
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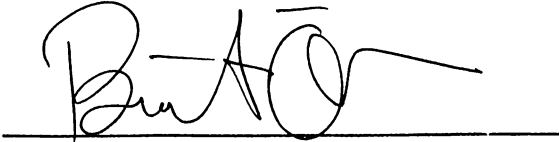
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ABSTRACT

Photography as the Writing of Light

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M.F.A. in Graphical Arts

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Lewis Keir Johnson

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The purpose of this study is to investigate certain critical approaches to photography and to try to make a re-reading of photographic images, with pursuing some of the reading strategies that French philosopher Jacques Derrida employs in deconstruction. The major aim is to point out the intrinsic features of photographic images which have been foreclosed most of the time, by the discourses established upon it and to trace a possible framework for the experience of images.

Keywords: Photography, transparency, reality, deconstruction, death, punctum.

ÖZET

Işığın Yazısı Olarak Fotoğraf

Olgu Aytaç

Grafik Tasarım Bölümü

Yüksek Lisans

Tez Yöneticisi: Yard. Doç. Dr. Lewis Johnson

June, 2000

Bu çalışmada, fotografik imgeleme ilişkin birtakım eleştirel söylemlerin araştırması yapıp, Fransız filozof Jacques Derrida'nın öne sürdüğü yapıbozumcu okuma stratejileri yardımıyla fotoğraf imgesinin olası bir yeniden okuması sunulmaya çalışılmıştır. Asıl amaç, fotografik imgenin, çoğu zaman kategorik sınıflandırmalar ya da sözü geçen söylemler tarafından gözardı edilen içsel özelliklerinin izini sürerek, imgenin deneyimi hakkında ipuçları vermektir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Fotoğraf, saydamlık, gerçeklik, ölüm, yapıbozum, "punctum."

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INTRODUCTION

Starting from its early days of invention, the debates that have effectively shaped the theories on photography hinge around the capabilities of the medium, how it changed the orders of representation, what differences it brought to the social world, etc. The common ground from which most of these debates flourish from is the belief that photographic images provide us with a direct, unmediated relation with the things they render visible. The invention of camera marks a critical point in the history of representation because of the introduction of an impersonal, non-living instrument between the object and its image. Depending on the fact that in photography, things, events, people leave their traces on the photosensitive material, a notion of transparency has been attributed to the medium. In this sense, camera becomes a self-effacing instrument, giving way to an objective recording of the world through which the captured "reality" speaks directly to the viewer.

Photographs, in the first instance, reproduce the visible world in a perfectly realistic manner. The image's relation to its referent here, is understood in terms of resemblance and analogy. Camera is taken as an extension of human body, imitating and even improving the capabilities of the

eye. In this framework, photographs are regarded as trustworthy replicas of world's reality. At the same time, while photographic images contribute to the reproduction of reality, they impose their own illusionary reality onto the world. As it is tried be explained in the first chapter, Susan Sontag's account on photography lead us to the argument that with the technological image production, the "real-world" has been duplicated and transformed into an "image-world." The constitutive aspects of technological media are important to understand its impacts on the cultural, social milieu.

The notion of transparency of photographic images has been celebrated for conveying the truth of the event that had taken place before the camera, or devalued for the elimination of the artistic creativity from the artwork. It should be pointed out that the uses of photography are not limited within any confined realms. And the consequences of the effect of transparency differs from one context to another. However, the common matrix that underwrites these discourses is the valorization of the visible in Western culture. Photographs, being the result of a chemical process instead of a creative one, open the way for an investigation of entities by means of their visible aspects.

In the domain of science, photography can serve as a means of inquiry and discovery, owing to its objectivity. In a somewhat similar manner, the use of photographs in magazines and newspapers is to convey the reader the reality of some event. When the sphere of art is concerned, the

instrumentality of the camera suggests that it offers the eye a certain way of seeing things. In this case, the qualities of the scene depicted gains primacy over how the vision is constructed. Following the transparency effect in this sense, would lead us to say that neither the camera nor the photographer can make a decisive change in the resulting image; if the thing were different, the picture would consequently be different. However, this remark does not simply suggest that such notions can easily be dismissed for the sake of their opposites. Of course, the transparency of the medium is one of the major concepts that needs to be analyzed further since we cannot simply ignore the fact that photography is the writing of light.

Throughout the history of photography, a number of dichotomous terms shaped the discourses established on the subject matter. Photographic images are regarded as products of "culture", while maintaining their close relation to "nature". The camera's mechanical objectivity is used as a means of creating expressions which would arouse emotional responses in the side of the viewer. The printed surface, as "present", functions by pointing to its referent as "absent." In fact, the discourses surrounding photography are structured upon the undecidability of term proper to the medium.

Regarding the notion of transparency attributed to the medium, what I would like to suggest here is that the photographic image is both transparent and opaque. Transparency is the outcome of thinking photography as a means to establish a direct link between the spectator and some visible thing

projecting its light on the photosensitive surface. At the same time, it is because of its opaqueness that it can actually show us things as they had once been. The oscillation between the material opaqueness and the transparent effect it produces makes the image-referent relationship a problematical issue that cannot be easily overcome. Photographic images render visible present the traces of those things which have already plunged into past. A return to the time of the photographing act is impossible. And the referent cannot be held stable by an assumption that it remains unchanged.

One of the leading themes of this study will be the question concerning the problematic of reference in photographic images. Unlike the preceding forms of representation, i.e. painting, which function by connecting the image to its referent metaphorically, photography places a metonymic identity between the real and its representation. Even if one gives priority to the photographer's intentions in setting up the scene, his genius of presenting the viewer a certain kind of seeing things, whether to convey an idea or to create emotion, the literal connection of the image to the event preceding it cannot be broken down so easily.

In the first chapter, an overview of critical approaches to the characteristics of the medium are briefly explained. The issues put forward in the writings of Susan Sontag and Walter Benjamin will be the guiding principles that shape my discussion in this chapter. Along with the invention of the daguerrotype, technological image production has brought changes to the

subject's engagement with images. The advances in technology of the camera even accelerated these shifts. Consequently, the image is believed to be separated from the sphere of art or nature, and found its new place in the realm of technology. What has been so highly promoted in this sense is that the images reconstitute world's reality, and impose a false, artificial life upon it. Benjamin's writings on the subject matter give important clues about the changed status of the referent, and how this system of referentiality challenged traditional way of conceiving images. Sontag, also writing about photography, provide us with the social changes that photography brought about. The main concern of these thinkers on photography is to demonstrate the impacts of the medium in terms of the changes it brought about in constituting our lived environment and the subject's position in confronting them. The importance of such views cannot simply be left aside. However, giving priority to the use of the medium as a political tool is to limit its understanding to some confined realm - although politics is inherent in every facet of life.

The second chapter searches for the possible ways of a redefinition of photography in terms of textuality. In fact, I believe that approaching the medium from the point of Derridean deconstruction can open up the way for an understanding of the possibility of signification and communication in the sphere of photographic practice. Thus, my basic attempt will be to shift the

terms of argument from a discussion based on the theory of mimesis to one that will take its force from the "logic of the supplement" in Derridean terms.

The third chapter is specifically about Roland Barthes's book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, which I believe can be read in the light of the arguments developed in the first two chapters. Not only the issues Barthes puts forward but the way they are brought together in the structure of the book is exemplary. While at a first glance, it seems as if in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes simply demonstrates a subjective approach to photographic images, his personal meditation does not occur in the form of photography criticism. It should be remembered that Barthes's engagement with photography is not limited to *Camera Lucida*. While his earlier writings suggest a more positivist approach employing the terms of structuralism, this later work resists the limitations of such analysis. However, I do not mean to say that Barthes simply opposes the tones of such discourses. Rather he moves beyond them without undermining their importance.

This study does not place in its center a certain type of photographic practice, such as art photography, documentary photography, journal photography, etc. Still, such an elimination of categories is not intended to suggest that there can be a generalizable philosophy of photographic images that is applicable to any kind whatever. In fact, what is tried to be pinned down are the forces that are inherent in the medium that cut through the confined and clearly distinguished domains and make it resistant to such strict

categorizations. My aim is not to make yet another analysis of how photographic images shape culture or change our conceptions of what the real is. Neither is it promoted that one should be engaged in personal readings of photographs, dismissing their roles in society. The guiding theme will be to look at the characteristic feature of the medium within the light of deconstruction and to demonstrate the various forces that are at work when experiencing such images. It is necessary to make a remark here, that my intention is not to reach some totalizing inferences and to show how one should "look at" photographs beyond the common norms, which would end up stabilizing the forces of the medium, but point to some possibilities of being engaged in such an activity.

CHAPTER I

Photography, "Reality", Spectacle

Most discussions of visual representation technologies are basically concerned with the image/referent relationship. Along with the invention of photography and cinema, this relationship took on a far more problematic character with regard to the intervening of a technological apparatus in between the two terms. The main questions considering the photographic images have long been about the issues concerning its realism. With photographic (re)production, the image's distance from reality was believed to be overcome in a great sense. In most cases, photographic images are regarded as "unmediated transcriptions of the real." In his article "Ontology of the Photographic Image", André Bazin claims that the specificity of photography is due to neutrality of the image-making process that is free of all human intervention:

For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time, an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man. (Bazin quoted in Shaviro: 18)

1.1 Bazin and Sontag: Photography as Transparent Medium

For Bazin, photographic images are traces of those things, which had been captured by the camera. As opposed to the other regimes of representation, photography's innovation is that reality imprints itself directly on the film without mediation. The instrumentality of the camera, in this sense, brings the image and its object of depiction into close proximity, to the point that the spectator receives these images as if perceiving reality. A similar argument is put forward by Susan Sontag concerning the effect of the instrumentality of the camera in photographic representation:

Photography has powers that no other image-system has ever enjoyed because, unlike the earlier ones, it is *not* dependent on an image maker. However carefully the photographer intervenes in setting up and guiding the image-making process, the process itself remains an optical-chemical (or electronic) one, the workings of which are automatic. (352)

In fact these arguments on the camera's "objectivity" emerge from the fact that these images are literally written by the light emanated from the object on the photosensitive surface, without the intervention of a creative hand. And this nature of the medium is brought forward when comparing it to other media, especially to painting. What was so insistently repeated in the light of these arguments was that even the most realist painting could not depict the world's reality as accurately as a photograph. If the instrumentality

of the camera establishes an unmediated link between the object and the subject, then it will not be wrong to claim that photography is a transparent medium. The effect of transparency makes the photograph a substitute for the object it depicts. To put it into another way, photographs mummify the object by capturing one of its many appearances that were once visible but had disappeared into the folds of time. In this case, photographic images are likened to a footprint, or a death mask, which circulates in the absence of its object.

However, neither Bazin's nor Sontag's account simply suggest that a photograph is only an image reflecting the reality of some original being. What needs to be pointed out here is that, according to Bazin, the novel thing about the photograph is that the outcome is not only an image representing the reality of the thing, a perfect analogon of it, but at the same time it is the model, the object itself.

The photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint. Wherefore, photography actually contributes something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it. (Bazin quoted in Hebdige: 13)

In his account of the ontology of photographic images, Bazin moves between the "objectivity" of the camera and the "subjective" affect it produces. Photographs do not only reorganize perceptive field but also

contribute to the constitution of identity and subjectivity. If such an argument were accepted, if photographs do not simply copy nature but themselves are a part of it, then one would necessarily assume that photographic perception is similar to natural perception. At this point Bazin's account of photography embodies a paradox: photography is a product of "culture" since it is a technology, yet, at the same time photographs endow the spectator with natural perception. Belonging both to the realm of culture and nature, such images do not only duplicate and preserve reality, they also contribute to the production of it.

Following a similar line of thought, Sontag claims that photography does not only work on the basis of resemblance, at the same time, a photograph is "a part of, an extension of that subject; and a potent means of acquiring it, of gaining control over it" (351). Again in her account, as one gets earlier in the history of images, the distinction between an object and its image gets less sharp. Referring to the status of images in primitive societies, she points out how real things and images were regarded as being "two different, that is, physically distinct, manifestations of the same energy or spirit" (Sontag: 350). She criticizes the attitudes that "equate image with mere appearance" and that places images and reality at two extremities. Photographs preserve what had once taken place before the camera and they circulate in the society not only as substitutes, but also a part of that reality, independent of that originary being. And this double posture, according to Sontag, establishes a different relationship between image and reality, one

that is reminiscent of the most primitive kind. The camera is passive and no matter how much manipulation is at work during the process, the passivity cannot be broken down. And it is because of this nature of the apparatus that it can penetrate into reality, not to represent it, but to challenge the traditional orders of representation.

But the true modern primitivism is not to regard the image as a real thing; photographic images are hardly that real. Instead, reality has come to seem more and more like what we are shown by cameras... people in industrialized countries seek to have their pictures taken – feel that they are images and are made real by photographs. (Sontag: 354 - 5)

This issue that Sontag puts forward needs to be discussed further since it problematizes the way technological image production has challenged our relationship to reality. What Sontag claims concerning this unmediated nature of photography is that it changes not only the notion of the image but also that of reality. She regards these two terms as complementary to each other; one cannot simply talk about the change in the nature of images by taking reality as a static term that resists change. For her, with the emergence of photography, the real has been duplicated, replaced and redefined.

Photographs can easily be produced and duplicated. When photographed, people, events, things, etc. become a part of a large network, starting from the very private (in case of family albums), all the way to the

public (newspaper photographs), in which they can be appropriated in different ways. They can be carriers of information, preserve the memory of some person, used as proofs, etc. Whatever the context, photographs are seen as evidences of some past reality. The evidential force of photography stems from the fact that actual people, events, places, etc. had left their traces on the light sensitive material through a chemical process over which human hand had played no decisive role except for pushing the button. But as Sontag suggests, this way of providing an immediate access to reality is in fact, "another way of creating distance" (356). While bringing close in the form of images what would otherwise not be accessible, photographs confront us with the "remoteness of the real" (356). At this point, how photographs reproduce reality in Sontag's account gains importance. As she claims, photographs being documents of the past supply us with a new kind of experiencing the present.

While old photographs fill out our mental image of the past, the photographs being taken now transform what is present into a mental image, like the past. Cameras establish an inferential relation to the present (reality is known by its traces), provide an instantly retroactive view of experience. (Sontag: 358)

As opposed to the continuity and the unpredictable future of the real world, these frozen images of the past tell us that something had happened

and it would not change whatever the case. Insertion of these moments of arrest into the flux of everyday life creates a paradoxical situation because what is seen in the photograph is "here", the experience of looking takes place at the present moment, but at the same time what one sees on the surface has irrecoverably disappeared. In this case, the world known through photographs transforms reality into an "image-world" which is resistant to intervention. Such is the reason why photographs disturb the viewer, leaving them as passive receptors (Sontag: 359). In a world where everything has become images of images, copies of copies, the individual's confrontation with the medium becomes more problematical.

An important issue that Sontag puts forward is that photographs also contribute to production of new meanings by "recycling" reality. Through photographs, the events and things become a part of a network in which they are assigned new uses. Her argument is that photography erases the common "distinctions between the beautiful and the ugly, the true and the false, the useful and the useless, good taste and bad," and dissolves everything into the realm of "the interesting" (Sontag: 363).

The photographic recycling makes clichés out of unique objects, distinctive and vivid artifacts out of clichés...We make of photography a means by which, precisely, anything can be said, any purpose served. (Sontag: 364)

Whether in the realm of art or as documentation, once something is photographed, it becomes a part of the image-world where they can be placed in various contexts and appropriated in an infinite number of ways to serve different needs. The point Sontag puts forward here is that this capacity of the medium makes it vulnerable to the needs of the capitalist society, which operates on an image oriented culture. In fact, Sontag's concluding lines of her essay *The Image World*, mainly focuses upon the uses of photography as a political tool.

The arguments that Sontag brings forth, which I have summarized very briefly, are crucial for an understanding of the function of photographic images in society. However, I believe that certain problematical points in her line of thinking require a further debate. In her rhetoric, Sontag suggests that in the case of photography one cannot handle the original-copy relation by referring to the ideas of Plato which draws clear distinctions between the two terms. Basically, her claim is that the "real-world" has been replaced by an "image-world" and specifically the uses of photography accelerates this transformation. However, once the effect is formulated as the real becoming unreal, an illusionary presence is situated as opposed to some forgotten, lost reality. Even if one is talking about a transformation in reality, in which the traces of the past effectively re-produce the present, this "living context is simply a different - and seemingly more - noble ideology" (Shawcross: 44). In fact, this way of approaching the medium is perhaps most problematical when such images are used in order to exercise power over the masses. Pursuing a

realist attitude would inevitably contribute to empowerment of what Guy Debord called "the society of the spectacle".

1.2 Debord's Society of the Spectacle

According to Debord, in the society of the spectacle, the visible form of the commodity occupies the whole of everyday life serving to this one massive and complex system called the spectacle, in which production and consumption is brought together in a constantly self-organizing and self-sustaining manner. The spectacle, as put forward by Debord, is not simply the outcome of an agglomeration of images presented to the public by means of TV sets, movie theaters, advertisements, etc., it is rather a "social relation among people mediated by images" (12).

The spectacle cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images... It is not something added to the real world – not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality. (Debord p.12-13)

Although the images of technological production like cinema or photography are important figures to the society of spectacle, in Debord's analysis their "spectacularity" cannot be the only means to explain and understand the relations of forces inherent in the term spectacle. Spectacle is

not merely an outcome of the realist attitudes towards images circulating through mass media, instead "the society of the spectacle is a form that chooses its own technical content" (Debord: 19).

If the spectacle – understood in the limited sense of those "mass media" that are its most stultifying superficial manifestation – seems at times to be invading society in the shape of a mere *apparatus*, it should be remembered that this apparatus has nothing neutral about it, and that it answers precisely to the needs of the spectacle's internal dynamics. (Debord:19)

Thus, it is neither the transparency of media nor their spectacular content that builds the spectacle. Instead, it is because such notions can easily be exploited in the full sense of the term to convey the spectators their already given imaginary positions in the society. In the spectacular society, under the capitalistic forms of production, people are alienated from/by the images they produce. They are passive observers of those images which are detached from lived experience and reunited under the false unity of the spectacle. Everyday is communicated to the passive voyeur by means of a look, which places vision in a highly privileged position over the other senses. The passivity of the observer here means his becoming a mere receptor. The gaze builds a gap between what is lived and what is shown. What is brought closer in the forms of representation in fact lies at a distance. With the distancing effect which is proper to the realm of images, the spectator

becomes capable of constituting them as objects ready for consumption and contemplation.

The point that needs to be elaborated further at this point is the hegemony of the eye in the spectacular society. The spectacle's existence is predominantly founded upon an understanding that establishes a direct link between vision and knowledge, which tries to explain all activity by the categories of vision. In this case, the world becomes an "object of vision" to be gazed at and photographs act like windows "that frame and mediate the possibilities of vision" (Burnett: 4). Referring to Robert D. Romanyshyn's arguments, Burnett says that the notion of the window implies a separation between the observing subject and the seen object. It also organizes the field of vision by drawing a boundary around it. Camera provides one with a constructed gaze. The spectator, "whose body had devolved into the eye," is no more than a passive actor who fails to live his "situations" within this system.

What I would like to suggest at this point is that the existence of spectacular society is not only the outcome of technical advances in the visual reproduction techniques. As Debord so rightly argues by claiming that the spectacle chooses its visual content, it is not the merely the images, nor their being transparent that create the spectacle but the functions they are assigned in society. Approaching such images by employing the terms of realism becomes problematical even when we claim that reality has also been

transformed. Indeed while Sontag resists the attitudes of realism, by proposing an "unreal reality", she still affirms the existence of some real world not contaminated by images.

1.3 Walter Benjamin and Technical Reproducibility

In his celebrated essay *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin not only discusses how technological reproducibility has changed the status of art objects but also presents these shifts as challenging the way one perceives and constitutes the world. According to Benjamin, photography and cinema do not simply represent the world, offering a direct and unmediated confrontation with reality, but the ease of production and distribution of images by technological means marks a critical turning point in the nature of artwork.

In Benjamin's line of inquiry the definition of the aura of an artwork occupies an important place. Benjamin puts forward the concept of aura as "the unique presence of a work of art, of a historical or of a natural object." And this concept is closely related to the phenomenon of distancing as again stated by Benjamin, "the unique phenomenon of a distance however close it may be" (325). The definition of aura based on the principle of distancing is the formulation of the cult value of the art object, rooted in ritual. With this definition Benjamin puts forward a fundamental and irreducible distance even

in the closest proximity to the object. By defining aura in terms of distancing he reaffirms the cult value of an artwork as distant and unapproachable. With mechanical reproduction, he claims, the aura is lost because the technological apparatuses abolish this distance by bringing images and reality into a close proximity, both "spatially and humanly" (Benjamin 325). For example, he talks about how the close-up shots by the camera satisfy the desires of the masses by placing things nearer to the observer. Furthermore, this displacement brings forward the detachment of the artwork from its original context and "emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual" (Benjamin 326). Once an art object becomes a material for the camera and reproduced by mechanical means, its "authenticity" is removed from the criteria for its evaluation. The possibilities of technical reproduction takes away the uniqueness of an artwork, transforms its "cult value" derived from its singularity and authenticity, into "exhibition value," its capability of circulating easily and being exhibited.

It should be noted here that in this particular essay Benjamin talks about a specific use of photography, as a tool for reproducing works of art. It would be a mistake to take his arguments as merely criticizing photographic image production for what it had done to the natural status of artwork and applying its effects on a boarder realm of photography. As Philippe Dubois states in his essay *Photography Mise-en-Film*, the cult value of the image affirms itself in the photographic image more fully than any other forms of visual representation (167). This is due to a double posture that photographic

images maintain in their very structure. Photograph as a material object stands, at the same time, closest and furthest from its object. The referent is lost, never to be grasped again, distant, absolutely separate, but at the same time it is present owing to the materiality of the medium, something that can be held, touched, even exchanged.

It is this hauntedness, formed by distance in proximity, absence in presence, the imaginary in the real, the virtuality of memory in the effectiveness of a trace, that draws us to photographs and gives them their aura: *the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be*. (Dubois: 167)

The structures of objectification and material possession by capturing aspects of "life itself" in a "real" object that can be possessed, copied, circulated, and saved, constitute the photographic as both a "real" trace of personal experience and a concrete extroversion of experience that can "belong to someone else". These aspects give a specific form to its temporal existence. The photograph freezes and preserves the homogeneous and irreversible *momentum* of a temporal flow into the abstracted, atomized, and secured space of a *moment*. A moment cannot be inhabited.

The double operation triggering the effect of looking at a photograph is a play between the two terms presence and absence. The simultaneity of presence and absence, the material opacity and unmediated transparency, distance in proximity, endows the photographic images with a paradoxical

structure concerning the referential system. These two terms co-exist on the surface of the photographic image. It is due to this double posture that there is always a gap, a distance, which cannot be overcome, between any object and its reproduction. And the presence of this gap is internal to their structure. In this framework one cannot simply mourn for the decay of aura, but one can claim a new definition of it.

CHAPTER II

Photography and Textuality

Regarding photographs as substitutes for the things depicted has been a major pre-conception for the discourses established upon the subject matter. What the realist attitude so insistently promotes about photography is its unmediated character, resulting in an objective recording of world's reality. Such claims work on the basis of a "metaphysics of presence" that has shaped Western thinking.

In this chapter, I intend to go through some deconstructivist techniques that Derrida puts forward which, I believe, can open up the way for thinking on photography. This should not be understood as a one-to-one application of the terms of deconstruction to the realm of photography since such an attempt would inevitably be reductive in the sense that it would be to treat deconstruction as yet another system, a universal philosophy whose functioning can be demonstrated on various models. What deconstruction promotes can be seen as offering a radical way of reading that challenges any structurally coherent system built upon the primacy of the presence of a fixed originary center that ensures the stability of meaning.

2.1 Deconstructing Metaphysics of Presence

Derridean set of deconstructionist practices are established upon the very existence of binary oppositions that are inherent in logocentric thinking and their dismantling. According to him, from a structuralist point of view every system has a center from which the whole system generates and its parts are interrelated due to the presence of such a center. Within these systems, Western thinking has long been based upon hierarchical binary oppositions such as presence/absence, culture/nature, masculine/feminine, original/copy, speech/writing, etc. Here, concepts like "truth", "nature", "original" are regarded as consistent, coherent in their interiority and wholeness. Their opposites, which might be "falsehood", "culture", "copy" relatively, are in a secondary position, without ever being capable of fulfilling the self-sufficiency of the first terms. In such a system of thinking, the primary term constitutes its identity by distinguishing itself from another identity, namely its opposite. Truth is truth because it is not error; original is original because it is not copy... This way of hierarchical ordering of terms and the attitude of repressing the "negative" term in any settled binary opposition that Western thinking has long been constituted upon, is quite problematical in the sense that the difference between the two terms is regarded as external to both of them. Several questions can be raised at this point: How can one talk about an integral whole, a pure idea under these conditions, if it is what it is, with relation to its supplement? Can it remain uncontaminated, not haunted by

the ghost of its opposite, this outside? How is it possible to locate the supplement outside the whole when we cannot talk about the latter without the former?

One important point that we have to keep in mind is that Derrida does not simply oppose the existence of binary oppositions. If it were so, deconstruction would end up being a reversal of traditional dualisms. In order to deconstruct something there should be a formerly built structure whose method of construction is thoroughly analyzed first and then dissolved into its parts to open the way for new meanings to the extent that it may turn against itself in the end. This liberation of text (and it is not purely in linguistic terms that "text" is meant here) from the dominant rules of a system makes it transparent to infinite number of factors intervening to its meaning. The analyzed structure is not a mute object waiting to be read, but open to interferences, without the dominance of its author. At this point, I think, Derrida problematizes the concept of autonomy in any structured system. Deconstruction does not work within closed systems to dismantle, dissolve their fragments to break their stability but also it seems to be an interdisciplinary practice to question the purified and settled manner of any system. Although what seems to be practiced by deconstructivist discourse is playing with the fragments of any structure in itself, this certainly goes to the point that the structure's very autonomy is brought into question in the end.

These hierarchical dualisms are indeed generated from a desire to secure the coherency of any signifying system by giving primacy to presence, which would be the originating center. The "truth" of concepts stems from their capabilities of being present, self-explanatory and self-sufficient.

We have experienced the systematic interdependence of the concepts of sense, ideality, objectivity, truth, intuition, perception, and expression. Their common matrix is being as presence: the absolute proximity of self-identity, the being-in-front of the object available for repetition, the maintenance of the temporal present, whose ideal form is the self-presence of transcendental life, whose ideal entity allows idealiter of infinite repetition. (Derrida quoted in Phillips: 158)

It can now be clearer why in any metaphysics of presence the phonetic sign is located as the center of language. In Western metaphysics, presence has always been privileged over absence, which lead to the priority given to speech over writing since the former assumes the presence of a speaking subject uttering his thoughts in total simultaneity with his thoughts. To put it in another way, the inevitable gap between the signifier and signified in the language is believed to be closed, meaning to be self-contained, the distance between the speaker and the listener overcome, in their presence. Here the coherence of meaning in any utterance is fixed by means of a transcendental signified.

It is not by chance that the thought of being, as the thought of this transcendental signified, is manifested above all in the voice: in a language of words. The voice is heard (understood) – that undoubtedly is what is called conscience – closest to the self as the absolute effacement of the signifier: pure auto-affection that necessarily has the form of time and which does not borrow from outside of itself, in the world or in "reality," any accessory signifier, any substance of expression foreign to its spontaneity. It is the unique experience of the signified producing itself spontaneously, from within the self, and nevertheless, as signified concept in the element of ideality or universality. (Derrida, 1976: 20)

Writing, in this context, is corrupt, deceitful since it operates in the absence of the author. It is a delayed act, a representation, contaminated by the absence of a self-presence. It is through positioning writing secondary to speech that thoughts about language wants to conceal the parts, namely distancing and difference, which are in fact integral to it. However, according to Derrida, it is upon these paradoxes that language constitutes itself. Without oppositional differences and the possibility of repeatable units language would not be intelligible, cannot communicate; thus speech must also be defined in terms of writing.

Derrida deconstructs what he calls phonocentrism by replacing the letter "e" with an "a" in the word difference. This small "a" is inaudible when the word is spoken. It is through writing that one can recognize it. Accordingly, what we have to do when we hear the word 'difference' or 'différance' is to

refer to the graphic sign. By bringing up a small, "a" which cannot be heard, Derrida challenges the traditional logic based on phonocentrism. However, *différance* does not go on to establishing itself as a new center by giving priority to writing. It belongs neither to speech nor to writing. It has a supplementary character that cannot be "stabilized within a polarization of the same and the different" (Derrida, 1991: 99). As Derrida says:

It (*différance*) is at one and the same time an idea rooted in sameness, and radical otherness, an otherness which is absolutely radical. So I'd say that *différance* can't be enclosed either within the same, or the idea of radically other, about which nothing could be said. It's an enigmatic relation of the same to the other. (1991: 99)

An important remark to be made here is that, as Derrida suggests, *différance* is not simply constitutive of identity in its present being. If it were so then we would need to locate it in a "simple and unmodified – in-different – present" (Derrida, 1982: 11). It is by Derrida's definition of the term that *différance* involves both a spacing in differing, and a temporization, a delay in deferring. These two aspects of *différance*, spacing and temporizing, are the fundamental conditions of any signification. It is a double operation to resolve the idea that a sign is constituted by a re-presentation of another presence, a substitute for it that can function in the absence of that originary presence. *Différance* as supplement generates and inhabits the terms of any binary

opposition. It is not introduced as a third term in-between two polarized identities. In fact, it is due to *différance* that one can employ an oppositional absence/presence dualism. As Derrida argues "*différance* produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing it makes impossible" (1976: 143). What makes signification possible is this *différance*. Each element has its other inscribed within it, a mark of pure exteriority, which Derrida calls a "trace":

... this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present. An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject. In constituting itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be called *spacing*, the becoming-time of space of the becoming-space of time (temporization). (1982: 13)

The term "trace" as Derrida conceptualizes here cannot be thought of on the basis of absence/presence dualism. It is not the present mark of some absent reality. Neither does it suggest that the negative term of the binary opposition (absence) contribute to the constitution of the positive one (presence.) If it were so, this would merely be to reverse the hierarchical

order. In Derrida's thematization of the term, trace has no site proper to it; dislocation, displacement and erasure belong to its structure (1982: 24).

In such a framework, any idea of a center, which controls the generation of a fundamentally coherent meaning, is shaken. The textual stability is threatened and the center is pushed to the limits. This inconsistency of meaning does not mean that the text lacks meaning. The impossibility of being full, internally coherent, is in the very structure of any text. According to Derrida, it is difference, distancing, rupture in writing that brings forth the conflicting forces inherent in the text and makes it communicable. Again for him, everything, including speech, in language operate on the model of writing and "there is nothing outside the text."

There has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. (Derrida, 1976: 159)

What Derrida is concerned with here, is not only the linguistic text. Rather, it refers to "textuality" which embraces all structures such as political, historical, economic, real, etc. According to Richard Dienst, in Derrida, writing is a machine (Dienst: 131). But it does not merely record the presence of the spoken word for later use, to represent it in the absence of the speaker but it

is one that constantly produces an excess by playing. The written text gives way to a play of interpretations, of differences between/in its elements and thus meaning always defers/differs. There is no longer just one meaning to be derived from any text, not one proper reading, not one pre-determined interpretation to make. Parts do not simply form a whole and serve to its coherency. "Despite the closure of any system, the text contains elements that unsettle the principle of its own production and cannot be integrated into it" (Frey: 125). Instead, the multiple relationships in and out of the machinic components, the tension between intensities, produce an excess of meaning, a surplus. This is not to say that the whole, the product is unimportant. But one cannot simply talk about *one* whole, closed, finished, there to be grasped.

Derrida says: "The motif of *différance*...plays neither the role of a "concept" nor simply of a "word"...*différance* finds itself enmeshed in the work that pulls it through a chain of other "concepts", other "words", other textual configurations". *Différance*, produces a multiple and complex network of infinite reference and opens up a space of work and of play. Once the realist attitude to equate signifier and signified to secure identity is overcome, meaning becomes subjected to production in an endless series of textual movements. It is this doubling operation that produces a multiplicity, a textual system that embraces all cultural, social and political dimensions. Once textuality is defined as an "illimitable matrix", one can approach certain problematic issues concerning visual representation in terms of *différance*,

which is "to delimit a formation of value by means of a continuous passage through it, out to its aporias, its limits."

2.2 Photography and Writing

Extending these arguments into the realm of technologically produced images, and of photography in particular, which is the major theme of this study, we can point out the problems of established discourses and suggest another way of meditation. Logocentric thinking suggests that images are secondary to reality; they come *after* the object. In other words, if the existence of photographic image depend on the idea of imprint alone, the imprint of light emanated from the object on photosensitive surface, we are again faced with the orthodoxy concerning model/copy dualism. Images are mere representations of reality, mere copies; their existence depends solely on some original being.

Apart from the ones, I have just mentioned, the privileged position of speech in logocentric thinking has, in fact, some other correlations with the discourses surrounding photography. As discussed in the previous chapter, the unmediated transcription of the real on the film surface makes photographs a perfect analogon of what they show. In other words, the presence of one instant, that is captured and extended, can be immediately accessed through photographs. The self-presence of the object is conveyed to

the viewer without mediation. In this manner, photographs are believed to establish a direct link between the recorded thing and the viewer owing to the full transparency of the medium.

The written character of photographic images are often foreclosed because vision is believed to be an even more direct way of making sense than speech. As John McCumber suggests in his essay *Derrida and the Closure of Vision*, the metaphysics of presence is strongly related to the privileged position of vision in Western thinking. Vision has long been regarded as establishing an unmediated relation between the subject and reality, giving way to truthful inferences about the world. In this sense, vision becomes directly associated with knowledge; the gap between form and meaning are believed to be overcome. According to Victor Burgin, "it is this logocentric longing which is expressed in the 'window-on-the-world' realism of the great majority of writers on photography" (55). In fact, pursuing Derrida's claim that there is nothing "beyond the text", vision can be explained in terms of textuality.

An important remark to be made here is that, photographic images embody a paradox concerning the location of the signifier and signified. If images are secondary to reality, they can somehow be likened to words; signifiers whose signified reside elsewhere. At the same time, where the attitude of giving primacy to the unmediatedness would lead us is that photographs carry their signifieds along with themselves. With the effect of

transparency, the photographic image becomes self-reflexive that generates its own meaning without necessarily making a detour to an outer reality.

2.3 Writing and Communication

Once the relation between the signifier and signified is problematized, the secure grounds to ensure the communication of the message of the photograph becomes unstable. The issues Derrida discusses in *The Post Card* might be useful to elaborate on the subject matter, especially concerning the delivery of any message by technological means. We should keep in mind here that by technology, we are not only referring to mass media technologies. In Derrida's account, writing is also a technology. What the postal system suggests is that the possibility of non-arrival is structurally inherent in any message. The postcard is written for a possible addressee in the absence of him/her. And it circulates without the authority of the sender. The event of the postcard is based upon "the separation of the two correspondents from each other" and against the condition of their coming together (Brunette and Wills: 180). In fact, in every system of communication, the idea of destination comes in the first place. Message is believed to reach its destination, once it has been sent. What Derrida suggests is that, the non-arrival is inherent in the formation of the message, not as some unfortunate possibility but as a structural necessity. Thus, the proposition 'a letter may not arrive' becomes "a letter *can* always *not* arrive at its destination" (Derrida, 1991: 505).

The mischance (the mis-address) of this chance is that in order *to be able* not to arrive, it must bear within itself a force and a structure, a straying of destination, such that it *must* also not arrive in any way. Even in arriving (always to some "subject"), the letter takes itself away *from the arrival at arrival*. It arrives elsewhere, always several times. (1991: 505)

The very formation of the message necessitates its detachability from an original context. Not a controllable set of concepts but an infinite and indefinite series of difference and deferral governs the operation of the communication system. Now, if a direct correspondence between the sender and the addressee can not be ensured by a transcendental signified that would ensure the stability and coherence of the meaning of the message, any beginning presupposing an end gets undone, yet to begin again.

Such arguments can be linked to our discussion of photography provided that we keep in mind the assumption that photographic images are generally attributed a function as carriers of messages of some sort. In different contexts the nature of the message can differ, for example, the images categorized under art-photography are most of the time believed to arouse a certain feeling in the spectator, which is dependent on the creator's intentions. In the case of newspaper photographs, or the ones that are used as pieces of evidences, the aim would most commonly be to convey the viewer that such and such event had happened. This is not to claim that photographic

images can be so easily fit into some categorizations and they are experienced accordingly. As I will try to discuss, photographs escape such strict categories that they were meant to function in. Being an adestined text, photographs cannot simply be analyzed under the determinations of the context for which they may have been produced. The production of meaning in photography, in this sense is always context oriented.

2.4 Photographic Images and the Communication of Meaning

To talk about the meaning of a photograph is to situate it within a discursive space where meaning is culturally produced and communicated. The limiting function of discourse gives way to the possibility of the production and exchange of meaning. In fact, the system of relations that define the discourse's limits are in fact not stable. In the most common understanding, photographic images circulating in the society are regarded as carriers of messages. In order to be communicated to the public, the message should be uttered on the basis of some generally shared codes. The discourse provides a context for such utterances to become communicable. In this sense, as Allan Sekula says, photographs are 'incomplete utterances' because their meaning is context oriented. The photographic message cannot be transmitted unless there is a pre-established system of relations governing its readability:

We might formulate this position as follows: a photograph communicates by means of its association with some hidden or implicit text; it is this text, or system of hidden linguistic propositions, that carries the photograph into the domain of readability. (Sekula: 85)

Sekula argues that photographic images cannot be thought independent of the tasks they serve in community. While discussing the many ways of how meaning is effectively produced in photographs, he opposes to those critics that attribute a 'truth value' to the medium. According to him, if the photographic images were regarded as being natural, like an imprint of reality, this would suggest that photography has a language of its own, beyond the cultural determinants. This kind of an approach would fail to explain the production of meaning, which is always determined by discourse.

Derrida suggests in *Signature Event Context* that the structure of the sign is one that is capable of constituting itself in the absence of both the receiver and the sender. Nevertheless, constitution of a self, here, should neither be understood as being able to preserve its consistency, nor as remaining the same.

It is at that point that the *différance* as writing could no longer (be) an (ontological) modification of presence. In order for my "written communication" to retain its function as writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general. (Derrida, 1998: 7)

According to Derrida, in order for there be communication, it must be "iterable." Repeatability of every sign that functions in communicating is a necessity which brings forth the fact that they "can always be detached from the chain in which it is inserted or given without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning, if not all possibility of "communicating," precisely." (Derrida, 1998: 9) However, iterability does not mean to say that each repetition would remain the same, it rather "introduces the possibility of irreducible difference (because repetition always carries difference along with it)." (Brunette and Wills: 87) The possibilities of communication can be revealed -still cannot be exhausted- by grafting the sign into various contexts. The preliminary given context is most of the time regarded as being the "real" one, in which the writer had produced the text. But the text has a "breaking force" that challenges the closure of any context. And if such a force were not an essential character of the sign then it would not have been able to function apart from its moment of creation.

These discussions on the operations of the postcard, I believe, have correspondences to any kind of utterance - verbal, visual, fictitious, etc. - that is put forward, whether addressing us intentionally or not. The photographs that circulate in society in enormous numbers can be rethought with the principles of the postal. We may not be the direct addressees of each photographic message, but still, we are the recipients of them. They may not be targeted to us as in the case of the postcard, which is stamped, addressed

to a particular receiver, but we get to receive them in various contexts, at exhibitions, in family albums, newspapers, magazines, etc. Anyhow, once put forward they become "posts" that each of us can pick up and read as we choose.

The direction of these arguments should not lead us to a conclusion that puts verbal language side by side with the visual one. As mentioned earlier, the relation of reference between the signifier and the signified in photography is different from verbal language. By explaining viscosity in terms of textuality I do not argue that the operations taking place are same in the two realms. To understand how the "logic of the supplement" supplements all logics in Derrida's account, it is important to make a redefinition of photography, one that does not put the mimetic function in its center.

In the next chapter, I will propose a re-reading of Roland Barthes's work *Camera Lucida* in the light of the arguments that have been discussed so far. This particular work of Barthes's on photography is exemplary in the sense that it not only suggests an engagement with experiencing photographic practice in a personal level, but also for its contributions to a novel thinking on photography that is not limited to structural analysis. Indeed, at various points Barthes's narrative echoes the terms of Derridean deconstruction. While, at a first glance, *Camera Lucida* provides us nothing but a personal work of mourning - mourning of Barthes after his mother's death - that places certain

photographic images at its center, it is precisely because of that reason it becomes a powerful narrative.

CHAPTER III

Barthes and Camera Lucida

In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Roland Barthes puts forward several important issues about photographs, which I believe are crucial to the experience of photographic images. Without forgetting his earlier texts about the subject matter and that the book is written as an homage to Sartre, I believe that it could be read on the basis of the terms it creates apart from all the literature that preceded it or affected its writing.

First of all, we should point out that in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes is not writing about photography in general, but about his experience of looking at particular photographs. Barthes's approach to photographs throughout *Camera Lucida* pursues this highly personal tone. While presenting the reader with certain photographs and reflecting on them, his aim is not to clarify the truth in them, nor to reach a meaning, but to stress in what manner certain pictures have an effect on him: "I dismiss all knowledge, all culture, I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own" (1991b: 51). But such an approach should not simply be taken as a subjective attitude that aims no more than writing about his feelings, thoughts, about some of the photographs he chooses whether arbitrarily or deliberately and excluding all scientific

attitude whatsoever. In fact the urge that made him reflect upon photography is originated from an "ontological desire", to discover its essential feature that marked its difference from other types of images. (Barthes, 1991b: 3) At the very beginning of his adventurous search to find out what photography is "in itself", Barthes locates his self as "a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical" (1991b: p.8). He resists the reductive tone of the discourses of sociology, semiology, psychology, etc. which cannot fully satisfy his desire for writing about his engagement with photographs. Rather than contributing to the social, in preserving his personal tone, what he suggests is a singular science for each object, a *mathesis singularis*, a science of absolute contingency, which will create each time the new. By making himself a mediator for photography, he tries to find out "the fundamental feature, the universal without which there would be no photography." (p.9) The beginning of his quest for the noeme of photography (its guiding principle), is marked by a self split between "a naïve 'I' who does not yet know where the journey will lead and a more knowledgeable, sophisticated 'I' who has completed it" (Shapiro 6). The tension between the "two voices" that shapes Barthes's narrative is not to be resolved in the course of the book by choosing one at the expense of the other. In fact, it seems to be the force that gives rhythm to the overall narrative.

The division of the self does not stop at this point. After asking the question "What does my body know of Photography?" Barthes states that the subject can be engaged in the photographic act under three positions: subject

being photographed, photographer, and spectator. From this point on, Barthes says that he will leave aside the second position, since he had not practiced photography as such. His narrative is structured upon the issues concerning the other two, the subject of photograph as the referent and the viewer, and especially the relation in between the two positions.

An important theme central to Barthes's mediation on photographs in *Camera Lucida* is death. The relation of death with the photographic image occurs at different levels. According to Barthes, any discussion on photography should start with the conception of death, since "each reading of a photo is implicitly, in a repressed manner, a contract with what has ceased to exist, a contract with death" (Barthes quoted in Burnett: 33). The relation to death is first of all the outcome of the fact that photographs are truthful witnesses of something, but the thing they witness no longer exists as such.

3.1 Subject as the Target of Photography

Every photograph is an annunciation of the death of the subject photographed. The word "subject" here, designates not only a living person, but also things, events, scenes, in short, anything that is a material for the camera. With the click of the shutter, the subject posing in front of the lens is transformed into an object. Barthes mentions this when he speaks of the uneasiness he feels while posing in front of the camera. In the earlier years of

photography, due to technical necessities, the duration of posing was far greater compared to the instantaneity of today's cameras. The person who was going to have his picture taken needed to stay motionless before the lens for several minutes. However long (or short) the time of exposure is, by making himself a material for the photographic lens, he lets himself be transformed into an image. Posing, according to Barthes, causes this transformation to take place even before the photograph is taken.

In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself... the Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death...: I am truly becoming a specter. (1991b: 14)

Being the object of camera one experiences this transformation of becoming "Total-Image, which is to say, Death in person" (Barthes 1991b: 14). Considering the difference in the length of exposure time, Benjamin makes a suggestion that in the earlier days of photography, the procedure that necessitated the subject to stand still for a long time in front of the camera "caused the subject to focus his life in the moment rather than hurrying past on it" (1979: 245). Benjamin claims that the aura of the photographs belonging to this earlier period is generated from this procedure which caused the

subject to grow into the picture, taking the imprint of his duration as well. The advents in the technology of photographic apparatus decreased the long interval of exposure to an instant and consequently, caused photographic images to be understood in terms of mimesis. For Benjamin, the sophistication of camera ironically marks the decline of photography, since it conceals the "becoming-image" of the thing in its momentary recording.

3.2 Studium and Punctum

Writing on his experiences of looking at photographs, Barthes mentions the co-existence of two heterogeneous components of the image. These two elements function on entirely different levels but in correspondence to each other. To designate the first element that is found almost in all photographs, Barthes chooses the Latin word *studium*, which means "application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment" (1991b: 26). According to Barthes, *studium* comes into play when one is engaged in a direct reading of a photograph within the terms of signification. *Studium*, establishing a coded relation between the image and its referent, places the "photographic meaning" in a world of comprehensible objects. Belonging to the realm of shared language, culture, history and so forth, *studium* speaks to the viewer in a conventionalized context. It is what makes the photograph communicate with a general audience.

To recognize the studium is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture (from which *studium* derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers. (Barthes, 1991b: 27-28)

Several functions attributed to photographs such as to inform, to surprise, to shock, etc. belong to the level of studium. The spectator recognizes these effects through his knowledge and/or past experiences. Studium arouses a general interest in the spectator, which is determined by the cultural, social context.

The second element, for which Barthes uses another Latin word *punctum*, meaning, "a mark made by a pointed instrument", is that which "breaks the studium", punctures the signifying surface. Emerging right from the scene and capturing the eye of the spectator, punctum creates a wound. As Barthes puts it, the punctum is "this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me" (1991b: 26).

As put forward in the earlier part of *Camera Lucida*¹, most of the time, punctum is inherent in a small but revealing detail in the photograph, which happened to be there accidentally. Whether this small detail exists in the scene dependent on or independent of the photographer's intentions is

¹ In the second part of the book, Barthes introduces a somehow different conceptualization of punctum, which I will be discussing later.

irrelevant, because intended or not it belongs to the photographic text and in order for it to function, "the punctum must be mine" (Shapiro: 20).

According to Barthes, the mere presence of this element arouses an interest in the spectator for that particular photograph. Unlike the studium, it is not *discovered* by the spectator through an analysis, it is rather *received* as if springing out from the very surface of the photograph and arresting the eye of the beholder. After having recognized it, the value of the photograph changes in his eyes, as if a new image emerges from the surface of the printed material and distinguishes it from other images. Insofar as it is not punctured by the punctum, studium evokes a general interest in the spectator. No disturbance, no wound, no love but a certain shock, surprise or an agreement. As opposed to the studium's generalized stance, punctum is an intensely private element, functioning at a highly personal, subjective level. Moreover, its position cannot be fixed. Depending on the time of looking and also with respect to the viewer, the punctum shifts. The particular photographs from which Barthes recognizes the effect of punctum in *Camera Lucida* are not necessarily the same ones that would prick the reader, or any other spectator who could have encountered them in a different context than the one of the book. Punctum, being the undeterminable, uncontrollable element, emerges from an encounter between a photograph and the spectator's consciousness. Thus, the effect of the punctum in a particular picture is of a contingent nature, cannot be generalized and attributed to a universal subject.

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According to Barthes, the mere presence of this element arouses an interest in the spectator for that particular photograph. Unlike the studium, it is not *discovered* by the spectator through an analysis, it is rather *received* as if springing out from the very surface of the photograph and arresting the eye of the beholder. After having recognized it, the value of the photograph changes in his eyes, as if a new image emerges from the surface of the printed material and distinguishes it from other images. Insofar as it is not punctured by the punctum, studium evokes a general interest in the spectator. No disturbance, no wound, no love but a certain shock, surprise or an agreement. As opposed to the studium's generalized stance, punctum is an intensely private element, functioning at a highly personal, subjective level. Moreover, its position cannot be fixed. Depending on the time of looking and also with respect to the viewer, the punctum shifts. The particular photographs from which Barthes recognizes the effect of punctum in *Camera Lucida* are not necessarily the same ones that would prick the reader, or any other spectator who could have encountered them in a different context than the one of the book. Punctum, being the undeterminable, uncontrollable element, emerges from an encounter between a photograph and the spectator's consciousness. Thus, the effect of the punctum in a particular picture is of a contingent nature, cannot be generalized and attributed to a universal subject.

Despite the fact that a photograph can be reproduced many times, and can circulate in the society through various medium (printed in magazines, newspapers, exhibited in galleries, or merely being collected in photo albums, etc.), the punctum, creating a crack in the surface of reproduction, singularizes the photographic image.

As Derrida puts forward in his article *The Deaths of Roland Barthes*, there is a two-way movement in the operation of the punctum. While it arises from the photograph, pointing to the viewer, addressing him, its direction is reversed on the side of the viewer. At the same instance of its pointing to me, I point to it.

It is thus that the punctuated photograph points me. Even on its minute surface, the same point divides itself: this double punctuation disorganizes from the start both the unary and the desire that finds its order there. (Derrida, 1988b: 265)

The singularity of the punctum cannot be thought independent of the generality of the studium since the experience of this contingent element is not possible if there were no already coded meaning at work. The difficulty here is to understand how the two terms are related to one another. Concerning the co-presence of studium and punctum, what Derrida suggests is that, although these two can easily be seen as opposable terms, in Barthes they are brought into play, "the one for the other, in a metonymic composition" (1988b: 262). The relation between the uncoded element and

the always already coded one cannot be regarded as exclusive or contradictory, rather it is compositional. One cannot simply isolate one term from the other or treat them as two opposable concepts constituting an identity. In Derrida's words, the punctum belongs to the studium without belonging to it; composes with it while preserving its heterogeneity; cannot be located in it but rather haunts it. (1988b: 267) Punctum "scans" the studium, but being its absolute other, cannot be located in it, neither simply stands outside it. The complete otherness of the punctum gives rhythm to the studium. Furthermore, Derrida says that:

...the punctum is not what it is. This absolute other composes with the same, with its absolute other which is thus not its opposite, with the locus of the same and of the studium (it is the limit of the binary opposition and, undoubtably, of any structural analysis the studium itself can exploit). (1988b: 285)

The disseminative force of the punctum is derived from its supplementary character. Again it should be pointed out that the punctum as supplement should not be understood as the dialectical opposite of the studium, which would mean to say that it is secondary, in relation to the primary coded meaning. According to Barthes, whether it is put deliberately or has happened to be there out of coincidence, the punctum "is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*" (1991b: 55). Although remaining a detail, the punctum has a metonymic power of

expansion: "it fills the whole picture" (1991b: 45). The difficulty here is that one cannot easily find a location proper to the punctum. At a first glance, the punctum seems to reside within the photographic image and at the same time, as Barthes suggests, it creates a "blind field", thus marking the space outside the frame. One may be tempted to claim here that punctum, springing out from the inside of the framed space, moves towards outside the frame, to what is not shown within that confined space of the photographic print. This way of thinking the punctum, as a visibly present element signifying an absence, would inevitably lead us to an affirmation of a border and thus, a confirmation of the presence of two identifiable "places", i.e. inside and outside. However, if the punctum belongs to the inside of the frame without belonging to it, and marks the belonging and inclusion in the same movement, it cannot be thought of as simply located inside or outside the photograph. The play of punctum, in this sense, marks an abyssal relationship in the heart of the photographic image.

As soon as we can no longer distinguish between two places, contents and things, the *punctum* is not entirely subjugated to a concept, if by this one means a predicative, distinct, and opposable determination. This concept of a ghost is as scarcely perceptible in itself as the ghost of a concept. Neither life nor death, it is the haunting of one by the other...Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same, the *punctum* in the *studium*, the dead other alive in me. This concept of the photograph *photographs* all conceptual

oppositions, it traces a relationship of haunting which perhaps is constitutive of all logics. (Derrida 1988b: 267)

According to this logic of the supplement, the term trace that Derrida uses cannot be understood as a substitute to the presence of an object that marks its absence. Photograph, which is likened to a death mask by Sontag, can be understood in terms of a trace, "a form which indicates the failure of presence, a face which withdraws behind the form which presents it" (Critchley: 108). Trace, being something more than a simple duplication of the object, points to the space between the object and its image, where there can be no fixed origin that would ensure mimesis, but pure resemblance which can resemble nothing.

Traces do not return to the moment of the mark, they are without origin, but not without end in the permanence that seems to perpetuate them, traces which, even while becoming confounded and replacing themselves, are forever there and forever cut off from that whose trace they would be, having no other being than their plurality, as if there were not a trace but traces never the same and always repeated. (Derrida quoted in Taylor: 24)

A characteristic feature of the punctum is that the difficulty of its thematization which requires the introduction of verbal language into the visual realm. Barthes's another essay *The Third Meaning* might be helpful for

understanding the punctum's relation to language. The theme of this latter essay is different from *Camera Lucida*; here Barthes looks into the "obtuse meaning" in film stills, and in particular in Eisenstein stills. The differences between photographic image and film still -photogramme - are put forward several times in both writings. The operation of what Barthes calls the "obtuse meaning" cannot be directly associated with those of punctum, considering the different forces at work in the two media. However, one can draw some similarities in the conceptualizations of the two terms, especially in terms of the "logic of the supplement" and the way they cause a rupture in the signification system.

If the obtuse meaning cannot be described, that is because, in contrast to the obvious meaning, it does not copy anything - how do you describe something that does not represent anything? The pictorial "rendering" of words is here impossible, with the consequence that if, in front of these images, we remain, you and I, at the level of articulated language. (Barthes, 1991a: 326)

Similarly, punctum, being the uncoded element, and not a function of language, is not to be conveyed in words, but is to be experienced. "What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance" (Barthes, 1991b: 51). It is because of the nature of the punctum that although one can understand its certain characteristics or how it functions, it is not possible to provide a specific account of what the term *is*.

To put it in another way, although Barthes can establish a theoretical framework to show how in some photographs the punctum captures his eye and arouses a feeling of great interest in him, it is inevitable that the examples he provides would not function in the same manner for a reader of *Camera Lucida*. Thus it would be a mistake to reduce the effect of punctum to Barthes's own commentaries and try to get the same feeling out of these pictures, which will only be an aftereffect, that is, a product of language. Even Barthes himself falls prey to the difficulty of the task he undertakes, when trying to clarify what the punctum is, under certain examples. Let us consider the black family photograph. While demonstrating how the punctum can reveal itself when one is no longer looking at the photograph, Barthes supports his argument with a commentary upon the new punctum, i.e. the gold necklace:

...later on I realized that the real punctum was the necklace she was wearing; for (no doubt) it was this same necklace (a slender ribbon of braided gold) which I had seen worn by someone in my own family, and which, once she died, remained shut up in a family box of old jewelry (this sister of my father never married, lived with her mother as an old maid, and I had always been saddened whenever I thought of her dreary life). (1991b: 53)

In the passage quoted above even though Barthes does not undertake a mission that would provide an interpretation that can be communicated with a general audience, he still cannot avoid building up a narrative around the punctum. This is not to say that we can share his feelings aroused by the force

of this particular detail, which are strictly personal. But his attempt to clarify the effect it has on him reduces its force as the punctum, the unnameable and incommunicable element of the image. Such an illustration inevitably places the punctum into a system of codes. In fact, to some degree, all the photographs Barthes reproduces in *Camera Lucida* in order to present the reader with how punctum effects him run this risk. In fact, those photographs can only function in the structure of the book to communicate with the reader on the level of studium. And this is precisely what Barthes is not interested in.

So, why is Barthes so insistent upon giving us examples of the play of punctum in certain images while he is aware of the fact that the thing he is striving to communicate with the reader is necessarily incommunicable? It is perhaps because he needs to validate the existence of such an experience, which can only be possible by providing a narrative for it, thus making it known to the reader and even to himself. This is not to claim that his task is by nature impossible, so should not be undertaken. As Derek Attridge suggests in his essay *Roland Barthes's Obtuse, Sharp Meaning*, this attempt to exemplify goes parallel with Derrida's discussion on the demand for translation:

The details that bruise or pierce him call out to be made known, to be transferred from the singular to the general, from the idiosyncratic to the communal. Indeed, it might be said that they are fully constituted in their incomprehensibility in the necessary attempt to render them comprehensible, that their specificity actually depends on the words (or other

codings) by which the viewer acknowledges and attempts to articulate them – in the first place, to his or herself. Thus they appear only in the moment of disappearance. (Attridge: 84)

Following Attridge, we can say that Barthes's betrayal of the effect of the punctum is necessarily inherent to its very nature. In order to prevent the punctum from "sinking into nothingness", he needs to bring it back "to the flesh of the world", by giving it a body and inevitably make it a product of language, at least to some degree. But as I have mentioned above, once it is named, the punctum cannot preserve its power as the obscure element. The moment when it appears by disappearing is fatal, like the instant when the shutter was clicked.

Talking about a photograph of a black family taken by James Van der Zee, Barthes draws our attention to the belt worn by one of the figures (possibly a sister or daughter) as the detail that aroused a great interest in him. After several pages, another detail in the same photograph is said to be the real punctum, the necklace worn by the black woman. He realizes this when he is thinking about that picture which is no longer in front of him.

Ultimately – or at the limit – in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes. 'The necessary condition for an image is sight,' Janouch told Kafka; and Kafka smiled and replied: 'We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes.' (Barthes, 1991b: 53)

In Barthes's understanding, the experience of photographic images do not only occur in terms of their visible aspects, of what they insistently reveal to the eye of the spectator. Rather, it happens at a level in which one moves between visibility and invisibility, thus "suspends the gesture which conflates photography with pure hallucination" (Durand: 145).

3.3 Problematic of the Referent

One of the issues that are discussed at length in *Camera Lucida* is the question concerning the referent in photographic images. By nature, photography reproduces almost infinitely, what had taken place for once and what can never be repeated. In the photographic image the subject's flow, duration is torn from a continuum and suspended forever. Photography makes its object disappear and return within an instant. The photographic referent does not relate to some outer reality, but can only refer to itself. It is inseparable from the photograph.

I call "photographic referent" not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph... in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. (Barthes, p.76)

This makes every image an absolute particular, for which, each time signifier and the signified merges into one another in the surface of the print. It is necessary to note here that, in the systems of representation, the process of reference functions by providing a framework for a signifier to be related to a signified that is located elsewhere. Whereas in photography, the referential system folds back upon itself, due to the fact that the moment when the shutter is released can never be repeated existentially. The photographic image persistently renders visible the absolute singularity of the other which has already disappeared in the folds of time. In Barthes terms, "It is as if the photograph always carries its referent with itself" (1991b: 5). Here, Derrida's suggestions on the question of how referential system works in photography gains importance:

But should we say the 'reference' or 'the referent'? Analytic precision must here be equal to the stakes, and the photograph puts this precision to the test: in the photograph, the referent is noticeably absent, suspendable, vanished into the unique past time of its event, but reference to this referent, let us say the intentional movement of reference,... also implies irreducibly the having-been of a unique and invariable referent. It implies the 'return of the dead' in the very structure of both its image and the phenomenon of its image. (Derrida 1988b: 281)

After discussing the photograph's relation to its referent, and pointing out how this relation in photography differs from the other forms of representation, like

cinema or painting, Barthes concludes that the photograph's noeme, its inimitable feature is "that-has-been", *ça-été* (1991b: 79). What each photograph points to, is this past presence, although it does not necessarily say what no longer is. Pursuing Derrida's comments on the problem of reference we can add that even when a photograph is faked by the making of certain manipulations during the process, still an argument that takes reference as the founding order of photography, referring to this unique referent would be relevant.

3.4 Photographic Time and Death's Upsurge

Even in this most instantaneous forms photography is a delayed action not simply because the time lag on the side of the viewer but for the fact that it claims to capture the presence which is already absent. This double operation is in the very structure of photographic images. They are closest to reality because the object's luminous imprint sticks quite literally to its skin (to the negative, or on the paper as in the case of Polaroid); and at the same time they are furthest since the object stands forever distant, separate both temporally and spatially. When looking at a photograph "we pass continually from the object's here-and-now to its elsewhere-in-the-past" (Dubois: 167). It is on the basis of this play in between the terms from which the experience of photographs flourishes.

In the second part of *Camera Lucida*, one of the central issues that Barthes puts forward is the photograph's relation to time. Looking at a picture of Lewis Payne waiting for his execution in a prison cell, Barthes reads at one and the same time both "*this will be* and *this has been*"; the young boy as already dead and as going to die. At this point, a new punctum emerges from the relation of the photograph with Time. Here, the punctum is longer inherent in the detail, rather it marks the unique relation of the photographic image to its referent. The photographic image causes a disruption in the flow of linear time. While bringing forward what had once taken place, according to Barthes, it tells of "death in future." Although they are most commonly regarded as being attached to life, Barthes says that "each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death" (1991b: 97). In the photographic image death and the referent share the same space. The living images of dead people in the photograph resist any relation to life.

And it is the modern possibility of the photograph (whether it be an art or a technique matters little here) which combines death and the referent in the same system. (Derrida, 1988b: 281)

Death cannot be experienced by the subject because one cannot live one's death as such. When it is lived, it is always the death of an other. By the same token, it can never occupy the present tense. It is either past, but not passed enough, or to come, but that which does not arrive. Death disrupts the

continuity of time that links past to future. Photographs remind us of our own mortality before death has taken place. While announcing the death of the photographed subject, it points to the possibility of our own death. In the photograph, we are shown what will remain of us when we are no longer there in self-presence but this is not to say that the photograph tells us our future death, instead it affirms that "we will only be here the way we have always been here, as images" (Cadava p.224). Here, when we speak of death, it is not the opposite of Life as such, but in Barthes words, it is "my own undialectical death."

Photography is characterized by its being tied to the past; it provides us with a retrospective kind of experience. Concerning the effect of transparency of the medium, Barthes says that in photography the light reflected from the subject reaches the eye of the spectator. In this sense, photographs become a certificate of presence. "That-has-been" is what every photograph tells the spectator. Looking at a picture of someone we know, we tend to reconstruct this person, as he/she was when the picture was taken. The way the photographed body looks at us has no references to our present life. In order to understand the meaning of the image, one traces the way back, from the present backwards. The photographic image has a presence, which causes a disruption in the linearity of past, present and future. The photographic image reveals that something had been present, in its materiality and at the same time this "presence" of the referent escapes, since it has

already passed. The referent's presence, lingering on the materiality of the print, points to its death.

Vivian Sobchack discusses the temporal dimension of photographs as a "vacancy" in the heart of the "possibility of temporality" (59). The act of looking at the material imprint of something that had been in the past, takes place in the present time of the spectator but it "transcends both our immediate present and our lived experience of temporality because it exists for us as never engaged in the activity of *becoming*" (Sobchack: 59). Then again, the possibility of becoming is inherent in the stillness of the photograph but is never presented as such. Thus, Sobchack claims that photographs introduce their atemporality "within the existence and finitude." The atemporality of photographic images cannot be thought of a transcendental time. It resides in finitude by never quite belonging or being a part of it.

...what I see has been here, in this place which extends between infinity and the subject (operator or spectator); it has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred...In Photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric; ... if the photograph then becomes horrible, it is because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing. (Barthes, 1991b: 77-78)

3.5 Winter Garden Photograph

Looking through some photographs after his mother's death, Barthes says that none of them revealed her *being* in a complete manner. He claims that these photographs just provided him with some fragments, which could not help him recognize her in her totality, therefore he "missed her altogether" (Barthes, 1991b: 66). None but one photograph achieves to capture the "truth of the face (he) loved", namely the Winter Garden photograph which was taken when his mother was five years old. This particular photograph makes Barthes rediscover his mother as if she was born again in the image. He sees his mother in this photograph although he had never seen her as in the photograph. And the "truth" in the photograph he talks about is not a transcendental or general phenomenon; as he insistently repeats that it is a truth peculiar to him. According to Barthes, the "truth" that is revealed in this image is his mother's innocence and kindness, "which had formed her being immediately and forever" and that which "belonged to no system" (1991b: 69). The photograph wounds him, pointing to an absence, which can never be filled while the image "fills the sight by force."

The force of the Winter Garden photograph does not reside in the photographer's preconceived notion of what makes a good picture, nor in the camera's ability to capture the subject's appearance with great accuracy. The photographer here is a mediator of the past which had never been present to

Barthes. Once the image wounds the heart of the spectator, questions like "Is it really Barthes's mother in the photograph or some other little girl who looked like her?", "What is the purpose of this picture?", etc. become obsolete. From that moment on, no culture can translate this suffering he feels in front of the photograph of the loved body which is not the product of any schema.

The Winter Garden is the only photograph that is not published in the book. Barthes says that it wounds him but for the reader of the book it would be just another picture, an indifferent, ordinary one: "it cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your studium: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound" (1991b: 73). This childhood photograph of Barthes's mother remains invisible but surrounded by the light that the text sheds upon it. Hence, in Derrida's words it becomes "the invisible punctum" of the whole narrative.

The mark of this unique wound is nowhere visible as such, but its unlocatable clarity (that of his mother's eyes) irradiates the whole study. It makes of this book an irreplaceable event. And yet only a metonymic force can still assure a certain generality to the discourse and offer it to analysis by submitting its concepts to a quasi-instrumental employment. (Derrida, 1988b: 286)

According to Derrida, the disseminative force of the punctum, its metonymic power makes us capable of speaking of the work. Composing with the Same

yet remaining Different, it lets us speak of the impossible while still retaining it as impossibility. Instead of making his suffering subjected to any kind of analysis, which would nevertheless be to reduce the pain, Barthes keeps it as the driving force of his work. Thus he speaks of the photograph without showing it, but not hiding it at the same time, because the narrative he builds upon it can again reveal it to us, while maintaining its invisibility.

Looking at a photograph of a loved person is in fact one of the most personal ways of being engaged in photographic experience on the side of the viewer. The evidential force of photography, in this case, exceeds its "power of representation" (Barthes, 1991b: 89). The Winter Garden photograph, which Barthes claims to have "achieved the impossible science of unique being" for him, points to his mother's death not only because he knows that she is dead, but because it reveals so perfectly her "being" which could only appear in the time of death. This life-giving picture testifies to the irreversibility of her death. The photograph here, being the unmediated medium that preserves the emanation of the referent, becomes the mediator for his work of mourning. But how can a photograph, a living mark of some past being can be so powerful? In his article *By Force of Mourning*, Derrida claims that the force of the image resides in its capacity of "making appear the one who had disappeared, of making them re-appear with greater clarity" (1996: 185). Thus as Beryl Schlossman rightly argues:

According to Barthes, History is "hysterical"; it can be the object of our gaze only if it excludes us ... The subject who turns on lights to look at them cannot enter their worlds, nor can History or Photography move over the threshold that separates the dead from the living, Eurydice from the world of Orpheus. (Schlossman: 155)

What remains when the identity is cracked in the upsurge of death is the power of punctum that singularizes the image in the spectator, and reveals the forces that will create the future. If photography is as stated by Barthes "without future", it is because the future is left to be created, it is not pre-given or foreseen. The double death in photography, "death triumphant and defeated at the same time", gives one the power to project into the future by opening onto a void for unforeseeable relations.

CONCLUSION

I

In Maurice Blanchot's writings, the term "image" occupies a crucial place. Keeping in mind that in Blanchot's writings, "image" does not specifically refer to those of technological production, but to literature, I would not make the photographic image a model for an understanding of his conceptualization of the term. Still, I believe that the way he conceptualizes the term "image" in the realm of literature can give us certain insights regarding photographic images.

In his account of the image, Blanchot begins with the claim that "seeing presupposes distance". In natural perception, the object of my gaze is separated from me. As Steven Shavero suggests such a separation is the affirmation of the border between subject and object, viewer and the thing-seen, which gives one the power to constitute oneself as an active subject. The objects of vision in this sense are under the control of the spectator, ready at his disposal (Shavero: 47). The distinction Blanchot makes between this way of thinking about vision and the regime of the image is crucial. Blanchot resists the idea that the image comes after the object, and is thus subordinated to it.

Here the distance is in the heart of the thing. The thing was there; we grasped it in the vital movement of a comprehension action – and lo, having become image, instantly it has become that which no one can grasp, the unreal, the impossible. It is not the same thing at a distance but the thing as distance, present in its absence, graspable because ungraspable, appearing as disappeared. It is the return of what does not come back, the strange heart of remoteness as the life and the sole heart of the thing. (Blanchot: 255-256)

The release of the image takes place when seeing becomes a "contact at a distance." In the moment of fascination, one can no longer put a proper distance between himself and the thing-seen, is not able to constitute it as an object and thus, he is stripped of his power to give sense. The thing, becoming its image, touches the eye, but the eye cannot grasp it. One cannot talk about an active or a receptive subject in the milieu of fascination. The impossibility of mastery over the thing by means of a look marks the passive regime of the image.

In it blindness is vision still, vision which is no longer the possibility of seeing, but the impossibility of not seeing, the impossibility which becomes visible and perseveres – always and always – in a vision that never comes to an end; a dead gaze, a gaze become the ghost of an eternal vision." (Blanchot: 32)

To the one who is fascinated, the thing no longer reveals itself as a real object belonging to the flesh of the world, but affirms itself in an atemporal presence, belonging to the "indeterminate milieu of fascination" (Blanchot: 32). Distance cannot be overcome by the active intentionality of the subject, but becomes unmeasurable because what touches in an "immediate proximity" leaves one infinitely separated.

In "The Two Versions of the Imaginary", Blanchot suggests that the image has a double character and points to the paradoxical relation between visibility and invisibility. In the first place, having emerged from a gaze cast upon the object, the image can show the thing "ideally" and thus, can be "the life-giving negation of the thing." And at the same time, the image inserts itself into the thing, not as a substitute, which takes the place of the object's prior reality and affirms its presence, but as its "neutral double" (Blanchot: 262). This duplicity lies at the heart of the image, and by pointing to the absolute Otherness inscribed in the same, death in life, it gives the image its spectrality. What the image reveals is not an object with an assignable origin but the originary splitting, which belongs to no system of signification. With the origin always – already split, it becomes impossible to tell the real from its double, since the real has become its own double.

The dead present is the impossibility of making any presence real – an impossibility which is present, which is there as the present's double, the shadow of the present which the present bears and hides in itself. (Blanchot: 31)

What can be derived from Blanchot's claims concerning death is that it belongs to the realm of insignificance, infinity, and indifference that intervenes in every facet of life by being present in its absence.

Blanchot's account on the cadaver is exemplary for an understanding of image's relation to death. The cadaver cuts across the dialectical subject-object relation, since it is neither the one nor the other but a non-dialectical other to both terms. In Blanchot's account, the image has a "cadaverous presence." What we are faced to face with is neither the living reality nor another reality that stands apart from it. This material residue refuses to disappear. It occupies space as a "non-thing."

Death suspends the relation to place, even though the deceased rests heavily in his spot as if upon the basis that is left him. To be precise, this basis lacks, the place is missing, the corpse is not in its place...The deceased, it is said, is no longer of this world; he has left it behind. But behind there is, precisely, this cadaver, which is not of the world either, even though it is here. (Blanchot: 256-257)

What remains from the dead person's body cannot find its proper place. The cadaver's presence has no topos, but its very presence of absence, the undecidability of its location "establishes a relation between here and nowhere". Between the object and the image there is a threshold that marks the abyss.

In Blanchot's account, the cadaver is not some inanimate, inert being but points to "Someone: the unbearable image and figure of the unique becoming nothing in particular" (257). Its unfamiliar presence makes it devoid of any significance. One cannot relate it to some graspable existence of being in the world. The cadaver can only "resemble himself". This third person here, "himself", does not only designate the person once living, and now dead, but points to an impersonal being which embraces both him and something more than him. In this way, Blanchot claims that cadaver's presence is one of resemblance, which resembles nothing, but to itself, which cannot be thought in terms of interiority.

That is why no man alive, in fact, bears any resemblance yet. In the rare instances when a living person shows similitude with himself, he only seems to us more remote, closer to a dangerous neutral region, *astray in himself* and like his own ghost already: he seems to return no longer having any but an echo of life. (p.258)

What the cadaver so insistently reveals is an infinite movement of the approach of the other as absolutely other, marking the opening to an outside devoid of any human presence, an abyssal movement. The pure exteriority does not offer us a relationship of interchangeability between places, it rather marks an abyssal relationship and thus limit itself is a crossing towards what Blanchot calls the "other night".

The other night is always the other, and he who senses it becomes the other. He who approaches it departs from himself, is no longer he who approaches but he who turns away, goes hither and yon. (Blanchot: 169)

If there is a limit between the night and the "other night", it can be found anywhere in the flow, not at some specific point where one can draw a border as such, not here or there. It is a threshold, yes, but one that does not define or delimit anything. There is no possible experience of the "other night" as such. It is inexhaustible, interminable, always the other. One can search for it by exhausting all the possibilities, and one is exhausted by this impossibility of exhausting the impossible.

In this sense, the cadaver's presence disrupts the continuity of linear time by introducing its uncertainty of a time, which had never been present. What is at stake here is the discontinuity that the cadaver confronts us with. Upon encountering the dead body one is forcefully exposed to a relation that had not been established consciously when that person was still living. But this relation cannot be regarded as simply moving from one regime to another, from life to death. Death marks the ghostly double that cannot be mastered or possessed. The impossibility to overcome death and still to undergo its approach causes a crack in the identity. The proximity in distance, virtuality in actuality, presence in absence that characterizes death challenges the centered self-identity.

By analogy, we might also recall that a tool when damaged, becomes its *image*. In this case the tool, no longer disappearing into its use, *appears*. This appearance of the object is that of resemblance and reflection: the object's double, if you will. The category of art is linked to this possibility for objects to "appear," to surrender, that is, to the pure and simple resemblance behind which there is nothing – but being. (Blanchot: 258-259)

Blanchot's writings on myth of the Gaze of Orpheus is exemplary at this point. According to the myth, Orpheus is allowed to enter the Underworld to bring Eurydice back to the light of the day, retrieve her from death, on condition that he does not look at her. But along the journey, he does not respect the rule and loses Eurydice at the moment he turns back his gaze upon her. In Blanchot's account, the disappearance of Eurydice is what Orpheus wants to see, not the visibility of her face as familiar but "the foreignness of what excludes all intimacy, and wants, not to make her live, but to have living in her the plenitude of her death" (Blanchot: 172). Thus Orpheus betrays the conditions of his work, but the betrayal is at the same time a necessary condition for his work. In this sense, Eurydice appears in the passage by disappearing. Again in Blanchot, the gaze of Orpheus that announces the disappearance of Eurydice absents him from the scene, by the same movement. Orpheus's gaze is a blind- vision that is in contact with the "other night" as pure exteriority and the powerlessness of not seeing. Thus the

threshold that marks the passage between this world and the other where the thing becomes image, opening to this outside.

II

A direct encounter with the subject of the photograph cannot be a given of the image. Since the subject is already dead in the photograph, no claim of transparency or unmediatedness resolves this tension of such a direct confrontation, which cannot take place. In a similar vein, a direct encounter with death is an impossibility; in order for it to become possible the person should also be dead. The only relation one can establish with death, is by taking the de-tour of representation, "an image, whether verbal or visual" (Critchley: 108).

The undecidable presence-absence relation that shapes Blanchot's conceptualization of the image, is parallel with the double operation that is in the very structure of photographic images. According to Siegfried Kracauer, photography presents us the fragments of "a disintegrated unity". The moment torn from the temporal continuity of the thing photographed becomes spatialized. What is then eternalized in the photograph is the spatial configuration of this single moment; not the person or event the photograph shows, "but the sum of what can be deducted from him or her" (Kracauer: 431). Furthermore, Kracauer claims that photograph "annihilates the person by portraying him or her, and were person and portrayal to converge, the person

would cease to exist." The photograph reveals the impossibility of the repetition of a single occurrence. By evoking a certain absence, which can never be present one more time, while being so forcefully present to us in its materiality, the photograph denies the fulfillment of a self-sufficient identity. Its power resides in, not mummifying the person, but joining death and the subject on its surface. The photograph is detached from this originary moment, which no longer can be, thus the word origin cannot be appropriate for it. As Eduardo Cadava claims, the photograph of a person circulates in society without him, recalling his death, belonging to his afterlife, while the person may still be living (225).

Blanchot's conceptualization of the image speaks to us of its unsustainability. It cannot preserve its presence unless it lets itself be appropriated, represented, thereby absenting itself in this gesture. In order to prevent the thing projected from "sinking into nothingness", one has to give it a material existence, a physical body whose elements would "exist to disappear", "exist to make the thing appear", and "continue to be and disappear to maintain the thing as appearance." The image, brought forward in its full materiality, something that can be seen, touched appears by disappearing. It silences what lies beneath, to provide a void for it to speak. The ambiguity is intrinsic and essential to the image. Something is rendered visible to make what disappears appear, something is silenced to make it speak.

III

The experience of the punctum, which singularizes the image and Blanchot's conceptualization of the act of *reading* a piece of work has certain correspondences. Recognition of the punctum can be seen as the spectator's *reading* of the photograph since "it makes the work become a work, beyond the man who produced it" and beyond the cultural determinants. According to Blanchot, reading differs from interpretation in the sense that the latter aims at "keeping meaning alive by pursuing it", whereas the former does not operate in the manner of an analysis.

... reading, seeing, hearing the work of art demands more ignorance than knowledge. It requires a knowledge endowed with an immense ignorance and a gift which is not given ahead of time, which has each time to be received and acquired in forgetfulness of it, and also lost. (192)

In Blanchot's account, reading opens up a space for a work to become what it is. It is not a conscious act to reproduce what had been put forward, nor to make something new out of it. It simply lets the work be, affirm itself without the writer. The play of punctum, like reading, provides this space for the image to communicate itself. This operation is entirely different than that of the studium whose function is to make the photograph communicable. Still, considering the relation between these two terms, it needs to be pointed here

that reading does not only take into account the effect of punctum as isolated from studium. A radical reading of photographic images, -one that is not limited by the analytical techniques of structuralism- would be to explode the image from within towards this exteriority, the void, which can never be inhabited, thus remains always in the form of an approach.

The photographic image therefore comes only in the form of a coming, within the messianism of its "event": photography promises that everything may be kept for history, but the everything that is kept is the everything that is always already in the process of disappearing. What is kept is only the promise, the event of the promise. (Cadava 243)

IV

I will not terminate these arguments with a wrap up statement by claiming any definite explanation for the experience of photographic images which would bring closure to the forces inherent in the medium. One important remark to be made here is that meaning can never be interiorized in any medium, or object. It is always created and re-created contextually. All experience is the experience of this meaning produced by *différance*, which is in turn, deconstructed. It is not something that the photograph preserves in itself waiting to be discovered or restored to an original source, but to be produced over and over.

Thinking on photography, is a non-totalizable process, which does not reflect upon the past but invents the future. The desire to go beyond the framed space of the photograph finds its triggering force in the wound that punctum creates. This is the dynamism of the photograph, which otherwise seems to lack mobility. The experience, here, is not the representation of an experience but the image itself *as* experience, in endless repetition of its own beginning.

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