A REVIEW OF THE ‘ONTOLOGY’ OF PHOTOGRAPHY

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ÖZET

FOTOĞRAFIN ‘ONTOLOJİ’Sİ ÜZERİNE BİR İNCELEME

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Yüksek Lisans

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Bu çalışmanın amacı fotoğrafın kimliği ve varlığı üzerine kapsamlı bir inceleme geliştirmektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, fotoğraf ve fotoğraflar hakkındaki kuramlar gözden geçirilmekte ve bu kuramların genellikle göz ardı ettiği bazı kavramlar öne sürülmektedir. Söz konusu kavramların geliştirilmesinde yazının ‘mantığı’ndan ve tarihsel olayın oluşundan yararlanılmış ve bu anlayışların fotoğraf alanına uygulanmasında fotoğrafın varlıkbilimin söylemiyle olan ilişkisi temel alınmıştır. Böylece, fotoğrafın varlığını onu ‘belirli’ ortamlara kısıtlamak yoluyla yok sayan ve fotoğrafik zamanı ‘gerçek zaman’a bütünsel bir karşıtlık çerçevesinde ilişkilendiren önergelerin sorunsallaştırılması hedeflenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fotoğraf, Yazı, Gerçek, Hayalet, Tanıma, Yinelenebilirlik, Tarih, Roland Barthes.

ABSTRACT

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This study is the culmination of a speculative attempt to understand and restate the enigma of photography. It aims to supplement the thought of photography with a host of concepts that seem to have escaped the scope of the theoretical critique of photography and photographs. In doing so, it follows the lead of the ‘logic’ of the grapheme and of the event of history to review the position of photography in relation to the language of the logic of being, and investigates whether the time of photography can be held in opposition to ‘real time.’ Consequently, the contexts in which contemporary thought on photography restrict the identity of photography are problematized, and the peculiarities involved in the interaction between photographs and viewers are emphasized in this study.

Keywords: Photography, Writing, the Real, Specter, Recognition, Iterability, History,

Roland Barthes.

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Undertaken in the shadow of a doubt, this study is compromised of a journey into thought on photography that risks becoming incomprehensibly disjointed, sometimes to the point of being enigmatic. In other words, those who would like to locate in it my 'own ideas' in some pure form and consequently a final truth on the subject would not be able to do so. The same could be related of my experience in the last couple of years as a graduate student/assistant at Bilkent University. There are people, however, who have rendered that trip more enjoyable and helped ensure that it came close to an appropriate conclusion. Amongst others, I would like to spell out the names of Nur, Umut, Özgür, Leyla,

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1 INTRODUCTION

> Once vision became located in the empirical immediacy of the observer's body, it belonged to time, to flux, to death. The guarantees of authority, identity, and universality supplied by the camera obscura are of another epoch. (Crary 24)

> We might say in another language that a criticism or a deconstruction of representation would remain feeble, vain, and irrelevant if it were to lead to some rehabilitation of immediacy, of original simplicity, of presence without repetition or delegation, if it were to induce a calculable objectivity, of criticism, of science, of technique, or of political representation. The worst regressions can put themselves at the service of this antirepresentative prejudice. (Derrida, "Sending: On Representation" 311)

> Only of writing as graph can it be said "that it perhaps does not exist." It does not *certainly* have being as defined by the either-or-structure of ontological discourse (the language of the logic of being). (Spivak 89-90)

1.1 Scope of the Study

This study attempts to present an understanding of the experience of photography that would 'differ' from the conventional manners of thought that focus on conceptualizing the relationships between the subject and the photographic image. In doing so, although it does not render right-at-the-outset the name given to its subject more forceful and designate a photo*graphy*, it cannot resist the temptation of bringing into its scope certain approaches that can be termed 'post-structuralist.' It takes its motivation, however, in particular from the work of Roland Barthes, and takes his studies on photography to constitute an especially challenging body of work. Although the essay at hand does not pretend to aim as nearly as high, it is undertaken in the belief that the directions with which Roland Barthes riddles in his work on photography can be carried over to ends that could alter the general frameworks of discussion wherein 'the photograph' is made the focus of considerate attention.

Since denying photography an identity-proper and a motivation to pursue a discursive agency definitive to it is central to an important vein of contemporary thought on photographs and other 'forms of representation,' the discussion undertaken here first and foremost puts modesty aside and engages in what could be considered a critique of some authoritative aspects of 'the theory of photography.' It does not, however, aim to breach open a current of emancipatory identity politics based on photographic image production or on viewing photographs. Neither does it pursue embracing certain practices involved, either in the form of 'photographic movements or schools' or institutions of spectatorship that would differ from other practices in terms of content, approach, or context. On the other hand, it is undertaken in the belief that photographs markedly differ

from other visual material in terms of the distinct ways viewers relate to them and their mode of production. Although room is left for a consideration of ways in which different families of experience and affect can accompany different groups of photographs, the focus is put on the somewhat remote possibility of approaching a consideration proper to photography at large, rather than in particular to certain photographs. In that, the discussions put forth here invite comment that targets in them a certain form of 'essentialism.' Why this ought not be the case, it is hoped, will be clearer as those discussions are put to motion, as 'intending' to entertain such a position would be out of the question here.

The recognition that viewers (at least this one) do not mistake photographs for other 'kinds' of images unless they are 'designed' to mistake them at the outset lies at the center of this study. In fact, that viewers can be fooled into thinking that images that are produced through means alien to the 'technology' of photography is taken to be one evidence that something called "photography" indeed exists. Understanding that efforts to somehow prove that photography could only exist in a prosthetical relationship to discourse thus risk remaining solely technological (thus coming close in the last instance to asserting that something called photography had to be made up in an era of pre-industrial capitalism whereas in 'reality' it would really not exist), the arguments presented in this study are born out of a desire to *review* the 'ontology' of photography. In other, somewhat apologetic words, the title of this study serves to the extent of remembering that it is the 'being' of photography and photographs and the 'mode of being' that they problematize that are in question here. This calls, without doubt, to understand that photographs are governed by the (ill)logic of the written mark, in other words the 'grapheme,' and important parts of this study are devoted

to articulating this notion. These articulations could be seen to invite another vein of critical comments, since they could be taken to mean that the study under review differs from those that it aims to prove deconstructable only to a limited extent: 'in criticizing certain approaches to photography under the term that they render photography a mere vehicle for what is above, behind and beyond itself, it sums photographs up as writing-nevertheless-in-the-general-sense.' Although it tries to resist pretending to nullify those comments with the theoretical rigor it would have to demonstrate, it is hoped that this study would succeed in alluding to work and thought that concerns 'writing' with the formality it demands that such comments would remain operational.

In striving to manage what is neatly summed up in this introduction, this study cannot help but provoke more questions than it answers and raise more problems than it solves. It should be emphasized, however, that this is pretty much what it sets out to do in the first place. In other words, in asking 'what photography is,' the intention here is not to come up with a singular answer, but rather suggest ways in which the question can be more productively considered.

Taking Vicki Kirby's suggestion that we should be critical of "postmodern correctives that regard the apparent evidence of nature as the actual representation of culture" as much as we are judicious of "an empiricism that perceives data as the raw and unmediated nature of the world" (2) seriously, the thoughts that are to follow strive to resist reducing photography either to the realm of light or to that of writing. Neither is a third term that would aim at effacing the differences under a single, anagrammatic title, such as the writing-of-light or the light-of-writing, is entertained, although discussions that do so are not considered any-more futile than the arguments advanced here or through the 'postmodern critique of

photography.' What is taken to be more important concerns rather the conceptual approaches the theory of writing can help introduce to the theory of photography. In that, this study should be considered less as an alternative than a supplement to what it aims to hold under scrutiny. And it is in trying to follow the 'logic' of the latter that it has to go to places where it could be believed at first sight to be outside its boundaries.

The question of what photography is does not find its answer in this study anymore than it finds an answer that would invite submission without restitution in other studies on photography. It is the question and the asking, however, that turns out to be more productive than any possibility of a definitive answer. Answers of the 'final' type seem to be caught up in a naiveté that this study tries to go around by means of a comparative conflation. The two major consequences of such naiveté that is hoped to uncover as a result of the banally quick reproductions that are about to follow can be understood, however, to ultimately collapse on each other when it comes to photography's identity. John Tagg, for example, finds that identity and its origins, agreeably, in political economy. For him, "[p]hotography is a mode of production consuming raw materials, refining its instruments, reproducing the skills and submissiveness of its labour force, and pouring on to the market a prodigious quantity of commodities" ("Currency of the Photograph" 123). Graham Clarke, on the other hand, setting out to isolate the photograph, has it that "[i]t is … a doorway on to a world waiting to be recorded; but, like the world through which we move, it seems almost neutral in its structures of meaning" (11). What this catastrophic juxtaposition bears to mind has something to do with the way photography is 'neutralized,' constantly taken out of itself, regardless of whether the 'world' it is taken to thrive in is presumed

to be strictly constructed or utterly undivided. ‘Take photography out of the equation,’ it can be heard at the margins of these arguments, ‘and the world will go on turning in the same direction as it always did.’ Indeed, if we were to replace the word photography from the above quotations and change it with the name of another mode of production or reproduction, nothing, it seems, would be lost in terms of the arguments’ internal coherence. An attempt at a demonstration, however, that the word proves irreplaceable because of the very fact that it is constantly replaced and replaces will be taken to be inescapable in the following pages.

This study takes off from a belief that ‘faith’ in photography and amazement in the name of photographs that its writer shares cannot be left to the intentions of either regional psychoanalytics or all-inclusive-linguistics alone. It takes the notions these approaches advance as given, but not as unproblematically in place. Therefore it tries to bring into play a host of concepts that are not strictly alien to these disciplines but somewhat veiled in them. In other words, in supplementing approaches that find photographs to be ultimately and strictly indispensable to the contexts in which they are located, it tries to resist taking recourse to the installation of a perfect formal essence for photography. It would, on the other hand, be equally superficial to argue that it does not have anything to do with the terms ‘modernist formalism’ (in other words, the institutional discourse of art) considers itself responsible for articulating. It insists, however, that if those terms, like, for example, ‘the artist,’ are to be problematized, they should be taken under consideration as elements that are productive as well as produced, acting even while acted upon. Indeed, it tries to encourage the study of

photography to emphasize the irreducibilities that similar oppositions contain but that cannot be simply restrained.

1.1 Chapters in Brief

The second chapter, “On Photography as Such,” aims to provide a review of certain compelling accounts of the very presence and effectiveness of photography within and for contemporary subjective, cultural, and political experiences. The two thinkers that receive most of the attention in this review are Victor Burgin and John Tagg, whose accounts of the mechanics involved in the ‘uses’ of photography seem to have been very prominent and influential for the thought on photography. My intention in attempting to present such a review is by no means to restrict the many theories and ideas that the quite dispersed realm of contemporary criticism on photography puts forward to the lines of discussion presented by the small circle of thinkers that are to be speculated on here. Neither is it to overlook the numerous differences that can be spotted and that certainly could amount to deeper theoretical discrepancies in these particular articulations of photography. However, it appears that some of the culminations and residues of the general trajectory that (so-called) postmodernist thinking on photography draws can be located in these accounts that thus seem to have pursued it with rigor. The disadvantages and advantages for an agreeable reasoning on photography involved in this vein of thought, then, it is hoped, can be made apparent through an inspection of the discursive productions that motivate and animate these accounts. (Speaking of motivations: this of course is not the place to undertake a critical investigation of any detail of the motivations and theoretical influences or invocations that seem to have fed the writings of Burgin and Tagg,

or any other thinker whose suggestions shall be alluded to in this review. Let it suffice for the moment to mention that specific blends of various theoretical penetrations that include but are not limited to psychoanalytic, structuralist, and Marxist gestures figure as important paths of development in these thinkers' approaches).

It should be born in mind that although Burgin and Tagg (as well as many other prominent thinkers) are very critical of the ways in which photography can be told to operate, especially in relation to the category of the subject and of subjectivity, their accounts can by no means be understood to negate photography or its 'subject(s).' In other words, they are not instances of an exercise in an 'anti-photographical' rhetoric, in any simple way. However, as it will be alluded to more often than not in the next few pages, the arguments they put forward can be understood to be determined by a declared intention to displace the notion that a fruitful discussion of photography (or photographs, for that matter) can be delineated through a recourse to the consideration of what is or are understood to be peculiar to it. In other words, it could perhaps be maintained that the attribution of an identity to photography, at least one that can be productively traced, is ceaselessly denied in these 'postmodern' approaches.

The interest this study has in putting the assumptions the postmodern critique of photography under scrutiny, even as it takes its findings as given, concerns the latter's reluctance in acknowledging the apparent dispersion the origin of every photograph introduces into accounts that would restrict it to either the domain of nature or to that of culture. Anxious to demonstrate that nature is cultural and historical, such accounts seem quick to turn the said binary over, without, however, paying much attention to the remains such an action extracts of

the natural. In other words, they risk privileging certain, presumably more natural and more real states of being to which the human-condition-in-general denies access over others. Photography, therefore, sometimes inadvertently but mostly within acknowledgement, is posited as an impenetrable boundary between its products and the body, the real, and other immutable, essential forms of being that somehow manage to escape an inter-relative relation with history and culture. Two particular approaches that are intermingled in these arguments are worth noting in this regard. An irreducibly psychoanalytic understanding of desire as a perpetual repression of and substitution for lack or loss; and an irreducibly technological understanding of the origin and place of photography in society and history as a response to the demand of repressive institutions: that is, as an ideal necessity of the demands of evolutionary history. These approaches, consequently, do not leave much space for discussion of photography and photographs as positively empowered agents, and restrictedly revolve around questions that concern the exactitude shown by repressive institutions in simply vehiculating them to their own ends. The outcome is a body of work of considerable efficiency that forgets some of the most radical findings of deconstruction in the name of evoking its name, most notably that the "fact that a unitary message about a unitary object from a unitary author to a unitary reader is what writing calls into question" (Spivak 94-5).

The third chapter, "Photography as a Mode of Spectral Writing," is the testimony of an attempt to operate the thought of photography at the very heart of the oppositions its argument traces in the preceding. Its effort has less to do with reversing the opposition between culture and nature that it takes to occupy the heart of photography than approaching this duality as a productive maintenance.

The discussions advanced in this chapter aim to introduce through the theory of writing and technological reproducibility certain concepts such as 'recognition,' 'iterability,' and 'specter' to the framework of thought on photography. The relationship of photographs and signs in general with matter, body, and reality are therefore destined to be problematized yet once again, without, however, necessarily positing definitive ends to those relationships. What photography means for and 'does' to the perception and the being of the subject are brought into fore-view as irrefutably necessary themes of critique, and, consequently, a different way of approaching the relationships of the subject, nature, culture, and history with photography and with each other is meant to be nurtured. Certain concepts, like spacing and absence, are also honored in the name of the photograph as irreducible, structural counterparts of the process of photographic 'communication,' as of any process of meaning-making in general.

The fourth and last chapter, "Conclusion: Photography and History," attempts to take issue with certain arguments that are presently at the forefront of thought on photography and that seem to announce the death of photography, chronological with the advent of digital technologies. Prior to doing so, however, the discussion advanced in this chapter attempts to take issue with the aftermath of the web of arguments developed in the preceding chapter. In that, the critique introduced in the second chapter is brought together with the notions posited in the third chapter in order to be able to fully explicate the dimensions of photography's relationships with history, writing, and time. In maintaining that the concept of history "corresponds to what happens during the photographic event – to what happens when an image comes to pass" (Cadava 234-5) and to the visitation of the specter, the discussion presented here aims to suggest that

photography can be understood as a productively viable field of writing and reading for the *concern*ed viewer. On the other hand, in granting that the notion of death occupies the very heart of the photograph, this chapter also aims to question the susceptibility of those arguments which maintain that digital technologies destroy the truth-producing capabilities of the photograph on the basis of the former's capabilities to alter the appearance of 'objects' in ways that are alien to the photograph. Taking this capacity to be have been an option in photography since its inception, however, what those technologies alter in the photograph are taken in this discussion to disturb, by taking to an extreme, its discourse of the necessary absence or interrupted presence of its referent. In other words, while the discussion here is complicit with accounts that maintain that photography-as-we-know is at stake in the age of its digital reproducibility and manipulation, it also supplements those accounts with the question of whether it has not always been at stake.

2 ON PHOTOGRAPHY AS SUCH

> It is precisely because the photograph is an anthropologically new object that it must escape, it seems to me, usual discussions of the image. It is the fashion, nowadays, among Photography's commentators (sociologists and semiologists), to seize upon a semantic relativity: no "reality" (great scorn for the "realists" who do not see that the photograph is always coded), nothing but artifice: *Thesis*, not *Physis*; the Photograph, they say, is not an *analogon* of the world; what is represents is fabricated, because the photographic object is subject to Albertian perspective (entirely historical) and because the inscription on the picture makes a three-dimensional object into a two-dimensional effigy. This argument is futile … The realists, of whom I am one … do not take the photograph for a "copy" of reality, but for an emanation of *past reality*: a *magic*, not an art. To ask whether a photograph is analogical or coded is not a good means of analysis. The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. … in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation. (Barhes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* [hereafter *Camera Lucida*] 88-9)

2.1 Notes on Why Photographs do not Matter

The three key articles by Victor Burgin that will be discussed in connection to each other in this and the following section are "Photographic Practice and Art Theory," "Looking at Photographs," and "Photography, Phantasy, Function." The arguments raised through them tend to revolve for most of the time and in a particular way around questions of subjectivity, technique, authorship, spectatorship, and modernism (read: modernist formalism), and will be understood and shown to project a specific understanding of photography.

In "Photographic Practice and Art Theory" (hereafter "Photographic Practice"), Burgin begins to undertake his discussion of the specific viewing and social experiences that photography invites in situating these experiences within larger frameworks that are nevertheless accountable in general terms, or, more appropriately, in terms of a critical delineation of the key moments of the discourses that are understood to overwhelm such experiences. Burgin announces an interest first and foremost in deconstructing the boundaries on which the habitual agendas that inform modernist discussions of photography come to a definitive limit. The arguments advanced by modernist formalism, by positing transcendental subjects at both ends of the photographic production of meaning (that will later be shown by Burgin to inevitably collapse onto each other), tend to occupy a significantly silent position on questions that involve the social aspects of the production and viewing of photographs. Burgin relates these accounts of photographic criticism, which he maintains assume that photography is defined by a relation of transparence to the presence of a referent or 'truth,' to an impossible yet logocentric (and ultimately nostalgic) yearning that fantasizes of immediacy in the name of representation. In other words, of an 'immediate medium.' He

contends that the "great majority of writers on photography" are prone to an age old "'window-on-the-world' realism," and are thus expressive of "this logocentric longing" (Burgin, "Photographic Practice" 55). In evoking Walter Benjamin's conceptualization of photography, Burgin finds the "fetishistic and anti-technical" ("Photographic Practice" 40) stance Benjamin locates in the discourse of early theorists of photography very much at work within contemporary thought on art and photography.[1] Declaring that his starting point can therefore be understood to be borne out of a desire to operate against these anti-technical notions, Burgin goes on to elaborate his 'anti-fetishistic and technical' position in the face of common discourses that surround the production of meaning, paying attention to the social as well as technical aspects by which photographs can be said to come to mean or 'work.'

In exemplifying a certain level of congruence with academic approaches leading in the time period in which he is writing[2], Burgin devotes much of his efforts to convincingly articulating that, in photography as in any other mode of textual production, meaning is actively produced rather than merely found in a locked-up cabinet in which it is to be carried away from the scene, stage or whatever pro-filmic event or space wherein the photographer – or, in his words, the "photographic opportunist" ("Photographic Practice" 40) – locates, while he is 'finger on the button,' 'the truth' or some aspect thereof. The photographer, according to Burgin, subsequently involves in a second act of positioning when he or she takes a picture of this newly-found-truth and disseminates it. This second

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[1] Benjamin details this anti-technical and fetishistic understanding, which operated for many decades "without achieving the slightest of results," as he puts it, in "A Small History of Photography."

[2] See "Diderot, Barthes, Vertigo," particularly p. 85: "It is partly in response to this lacuna of theory [:formalism] that, in recent years, a psychoanalytically informed semiotics has been evolved."

act of location is itself inevitably located in discourse, or in Burgin's understanding of discursive production, within language. This is not, however, to suggest that the 'positionary' act with which the photographer operates his part in the construction of meaning is to be discovered in a form relatively unbound of discourse, language, or ideology if it is investigated when it can be understood to be at the first order of its development. The issue of the selection and discretion of what to count as framed by the viewfinder and what not 'speaks' in and of itself of the particular social, cultural, political, and ideological moment wherein the photographer – who, as the producer of meaning, is never really reducible to the person who releases the shutter of the camera per se[3] – is enmeshed. Burgin continues his discussion on the premise that the out-there, the pro-photographic, is always already encoded, although not necessarily in a photographic way. Put more appropriately, each and every thing occupies first and foremost a place in the categorically superior system of exchange-value to which it cannot but belong to, and which therefore pre-determines the set of meanings its existence or allusions (like photography) to its existence will be governed by. Certainly, the specifics of the relations they have with other objects things-out-there constitute and are constituted by can be subject to change, but the fact that these relationships of meaning are always already *constituted*, or *rendered* meaningful prior to their occupation in the general web of relations is absolute.

Photography no doubt has to do with things out there, "it is these 'things' which photography provides pictures of," however, "things are never simply *things* to us" (Burgin, "Photographic Practice" 45). They are never 'without'

[3] While the very act selection, of dominating the viewfinder, appears at first to confine the production of meaning in photography to the photographer's 'performance,' Burgin will show effectively that the camera's viewfinder is far from being the only one in photography. Rather, a

meaning, as it were. Furthermore, the category of meaning, although it is subjected to the effects of the existence of these ‘things,’ can also be said to presuppose them: “[i]n the very moment of their being perceived, objects are *placed* within an intelligible system of relationships. […] They take their position, that is to say, within an *ideology*” (Burgin, “Photographic Practice” 45-6). This systematic occupation, certainly, is one that ensures the stabilization of meanings and systems of meaning making. Photography, then, can be understood to perform as serene as “one signifying system among others in society which produces the ideological subject in the same movement in which they ‘communicate’ their ostensible ‘contents’” (Burgin, “Looking at Photographs” 153). In other words, seeing is never neutral, and ‘neutral visions’ turn out eventually to be as governed by codes or culture as those that are more noticeably ‘artificial’[4].

In order for it to be capable of operating in the harmonious manner that it is taken to operate, it is necessary that ideology take “an infinite variety of forms” (Burgin, “Photographic Practice” 46), of which photographs are only a category – or even ‘lesser,’ only instances, so to speak, for they cannot be said to be categorical. Since photography and photographs are simply instances of those forms and because “[f]orms of artifacts, [which] as much as forms of language, serve to communicate ideologies” (Burgin, “Photographic Practice” 46), and are restricted restrictions as such, photography cannot but claim an existence per se. More appropriately, it does not or cannot in any sense pursue an agency of its

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much more powerful but no less technical viewfinder that goes by the name of ‘fetishism’ overrides the photographic procedure in his view.

[4] See on this point Eco, “Critique of the Image,” an article Burgin has reason to turn to frequently. Eco goes on in this piece to articulate many sets and categories of codes that can be understood to govern seeing even in its most primal, or primitive, sense. Victor Burgin elaborates the ways by which seeing should be understood as an interdisciplinary register further in “Seeing Sense,” where he affirms efforts that aim “to provide a corrective to the naïve idea of purely retinal vision” (53).

own. Because ideology appropriates, re-appropriates or incorporates each and every thing and form through an invisibly instantaneous, indivisible action, then those things and forms – of which photography is but one example – cannot be expected to retain much of a definitive identity. Furthermore, and for the same reasons, photography cannot be allocated a privileged place in the production of meaning either, even (or especially) when the image in question is not peculiar to a certain context, i.e. a piece of writing, or caption. "Objects present to the camera are *already in use* in the production of meanings, and photography has no choice but to operate upon such meanings" (Burgin, "Photographic Practice" 47). Therefore, neither the 'photographic genius' or 'talent' the artist-seer operates on a claim of possession of, nor "the lucky snapping of a 'moment of truth'" (Burgin, "Photographic Practice" 41) on the side of the amateur-realist could be taken to penetrate beyond appearances that are always already just that – appearances, even if it were possible to erect such typologies in an unproblematic way. On the other hand, Burgin's relentless efforts to demonstrate the uneasy assumptions that motivate modernist discourses – discourses that are constrained by a curious attempt at defending 'art photography' and the artist, for example – can be taken to hint at the efficacy of an unsuspecting attitude towards theories of representation and of the 'media' in the ways in which Burgin demarcates his arguments. In other words, at an alliance with the lineage of an epoch within which

> reading and writing, the production and interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, allow themselves to be confined within secondariness. They are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the logos. Even when the thing, the "referent," is not immediately related to the logos of a creator God where it began by being the spoken/thought sense, the signified has at any rate an immediate relationship with the logos in general (finite or infinite), and a mediated one with the

> signifier, that is to say with the exteriority of writing. (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 15)

Before we can start to outline the framework through which Burgin's structuralist assumptions can be understood to overwhelm the deconstructionist practice he aims at undertaking, let us pause to attend in further detail to the notion of truth-production he delineates. According to Burgin, photography, and in particular so-called 'straight photography'[5], has to invariably 'hunt' for truth 'out there,' and despite all the inoperability involved in such an endeavor, has to find it, too. Contrary to what an unreflecting notion of representation might suggest to be the 'medium's eternal cause and territory of conquest, photography 'in itself' is theorized by Burgin to be unproductive in locating and grasping truth. That is, without being accompanied by an eye to the very operation of truth-production they are always already caught in the process of performing, photographers are at best similar to dogs of prey (and under the service of their masters, of course). Burgin puts it in an eloquent way: "It seems to be extensively believed by photographers that meanings are to be found in the world much in the way that rabbits are found on downs, and all that is required is the talent to spot them and the skill to shoot them" ("Photographic Practice" 40). There are ways out of this vicious circle of compromises, and Burgin eventually takes the liberty of hinting at them, although cautiously. Before we can take note of those ways, however, the processes by which Burgin argues that truth/truths-not-necessarily-photographic produced shall be dealt with more extensively.

[5] This term has traditionally denoted a mode of production that values the effacement of any modifications by the photographer himself or herself either to the 'scene' to be photographed or to the resulting negative and/or print whatsoever. As problematic as it might be, it continues to dominate the code of practice by which a large – if not the largest – part of photography that is produced today abides by. It should suffice at this moment to note that Burgin's criticism, it seems, should be understood to extend to the dimensions of the dissemination of that code as well.

Victor Burgin's assertions in "Photographic Practice and Art Theory" seem to be constrained and expanded by the necessity to downplay first and foremost the notion that truth is to be found on the street – that is, 'out there' – waiting to be revealed, however, by the singular click of the still camera's shutter. The problems he locates in such an understanding of photographic (as well as other 'means' of) image production relates less to the very common place notion that images are not to be relied on – i.e. they are 'deceptive,' etc. – than an act of taking issue with an uncritical acceptance of truth(s) thus produced. Hence, appearances are deprived of the power to produce truth, but no more can 'things themselves' be immune to the procedures by which images are made to produce meaning: procedures that can be grouped under the headline of ideology. Contrary to what appears at first sight, it seems that Burgin is operating here less in a framework governed by the binaries of truth/illusion or presentation/representation (a framework that is borne every time and again the word ideology is uttered) than in one that values combating any stable notion of truth and meaning, although the said binaries and other such pairs of relevance have a definitive importance for his discussion, as I shall attempt to demonstrate later. Meaning in photography is always already produced through acts of recourse to texts other than the particular photograph in question and which are no less central to the process by which meaning is generated as the photograph 'itself.' Certainly, the latter has, by consequence, to assume a very slippery position from which to involve in this practice. Hence, photographs communicate in an almost entirely syntagmatic manner, always in relation to other photographs and texts of other persuasions as well as ideas and ideologies, whether or not the

‘second’ (or ‘sub’) text/texts crudely coexist with, that is, be ‘present’ at the time of the ‘reading’ of the photograph. Their meanings ultimately depend

> rather on our common knowledge of the typical representation of prevailing social facts and values: that is to say, *on our knowledge of the way objects transmit and transform ideology, and the ways in which photographs in their turn transform these*. To appreciate such operations we must first lose any illusion about the neutrality of objects before the camera. (Burgin, “Photographic Practice” 41. Emphasis added.)

The fact that Burgin dismisses at once understandings of photography that depend on a certain notion of processes of communication that emphasizes the supposed neutrality of channels of meaning and approaches that ascribe an intrinsic integrity to ‘messages’ seems to demand attention. In other words, the apparent incongruity involved in the dual movement that Burgin details seem to stem from a more fundamental dispersion. Photography capitalizes on meanings already being made, ideologies that have been already installed in place. However, it somehow manages to further transform these archaic deployments, the petrified nature of which Burgin had to assure us a priori. It is tempting, therefore, to acknowledge the very correspondence the reluctance to negotiate an active, constituting site for photography in the production of meaning that runs through Burgin’s assertions as a backdrop with a Sausserean relegation of writing. In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida puts this act of downgrading at the very heart of the notion of an uncontested sign, and does so succinctly:

> The written signifier is always technical and representative. It has no constitutive meaning. This derivation is the very origin of the notion of the “signifier.” The notion of the sign always implies within itself the distinction between signifier and signified, even if, as Saussure argues, they are distinguished simply as the two faces of one and the same leaf. (11)

The problems that such a correspondence can be understood to invite emerge in further development in a later passage in "Photographic Practice and Art Theory:"

> In an ingenuous assumption the photograph is held to *reproduce* its object. However, the relationship between a photographic image and its referent is one of reproduction only to the extent that Christopher Wren's death-mask reproduces Christopher Wren. The photograph abstracts from, and mediates, the actual. For example, a photograph of three people grouped together may, in reality, have comprised a live model, a two-dimensional 'cut-out' figure, and a wax dummy. In the actual presence of such an assembly I would quickly know them for what they were. No such certainty accompanies my cognition of the photographic group. It is precisely the *difference* between our comprehension of an object and our comprehension of its image. (Burgin 61-2)[6]

Suddenly, it appears that photography is at its core a system of mediation, and a corrupt one at that. What exactly could the "difference" Burgin is anxious to emphasize be constituted of? The difference, that is, between presentation and representation; a difference that Burgin spent many suggestive assertions to assure us did not hold up, the assertion that things are never present to subjects in an unproblematic sense being at the center of those assertions. The difference Burgin has in mind, then, can be taken to comprise in its nucleus a fundamental one: that between truth and illusion per se. "In the actual presence," of things proper Burgin would know them "for what they were;" but faced with their presence in the photographic space that brings the automaton with the living and that counters 'reality,' he cannot quite be sure. In the process of evoking such an opposition, such a difference or the difference-as-such, then, certain aspects of Burgin's

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[6] The hostility toward 'staging' in photography, or, more appropriately, of the staging of the referent in photography, here emergent in the examples of the wax dummy and the two-dimensional cut-out figure, can be traced back on a certain level to that most anxious early critique of photography, Charles Baudelaire. See particularly Baudelaire, Charles, "The Salon of 1859." Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe aptly demonstrates that Baudelaire's ultimate problem with photography, which Burgin seems to share, at least in this particular excerpt, has to do with the theatricality involved. In other words, that what the presence of photographs puts in danger is the integrity of the referent rather than of visual communication (i.e. persons becoming cut-out figures). See Lacoue-Labarthe.

arguments can be followed to invite dangerous lines of an analytical act that would, for instance, look for in photographs for 'signs' of intervention: the signs, that is, through an evolution of which photographs can be understood to become coded utterances and photography a language, or, better still, linguistic. Burgin's next task is to go on to attempt at helping it to emerge that analogical 'means of representation' should be understood as being as coded as digital ones. Those codes of 'natural' perception are merely invoked by the iconic image rather than do exist in the presence of it. In other words, the iconic image simply renders present a system of signs that are associated in the mind of the subject with those of 'real presence,' with which the representational system at work is not to be confused. Burgin does not, however, entertain even in the very least the uncanny directions the recognition that the codes that are supposed to govern photographic representations are very similar, at least in experience, to those that are understood to regulate 'presentation.'

A certain, very definitive trace of an overwhelming tradition of thought on visual communication, therefore, can be spotted to run through at least some aspects of Victor Burgin's arguments, as the paragraph cited above makes evident. The distinction that Burgin raises between the referent and the photograph, it turns out, is one that occupies the very heart of the structuralist controversy – a controversy Burgin wows in his early writing to take issue with in the near future. We suddenly remember the archaic opposition which Ferdinand de Saussure devotes much effort to sustain in his *Course in General Linguistics*: that of speech versus writing. Saussure goes as far as to compare the relations between the two hands of this notorious duality to the opposition between the thing photographed and the photograph, the respective locations of the terms in

the hierarchy being assuredly perpetuated (17). This binary framework toils to maintain first and foremost the primacy of the spoken word, of the truth of the spoken word; and the illusory nature of the written word, of the inability of the written word to produce meaning in that it operates through mimesis: in short, of the proximity of the truth to the subject when the subject is proximate to the word, or, put exactly, the metaphysics of presence. In such an economy, "[a]s has been more or less implicitly determined, the essence of the *phone* would be immediately proximate to that which within 'thought' as logos relates to "meaning," produces it, receives it, speaks it, 'composes' it" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 11). It should perhaps be spelled out at this moment that the deadly secondariness, the ill-laden alterity that occupies the space of writing – contrary to speech, of which it merely is a meager copy – defines for Burgin also the space of the photograph. The confusion of the one for the other should no doubt give birth to unholy results, of which 'illusion' is one but a minor instance. The cut-out figure and the wax dummy come to invite comparison with the human being, and the photograph is confused with the referent in much the same way as maps are confused with territories and representations are equated with presentations. The particular problem that bespeaks the photograph, however – that it puts into danger the very dimensions that restrain such relations – is what Burgin does not seem to desire to investigate, but prefer to leave to psychoanalytics-proper. In other words, the subject is as grounded in 'reality' as to evade confusing the map with the territory, but suffers such 'madness,' the madness of taking writing to be speech, when faced with photographs. A case in point is that the territory is assumed to be always already present to the subject in some supposedly 'pure' form: in Burgin's words, the subject could devolve "[i]n

the actual presence" of it and "would quickly know" it for what is ("Photographic Practice" 61-62). What Burgin leaves untheorized is that the 'actual,' 'real' territory of the photograph, on the other hand, is apparently no more available in any other figure at the viewing of or in the presence of the photograph: it cannot be grasped in any form except the photographic. In addition, photography can be understood to act mute in terms of its roots when it is compared with other photographic systems of representation: while the 'reality test' operated in the manner of 'sticking one's hand in front of the projector'[7] rescues the cinematic form of reference from such confusions, the surface of the photograph bruises the hand that aims to reach out and through. It is thus that the photograph can be understood to complicate the binary logic that governs *the difference*.

Burgin therefore has to breach the politics of denial he inaugurated earlier and inaugurates elsewhere, and grant photography an identity, however illicit. In the process of downplaying the illusions it advances against truths proper, he seems to feel the necessity to ascribe photography a privileged (although illegitimate) position among systems of representation that he argued served ideology equivocally. He can be understood, more importantly, to appear to exemplify an uncritical stance towards the condemnation of writing as an ill-founded ground for the play of signification, with photography claiming almost the place of the most perverse form of writing. In that, Burgin's arguments can be maintained to display an alignment, however accidental or superficial, with the preoccupations of the dimensions of the logocentric longing he claims to operate against, and which "would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 12), and presence only. The

[7] This expression is borrowed from Martin Jay.

difference between the sensible and the intelligible Burgin erects in the example of the wax-dummy who threatens to come to life through the photographic print has profound implications indeed: the totality of the semiotic or linguistic register cannot take hold without it. As Derrida puts it,

> [t]he semiological or, more specifically, linguistic "science" cannot therefore hold on to the difference between signifier and signified – the very idea of the sign – without the difference between sensible and intelligible, certainly, but also not without retaining, more profoundly and more implicitly, and by the same token the reference to *a signified able to "take place" in its intelligibility, before its "fall," before any expulsion into the exteriority of the sensible here below.* (*Of Grammatology* 13. Emphasis added.)

In trying to detail the ways in which Burgin's arguments can be understood to be informed by an implicit disinclination to writing – here, photography – as a constitutive or primary system, my intention is not to perform a revelatory act of spotting out the 'metaphysics of presence' involved. It is rather an attempt at articulating the disadvantages that can blemish the ways we have come to think about photography and that seem to emerge most powerfully when photography is considered within the confines of oppositions like presentation/representation and truth/illusion solely. Of course, as Derrida is quick to add, it is not a question of "rejecting" these notions; they are necessary and, at least at present, nothing is conceivable for us without them" (*Of Grammatology* 13).

In setting down the extensions of the oppositions he raised, Victor Burgin takes a turn to assure us that the said binaries are deployed not as rigidly as the critique of representation he thus installed might suggest. He notes that

> [r]eceived habits of thought have accustomed us to oppose the schematic to the non-schematic. On closer consideration, however, we may recognise these two states as highly theoretical, the ideal antipodes of a unified world. We should more realistically speak

> *degrees* of schematisation, or iconicity of signs. ("Photographic Practice" 65)

Contrary to what appears at first sight, Burgin's suggestion that we should understand all signs to be essentially iconic and arbitrary at the same time, distributed along the two said poles (the photographic being the closest to the iconic), falls short of hinting at a retrieval of his arguments from the moderation of the 'logocentric longing' he condemns. Rather, the argument seems to promote forgetting off 'the real' all-together, and thus denies any kind of access to it particularly when writing-in-the-form-of-photography is in question, since the photographic sign, or more properly the written sign, cannot get away without falling first under the handicap of schematization. "[T]he dots of a half-tone block, the apparent lines of a TV image" are dismissed as only secondarily related to the "high iconicity of 'photography proper,'" (Burgin, "Photographic Practice" 65) which itself is only derivative of a code already in place, almost in 'presence:'

> The photograph, however, is not *innocent* of arbitrariness for its being in a more directly causal and apparently unmediated relationship to its referent, because the interaction between the photographic emulsion and the light reflected from the object is selectively controlled. [...] These carry the optional variants which are *equivalent* to the prosodic features of natural language [: language proper]. A photograph, for example, may exhibit 'hard' or 'soft' focus, large or small grain, and thus carry such connotational oppositions as masculine/feminine. (Burgin, "Photographic Practice" 65. Emphasis added.)

2.2 Different Photographs/Differing Photographies

The inferiority of photographic meaning, of photographic discourse against the discourses beyond itself it has to engage, is thus settled. The texts and discourses that make photographs possible, that precede photography in too many senses of the word, "[t]hese prior texts, those *presupposed* by the photograph, are

autonomous; they serve a role in the actual text but do not appear in it, they are latent to the manifest text and may only be read across it 'symptomatically'" (Burgin, "Looking at Photographs" 144). A new definition for what photographs are that turns out to be at least as old as photography, then: warning signs of the intoxications of ideology. A locatable author in photography, therefore, becomes a necessary ingredient, and the rhetoric of 'the message' a must. The lineage Burgin's arguments raise up pre-requires that any arrangement of dialogue on and with photography involve the tenet of intention, that "whatever specificity might be attributed to photography at the level of the 'image' is inextricably caught up within the *specificity of the social acts which intend that image and its meaning*" (144. Emphasis added), as Burgin notes in "Looking at Photographs."

Pausing for a moment, we may note that Burgin's style of stabbing to let the ghosts of structuralism and the oppositions that sustain it go their own way involves a summoning forth of the ghosts of psychoanalysis, more particularly that of the psychoanalytic subject. Earlier, Burgin outlined photography and the photograph against common wisdom and staged it so that photographs cannot be said to refer to any ('actual') thing ('out there'), at least not in an unproblematic way, but only to other signifying systems and significations. In other words, his take on photography or photographic communication has demanded that the 'in itself' of the photograph and of photography is questioned vigorously and that this questioning be made the primary task of critique. Burgin spells out his position most explicitly in another article – one which embodies a certain attempt at incorporating Roland Barthes's thought on photography within a psychoanalytically driven agenda, where he states that "[m]eaning is never simply 'there' for our consumption, it is only ever *produced* in a process of substitution

of one term for another in a potentially limitless series" ("Diderot, Barthes, Vertigo" 85). The particular take on the 'differential' equation or understanding of the production of meaning Burgin puts forward, however, is not without its problems, at least at the moment when one wishes to speak of ideological effects and acknowledge their primacy in visual communication, as Burgin is quick to recognize. He adds that "[i]n the *social* world," which it seems is the more problematic one since it sets the ground for the practice of daily life, "meaning must come to rest somewhere" (Diderot, Barthes, Vertigo 85). This 'somewhere,' a moment no doubt ridden with the political as well as the cultural and the social, constitutes something of a limit in more than one sense of the word. The frameworks that are established in terms of such a constitution make up the chief concern Burgin follows in much of his work. The 'fact' of the social world, that is, leads immediately to a singular question which Burgin prefers to answer in a singular way: "[W]hat is it that sets limits on the meaning of images?" ("Diderot, Barthes, Vertigo" 85). The most important point of leverage among the ones that surround Burgin's response seem to concern, however, that there exist a sharp limit indeed, rather than the particulars of that limit. In other words, that subjects are far from being able to recognize the constraints that set the meaning of images, let alone be involved in the production of certain questions that can insult their 'truth.'

Victor Burgin continues articulating a line of thinking that renounces photography an identity proper in "Looking at Photographs" (hereafter "Looking") as well, where he strives to make further evident that quite unmistakable fact that "photographs permeate the environment, facilitating the formation/reflection/inflection of what we 'take for granted'" (142). Photographs

partake in this very process of naturalization in much the same way other means of the transportation and dissemination of ideology: by 'losing' "themselves in the ordinary world they help to construct" (Burgin, "Looking" 143). And the proper occupation of contemporary theory is to follow "photography beyond where it has effaced its operations in the 'nothing-to-explain'" (Burgin, "Looking" 142). That is, not in the pervasively invasive contexts photographs are to be found and are 'naturally' overwhelmed by, but in the space of ideological analysis which the analyst has to construct if he or she is to ever (momentarily) step out of the influential, vicious circle of invasions himself or herself: to 'look' at photographs with fresh eyes, or eyes that are informed by theory rather than blinded by common sense, as it were.

Contrary to some of his assertions that appear at first sight to insist on a historical continuity of that notorious optical device that belonged to the 18th century, the camera obscura, and the particular epistemology it partakes in, Burgin is careful enough to emphasize that accounts which associate the 'invention of the camera' merely with a particular 'nuancing' of art history risk reinstalling lines of thought that belong to theories that aim to encourage the analysis of 'art in itself.' Consequently, art historical stories of origin are "cast within the familiar confines of a succession of 'masters', 'masterworks' and 'movements' – a *partial* account which leaves the social fact of photography largely untouched" (Burgin, "Looking" 143). Burgin, then, announces the need for and begins undertaking a demonstration of an approach to photography that would stress the dimensions of the differences involved in the experience of photographs and other 'media.' That is, an understanding that strives to operate against accounts of photography wherein it is situated 'between' painting and film, as if photography's standing in

the chronological trajectory justifies this strange positioning, and because it shares "the static image with *painting*, the camera with *film*" (Burgin, "Looking" 143). Apparently, we have no choice but to join Burgin in understanding such accounts of photography as ones that are dangerously involved with the installation of a narrowly linear and thus disabling understanding of art history wherein differences and disjuncture are omitted and cultural history is reduced to a motive for 'realism' and 'higher technology' in the arts. It seems it should rigorously be emphasized, as Burgin does, that photography "is encountered in a fundamentally different way from either [painting or film]" ("Looking" 143). The essentials of these differences, however, seem to matter more than Burgin appears to take them to. Although it is certainly necessary to account for the observation that "photographs offer themselves *gratuitously*; whereas paintings and film readily present themselves to critical attention as objects, photographs are received rather as an environment" (Burgin, "Looking" 143), the permeation of photographs and photography in everyday life appears to invite a further detailed analysis of the conditions that such permeation requires, and the unusual coupling of the everyday with art in the 19th and 20th centuries that Walter Benjamin identified with impressive accuracy seem to demand closer inspection, which the second part of this study will attempt to hint at. Let us turn for the moment, however, to the particular ways in which Victor Burgin presents his conception of the 'effects' and affects photographs – and, to a lesser degree, photography – represent for the subject, who is, if anyone, given to such effects by definition.

The rhetoric of representation and ideology Burgin seems to endeavor to establish in a photographic framework appears to invite a requirement to conceptualize the two 'ends' of the photographic process as immutable resources

of making meaning. Therefore, much of Burgin's attention is devoted to the subject of the photograph on the one hand of the 'equation' (the pro-photographic, etc.) and the subject of the photograph on the other hand (the subject of the symbolic order, etc.). Consequently, the 'photograph of the subject' does not receive the consideration it seems to demand. For it to be "one signifying system among others in a society which produces the ideological subject in the same movement in which they 'communicate' their ostensible 'contents'" (Burgin, "Looking" 153), photography as well its resources and 'products' (which are not limited to photographs per se, or, more fittingly, which might have nothing to do with photography or photographs as such) have to remain, and remain undisturbed, in the framework that had been drawn in their name in advance. In other words,

> [t]he effect of representation (the recruitment of the subject in the production of ideological meanings) requires that the stage of the represented (that of the photograph as object-text) meet the stage of the representing (that of the viewing subject) in a 'seamless join.' (Burgin, "Looking" 150)

Burgin takes the 'seamless join' that is thus achieved to be an effect of photography, or in his terms of 'photographic discourse,' which he has maintained is itself a product of other, 'more self-governing' discourses and not properly discursive as such. However, since Burgin devotes a great deal of effort to founding that photography operates in significantly different ways than other – however similar – modes of visual communication like painting and cinema, one cannot help but wonder whether the particular manners of the effects the inscription of which facilitate the reign of the 'seamless join' can be peculiar to photography. It emerges, contrarily, that the deployment of the picture perfect adherence of the subject to the ideological line of work is in no way a

photographic enterprise, and, furthermore, that it runs quite independently of the particular ‘medium’ in question. It has, above all else, to do with the installation of a technical category, or, more suitably, a mechanical one. Optical mechanics and the apparatus they engender are the signifiers and, consequently, generators, if not straightforward carriers, of a certain ideology of seeing. The lens – taken to be central not only to photography but also to cinema, the camera obscura, the stereoscope, and a host of other devices of seeing or visual communication, as well as to painting by a latent yet somehow observable relationship – almost single-handedly “arranges all information according to laws of projection which place the subject as geometric point of origin of the scene in imaginary relationship with real space” (Burgin, “Looking” 152)[8]. Thus the lens is candidate to perform two operations at once, and that for several past centuries and more to come. The first level of its dual mechanics concerns a distancing, a separation, or a severe severance. According to Burgin, the

> distancing of the subject from a separate and neutral reality, in what Husserl called the ‘natural attitude’, is magnified when the world is viewed through a lens. Compressed against the viewing screen into a single plane, chopped by the viewfinder into neat rectangles, the world is even more likely to be experienced as remote and inert. (“Photographic Practice” 47)

Subjects are therefore left isolated, detached and rendered aloof from ‘the world,’ or better still, ‘the real world.’ In other words, they are made susceptible to the inscriptions of ideology, which makes its appearance at just this moment. The

[8] It should perhaps be noted that this expression by Burgin can be understood to be reminiscent of the way Althusser defines ideology, wherein it is taken to entail an imaginary relationship to real conditions. However, Burgin’s line of thought in general could also be understood to be negligent towards the performative aspect of Althusser’s conceptualization of the subject. (Althusser insists that the ‘subject’ he is interested in conceptualizing is and is not recruited prior to being hailed: the processes of recruitment and hailing are not chronologically ordered.) It can also be suggested that Burgin can be understood here to allocate an essential status to the lens as the ‘perpetuator’ of ideology. On the problems involved with such a restriction of the discussion of image technologies to the camera and the lens, see Commoli.

second level of operation the lens is put to use finalizes the sudden act of inversion through which the relation of 'the world' to the subject is rearranged. Erected between 'the world' and the subject are the images that a lens produces and that (mis)guide the subject to another world, which is that of ideological effects. The subject is thus recruited in a very definitive framework that presents him or her with a screen impenetrably opaque to 'the real' but transparent to ideology. The subject thus comes to be "constructed within," rather than alongside, "the technical apparatus itself" (Burgin, Looking 146), and the camera (or the lens) becomes the primary form of vehiculation through which ideological subjection takes place.

Burgin, moreover, goes on to maintain that "technical apparatus" can be understood to open up the singular operating system "upon which all photographs depend," while "[w]ork in semiotics showed that there is … no single signifying system … upon which all photographs depend," since photography extorts, and never distorts, the smooth operations of "a heterogeneous complex of codes" (Burgin, "Looking" 143). It appears so that Burgin presumes the agency of the supremacy of what he calls "technical apparatus" in the process of making meaning: the lens and by extrapolation the camera – and at their origin the ideology of 'geometrical' vision – are situated virtually as the very ground photography substantiates as its artery of signification. A singular positioning, an operation that bears an immutable affectivity for the subject, is what by corollary follows: "the subjective *effect* of the camera" reemphasizes "a coherence founded in the unifying gaze of a unified, punctual, subject" (Burgin, "Looking" 150). And "photography theory" had better "take account of the production of this subject as the complex totality of its determinations are nuanced and constrained in their

passage *through and across* photographs" (Burgin, "Looking" 153. Emphasis added). Whatever they may possibly be about, then, photographs are actually about the possession of the subject in itself and for a subjective economy that capitalizes on that possession. They are the agents of an operation which, however, would not suffer from their inactivity: ideology knows of no substances, only forms. Concurrently, since photographs entail at best a solely transformative differentiation in terms of their relation to 'things-out-there,' when magically 'disregarded,' photography bows them out to the originary system they belong to, which it nevertheless could only emphasize. Besides, the ideological employment photography is conferred is in no way distinctive to it, however strongly its utilization could be understood to put a spin on it. Burgin tracks it along the lines of what could amount to remaining very assorted systems of signification:

> The signifying system of photography, like that of classical painting, at once depicts a scene *and the gaze of the spectator*, an object *and* a viewing subject. The two-dimensional analogical signs of photography are formed within an apparatus which is essentially that of the *camera obscura* of the Renaissance. ("Looking" 146)

The apparatus in question, of course, cannot be allocated to a single optical device, or even a constrained historical period. Rather, it is the pre-requirement, in Burgin's line of thought, for any system of representation, or at least for visual communication. At the heart of this apparatus, then, are "geometric projection" and the by-product it generates and imposes: "a unique point of view" (Burgin, "Looking" 146). "It is the position of point-of-view, occupied in fact by the camera, which is bestowed upon the spectator" (Burgin, "Looking" 146). Consequently, this imposition works first and foremost to secure the coherence of the subject and the immobility of the dimensions that foreclose the subject's space

of activity. In other words, while the 'system of the lens' assures that 'the world' is displaced or at least rendered 'remote and inert' and 'illusion' adjacent and active, the 'system of the frame' further shelters this installation from the possible violations of the moving eye, or, in other words, the incongruence that could behold a subject. Burgin asserts that

> [t]o the point-of-view, the system of representation adds the *frame*, (an inheritance which may be traced through easel painting, via mural painting, to its origin in the convention of post and lintel architectural construction); through the agency of the frame the world is organized into a coherence which it actually lacks, into a parade of tableaux, a succession of 'decisive moments.' ("Looking" 146)[9]

The frame, furthermore, ensures that the movement the "depicted space" has the potential to invite for the "eye/I" is denied or disturbed: this movement can only run "*across* it to the points where it encounters the frame" ("Looking" 152). For Burgin, the constitution of the frame blocks all amendment despite experiences that seem to suggest otherwise. It is an establishment, on the other hand, that Burgin notices to occasionally have a difficult time standing up. Elaborating on a photograph by Friedlander, he relates of the experience of viewing it as one in which "the conjunction of technical photographic apparatus and raw phenomenological flux has almost failed to guarantee" the wholesomeness of the boundary the concept of the frame represents ("Looking" 150). Burgin compares and contrasts this photograph with another one, which he suggests is utterly loyal to the maintenance of the lineal formation of the spectator-subject. Although in 'extreme' cases, that is, when the spectator is faced with a photograph that offers

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[9] See also "Photography, Phantasy, Function," 187, where the association with painting is rendered in more explicit terms. For an elaborate account of the ways in which the articulation of such associations across different visual registers brings Burgin's arguments closer to those of the 'modernist formalists' he claims to operate against, see Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, 19.

him or her “raw phenomenological flux,” the experience of viewing a photograph can be understood to deviate from the ideological mission photography is bestowed upon, in principle, looking at photographs do not fail to help endure the viewer’s position as subject, and furthermore, his or her subject-position. Ultimately, “the picture (and therefore the subject) remains ‘well composed’” (Burgin, “Looking” 150). What is interesting is that Burgin, in exemplifying that even photographs which could motivate the analyst to doubt his assumptions can be understood to participate in the same economy as more ‘obviously ideological’ images, has therefore to install a framework wherein photographs could be differentiated from each other by the degree to which they submit to the pre-given schemas of textual experience. The rhetoric and practice of ‘good composition,’ then, becomes the key element that motivates the inscription of the ideological in the photograph:

> ‘Good composition’ may therefore be no more or less than a set of devices for prolonging our imaginary command of the point-of-view, or *self*-assertion, a device for retarding recognition of the autonomy of the frame, and the authority of the *other* it signifies. ‘Composition’ (and indeed the interminable discourse *about* composition – formalist criticism) is therefore a means of prolonging the imaginary force, the real power to please, of the photograph. (“Looking” 152)

It should perhaps be noted at this point that Victor Burgin’s conceptualization of photographic composition seems to point to the intervention of an important dispersion within the schema of criticism he strives to install. Burgin, a practicing artist *and* a critique, has to advance his line of thought in such diffusive manner, it appears, as to be able to conceptualize photography as a practicable, creatively viable field. In other words, Burgin ultimately has to take a stop to attribute an agency and a closure to the field of photographic discourse, if only in order to

create room for photographic practices and experiences wherein the general ideological motif of the photograph is to be suspended or surpassed. Although the photographic field does not generally figure as a constitutive mode of discourse in Burgin's thought, such a conception nevertheless makes its way in. Burgin notes that

> to reject the 'transcendental' subject is not to suggest that either the subject or the institutions within which it is formed are caught in a simple mechanistic determinism; the institution of photography, while a product of the symbolic order, also *contributes* to this order. ("Looking" 145-6. Emphasis added.)

Furthermore, Burgin can also be read to propose that "it is most important that photography be recovered from its own appropriation to this [: the symbolic, ideological] order," "precisely because of its real role in constructing the imaginary, the misrecognitions necessary to ideology" ("Looking" 153). Photography, then, although at most times it is a more-than-helpful servant in maintaining subjects and ideologies, can be 'saved.'

The theme of 'recovery' that can be tracked in Burgin's writing can be found articulated explicitly and in further elaborated form in other thinkers who participate in the so-called postmodern critique of photography. I would like to turn for a moment to such an articulation, as laid by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, in order to be able to better explicate the political directions and strategies Burgin can be understood to point towards.

Pointing out that photography "has become a principal agent and conduit of culture and ideology" in industrialized societies (76), Solomon-Godeau, in "Photography After Art Photography," sets out to contrast (modern) 'art photography' with 'postmodern photography,' or, more appropriately, with the employment of photography in 'postmodern art,' in order that the potential the

latter has to promise is spelled out. Solomon-Godeau notes that ‘art photography’ and ‘postmodern art’ stand in complete opposition, particularly because “the properties of photographic imagery which have made it a privileged medium in postmodern art are precisely those which for generations art photographers have been concerned to disavow” (76). She furthermore asserts that the employment of photography in ‘postmodernism,’ in a way that is reminiscent of Burgin’s proposal, tends toward a reluctance to being incorporated in the ideological programme and subjective economy ‘art photography’ is responsible for carrying out, if not for advancing. According to Solomon-Godeau, there is a “generic distinction” between the ways photographs operate in their postmodernist employments and the usual mechanics of art photography, and the roots of this distinction lie in the “potential for institutional and/or representational critique, analysis, or address” “photographic use in postmodernism” is capable of invoking (77). ‘Art photography,’ on the other hand, is characterized, if not defined on the outset, by a “deep-seated inability to acknowledge any need to even think about such matters” (Solomon-Godeau 77).

However, postmodern art tends toward critique through emphasizing what Solomon-Godeau understands to be photography’s intrinsic qualities: its being simultaneously indexical and iconic (77). Further,

> [t]hat photography should thus figure as a crucial terms in postmodernism seems both logical and (at least retrospectively) inevitable. Virtually every critical and theoretical issue with which postmodernist art may be said to engage in one sense or another can be located within photography. Issues having to do with authorship, subjectivity, and uniqueness are built into the very nature of the photographic process itself. (Solomon-Godeau 80)

In Solomon-Godeau’s understanding, ‘postmodern art’ promises a breakthrough from the rigid modernist boundaries photography is prone to being subjected to

when it is left to its own devices, or those of the institutions – like art photography – through the schemas of which it generally nurtures as an approvable practice. Postmodernism is understood to position itself critically in relation to the institutional spaces that manage what photography is and how it operates, and, thus, is approached by Solomon-Godeau as a 'legitimate' practice, in opposition to 'regular' photography, susceptible to discourses whose operations are prior to and formative of it. Although photography has "potential for rigorous, critical, and conceptually sophisticated works" (Solomon-Godeau 85), this potential – repressed in 'art photography' – has to be brought about by the postmodern or postmodernist intervention. On the other hand, since "[t]he current political environment ... does not favor critical practices in any media," "it seems reasonable to predict that the photographic practices that will remain most favored will be those that call the fewest things into question" (Solomon-Godeau 85), and, therefore, to resist expecting the progressive possibilities postmodernism promises for photographic discourse to flourish in the near future.

Let us pause to remember Victor Burgin's main thrust of argument on photography; what he maintains is photography's primary role:

> It is hear that we encounter a general social effect of photographs. A major part of the political import of photographic signification is its constant confirmation and reduplication of subject-positions for the dominant social order through its imbrication within such dominant discursive formations as, for example, those which concern family life, erotic encounters, competitiveness and so on. […] But 'art' photographs are not exempt from such determinations of meaning, determinations which are achieved even where actual writing is absent. ("Photography, Phantasy, Function" 205)

While appearing to follow Burgin in putting photographs and their uses that are not characterized by an intent to critical practice in their place, Solomon-Godeau

in fact spells out a proposition that Burgin hints at but does not explicate: there are photographic categories or uses of photography that the postmodern critique of photography feels the necessity to understand as exempt from ‘such determinations of meaning.’

In reviewing a post-revolutionary Russian school of photographic practice, the work and programme of “Oktyabr,” Victor Burgin makes it clear that an exhaustive critique of photography cannot but approach skeptically to photographic practices that may seem to follow through its insights. Attempts, in other words, to invent a different photography, as the efforts of the Oktyabr group represent, are destined to fail at succeeding to mobilize photography to different ends than that already determined for it. Burgin contends that

> [w]e may … endorse the basic premise of the *Oktyabr* leftists’ programme for photography: looking is not indifferent. […] However, this is to endorse the *Oktyabr* premise so completely as to overwhelm the argument based on it: that the ideology of the subject may be *overthrown* by a ‘revolution in perception’ – for it can now no longer be a question of the *ideology* of the subject, a body of ideas the subject ‘owns’, and may abandon; it is now rather a question of that very ideology of the *subject* which informs the previous formulation. Such a punctual subject of ideology may not be overthrown by the camera as that subject is inscribed in the very functioning of the instrument itself and in the very history of the act of looking. (“Photography, Phantasy, Function” 188)

What is interesting in Burgin’s approach to photographic practices that aim to follow a programme which proposes to alter the ways in which photography regularly operates and functions is its apparent and unexpected inflexibility. While maintaining that the experience of viewing photographs involves complex predeterminations and dynamics the ascription of which cannot be reduced to either of the categories of photographer, photograph and spectator, Burgin is never tired of binding these categories to each other and then to ‘the ideology of

the subject' with immutable connections. The "fact […] that the photograph is a *place of work*," which Burgin asserts is "of primary social importance" ("Looking" 153. Emphasis added.), can therefore be understood to exert force that is only supplementary for his arguments. For the 'place of work' Burgin has in mind is one in which the work is always already labored in advance, so much so that the photographer, the photograph, and the viewer figure space as important and deep only as placeholders in it. How, then, it seems it should be questioned, are practices that would not be caught in the mechanics of the 'ideology of the subject,' 'photographies' that would not be overdetermined by the "integrated specular regime" that maps out industrialized societies (Burgin, "Looking" 152) even likely of being undertaken? The question, however, is not restricted to photography or photographic practice per se, but colors all activities that have to do with the production and consumption of images, activities which Burgin nonetheless is reluctant to tell apart. Borrowing the critical concept of 'suture' from film theory, Burgin is quick to note that the processes the operations of which this concept denotes are not restricted to the movie-theater. Rather, the questions film theory raises are valid for all environments where a spectator is present:

> [T]he apparatus which desire has constructed for itself incorporates *all* those aspects of contemporary Western society for which the Situationists chose the name *spectacle*: aspects forming an integrated specular regime, engaged in a mutual exchange of energies, not strung out in mutual isolation along some historicist progress; desire needs no material darkness in which to stage its imaginary satisfactions. ("Looking" 153)

Another gloss-through the framework Burgin builds, however, reveals that in fact he refuses to limit the stage in which desire maps its objects to the visual field. "The primary suturing instance of the discourse of still photography," which

“takes the form of an identification of the subject with the camera position” (Burgin, “Photography, Phantasy, Function” 189), holds also true for any other form or type of discourse. It derives from the general mechanism suture is responsible for deploying, which is none other than the recruitment of the subject in the ‘ideological’ sense: “Suture operates within all forms of discourse as a movement of construction/incorporation of the subject *in* the discourse in question: a set of effects in which the subject recognizes the discourse as its own” (Burgin, “Photography, Phantasy, Function” 188). It is difficult, therefore, to not align with Geoffrey Batchen in pointing out that Burgin has to look “through the photograph in search of something that necessarily has its origin elsewhere,” much “[l]ike the desiring subject he describes” (*Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* [hereafter *Conception*], 11), in order that “the experience of the photograph can be readily incorporated into a Lacanian theory of the subject” (*Conception* 10). Not only, however, does “this psychoanalytic version of photography’s origins still does not account for the specificity of the timing, the morphology, or the cultural focus of the desire to photograph” as Batchen points out (*Conception* 113), but neither does it help understand and explain the distinct processes of affection that overwhelm the experience of different images that are understood to have originated through different ‘means.’

“In effect, this makes the desire to photograph,” and, we might perhaps add, the desire to look at photographs, “but one instance of a more general desiring economy common to all times and places and therefore transcending historical and cultural difference. In other words, Burgin replaces one originary essence, ‘photography in itself,’ with another, ‘desire in itself.’” (Batchen, *Conception* 113). Such an overarching approach to social determination,

consequently, makes one certainly wonder what sorts of practice the "'new forms of politicisation' within the institutions of art (and) photography" ("Photography, Phantasy, Function" 216) Burgin calls for could denote. According to Burgin, these forms would not have to abandon the existing modes of practice that saturate the photographic environment, but would necessarily "begin with the recognition that meaning is perpetually displaced from the *image* to the discursive formations which cross and contain it" (Photography, Phantasy, Function 216). Burgin, apparently, is not suggesting that, in order to contribute new terms of politicization in photography and art, artists and critiques should attempt at altering the 'autonomous' discursive formations that are responsible for how photography functions. Since, however, he contends without doubt "that there can be no question of either 'progressive' contents or forms *in themselves*, nor any ideally 'effective' synthesis of the two" ("Photography, Phantasy, Function" 216), his approach to the occupation of spaces in the institutions of art that would allow for 'new forms of politicization' seems actually to leave no room for any political practice whatsoever, aside from that of the critic, or the artist-critic.

2.3 Photography as a Totalized Field

In an interview he gave on the possibilities new forms of politicization in institutions of photography and art could promise, John Tagg offers his comments on photographic practices that aim to counter dominant ideologies through an effort to use photographs as a means of disseminating unacknowledged and potentially subversive, and thus supposedly progressive, truth-claims. He relates these practices to have been "volubly committed to street photography, to the idea that Reality is out there on the streets and you've got to get out there, that's the

radical thing to do” (Lukitsh 226). In order to able to search for, locate and disseminate ‘the truth,’ however, the practices Tagg has in mind are obligated to take their motivation from a particular conception of the subject of ‘their’ photography, and presume that “[t]here is the Real, out there, it can be possessed and brought back, and the truth will blow apart ideology” (Lukitsh, 226). The following discussion takes the warning Tagg raises in the name of photographic practice seriously and aims at understanding whether a respective positing of ‘the real’ and/or ‘the truth’ comes to be necessary also for John Tagg’s articulations on photography to occupy a reasonable place within the critique of photography. In other words, whether the challenges Tagg imposes in the name of certain photographic practices could be leveled at the practice of historically informed photography critique that targets to undermine the established order of art history he is involved with. Whether Tagg’s discussion of photography, and in particular his conception of the relation of photography with power demonstrate any cues of tangibly graspable difference from the ‘reflectionism’ he frequently holds Althusser responsible for having posited as a means of the analysis of power remains to be seen.

John Tagg’s eloquent articulations on photography seem to stem from a radical proposition: that there has never been *a* ‘photography,’ in the singular, and if a field of practice and experience have been aggregately termed under this single heading, this finds its reasons in no place other than the dedicated labors of discourse and ideology in accumulating different kinds of practices or different ‘photographies’ together. Tagg relates that

> [t]here is a complex topography of debates and spaces which we must map out, and historians of photographies – an unavoidable coinage since the category is indelibly plural – cannot avoid the question of the stratification of photographic practices and its

> consequences, which cut right across their own institutional practice. ("The Proof of the Picture" 99-100)

Asserting that photography-as-a-field and the different photographic practices that make it up had to be constructed and maintained through the agency of "specific discursive economies that are sited in specific institutions and practices, supported by specific agents, and invested with specific relations of power," Tagg directs attention to the agency of "legitimations" that "are never given in advance but have to be produced and negotiated," and whose effects are derivative of those of discourse 'itself' ("The Proof of the Picture" 102). While photographs can at times be defined as objects that carry through an "openness," "this openness … [is usually] contained and a specific reading [is] to be constructed and imposed" (Tagg, "The Proof of the Picture" 109). In order to for this imposition to work as intended, in Tagg's approach, photographs or certain photographs that belonged to certain 'photographies' have had to be given occupation in the general discursive economy as vehicles of 'truth,' while a category named photography and rendered undifferentiated was designated as a common producer of 'truths.' What we can term 'the negotiation of photography-as-we-know-it,' then, can be said to have succeeded in part through a certain process by which subjects are 'tricked.' These processes, at the present moment, are 'facts' of a history the 'progressive outcome' of which John Tagg would wish would have turned out otherwise: "[T]he proof of the picture *was* in the reading. The photographs had to have their status as truth produced and institutionally sanctioned" ("The Proof of the Picture" 111).

John Tagg, without doubt, has been responsible for helping "the emergence of a distinctive theory of photography's relationship to power," and his

can be regarded as "a pioneering effort to relate the work of Michel Foucault to the history of photography" (Batchen, "Photography, Power and Representation" 7). However, Tagg's is a particular take on that body of work, and while the discussion aimed at here has no intention of reviewing his arguments as a follower of Foucault's, to help understand whether those arguments could be regarded to treat power as a site that resists rigid localization seems to be necessary. What could it mean to argue that in the process of its social as well as technical advancement "the powers photography wielded were never its own" (Tagg, "The Proof of the Picture" 111)? It could, for example, be taken to suggest that not only did photography's development in the 19th century shared the dynamics that motivated industrial capitalism, but was straightforwardly demanded by them. Indeed, according to Tagg,

> photography seemed to bring to the institutions involved certain powers they sought – the power of a new and intrusive look; the power of a new means and mode of accumulative knowledge; the power to structure belief and recruit consent; the power of conviction and the power to convict. ("The Proof of the Picture" 111)

As a pre-digested tool for the intrusions of power, photography, then, had to assume a destiny set for its name in advance. Far from internalizing power, let alone mobilizing a power of its own, the surface of its products had to remain sole facades, allowing streams of discourse to slide through one photograph to the next.

Like Victor Burgin, Tagg makes deconstructing the propositions of modernist formalism a primary object of his work, putting more attention on countering "[c]riticism's hypostasizing of art 'in itself', originality and the creative subject" ("The Proof of the Picture" 117) than outlining the specific role

photography might have played for discourse and the specifics of that role. This intense focus on context, however, seems to invite dangerous propositions. While it would be difficult not to agree with Tagg in suggesting that "it is this institutional field of discursive strategies, the relations of power which invest them and the effects of power they produce, that we must study" ("The Proof of the Picture" 112), the reasons why photography fails to figure as an institutional field in itself are hardly intelligible. Would not it be possible, furthermore, to argue that the "institutional interventions" Tagg would like to allude to are rendered even more remote in the context of his own arguments, much like "the [a]nalyses premised on the positing of photography as such," which "can never theorise this [i.e. institutional interventions] as the historiographical task" ("The Proof of the Picture" 112)? In effect, indeed, it would seem that positing an agency in some pure form to the level solely of institutions which were to mobilize, interpret, "and to the discursive, institutional and political strategies" which would support and validate the politics of photography (Tagg, "The Proof of the Picture" 111) would call for a task very difficult to undertake, let alone imagined. John Tagg is certainly aware that "we have to live with the fact that there is no externality, nor any natural grounds on which to base a struggle or motivate resistance with the promise of (human) emancipation" ("Totalled Machines: Criticism, Photography and Technological Change" [hereafter "Totalled Machines"] 120). However, it is to those very grounds that are out of cultural reach that his mode of critique seems to point to in terms of 'practical' intervention.

Merely an instance of the "new generation of technologies [that] has arrived to discipline, punish, absorb and, finally, replace mere fleshly bodies in

new and potentially overwhelming ways" (Tagg, "Totalled Machines" 119), the advancement of photography, although understood as a social threat at first because of its so-called democratizing possibilities, never were put under 'positive' social uses, rendering "Benjamin's wishful predictions" (Tagg, "The Proof of the Picture" 100) obsolete. Before the potentials Walter Benjamin thought photography promised could even be considered, the agency of industrial capitalism

> readily appropriated the latest technologies – photography prominent among them – though it was as suspicious of their productivity as it was of the social itself. It sought to make them servile instruments of its compulsive knowledge, driven by a separation, isolation and subjugation of its still troubling object, but eliding the erotic character of its curiosity, denying desire and the exchange of pleasure. (Tagg, "Discontinous City" 141)

These historical dynamics, however, were already played out and their consequences set in place before either photography as a concept and practice assumed a social character or Benjamin wrote his respective analysis.

Since it has never been "a unique technology or an autonomous semiotic system," Tagg has it that "the unity of the field of photographic meanings" ("Totalled Machines" 128) have been necessarily supplemented by the sovereign and extramural systems that discourse set in place. Certainly, approaches that propose that a certain set of expressive methods is what binds all photographs together, securing their meaning through a technical and metaphysical operation, has to be thoroughly interrogated, as Tagg does vigorously. However, it seems that to suggest that there are no other shared, peculiar characteristics to photographs than the 'single range of technical devices' they make use of, as Tagg appears to offer, is equally inadequate. Without having to posit the "notion of photography as a unified medium, with its own inherent qualities and consequent

potentialities for good or bad" (Tagg, "Totalled Machines" 129) right at the outset, it should be possible, at least in principle, to articulate the identifiable traits of the photographic event, and resist in the process the temptations of deferring the possibly positive aspects of the photographic experience either to an irreducible, extra-terrestrial field or to a technical determinism that would operate on condition that the agency of the social and the subject are nullified.

Through a strategy of critique that reminds us of Burgin's, Tagg's next move is to categorically elevate 'the Real' and its materiality to the place of that which denies the production of (real) knowledge about itself. The new (insubstantial) substance of 'the Real,' however, is only a byproduct of post-industrial capitalism, and of photography to the extent that it was serviceable to that order. Very much like money, photography blocks access to reality by offering a seemingly superior, naturally inferior form of experience. "Solid substance," then, although it used to be an inhabitable territory of relationships, is not any more a humane category: "Indeed, as with money itself under capitalism, so great is the mystery of this fetishised token of equivalence that 'solid substance' seems poor exchange" (Tagg, "Totalled Machines" 124). What supplants it is "a complex discursive reality, figured at every level in metaphors which multiplied its meanings" (Tagg, "The Proof of the Picture" 104). The 'Real' that is taken to inflict the photograph, "that was thereby called up for the photographs," is, then, of a different persuasion, it is 'the real' at best, "though represented as inhering in them" (Tagg, "The Proof of the Picture" 104). The negotiation of photography, the negotiation, more appropriately, that created photography, has therefore been "produced by imposing a transparency on experience and representation, as the instruments of an overwhelming truth,"

since discourse categorically “needed to enforce the immediate presence of … [its] object to … [its] subject” (Tagg, “Discontinuous City: Picturing and the Discursive Field” [hereafter “Discontinuous City”] 141). A great deal of Tagg’s suggestions can thus be understood to intend to displace the notion that the ‘Real’ and the ‘Truth’ that photographs are taken to thrive in and refer to are necessarily of a secondary nature, and are at best sole ‘constructions:’ merely, the ‘real’ and the ‘truth.’

John Tagg, in elaborating his contextual mode of thinking on photography, is careful enough to grant at least that “[t]he notion of evidentiality, on which nineteenth-century practices of documentation traded, could never be taken as already and unproblematically in place” (“Discontinuous City” 143). That is, that the conceptualization and advancement of photography were aspects of a social rupture. However, he never takes photography to be a principal part of the split that it started operating in, but insists that it was merely a timely add-on. Photography-as-it-was-practiced was simply supplemented to “a discursive space in which a particular photography could be made to operate and in which a particularised photography was already prepared, by then, to find its place” (Tagg, “Discontinuous City” 142). The dangers involved in the directions Tagg supposes we follow when thinking on photography can be found in his own text, in further development. In other words, Tagg’s critique of the ways in which photography was institutionalized can, it seems, be understood to disturb his own critique as well. It is not definitive, for example, whether Tagg, who asserts that those autonomous discourses which are responsible for the “fixing in place of certain new technologies of representation as *purely instrumental* modes” (“Discontinuous City” 141. Emphasis added.), could be understood to treat

photography as a purely instrumental device, since for him "no meaning to photography as such" can be considered to be in effect ("Totalled Machines" 129). It becomes all the more difficult, therefore, to distinguish Tagg's mode of ciritical operation from those

> conceptions of cultural practices as reflections, expressions, superstructures, ideologies or functional apparatuses of social reproduction [that] have to deny that the discourses, practices and institutions that constitute the cultural can accomplish anything in themselves, other than the *re-presentation* of what is already in place, at some more 'basic' level (Tagg, "Discontinuous City" 149),

as well as from the apparently pedestrian understanding that guide those photographers and critics that treat the photograph as a loyally transparent transcription of 'reality.'

The problems that Tagg's account of photography is shot through with can be reflected on in further substantiation through focusing on a principal he discloses to have motivated his work: countering the equation of "a discursive structure with a technology" ("Discontinuous City" 143)[10]. Although this particular incentive of Tagg's can be understood to find its motivation in deconstructing accounts of photography that are characteristically of a technological-determinist persuasion, Tagg's ceaseless efforts to keep discourse distant from technology and representation and his conceptualization of photography as an (originally) amorphous field that is viable for habitation by dominant discourses but impossible for critical practice point to larger issues.

Critique that aims to invalidate 'historical' accounts of photography "in which an independent dynamic of mechanical invention, modification, and

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[10] It should perhaps be remembered at this point that Foucault frequently referred to discursive structures as technologies. This habitual reference could amount to saying that, in the words of Gilles Deleuze, "machines are social before being technical" (*Foucault*, 13. qtd. in Crary 35).

perfection imposes itself onto a social field, transforming it from the outside" (Crary 8), like that of John Tagg's, is certainly invaluably necessary. However, propositions of the exact opposite dimension in which discourse would be attributed an overwhelming agency and taken to mold any field whatsoever that falls on its path of flow does not seem to be able entertain the productivity of the subject or the technology in question any more than modes of technological determinism do. In fact, understandings that insist that social field, discourse, optical device and viewer are distinct entities could be as limiting as those accounts that posit the absolute primacy of technology in governing the relationships between these entities. In that, photography perhaps should be understood as "a site at which a discursive formation intersects with material practices," irreducible to "either to a technological or a discursive object" (Crary 31).

3 PHOTOGRAPHY AS A SPECTRAL MODE OF WRITING

> Never to reduce myself-as-subject, confronting certain photographs, to the disincarnated, disaffected *socius* which science is concerned with. (Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 74)

3.1 Reality Effect and Substance

Starting from the very first section in *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes operates his conceptualization of photography on the grounds of the inadequacy of structuralism to come to a grasp with it: Photography complicates, or can be even said to defy, the logic of the sign as conceived in structural or semiological terms. The project Barthes intends to undertake, however, could never be indifferent to the efforts of Victor Burgin or John Tagg, although their comments on it do seem to suggest otherwise[11]. Very much in the manner in which these writers organized

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[11] Burgin, in "Re-Reading Camera Lucida," suggests that some of the arguments advanced in *Camera Lucida* "strictly, here, would be a matter between Barthes and his analyst" (86), adding that, consequently, "*Camera Lucida*, as a totality, may be read as the autobiographical novel that Barthes often said he wished to write" (89). Elsewhere, Burgin can be seen even more tempted to disregard those arguments because they are articulated in the context of "a book which is not a text of theory" ("Diderot, Barthes, Vertigo" 92). Tagg's comment is more interesting in that it takes Burgin's proposition to approach *Camera Lucida* from the standpoint of the psychoanalyst literally: "With all due deference to Roland Barthes, no amount of pre-Oedipal nostalgia can get beyond the disappointing fact that the photographs do not and could not validate their meanings within themselves. The photographs' compelling weight is not phenomenological but discursive" ("The Proof of the Picture" 103).

their suggestions, Barthes takes off by asking, within the context of a negative intuition, whether photography 'really' exists:

> I decided I liked Photography *in opposition* to the Cinema, from which I nonetheless failed to separate it[12]. This question grew insistent. I was overcome by an "ontological" desire: I wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was "in itself," by what essential feature it was to be distinguished from the community of images. Such a desire really meant that beyond the evidence provided by technology and usage, and despite its tremendous contemporary expansion, I wasn't sure that Photography existed, that it had a "genius" of its own. (*Camera Lucida* 3)

The concerns of Roland Barthes's in terms of the existence of photography are quite distinct in approach from those of either Victor Burgin or John Tagg. The reason why 'Photography' may indeed not exist for him is not that it is generally neutral towards and susceptible to the vehiculations of discourse or ideology, but that a classifying principle that would bind all photographs under its sign is difficult to articulate. And, it should perhaps be added, for the structuralist/formalist, the question of the existence of forms is usually one that has to do with the problem of classification[13]. However, Barthes announces at the outset that

> [f]rom the first step, that of classification (we must surely classify, verify by samples, if we want to constitute a corpus), Photography evades us. The various distributions we impose upon it are in fact either empirical (Professionals / Amateurs), or rhetorical (Landscapes / Objects / Portraits / Nudes), or else aesthetic (Realism / Pictorialism), in any case external to the object, without relation to its essence, which can only be (if it exists at all) the New of which it has been the advent; for these classifications might very well be applied to other, older forms of representation. We might say that Photography is unclassifiable. Then I wondered what the source of this disorder might be. (*Camera Lucida* 2)

[12] See on this point "The Third Meaning," where the essence of the cinema is understood to be photographical.
[13] See Propp on this point.

The disorder Barthes has in mind, furthermore, is not only a technological one, and concerns not only photography, despite the fact that "[f]ilm and photography are pure products of the Industrial Revolution. They are not part of a heritage, a tradition" (Barthes, "On Photography" 354). It further has to do with the position of theory in regard to the object of analysis:

> [W]e should invent a new aesthetics that can deal with both film and photography by differentiating them, whereas in reality there is a cinematographic aesthetics that functions on the basis of stylistic values of a literary kind. Photography hasn't benefited from this transference, appearing instead as a kind of cultural poor relation for whom no one wants to claim responsibility. (Barthes, "On Photography" 354)

The disorder under question, however, certainly points also to a desire embedded in *Camera Lucida* to interrogate certain modes of analysis that the work of Barthes himself has been primarily responsible for advancing. No more 'reality effect,' then, in this novel understanding but 'only the real.' Put more appropriately, Barthes seems to suddenly recognize that what he had been calling 'reality effect' has something indeed to do with the 'real,' making it hard to install any limiting boundary between the two concepts, at least in the case of photography:

> In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This* (this photograph, and not photography), in short, what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression. (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 4)

The relationship between the corpus Barthes feels the need to hold under control to the body in the photograph is a total and indispensable one. The photograph leads him "not only toward 'the rest' of the nakedness, not only

toward the fantasy of a *praxis*, but toward the absolute excellence of a being, body and soul together" (*Camera Lucida* 59). The question that remains, however, concerns whether the unity and purity of the entire being itself, the being of Barthes's dream, can survive photographic production and reproduction rather than fall into pieces. The return to the body that the photograph testifies to is in no way a simple homecoming, but will be shown to be extremely 'spooky.' In that the being of photography necessitates that "there must be return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever," and therefore facilitates a "spectrogenic processes" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International* [hereafter *Specters*] 126). Before we can begin speaking of that process, however, the dimensions of the framework in which the photograph relates to the linguistic and to the real should be alluded to in more detail.

Although comments on Barthes's work and reviews of *Camera Lucida* usually and understandably focus on the agreeably important differences this final work represents in terms of the Barthesian trajectory, the problems 'the Photograph' (that is, an *existing* photograph) bears to mind can be understood to inform Barthes's earlier thought on photography as well. He would argue, in "Shock-Photos," for example, that the power of photography resides in being able to efface itself or the procedures of 'signification' that impose meanings on its products. Commenting on a series of photographs on display under the heading of Shock-Photos and that were exclusively 'aimed' at shocking the viewers, in this article Barthes argues, in a way that reminds us of his suggestions in *Camera Lucida* yet retains something of the 'postmodern critique of photography,' that since in the space of these photographs viewers had been dispossessed of their

judgment of recognition, they had “linked to these images only by a technical interest” (71). Emphasizing the importance of the activity of the viewer in the experience of photography, Barthes adds that the images under question had “no history” for the viewer, that they were pre-digested, as it were.

Rendered lacking of an act of viewing through which he would be able to make-out the referent of the photograph for his own, Barthes complains that “we can no longer *invent* our own perception of this synthetic nourishment” (“Shock-Photos” 71-2) that is called the shock-photo. He further explicates what could be appreciated as the beginnings of the rehearsal of a particular approach to photography which he will later give its due articulation in *Camera Lucida*: that the power of photography lies in a momentary interruption that the photograph introduces into the linguistic apparatus. In “Shock-Photos,” deprived of a photograph or a group of photographs that can be employed to demonstrate this peculiarity, Barthes introduces this conception in a negative manner. Asserting, somewhat paradoxically, that the photographs under consideration cannot help but remain “the product of an encumbering will to language,” Barthes understands them to operate outside of the field or discourse of photography, and, however pretentiously, inside common reading experiences. The ‘technical’ – which is to say, here for Barthes, ‘merely cultural’ – interest that these photographs invite of the viewer

> does not exceed the interval of an instantaneous reading: it does not resound, does not disturb, our reception closes too soon over a pure sign; the perfect legibility of the scene, its *formulation* dispenses us from receiving the image in all its scandal; reduced to the state of pure language, the photograph does not disorganize us (“Shock-Photo” 72).

Barthes actually grants a name and an existence to photographs that violate the "interval of an instantaneous reading" in "The Photographic Message," calling them, strangely enough, shock photos. What he understands from shock, however, is quite different, it seems, from the understanding that governed the Shock-Photos exhibition he thus had to denigrate. Holding on to the notion that the frames of perception of photographs are anything but linguistic, Barthes could go as far as to grant the possibility of the intervention of a long-drawn-out 'verbal interval' in the photographic experience, linking the latency of the linguistic faculty in coming to grasp with an infrequent yet traumatic event, which he would later locate at the heart of the photograph. Locating the perception of the photograph within general perceptive categories, Barthes relates that

> [i]f … there is no perception without immediate categorization, the photograph is verbalized at the very moment it is perceived; or, better still: it is perceived only when verbalized (or, if verbalization is delayed, there is a disorder of perception, interrogation, anxiety of the subject, traumatism … ("The Photographic Message" [hereafter "Message"] 17)

However, the "traumatism" Barthes has in mind, it appears, turns out to be what characterizes the difficulty the mythologist faces in conceptualizing the photograph. The "difficulties of a structural analysis of the photographic message" (Barthes, "Message" 5) indeed stem from the observation, however 'mythical,' that "[s]ince the photograph offers itself as a mechanical analogue of reality, its first [i.e. denotative] message completely "fills" its substance and leaves no room for the development of a second [i.e. connotative] message (Barthes, "Message" 6). The structural analysis of the photographic message, then, can only operate on the basis of the recognition that while "it is possible to separate out certain connotation procedures," these procedures cannot be taken to

"strictly belong to the photographic structure" (Barthes, "Message" 9). The presence of what Barthes names the denotative – which is a term that brings along its own (i.e. linguistic) connotations and limitations – in/as the photograph, however, complicates the separation that any instance of structural analysis that concerned it would build upon. Fearful of the risks involved within his own argument of "being mythical," Barthes goes on to elaborate on photography on the basis, nevertheless, of "the characteristics which common sense attributes to the photograph" ("Message" 7) and which appear to have something of a virtue. Reluctant as he is to fall prey to the magic of the photographic message and become a 'common reader,' who has no choice but to receive "as a simple denotation what in fact is a double structure – denoted-connoted" ("Message" 11), Barthes is careful enough to limit the denotative capacity in equating it with a few extraordinary photographs:

> Is this to say that a pure denotation is impossible? If it exists, it is perhaps not at the level of what ordinary language calls the non-signifying, the neutral, the objective, but quite the contrary at the level of strictly traumatic images; trauma is just what suspends language and blocks signification. […] Strictly traumatic photographs are rare, the trauma is entirely dependant on the certainty that the scene really occurred: *the photographer had to be there* (this is the mythical definition of denotation); but this granted … the traumatic photograph … is the one about which there is nothing to say: the shock photo is by structure non-signifying: no value, no knowledge, at the limit no verbal categorization can have any hold over the process instituting its signification. We might imagine a kind of law: the more direct the trauma, the more difficult the connotation; or even: the "mythological" effect of a photograph is inversely proportional to its traumatic effect. ("Message" 19-20)

Connotation in the photographic message is quite distinct from the connotative capacities of the linguistic message. In photography, "the code of connotation is neither artificial (as in a true language) nor natural" (Barthes, "Message" 10).

Things are further complicated for Barthes by the novelty he senses the photograph to introduce into the framework that the sociological analysis of 'the message' draws in advance for the investigation of meaning. "[A] specific method prior to sociological analysis" becomes exceedingly necessary, since "whatever the origin and the destination of the message, the photograph is *not only a product or a channel*, it is also an object, endowed with a structural autonomy" (Barthes, "Message" 4. Emphasis added.). The method that Barthes intends to constitute in "The Photographic Message" – which "can only be the immanent analysis of that original structure which the photograph constitutes" (4) – motivates him, however, to arrive at a very strange conclusion before the method can even be declared in its unity.

The violence Barthes's 'photographic paradox' introduces into the framework of structural thinking usually goes unnoticed. First and foremost, this paradox qualifies the particularity of the photograph against other modes of image production or 'systems of representation,' in that it nurtures the photograph and nothing else. Structuralism, and especially the mode of structuralism that Barthes is responsible for elaborating perhaps with terms more definitive than anyone else's, it would be remembered, is notorious for a reluctance to discriminate between modes of meaning making. There is more, however, to the 'photographic paradox' than its qualification of the photograph in negative difference from any context of meaning making whatsoever. The "particular status of the photographic message" stems from the fact that, in its 'essential' center, "*it is a message without a code*" (Barthes, "Message" 5). The shock that Barthes's hardly expected proposition maintains stems from a variety of factors. At the outset, it should perhaps be remembered that talking about the 'presence' or existence of a

message, of any message, in terms of the linguistic or semiological endeavor at least, presupposes the immediate presence of a code, or, even – within the framework of Barthes's linguistically overwhelmed semiology – 'the code.' This is, it would be remembered, exactly why Saussure had to be insistent to encourage the study of 'langue' rather than 'parole.' Without a code or without a language system that is to precede it, parole or utterance is simply inconceivable. Emphasis on Barthes's formulation of 'the photographic paradox,' then, could breach open the way to understanding the reasons why photography might not exist: it certainly does not exist for the semiologist. In other words, although Barthes ultimately aligns 'the photographic paradox' with a proposition that he understands is "an important corollary" to it in "The Photographic Message," namely that "the photographic message is a continuous message" (5), the interruption the paradox he is undertaken points to the presence of an irreducible aspect of his thinking on photography that cannot be simply nullified through the strategies Umberto Eco, for example, has in mind and that emphasize the ultimately coded culture of the natural, which is thus taken to be in difference from a nature that resists all access and that is 'truly' natural.

One of the most interesting propositions of "The Photographic Message" concerns the caption that almost always accompanies the news photograph, Barthes's primary object of analysis in this essay. "The text," suggests Barthes, pointing to the caption but also to the work of the connotational framework in general, "constitutes a parasitical message intended to connote the image, i.e., to "*enliven*" it with one or more secondary signifieds ("Message" 14. Emphasis added). What is striking in this suggestion concerns not only the recognition that Barthes takes, although cautiously, of the connotational aspect in its move

exceedingly outward to the photograph, but also that he understands the photographic image to be inanimate. Not only dull, that is, but also non-living, somewhat devoid of, as it were, a certain 'culture,' which is where Barthes locates the animate parasites of connotation to reside. Added to the 'photographic paradox,' this vein of articulation through which the very essence of photography would be defined against the grain, so to speak, of its own exchange value (i.e. circulative animation) has Roland Barthes approach in *Camera Lucida* in a peculiar way to the photographic enigma.

The agency of a duality that announced itself earlier to Barthes under the cover of that which is 'neither artificial (as in a true language) nor natural' presses itself with extreme burden on the photographic surface now in *Camera Lucida*, complicating the very logic of the sign:

> It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funeral immobility, at the very heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures; or even like those pairs of fish … which navigate in convoy, as though united by an eternal coitus. The Photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both: the windowpane and the landscape, and why not: Good and Evil, desire and its object: dualities we can conceive but not perceive. (6)

What photography gives claim to, then, consequently, is a "stubbornness of the Referent" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 6). This perseverance of the referent of the photograph and by extension of photography, a referent with the capital r for Barthes, thus defies signification-proper through its photographic mode of "always being there" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 6). In contradistinction, "every other image" is laden "from the start, and because of its status–by the way in which the object is simulated" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 5), that is, rendered

‘nothing but code.’ Barthes thus can involve with a sound definition of the essence of this disturbing – in too many aspects of the term – thing called the photograph: “A specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents), or at least it is not *immediately* or *generally* distinguished from its referent …” (*Camera Lucida* 5).

In *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*, Vicki Kirby puts the problem of the being (and Being) of the referent at the very heart of the conception of the sign as conceived in structural terms. Although Saussure never comes to definitive terms with the interruption the referent introduces at the center of the relationship of the signifier with the signified, Kirby suggests, the problematic nevertheless characterizes the origins of his discussion:

> [i]f we grant that language precedes the referent rather than the other way around [as Saussure does before us] – or, perhaps more accurately, *if we think of the referent as neither preceding nor following language because it is an immanence within it* – then the referent cannot be bracketed out of a Saussurean approach. Although the referent’s status as the generative origin of meaning is certainly called into question, this does not imply that we can be entirely rid of the referent as a consequence. (19. Emphasis added.)

Following Kirby, it seems to be possible to argue that Barthes, who, along with “Benveniste, Lévi-Strauss … and … many of today’s post-modern and cultural critics,” would be expected to remain “captured in the structuralist aphorism ‘language speaks us,’” does a little more than “read this aphorism … through a notion of language where linguistics mainframes all other data” (Kirby 54) in *Camera Lucida*[14]. In this last essay by Barthes, the paradox that was announced in

[14] My intention here has little to do with entertaining a dialogue through which a definitive, somewhat revisionist [and post-structuralist] leverage point would characterize the later Barthes, who would be understood, consequently, to suddenly turn into after having made the focal point of his study a relentless critique of mythologies for decades a ‘professor of desire.’ (For such discussions, see Lavers, Rabate, Shawcross, and Ungar). What demand notice, it seems to me, are the ways in which Barthes treats photography with a distinctive approach.

“The Photographic Message” and that the photographic message is the expression of – namely, the conception of a continuous sign – is taken to an extreme wherein the ‘presence’ of the referent in the sign cannot be deflated by any means. The term continuous, then, it seems, could be better understood in this context as that which stands in distinction from the notions of the arbitrary and arbitration, with which structuralism has so often attempted “to separate the sign from reality,” taking it as the threshold with which to mark ‘the difference’ (Kirby 27)[15].

Although Saussure himself can be understood to have “inadvertently contradicted his own argument by including within the sign the reality to which the sign refers” (Kirby 19), confusedly equating and thus conflating what he termed the signified (i.e. the mental concept) with the thing itself (i.e. not only the sound-image, but also the referent), structuralism, as evident in the work of Benveniste as well Barthes, can be understood to be characterized by a relentless attempt to petrify “the sign’s integrity by differentiating it from a reality to which the human condition is prohibited access” (Kirby 20). In thinking on photography, however, Barthes seems to notice the rigidity of “[t]he parameters of this classical comprehension of the sign as something separable from the extralinguistic reality of matter” (Kirby 52). Indeed, in defining the photograph-as-sign as an entity that lays testimony to the irreducible duality of the sign, destroyed as soon as its two edges are thought of without one another, it appears that Barthes comprehends photography to violate the conception of the sign as conceived in linguistic terms, that is, as a well-rounded and ultimately close-ended unit of communication. Suggesting to envisage photography as a form of ‘carnal knowledge[16],’ as that which *has* to do with matter and body, Barthes appears to propose that the

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[15] See please the discussion on Victor Burgin’s approach to photography, above, in “Notes on Why Photographs do not Matter” and “Different Photographs/Differing Photographies”

referential capacity of the photograph "is not so much a veiling or a mediation of the substantive realm from the formal as it is a partitioning – an intricate and infinite fabric-ation" (Kirby 80).

In *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, Geoffrey Batchen sets out to demonstrate that thought of and on photography have actually never been apart from a conflation of nature with culture. Citing a host of texts by people associated with its conception or invention as well as it later thinkers, Batchen aptly concludes that photography, as a production and a mode of production, resists being approached to in ways that would relate it to either of the terms that make up the nature/culture dichotomy singularly. As a matter of fact, it turns out that the question of photography's identity, a question whose shadow seems to foreclose all other questions on photography, puts forward a reluctant posture to accounts that would restrict it as such. Confronting the thinker with a question that leads to many more rather than a crystal-clear answer, when interrogated, the history and ontology of photography asks in return: "Should the identity of photography be confined to the realm of nature or to that of culture?" (Batchen, *Conception* 21). Indeed, even before the time when the 'idea' of photography occurred to anyone, it appears, "nature had become irrevocably tied to human subjectivity" and nature and culture were already being thought of as "interconstitutive entities" (Batchen, *Conception* 62). This uncertainty as to where nature or culture could belong to when considered apart from each other, the "[r]ecognition of the impossibility of either reconciling or separating nature from its other, culture," is in fact, Batchen argues, parasitical to the frameworks in which those who experimented with trying to record images in a photographic

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[16] The terms is Geofreey Batchen's. See "Carnal Knowledge."

manner before photography was finally announced to the public (*Conception* 62). On the other hand, when the initiatives that led to the idea and practice of photography are considered as important pre-cursors of thought on its identity, they also reveal further confusion as to the particular manner with which nature made its way, as it were, into the photograph. No one among Niépce, Talbot, Daguerre, or others that have been registered to take part in practices that led to photography, for instance, were able take an ultimate stand on whether nature was "painted by photography or being induced to paint herself," or whether she was "produced by or a producer of photography" (Batchen, *Conception* 63). Rather, at the heart of the discourse evident in the writings and experiments of these 'proto-photographers,' as Batchen calls them, an impossible definition that takes photography to simultaneously be "a mode of drawing and a system of representation in which no drawing takes place" (*Conception* 68) is uncovered. The nature that early thinking on photography had photography subjected to, then, cannot be understood as either a definitively active agent or a solidified, passive surface that is fair game for inscription. This convoluted formulation characterizes photography as well, itself a natural as well as cultural experience. The double take on the nature/culture binary photography has been involved with, furthermore, entails other, associated but equally fundamental binaries. Dualities like transience and fixity, space and time, subject and object can be understood to be articulated in the singular act that is dubbed photography, which actually is a term that profits from the simultaneous attendance of two 'opposing' edges: light (nature) and writing (culture). This productive dilemma, then, can be put at the very heart of photography's origins, from where the desire to/of photography

springs forth. Being the unexpected wonder Roland Barthes understands it to be[17], then, the invention and conception, or, better still, the *discourse* of photography can be considered to have put at issue "not just the theorization and depiction of nature, landscape, reflection, or the passing of time but, more fundamentally, the nature of representation and the constitution of existence itself" (Batchen, *Conception* 100). No wonder that we find, then, that "wherever we look – at photographic theory or at the medium's history – any given foundation is continually being displaced by a dynamic and troubling play of differences" (Batchen, *Conception* 21).

We have seen how the being of photography as sign, a being that in and of itself renders the sign/non-sign division problematic, would unavoidably complicate conventional notions that uncritically assume the concept of an outside-the-sign, in other words of an uninflected natural sphere that should nevertheless remain "unendorsable because unknowable" (Kirby 20). Since these notions, moreover, stem from an "understanding of identity and difference [that] takes these categories as oppositional, assuming that there is … a presence and an absence – an actual versus a potential" (Kirby 46), the violence that Barthes notices photography to take part in certainly cannot be limited to discourse that relates to and of photography per se, but extends or is found to interrupt the restrictions of discourse in general. However, because photography brings to surface view the irresolutions concentration on the concept of writing-in-general

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[17] It should perhaps be noted that the position of the "photographic image" as regards the nature/culture dichotomy occupies an important place for André Bazin as well as, or even before, Barthes. An investigation of Bazin's equation of the affect involved in viewing a photograph with that involved in the interaction of the subject with natural figures like a flower or a snowflake, for example, could certainly bring in an interesting dimension to the discussion advanced here. The reason why such a connection is not honored is the general historicist framework in which Bazin delineates his arguments and which seems to posit photography as a necessary step in the evolutionary logic that is supposed to govern the history of art and technology. For a discussion that reads *Camera Lucida* under the light of Bazin's suggestions, see McCabe.

is responsible for drawing attention to, a careful consideration devoted to it promises to be rewarding. Indeed, it seems that thought on photography could render it most evident that what is appreciated to be extramural to sign, ("[t]he 'stuff' that is considered absent"), lies at the heart of "the process of the sign's 'becoming sign'" and that it is "not simply absent any more than the sign is simply present" (Kirby 46-7), when it acts out of a determination to focus on what photography 'is.' On the other hand, the recognition that a conflation of the hierarchies the concept of the sign lays claim to is always already present around us certainly could not adequately explain the sources of that recognition in and of itself. Although the explanation could indeed lie in the reason that we have merged the intelligible (culture) with the sensible (nature), "we still need to explain how this confusion is produced," as Vicki Kirby is quick to add, even "[if] we admit that the difference between 'concept' and 'reality' is indeed blurred here" (13). To be able to do so, however, I would like to first turn to a primary aspect of Barthes's discussion in *Camera Lucida* which have already been touched upon in the preceding section and that concerns the 'Encounter' or 'Tuché,' particularly in relation to the notion of the 'Real' and to the 'specter.'

3.2 The Real and the Specter

Barthes's introductory conceptualization of the experience of 'the Photograph' as "what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression" (*Camera Lucida* 4) later finds its place, although a precarious one, amidst the two edges of the framework that governs all photography: the 'studium' and the 'punctum.' These terms refer respectively to "a field of cultural interest" and an "unexpected flash which sometimes crosses

this field" in the photograph which Barthes at first thought he "could distinguish" from each other (*Camera Lucida* 95-6). The definition of the punctum as a traumatic, wounding prick that makes its appearance "[a]s if direct vision oriented its language wrongly" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 53) certainly calls to mind the way in which the 'Real' is conceptualized in the Lacanian schema: "The real, or what is perceived as such, is what resists symbolization absolutely" (Lacan, "Discourse Analysis and Ego Analysis" 66-7).

The order of the Real in the triadic framework of arrangements Lacan sets up in understanding the subject and the psyche works first and foremost to construe the uneasy relationships between the other two orders in the triad. The Real is posited as a locus between the Symbolic and the Imaginary that cannot be assimilated to either of these orders but that deploys "a permanent agent of disharmony between them" (Bowie 94). Whereas, however, the Imaginary may keep a basis of activity even "in the heartlands of the Symbolic order" (Bowie 93), making it hard to install a coherently oppositional conception of the relationships between these two orders, the Real occupies a strangely invulnerable place in the triad, and a position supplementary to the engagement between the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Indeed, the Real could be taken to be the "suitably recalcitrant third term" Lacan feels the necessity to bring in to the framework that governs the subject in order that it is complete, and one that should be "handled with an acute sense of paradox – with a sense indeed of the unthinkable being thought" (Bowie 102). The Real is unthinkable insofar as, of course, "the system of signs" is recognized as forming "a whole" in its very constitution, which consequently comes to mean "that it institutes an order from which there is no exit" (Lacan, "Truth Emerges from the Mistake" [hereafter "Truth"] 262). The

agency of the Real for the constitution of the subject and the psyche, then, although very effective and concrete, remains that of an order aptly cloaked through the introduction of the Symbolic: “One can only think of language as a network, a net over the entirety of things, over the totality of the real. It inscribes on the plane of the real this other plane, which we here call the plane of the symbolic” (Lacan, “Truth” 262). Therefore the Real lingers behind and beyond the Symbolic order as “a world that falls entirely and irretrievably outside the signifying dimension” (Bowie 95). In other words, the conceptual schema with which Lacan explains the working of the psyche demands the necessity to acknowledge a sphere that shall be entitled “[t]he real as just as it is” (Lacan, “Truth” 271). Although “the passage of the thing onto the symbolic plane, thanks to which the truly human register comes into its own” is necessarily “destructive” of the ‘thing itself’ (Lacan, “Truth” 219), the symbolic register does not – and at times cannot – facilitate a complete effacement of the latter. More appropriately, whereas the dimensions of the order of the Real is considerable only to the extent that it is accessed under the authority and through the screen of the Symbolic, the former should be understood to exist necessarily as an order that is “identical to its existence” (Bowie 95). That is, as populated by the thing itself, in a form that defies the alienating attack of the signifier, always in its place. It hangs about, therefore, as “an uncrossable threshold” in the world of the subject (Bowie 106). On the other hand, occasions of contact between the subject and the Real, provided they are constrained by the guidance of the Symbolic, are fundamental for the unity of that world.

In understanding the subject’s mode of conduct with the Real under the constraint of the boundaries of the ‘human condition,’ Lacan turns to the

Aristotelian opposition of Tuché versus Automaton. Although these two terms are conceptualized in the Lacanian schema as coextensive agencies, the former, as the encounter with the Real, is necessarily subsumed under the latter, which denotes the agency of the network of signifiers. The opposition further reveals that in the framework Lacan posits "'the real' sounds rather like 'nature' and 'signifiers' suggests the presence of a human subject" (Bowie 102-3). Its set up demands that the tuché lies always "beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs," and that its possibility exist independent of them (Lacan, "Tuché and Automaton" 53-4). The Real is thus unapproachable for the subject, or at least not willfully approachable, if not utterly ineffable. The subject's encounters with the Real that Lacan's tuché brings into the discussion of the psyche can therefore be understood to chance culminating in interruptive occasions wherein the latter interacts "with that which its structure cannot structure" (Bowie103-4). The disturbing potential that the encounter announces and that the analyst should always bear in mind motivates Lacan, then, to investigate if it is

> not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is *unassimilable* in it – in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin?
> (Lacan, "Tuché and Automaton" 55)

It should be noted that whereas Lacan's question appears to position the trauma at the heart of the Encounter, that is, while it seems to maintain the traumatic character of every encounter with the Real, it does not mean that the Lacanian schema makes room for understanding the fundamental distinction it sets up between the encounter and the trauma as a deconstructable one. The fact that encounters are "those radical points in the real" ("Tuché and Automaton" 55) for

Lacan seems rather to bring to mind the agency of an option disguised under the unity of the triadic network than an irreducible radicalism, except when the traumatic is in question. For "allowing the structure of the Real to emerge against the background of a primitive, undifferentiated All is not the same thing as being able to name it, process it symbolically and put it to work for one's own ends" (Bowie 95). In that, 'being in the real' here denotes less a continuous contact with the real than interacting with the Real under the authority of the word: that is, 'being in the symbol.' The trauma, then, is not an instance of the Encounter among others but is a problematic occurrence of the latter that defies the recurring weight of the Symbolic order. The subject is at home as long as encounters with the real follow the guiding line of the symbol, and the Encounter therefore is not in itself necessarily traumatic. However, the

> subject who has all the elements of language at his disposition, and who has the possibility of making several imaginary moves that allow him to structure his world, might not be in the real. Why isn't he in it? – simply because things didn't happen in a specific order. The figure is in its entirety upset. (Lacan, "The wolf! The Wolf!" 87)

The encounter with the real as a traumatic experience, reserved to the world of the psychotic is, then, an aspect of the subject who is not in the real. More appropriately, who is not in 'real time.' Anachrony, in other words the corrupt organization of things that do not happen in the order they ought to happen, speaks therefore of the trauma as the encounter with the real. It should, on the other hand, be remembered that it is the Symbolic that puts things in their right place as it intervenes in their unconstrained presence: "Everything begins with the possibility of naming" (Lacan, "The Object Relation and the Intersubjective Relation" 219). Considered as a radical slave of the symbolic, the Real in this

framework thus comes to mean "the endlessly daunting power that Lacan ascribes to the Symbolic" (Bowie 95). Although it is the trauma that first turned the attention of psychoanalysis to "[t]he function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter – the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter" (Lacan, "Tuché and Automaton" 55), the former speaks of psychotic effects: of the agency of that which have escaped or been expelled from symbolization. The encounter in general, while necessarily of an accidental nature, turns out usually to contribute to the unity of the triad that governs the subject.

Disorders of two interrelative frameworks, on the other hand, seem to be primarily responsible for governing the fundamentally disturbing, irreducibly psychotic encounter: those of time and those of the Other. Roland Barthes juxtaposes these disorders under a single paradigm in the name of the photograph: life and death. The photograph certifies that

> the corpse is alive, as *copse*: it is the living image of a dead thing. For the photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somewhat eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past ("this-has-been"), the photograph suggests that it is already dead. (*Camera Lucida* 79)

Just like the voice in the dream that wakes the subject up with its unmistakable iteration, the photograph in this context is positioned very much like the "accident that repeats an accident, an irreducible fragment of the real that speaks of irrecoverable loss, an encounter that is peremptory and brutal" (Bowie 106). Whereas tuché as the traumatic encounter that puts an end to the dream can never take place outside the dream, however, the photograph as tuché violates the

opposition by way of its unconstrained, common existence and commerce. The encounter in the framework Barthes takes it up, therefore, is not exactly the surprising "tile falling on to the head of a passer-by" or the intrusive "knock on the door that interrupts a dream" (Bowie 103) of Lacan's, but is rather reminiscent of the tile that is never tired of falling on the subject's head or the arrhythmic knock that the subject wished was inaudible. Not the Real as "that which always lies behind the automaton" (Lacan, Tuché and Automaton 53-4), but the automaton that is so real as to beg the question: an automaton, in other words, that matters. Photography, then, as the "figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 32), comes close to a mask that is hard to tell apart but "that may always be hiding no living gaze beneath" it; the Thing concerned "mimes the living," but it "is neither dead nor alive, it is dead and alive at the same time. It survives" (Derrida, *Specters* 153). The automaton and the tuché, then, come back together there in the specter, and are not distinguishable from each other and from the repetition of the sign, of the irreducibly repetitive sign that is the photograph, at least not clearly or immediately: "some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other" (Derrida, *Specters* 6). The specter is simultaneously as autonomous, traumatic and "unassimilable to the pursuit of pleasure as any foreign body encroaching upon the human organism" (Bowie 103), and as iterable as any product of signification, as any automaton is deemed to be. It reminds us not that the "network of signifiers in which we have our being is not all that there is, and the rest of what is may chance to break upon us at any moment" (Bowie103), as Lacan would have it, but rather that the latter habitually breaks upon the subject through the former. Amidst the presence of specters, therefore,

the delirium that the Other's slippage out of the signifying chain and in to the real is responsible for becomes commonplace rather than constitute a threshold between the orderly and the disorderly. As the appearing- disappearing appearance of the specter is made contemporary and its inclination to being marked is heard, it suddenly appears that the 'time is out of joint.' For the "spectral asymmetry interrupts here all specularity. It de-synchronizes, it recalls us to anachrony" (Derrida, *Specters* 6-7).

In *Specters*, Jacques Derrida begins to operate his discussion of the notion of the specter on the remains of a very famous instance of the latter: of the ghost of Hamlet's father. This ghost, it would be remembered, like all specter, brings disorder to the State in too many senses that 'something rotten' should be declared to be in effect. Its unmistakable appearance orders that its coming about is marked, in an unfamiliar tone of voice. In that its presence, contrary to its appearance, follows not the father of Hamlet's, the setter of order, but resembles the symbolically unbound Other, who is the condition of all alterity: "not a law-maker but a tyrant, not one who maintains the threat of judicial punishment but one who exercises and withholds punishment in accordance with its own unfathomable whim" (Bowie 109-110). The displacement of the Name-of-the-Father, in other words the breeder of psychotic catastrophe, then, is here not restricted to the dimensions of the chronology of the signifying network as it is conceived in the Lacanian schema, but is borne despite the agency and at the heart of the latter. It is not possible anymore to speak only of the name of the father, but the being of the father, in a mode that defies proper names and beings alike, now complicates the schema in a way that challenges the order of presences and absences the Symbolic is supposed to put into motion.

The juxtaposition in *Hamlet* of the repudiation of the Name-of-the-Father, of the irreducible anachronism that is associated with a fundamental disorder in the Symbolic (the bearer of correct time) with the ghost motivates Derrida to posit the latter at the center of the problem of being as it relates to time and substance. The radical move here concerns not so much that the 'existence' of the specter is such that "[o]ne cannot control its comings and goings," just like the subject caught off-guard in Lacan's tuché, but that the specter has to do, just like the sign, with a "question of repetition" (Derrida, *Specters* 11). As common and iterable as the automaton and as off the mark and substantial as the tuché, the ghost's logic demands that thought of the historical event "exceeds a binary or dialectical logic, the logic that distinguishes or opposes *effectivity or actuality* (either present, empirical, living – or not) and *ideality* (regulating or absolute non-presence)" (Derrida, *Specters* 63). The opposition between the spirit and the specter, that is, the dyadic relation between nature and culture which gives birth to the opposition between the tuché and the automaton, has a hard time standing up in the face of the spectral visit. "As soon as one no longer distinguishes spirit from specter, the former assumes a body, it incarnates itself" and, at least momentarily, becomes indissoluble from the latter: in that the specter is "a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. […] For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant* or the return of the specter" (Derrida, *Specters* 6). Therefore the specter cannot, at least not easily, be treated through a logic of opposition that would counter it with "actual reality, living effectivity" in the way "vain appearances of the simulacrum" are habitually saluted against "real presence" (Derrida, *Specters* 47). The specter, then, 'presents' the trace of the

Other in a particular way that it cannot be mistaken, without, however, going anywhere near of assuring the unity of the self or the other. In its intangible tangibility, the body of the specter is a

> a proper body without flesh, but still the body of some*one* as some*one other*. And of some*one other* that we will not hasten to determine as self, subject, person, consciousness, spirit and so forth. This already suffices to distinguish the specter not only from the icon or the idol but also from the image of the image, from the Platonic *phantasma*, as well as from the simple *simulacrum* of something in general. (Derrida, *Specters* 7)

This inapparent appearance, the frequentiation that we call the ghost, in its difference from the simulacrum in general and the 'good' dead that remain dead, works and makes the spectator whom it does not get tired of visiting strive to work. For it seems it is almost impossible "to speak always *of the* specter, to speak *to the* specter, to speak with it, therefore especially *to make or let* a spirit *speak*" (Derrida, *Specters* 11), although it demands that it is spoken and given room and time to speak:

> The one who has disappeared appears still to be *there*, and his apparition is not nothing. It does not do nothing. Assuming that the remains can be identified, we know better than ever today that the dead must be able to work. And to cause to work, perhaps more than ever. There is also a mode of production of the phantom, itself a phantomic mode of production. As in the work of mourning, after a trauma, the conjuration has to make sure that the dead will not come back: quick, do whatever is needed to keep the cadaver localized, in a safe place, decomposing right where it was inhumed. (Derrida, *Specters* 97)

And this is where, it seems, the being and work of photography, of the punctum in the photograph that pure contingency defines intervenes in the work of mourning, rendering its effort traumatic and ever incomplete. Its installation of the relation to the other shares the specter's mode of existence in that it is determined by a "relation to time which itself would not be possible without surviving and

returning, without that being 'out of joint' that dislocates the self-presence of the living present" (Derrida, *Specters* 154). It is here that we get closer to being able to define the scandal of photographic reference, which is not exactly that of a calling up of the past, not "to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 82), and to acknowledge the spacing involved by momentarily effacing it, rendering "what we see on paper … as certain as what we touch" (88) and the being of what is *not* present as assured as what is present. For in the photograph it is necessarily "a real body, which was there" that sends "radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here." Rendering the duration of the transmission insignificant because defied, "the photograph of the missing being … will touch me like the delayed rays of a star" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 81), distinctly glowing in the here and now, dead in the there and then. The usual course of the thing, then, is reversed, or better still put out of its course, in the instant of this "strictly revulsive moment" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 119), and its former, which is to say formal, existence is interfered with. The photograph, while seeming to honor the figure of what is represents, "caricatures … its very existence" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 115). But an "[i]rrepressible desire for identification" (Derrida, *Specters* 11) on the side of the spectator to whom the specter pays a visit interrupts this very opposition between figure and being as well. While the former is involved in "attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead" (Derrida, *Specters* 9), the singularity of an alterity that cannot be anticipated and that efforts the identification before the spectator can even get there intervenes in the process. For in order to be able to identify the spectator needs to touch, but what he or she

is dealing with here is “neither image nor reality, a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 87), a being that “resists the intuition to which it presents itself” of being tangible (Derrida, “Spectrographies” 115): “The subject that haunts is not identifiable, one cannot see, localize, fix any form, one cannot decide between hallucination and perception, there are only displacements; one feels oneself looked at by what one cannot see” (Derrida, *Specters* 136).

Before explicating in full what the ‘existence’ of specters means for the spectator-subject and for the unity of time, that is, before turning to spectrability as a necessary and common condition of the photographic image, and prior to spelling out that photographs can indeed be conceptualized to share in the untimeliness of specters, I would like to turn first to the ‘science’ of this new being. That is, to the ‘logic’ of the grapheme, simply because “deconstructive thinking of the trace, of iterability, of prosthetic synthesis, of supplemantarity,” in going beyond the oppositions the language of being and the being of language presumes, makes available those “means with which to take into account, or to render an account of, the effects of ghosts, of simulacra, of ‘synthetic images’ ….even if these take the novel forms to which modern technology will have given rise” (Derrida, *Specters* 75). The politics of technical reproduction as conceived by Walter Benjamin will also find due articulation in the framework of thought the next section attempts to hint at, in order that the relation of photography with history and time can be productively laid out.

3.3 Recognition and Iterability

It would be remembered that Barthes began his discussion of ‘the Photograph’ in *Camera Lucida* under the guidance of its reluctance to classification. He offered that the basis of this standard of being unclassifiable lied in photography’s indifference towards and among the “vast disorder of objects” (*Camera Lucida* 6). This standard in turn rendered all photographs equivalent, so that there was “no reason to mark this or that of its occurrences,” and since photography was consequently “deprived of a principle of marking,” its production and products remained “always invisible: it is not it that we see” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 6). On the one hand, this suggestion of invisibility on the part of Barthes have implicitly been taken here, since the concept and the being of the specter have been put at the heart of the discussion, to point towards the visibility of the invisible the ghost brings along. In other words, that the specter is evidential of the essential invisibility immeasurability of “visibili*ty*” itself, rendering it “beyond the phenomenon or beyond being” (Derrida, *Specters* 100). On the other hand, this introductory suggestion of Barthes can also be taken to open up a vein of discussion with which the ‘postmodern critique’ of photography seems to have been shot through, although implicitly, right from the start. The discussion concerns the relations and the presumed opposition between the concepts of use-value and exchange-value, and as the second chapter of this study tried to hint at, photography’s critics seem to habitually take this opposition for granted, asserting that photography is use-*less*. That is, that it could only thrive within the sphere and under the efficacy of exchange-value. Such an approach, as I tried to demonstrate, risks positing a field of existence that is populated by ‘pure’ objects of nature that become impure once they are endowed with exchange-value but are

nevertheless imaginable, or, better still, intelligible, although humanly inhabitable. The discussion advanced here, on the other hand, has been marked by an attempt to grant first of all that

> there is no pure use, there is no use-value which the possibility of exchange and commerce (by whatever name one calls it, meaning itself, value, culture, spirit [!], signification, the world, the relation to the other, and first of all the simple form and trace of the other) has not in advance inscribed in an out-of-use – an excessive signification that cannot be reduced to the useless. (Derrida, Specters 160. Brackets in original.)

This relationship of the commercial with which it does not intend to exchange but nevertheless gives way to occupies the heart of the discussion of the encounter between the aura and technical reproducibility of artworks Walter Benjamin introduces in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." The latter, while representing the advancement of the capitalist mode of production, inadvertently posits a rupture in the world of the former, which, however, is a necessary component of the exploitation of the masses. Benjamin finds in the realization of this encounter, then, the mark of a historical fissure that should be relentlessly emphasized.

Very early in his "Work of Art" essay, Walter Benjamin declares the specifics of the theoretical fiction he is about to help unfurl. A fiction the tangibility of which is as extreme as Benjamin's subject matter, the political directions it intends with extreme thoroughness are not the most frequently honored aspects of the essay. As is evident in his opening remarks, Benjamin seems less interested in proposing what could be termed a final resolution of truth in terms of the supposed evolutionary logic his subject matter would entail than the potentials that can be understood to flourish at the heart of historical discontinuity:

> Certain prognostic requirements should be met by these statements. However, theses about the art of the proletariat after its assumption of power or about the art of a classless society would have less bearing on these demands than theses about the developmental tendencies of art under present conditions of production. Their dialectic is no less noticeable in the superstructure than in the economy. *It would therefore be wrong to underestimate the value of such theses as a weapon*. They brush aside a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery – concepts whose uncontrolled (and at present almost uncontrollable) application would lead to a processing of data in the fascist sense. (Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [hereafter "Work of Art"] 218. Emphasis added).

In other words, the "Work of Art" essay could be understood to be further removed from the recollection of 'wishful and technicist predictions' it is sometimes taken to be[18] if reconsidered as a political project that points to certain possibilities the characteristics of reproductive technologies and 'mass movements' could breach open. In this sense, Benjamin's intentions appear to be more interesting than anything thinkers reviewed in the first part of this study has to offer as to possibilities of intervention in institutions of art and photography.

The fact that "the social significance" of the advent of reproductive technologies in their "most positive form … is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect" (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 221) occupies a central place for Benjamin and distinguishes his suggestions from those that would operate on an assumption of the existence of immutable characteristics of photography, here fundamentally conceived as a matter of reproduction. In other words, Benjamin cannot be understood to simply theorize the novel associations related to reproductive technologies, which before long turn into practices of art, like photography, as eternally positive or negative. This becomes further evident

once it is remembered that Benjamin is fully aware of "how the modern ambiguities can be manipulated for regressive ends" ("The Flaneur" 45). Neither can it be suggested that Benjamin posits a unidirectional relationship between technology and society, in other words that he is caught up in a simple gesture of technological determinism, precisely because Benjamin is interested in the age of mechanical reproduction as it is defined through an interaction of psychological, social, and historical currents. Rather, the source from where Benjamin's suggestions stem in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" as in elsewhere appear to concern a radical reconsideration of the notions of subject and perception as well as history and historiography as they are at the verge of being redefined.

The suggestions Benjamin puts forward in relation to the thought of the subject and history in connection to the image and photography could hardly be indifferent to any study that would intend to displace assumptions of a stable relationship between these concepts. A closer consideration of the "Work of Art" essay, for example, reveals that Benjamin actually puts a strong emphasis on the changes that the viewer goes through in his or her relationship with objects of art, and in particular as these interactions relate to photography. As Samuel Weber notes, the mass of subjects Benjamin speaks of does not consist simply of a massed version of traditional, 'contemplative' individuals. Indeed, "[t]he shift from the uniqueness of the original work of art to 'copies' which from the very start are made to be reproduced and exhibited" that Benjamin devotes much attention to "involves not just the substitution of one kind of work for another but rather a modification in the way works of art quite literally take place" (Weber 85.

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[18] See Tagg, "The Prof of the Picture" 98.

Italics omitted). Benjamin himself announces his primary interest as an investigation into the new (i.e. modern) processes through which "[t]he adjustment of reality to the masses and of masses to reality" ("Work of Art" 223) is negotiated. At the very moment when subject/object relations are being rearranged and mapped onto new constraints, such processes interrupt those rearrangements whenever they approach closure. What Benjamin names "contemporary masses" are indeed characterized by a certain desire; a "desire … to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly," as they bend "toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by *accepting its reproduction*" ("Work of Art" 223. Emphasis added.), in line with the rupture of the "classical models of vision in the early nineteenth century" that "was inseparable from a massive reorganization of knowledge and social practices that modified in myriad ways the productive, cognitive, and desiring capacities of the human subject" (Crary 3). "Uniqueness and permanence," therefore, are here "as closely linked" in the experience of the unarmed eye with the image it registers rather than solely in that image, "as are transitoriness and reproducibility" characteristic not only of the reproduced image but the experience of the viewer with it as well. The subject of the age of mechanical reproduction, then, cannot be understood to be governed by currents less dynamic then its object, and what fascism represents for Benjamin is precisely an effort as such to petrify those currents and the subject in its relationship to the image. Therefore, it would not be entirely off the mark, it seems, to suggest that the age Benjamin has in mind is one that the characteristics of subjects and objects are conflated, in the context precisely of technological reproduction. For it is a context when time renders objects to be 'reactivated' and causes the subject to get caught within "his own particular situation" (Benjamin,

"Work of Art" 221). The fact that the representation or visual experience of nature and art is no longer an act of passive contemplation but starts to entail an active and constitutive mode of consciousness at the age of reproduction, in other words 'the withering of aura,' therefore, cannot be a matter solely of technological reproduction, but concerns also the counterpart of its products, namely, the perceptive dimensions of the subject. And this is how, it appears, the suggestion that "the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed [:] [i]nstead of being based on ritual, it begins to based on another practice-politics" (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 224) could be better understood. The practice-politics Benjamin has in mind involves the productive agency of the photograph as well as its viewer in the experience of photography. In other words, the difference between the subject "who concentrates before a work of art" and the one who is 'distracted,' although it is a difference that cannot be understood to be final, concerns that the latter is 'concerned' with it, unlike the former who is 'absorbed' (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 239).

Perhaps it should be mentioned at this point that the relations of the subject with the object (not only the image or the photograph, but also the referent) and the production of that object lies at the center of Barthes's discussions in *Camera Lucida* as a category as important as Benjamin's main thrust of argument in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" suggests[19]. Interested as it is with a project quite different from Benjamin's, particularly in that it sees Barthes pose as a carnal measure of photographic knowledge (9) and under the

[19] My intention here has less to do with a 'comparison' of Benjamin and Barthes than an attempt to articulate a web of relationships between certain terms that their respective works on photography emphasize. For examples of a discussion which would read these thinkers' works in (somewhat direct) relation to each other, however, see Dant and Gilloch; and Haverkamp.

guidance of the consciousness of his feelings (10), *Camera Lucida* centers around the viewer of the photograph as a perpetuator – simultaneously active and passive – of photographic relationships. In addition to acclaiming the *responsibility* of the viewer in photography, however, *Camera Lucida* shows an interest in making clear that the experience of photography complicates assumptions of an indifferential bondage between the terms of the subject/image pair. Barthes is unsure as to what he could expect of photographs that feature his own: does his interest concern that his "(mobile) image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with … [his] (profound) 'self,'" or "is it the contrary that must be said: 'myself' never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn … and myself which is light, divided, dispersed" (*Camera Lucida* 12)? Without a doubt, what concerns Barthes here has more to do with a subject-image and an image-subject than either the subject or the image considered in isolation. What photography thrives in for Barthes can be understood, consequently, to involve a conflation of the subject (as an agent of effective presence) with the photograph itself. Not only does photography transform the "subject into object" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 13), as was mostly evident at the time of its advancement when "during the considerable period of the exposure, the subject as it were grew into the picture (Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography" [hereafter "Photography"] 245); and not only does the subject "make another body" in order to constitute himself/herself 'differently' once he/she feels the observation of the camera, transforming "in advance into an image" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 10). Photography, moreover, causes its subject to experience an unease wherein his command of his or her own presence slips out of hand through the mode of

'deferred presence' that is the photograph. Roland Barthes sees it "alter the precious essence of my individuality: what I am, apart from any effigy" (*Camera Lucida* 11-2). "[A] cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 11-2), photography leaves him naked at the mercy of the other's concern, hoped to blossom at some time and place deferred. The notion of evidence that the discourse of photography posits, then, it seems, can be understood to be closer to a sort of "awful evidence that perhaps we are not or where we think ourselves to be" more than an unproblematic one, and the subjects of photographs, those observed and observers alike, could also be considered prone to an equally troubling question: "what does it mean when the body that is written upon signs itself, when a symptom 'speaks,' or when an object possesses us?" (Kirby 59).

Contrary to what appears at first sight, Barthes's insistence in *Camera Lucida* on the intractability of the photographic referent in 'being there' never amounts to denying "the applicability of this logic of the mark [or 'iterability'] to photography" (Wike 2). Neither is the ecstasy Barthes has 'in mind,' strictly speaking, is the very same as the "fascination of writing" (Haverkamp 268). His fascination in the photographic event, however, could be better grasped as less an effort in opposing "citation or iteration to the noninteration of an event" than in acknowledging photography within a layout of "differential typology of forms of iteration" (Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context" 326). Fascination as a strategy of critique occupies an important place in terms also of the framework in which Benjamin approaches photography: it "involves seeing a dialectical relation between the image and history" rather than mere absorption (Abbas 56).

Some strange things occur to Barthes as he cannot make himself out of his own photograph, or comes over photographs that he cannot recall having been taken, poses he cannot remember having put himself into. Looking at the photograph of oneself, then, Barthes seems to suggest, a subject goes through an irresolution that can be put thus: seeing myself not seeing myself. First, the 'self' that he wants to construct as he is being photographed, as he is posing, is invisible to himself: it is not present to himself, which is to say that one is not present to himself/herself when being photographed, in pre-photographic form. Second, Barthes-as-photograph is not seeing Barthes-as-viewer: it is someone else, an-other, that sends his gaze to Barthes in the photograph, although it looks very much like Barthes himself. These are the beginnings of an argument wherein the photographed and consequently photography is defined as the "*Spectrum*" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 9). Specters, it would be remembered, are spotted through the recognition that "they are deprived of a specular image, of the true, right specular image […] How do you recognize a ghost? By the fact that it does not recognize itself in a mirror" (Derrida, *Specters* 155-6). More importantly, however, this aspect of the ghost effect brings to the discussion a question that concerns more than the 'properly spectral:' Who is not so deprived?

Like a kid who has trouble in having done with the 'mirror phase,' Barthes can be heard swearing that no photographs can ever 'feature' him, and no degree of resemblance will ensure him that photographs can 'restore' him to himself. However, he cannot deny having been photographed either, for the principle by which photographs are produced acquaints him with the 'stupefying evidence' of the 'that-has-been.' A discussion that is as troublesome for Barthes as it is for his followers, then, is set in motion, wherein what Barthes appositely terms 'the

essence of photography' has to do not with "truth-to-appearance" but rather with "truth-to-presence, a matter of being (of something's irrefutable place in space/time) rather than resemblance" (Batchen, *Conception* 193). In difference to what appears at first sight, however, the discussion of the 'noeme' of photography Barthes entertains in *Camera Lucida* has less to do with installing an incontrovertible photographic continuity of presence within absence than interrogate, at least intuitively, an ultimate opposition between these two terms: "it is not simply because there is something real that is undecomposable" (Derrida, "Spectrographies" 123)[20].

Strange couplings befall the photograph as Barthes defines it. The first, from which the others spring, is that "[w]hat the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially" (*Camera Lucida* 4). In that, photography concerns a certain defiance: by reproducing some-thing that is (was) not meant to be reproduced, it calls to question whether it was (had been) not reproducible in the first place. Barthes has his way of dealing with/sidestepping this (ill)logic, this madness that he himself introduces into the theory of photography, which will receive due respect in the next few pages. Let it suffice here to elaborate on the power of the tear that splits him. As the sequence of photography, the sequence of photographs that leads Barthes to his deceased mother that he 'meditates' through carries him closer to the impossible, the impossibility of finding the single being he thought on earth would not give itself to reproducibility in a photograph, as photograph, Barthes experiences serious trouble. When photographs of her mother seem to remain short of interrupting the beloved, necessarily past presence of her mother,

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[20] For arguments that seem to suggest the contrary, see Burgin, "Re-reading Camera Lucida" and "Diderot, Barthes, Vertigo;" and Wike.

Barthes is at home. It is not necessarily distressing to say, then, confronted with a certain 'indifferent' picture of her mother, "[t]hat's not the way she was at all" (*Camera Lucida* 66). As long as that regime of irreproducibility is maintained in the name of the photograph, as long as the *sign* of Being-as-presence remains undivided, photography can indeed be understood to be indifferent among other 'systems of representation.' To feel, confronted with a certain photograph, "That's *almost* the way she was!" (*Camera Lucida* 66), however, marks for Barthes the outcome of a structural anxiety which in fact returns to mark every photograph. The problems slip out of control when the photographic referent starts to "protest its former existence" (*Camera Lucida* 89). When at last Barthes 'rediscovers' her mother in a photograph, it is, then, utter catastrophe: It suddenly appears that the photograph of Barthes's mother comes before 'her,' and this in more than one sense.

As Barthes begins digging for not The Mother but his mother inside a group of photographs that invariably feature her, he is hopeful that no errors will interrupt the banal flow of this excavation. "[T]he essential question [that] first appeared: did I *recognize* her?" (*Camera Lucida* 65) is fearsome in that it could call forth a positive answer. Yet the only photograph Barthes manages to recognize his mother features her as a little kid Barthes could not be expected to have had any acquaintance or 'contact' with in the usual sense. Under the influence of what Derrida calls a "ghost effect," wherein the difference between the spirit and the specter tends to disappear (*Specters* 125-6), and thus desiring to put the spirit back into the specter or the specter back onto the spirit, as it were, he attempts to resolve the conflict involved in this recognition that is far from being cognitive through the personal evidence of a mode of presence of her mother's

that is anterior to her death and posterior to the photograph in question, but whose tangible grasp is nevertheless ‘still present’ for him. In striving to let the dead bury their dead, then, Barthes tries to convince us that this act of recognition he stepped into, in which her mother happened to him under the ‘guise’ of a five year old girl, should have something to do with the fact that her mother, in the last period of her life, indeed became something of a child for him. Since the whole procedure is overwhelmed by the fact that Barthes could only have come to even believing that the little girl featured in the photograph is her mother as-a-five-year-old through a comparison with other photographs belonging to her childhood, and since his endeavor in its entirety is under the sign of a lack of recognition of the ‘object’ of photography through its ‘original’ features, however, we remain unconvinced, as much as Barthes himself is. There is, furthermore, an aspect to this recognitive performance that entraps Barthes-the-spectator between finding and missing the ‘soul’ of her mother in the photograph. The ghost that the incarnation of the spirit in the picture produces “is in turn negated, integrated, and incorporated by the very subject of the operation who, claiming the uniqueness of its *own* human body, then becomes … the absolute ghost”; for the specter involves, if it is to be possessed, becoming “possessed by it, possessed period,” and thus confuses the opposition of the specter to the non-specter ((Derrida, *Specters* 127; 132).

The procedure through which Barthes discovers her mother in the photograph demands some more consideration. Keeping in mind that the punctum of Barthes’s photography – that quiet unclassifiable feature in a photograph and consequently in all photography that comes to define the noeme of photography in the end – concerns “what I add to the photograph but what is nevertheless there”

(*Camera Lucida* 55), we should perhaps focus on the curiosities involved in this procedure rather than 'leave them to the psychoanalyst.' In that regard, Barthes's insistence that being and appearance should be left uninterrupted of each other produces results interruptive of that very opposition itself. In those photographs of his mother that leaves Barthes only generally affected, a particular mode of banal presence that is defined by an absence blossoms. 'According' to those photographs, Barthes relates of recognizing their object, the object of photography, only partially, finding sometimes "a region of her face, a certain relation of nose and forehead, the movement of her arms, her hands" (*Camera Lucida* 66). Amidst the attendance of fragments that do not add up, and not quite able to break through this fragmentary mode of recognition, Barthes is convinced that he missed in these photographs the 'being' of the beloved, that is, missed her 'altogether,' just like in all photography the essence of being is missed. These 'ordinary' photographs, however, are opposed to the 'Winter Garden Photograph,' in which Barthes's mother's being is revealed, on the condition of a strange principle. It pertains to a totality, which indeed bring together connotations of a binary by which the suppression of the fragmentary would operate, and the perpetuation of an originary, total being would be presumed. What is surprising is that Barthes declares the memory of her mother to be just as photographic, just as fragmentary to him in the first place. He notes that, "conversely," what had sent him "back" to these photographs is an already overwhelming "suppression or partial alteration" of "all the possible predicates from which my mother's being was constituted" (*Camera Lucida* 70), which the Winter Garden Photograph "collected." The congruity that this particular picture evidences, this 'accord' that it hits a tone of between Barthes and his mother-as-five-year old, then, is "so

abstract in relation to an image" (*Camera Lucida* 69-70), at least the reproductive image, at the same time as it is possible only in relation to the photographic image and its mode of being. It appears that without evoking the very fragmentary 'nature' of the being it touches at first, in other words, Barthes's precious photograph cannot operate. The totality the Winter Garden Photograph can offer for Barthes is equivalent to and can be as total only as "an infinite series of adjectives (*Camera Lucida* 69-70)" serialized in disorderly fashion. It can defy the mode of production that accompanies it, that is, insofar as it makes it possible.

The 'punctum' in Barthes's terminology has as a matter of fact been an effect of the partial feature from the very start. This partial feature that Barthes could not quite put his finger on, however, never gave in to a totality: it stood in opposition to what Barthes termed the 'studium,' conceived as the ('original') context of either the photograph or the referent, or "a field of cultural interest" which Barthes at first "thought" he "could distinguish … from that unexpected flash which sometimes crosses this field" (*Camera Lucida* 95-6). However the very naming of the photograph of which Barthes established a 'real' yet 'simply visual' accord, for example, now puts this opposition into danger. It is the 'Winter Garden Photograph,' rather than the 'Photograph of My Mother.' Moreover, although Barthes sets out to find not The Mother but mother, not a figure but a being, not a being but a soul, he cannot ensure that these categories can be hold in absolute opposition to each other in the process. Barthes's attempt to discharge the "ghostly debt" and rather restitute the pictures to their referent, "render them to their rightful owner" (Derrida, "Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing" 258) turns out to be a necessarily difficult task.

In a similar vein, the ways in which the opposition between studium and punctum that Barthes sets up in *Camera Lucida* comes to collapse can also be found in the flow of the very text that erects it. As Barthes started earlier to attempt at providing us with instances wherein the punctum-as-partial-yet-fugitive-feature, rising "from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow," piercing the unexpecting viewer (*Camera Lucida* 26), he had to oppose it to the stadium, which could be defined thus in relation to a particular photograph, by Van der Zee, of a "family of American blacks:"

> I am sympathetically interested, as a docile cultural subject, in what the photograph has to say, for it *speaks* (it is a "good" photograph): it utters respectability, family life, conformism, Sunday best, an effort of social advancement in order to assume the White Man's attributes … The spectacle interests me but does not prick me. (*Camera Lucida* 43)

What disturbs Barthes here, on the other hand, turns out ultimately to by no means be distinguishable from the banal, stereotypic interest the scene invites. It pertains to "[t]he belt worn by the sister (or daughter)," whom Barthes does not refrain from calling "the 'solacing Mammy' – whose arms are crossed behind her back like a schoolgirl, and above all her *strapped pumps* (Mary Janes – why does this dated fashion touch me?)" (*Camera Lucida* 43).

In distinguishing the punctum from the stadium, "[s]ome soldiers with nuns behind them" serves Barthes to make his point (*Camera Lucida* 47). These elements are featured in a photograph by Koen Wessing, part of a study on the 1979 Nicaragua rebellion, and claiming to a duality: "the co-presence of two discontinuous elements, heterogeneous in that they did not belong to the same world" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 23). Barthes therefore installs this opposition wherein two sorts of recognition or affect can be split from each other. The first,

stadium, concerns the familiar, the homely, referring to "a classical body of information" and its regular signs, operating at the "rational intermediary of a political and ethical culture" (*Camera Lucida* 25-6). The second, punctum[21], has to do with a certain yet fugitive mark, "made by a pointed instrument" (*Camera Lucida* 26). It disturbs, dislocates and punctuates the work of the stadium. Like a soldier, it wounds the guerrilla the nuns just recovered or aim to recover, or, better still, like a nun, it recovers the little boy in the picture the soldiers thought they killed. The center of the analogy, nevertheless, remains that no nuns are allowed to circulate as health care officials without some soldiers accompanying them. In other words, no guerrilla warfare will be ever carried out without some nuns and soldiers circulating around at the same time. Barthes therefore goes on to find a punctum in so many different photographs that occupies the picture even before the stadium gets there, preceding it, breaking its totality into pieces before it can reach closure.

The stadium, then, in giving itself up to, or even intending to 'the name,' to the Law of language and linguistics, as it were, "cannot really prick me" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 51) and stands erect in the picture insofar as it is in difference from the punctum. The latter "is a good symptom of disturbance" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 51) in that it resists being named or even being ultimately located. Barthes knows of it, senses it, perceives the referent and recognizes it with his "whole body" (*Camera Lucida* 45) through this opening that

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[21] "[F]or *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 27). Punctum, it seems, have etymological links not only with the above and with punctuation, but also with punctuality, being 'on' time. Moreover, the word is a variant of the Latin "punctura," that is, "puncture" in English: perforation, piercing, stabbing, penetration. The equivalence of the term with the French "pointure," pointing, are exploited in the polylogue Jacques Derrida sets up in "Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing" in regard to the series of 'shoe paintings' by Van Gogh. Although the polylogue in question would certainly resists such banal reduction, let us note in passing that it seems the pointing in relation to the 'referent' in painting, performed here by the

breaks the skin of the photographed, the photograph and the viewer, but has trouble coming to terms with it. “The effect is certain but unlocatable, it does not find its sign, its name; it is sharp and yet lands in a vague zone of myself; it is acute yet muffled, it cries out in silence” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 52-3). In trying to overwhelm it by description, Barthes goes from photograph to photograph, from punctum to punctum, from studium to punctum and punctum to studium, and does not seem able to choose an inhabitable point amidst the oscillation of these so many points. Even in a single photograph, the one by Van der Zee cited above, the “floating flash” (*Camera Lucida* 52-3) does not seem to allow Barthes to hold the punctum under total illumination. It remains as the outrageous ineffability that makes all photography possible, and in that, it is ‘bound’ by the very logic of the mark: “it occurs in the field of the photographed thing like a supplement that is at once inevitable and delightful; it does not necessarily attest to the photographer’s art; it says only that the photographer was there” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 47). However, its very existence complicates also the conventional notions by which the agency and the being of the photographer in the ‘production’ of photography are conceived. The agency of the punctum toils against the efficacy of the photographer: photographs that seem to Barthes to resist the ‘illumination’ of the punctum suffer from the latter’s ‘intervention’ in the former. Certain details that fail to constitute a punctum are thus disregarded, “doubtless because the photographer has put them there intentionally” (*Camera Lucida* 47). In that, Barthes prefers to relate the partiality of the punctual to the fact that the photographer “could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object” (*Camera Lucida* 47).

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viewer-scholar, leaves unbounded, ‘half-laced’ the life-cycle of the object of painting, while in photography the pointing does not seem to escape the history of the referent.

The photographic context, be that the pre-photographic scene or the context in which the photograph is viewed, therefore, like all 'communicative' context, remains through the punctum's labor one whose determination "is never certain or saturated," resisting absolute determination (Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context [hereafter "Signature"] 310).

In bringing "Signature, Event, Context" together with *Camera Lucida*, my aim has less to do with aligning photography with writing-in-general in any manifestly associative sense, or suggesting that one comes before the other or circumscribes it. The point is that the theory of the latter could be quite beneficial for thinking about the former, and stress on the 'existence' of the former could introduce new questions and complications for thought on writing as well[22]. The parallels could be articulated productively particularly around the notion of intention in writing and in photography, unless Derrida's point in "Signature" is understood to mean, as speech-act theorists seem to have done, that 'communication' is governed by the solemn authority of conscious intentions[23], or Barthes's argument in *Camera Lucida* is taken to stem from the culmination of "an increasing effort on Barthes's part to eliminate all forms of intentionality from the photograph"[24]. Intentionality in this context turns out to be conceived in difference from cases wherein it is conventionally totalized "into self-presence and self-possession" (Spivak 80). It is thus not only the "the ever-necessary possibility of the writer/reader's absence to the context, but the claim of the

[22] This second aspect is not of particular focus here. For such focus, see Cadava; Havelkamp; and Derrida, "Deaths of Roland Barthes," where he is reported to suggest, after many precautions, that all signs could be understood to involve a punctum or an aspect thereof (Batchen 211). This text, unfortunately, has not been accessible to me in the preparation of this study.
[23] See Spivak on this point, particularly p. 83.
[24] Comment, Bernard. *Roland Barthes, vers le neuter*, qtd. in Burnett 37.

writer/reader's presence to himself in certain privileged contexts" (Spivak 80) as well that is at stake here.

The peculiarities photography represents for Barthes appear certainly to qualify it for him as a case where "we are dealing neither with a semantic or conceptual content, nor with a semiotic operation, and even less with a linguistic exchange" (Derrida, "Signature" 309). Barthes's interest in photography, first and foremost, speaks to a certain particularity in that it is charged with fascination. This affect, however, does not have much to do with the general categories of art-talk, and precedes the 'author' of the photograph in that it is established exclusively between the photograph (and the photographed) and the viewer. Neither does it pertain to what that discourse has to say on photography. In other words, it is negligent of if not alien to terms like 'the harmony of the frame,' 'the genius of the photographer,' 'rarity of the referent,' 'element of surprise,' 'essence of our culture,' 'beauty of nature,' and so on. Its power renders Barthes at once unable to "accede to that notion which is so convenient when we want to talk history, culture, aesthetics – that notion known as an artist's style" (*Camera Lucida* 18). Barthes, of course, as is well known, is responsible for 'killing' the author as early as 1968. Announcing that "the birth of the reader must be required by the death of the Author" (55), Barthes associates the thus refutable existence of the latter with the advent of modernist criticism with indispensable links in "The Death of the Author." Writing is here defined as "the destruction of every voice, of every origin," "the black-and-white where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes" (49)[25]. As that operation which makes,

[25] A review of Barthes's arguments in the "Death of the Author" with the notion of writing as advanced by Derrida in mind would certainly be a productive endeavor, particularly in that Barthes alludes here to the category of the performative speech-act. This would, however, be exceeding the confines of this study.

that is, a self-present author increasingly difficult to locate in the text. Similarly, Barthes can be followed in *Camera Lucida* to definitively displace the notion of the artist or author in photography, resisting its ultimate agency. Not only are photographs that call attention to the labor of the photographer in putting things in and out of their place abandoned, but neither is the possibility of aggregating photographs by a single photographer with each other is entertained. Perhaps more importantly, however, Barthes also establishes through the 'lack' of the photographer the desire he utters of being a "primitive" (*Camera Lucida* 7) at the face of photographs, of being negligent in photography of everything except the 'presence' of the referent it lays claim or 'testifies' to. Indeed, Barthes installs a framework for the photograph in *Camera Lucida* that has to invite that which disturbs that framework:

> It is rather as if I had to read the Photographer's myths in the Photograph, fraternizing with them but not quite believing in them. These myths obviously aim (and this is what myth is for) at reconciling the Photograph with society (is this necessary? – Yes, indeed: the Photograph is *dangerous*) by endowing it with *functions*, which are, for the Photographer, so many alibis. These functions are: to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to signify, to provoke desire. (28)

Barthes therefore renders incomplete at once, it seems it could be argued, aspirations both of modernist formalism (i.e. 'artist unbound of context') and postmodernist critique (i.e. 'photographer as nothing but context'). The dangerous in the photograph, that unexpected flash, is reluctant to the caption, the unconscious or conscious designations of the photographer or of 'ideology' conceived as an extrinsic stream of force, other texts that surround it in every sense, linguistic determinations, etc. without, however, standing in stark opposition to them. In that, photography seems here to share with writing an

important act of disqualification. This disturbance that the being of and in photography brings about to the playground of 'communication' concerns "'real' or 'linguistic'" contexts at the same time, leaving their 'empirical saturation' anything but complete (Derrida, "Signature" 316). Perhaps more importantly, however, this interruption holds true in the case also of what is to be denied to the context of communication, to the beyond-or-behind-the-sign, to that which would have nothing to do with the photographic sign if not the sign-in-general, in other words, "for the entire field of what philosophy would call experience, that is, the experience of Being: so-called 'presence' (Derrida, "Signature" 316-7).

Contrary to what appears at first sight, then, Barthes's articulation of the essence of photography, of the 'that-has-been,' has less to do with qualifying photography as a means of access to the 'origin' of the absent entity it 'includes' than the acknowledgment of an irreducible spacing, in the sense of a "disruption of presence in the mark" (Derrida, "Signature 327), of "a critique of presence" (Spivak 101), in general as the corruptibility of every originary presence, of originality itself. The 'discourse' of photography testifies to the presence of the referent, its existence "in this place which extends between infinity and the subject (*operator* or *spectator*)," but does so through a certain, dispersive operation: the referent in photography "has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 77). It should probably be noted that this space in which the referent of the photograph 'exists' and the labor of spacing that no photography could operate in exclusion of are not among the most frequently focused aspects of the photograph. In writing, too, "[s]pacing is always the unperceived, the non-present, and the non-conscious" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

68). Thus the necessity of the 'alibis' of the photograph: the contingency that occupies the heart of the photograph demands that photography do not "signify (aim at a generality) except by assuming a mask," that is, "what makes a face into the product of a society and of its history" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 34), and what does not allow room for being simply removed from that face.

The reasons why every photograph should be a mark of 'sovereign contingency,' an undeniable error, should begin to start appearing clearer now. Since what the viewer does with it, carrying it outside of any generality, what he or she 'intentionalizes,' as Barthes has it, has more to do with "Reference" than either "Art or Communication" (*Camera Lucida* 77), photography cannot be told to operate solely under the sign of the absolute determination in which it is found. This order of reference, the loaded evidence of the referent that is the photograph, however, does not simply extend an original context that is the context of the founding referent. Even before it can establish, let alone announce, a certain operation of contiguity with its referent, it has to acknowledge its not only future, but also past and present absence. Rather than merely authorize a mechanical economy wherein it would simply succeed in abbreviating access to signs that carry the sterile marks of their origin or effacing them altogether, it first and foremost suffers under the mark of that which risks "introducing a certain break in the homogeneity of the system" (Derrida, "Signature" 312) that qualifies, however, the entirety of its order. The possibility of this order, of its reference, is this break, this spacing that renders time space and space time. The fact that photographs are omnipresent as representations, as objects or images, therefore, cannot simply keep them intact "from having an enigmatic point of inactuality, a strange stasis, the stasis of an *arrest*" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 91), since this

omnipresence is forever inhabited by an overwhelming absence. Since this absence is unfillable, as it were, the space that its effect is a disturbing expansion of cannot be brought to a closure, and photographs cannot be taken in the last instance to simply function in completing an imagined circle of presences, as simple mechanisms of substitution for lack or loss.

In seemingly preserving the presence of its referent, then, the photograph cannot escape from rendering impure "not the figure of what it represents (quite the converse) but its very existence" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 115). This very opposition between figure and existence, or the figural and the literal, on the other hand, does not seem to be able to stand erect. Conversely, it is in its very conflation of these two terms that photography comes to disrupt any conventional understanding of presence. Taking the Winter Garden Photograph to be the signature of his mother, therefore, it is understandable why Barthes should suggest that a disorder occupies the heart of all photography. For it is suddenly discovered that for a photograph to be a photograph, and better still, for a referent to be photographable, just like signatures, both "must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form" and "must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production" (Derrida, "Signature" 327-8). The "condition of possibility of form," of the photograph as well as of the referent, suddenly is discovered to lay in the labor of the trace, in iterability, interrupting the finality of notions like the "appropriate context" and "the so-called unity of voice" (Spivak 99), that is, of presence-proper as it is usually conceived. It is in this sense that photography testifies to a "strictly revulsive moment which reverses the course of *the thing*" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 119. Emphasis added.). It is in photography, then, that we find a particularly consistent embodiment of the notion of identity as

not the straightforward converse of repetition, but as a consequence of the irreplaceable, irrefutable condition of the latter. In that, the questions raised in the identity of identity by the very existence of photography can be understood to seriously trouble it, and with it any assumption of pure self-presence. For photography identifies at the moment it alters, by repeating, the being of its referent. Neither, then, the self-presence of that being can be maintained as "infinitely repeatable as the same," for in being repeated not only its present limits or context is violated but also its future occupation, nor "contexts that can be defined and transferred within firm outlines" (Spivak 86) honored, since those contexts irrelevant to the 'original' and into which the photograph and its referent as iterable entities are put ultimately fail to saturate the very process of their repetition. This is why every photograph is potentially endowed with a punctum, a violent fissure that wounds the hand that tries to reach through the photograph, taking the viewer out of the frame, to the territory of the blind, and offers a field of "a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 59). Photography's undeniable but unapparent structural necessity, the "structural possibility of being severed from its referent or signified (and therefore from communication and its context)," simultaneous with its production of "the nonpresent *remaining* of a differential mark cut off from its alleged 'production' or origin" (Derrida, "Signatures" 318), therefore, does not only qualify it among other forms iteration, but renders it a very powerful and interesting corollary of the latter as well.

Barthes does not reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph in *Camera Lucida*, claiming that it would solely represent for the reader what he terms the studium in photography, and would present no wounds, no punctum. This

reservation has usually been treated as an inadequacy on the part of Barthes by a host of commentators, some taking their claim to the degree of maintaining that no such photograph existed, that it was merely a 'fiction' set up by the grieving thinker. On the other hand, this act, it seems, could be another moment of *Camera Lucida* wherein Barthes acknowledges the very force of photography. Being himself an 'illegitimate' receiver of the photograph under question, for it had been generated at a time when the empirical presence of Barthes as its addressee had not been a possibility, it appears Barthes understands through it that each and every photograph, like the grapheme in general, should "remain legible despite the absolute despite the absolute disappearance of every determined addressee in general for it to function" (Derrida, "Signatures" 315). The exclusivity of the strange accord that this peculiar photograph establishes between Barthes and his mother that he wishes to render incomprehensible if not illegible for anyone else, by the very evidence of its coming to legibility for Barthes, remains a decipherable mark "that is iterable for a third party, and thus for any possible user in general" (Derrida, "Signature" 315). It is, however, because of Barthes's reluctance to grant that the Winter Garden Photograph will remain legible infinitely, or for as long as the photograph lasts, that he seems to have felt the obligation to relate that "at the end of this first *death*" (*Camera Lucida* 93. Emphasis added.), as the necessary component of the photograph's life, his "own death is inscribed." For it is the absence of the sender of the photograph, the absence of Barthes's mother, and in general of any referent of any photograph "from the marks that [s/]he abandons" that makes the photograph possible and which are bound to "continue to produce effects beyond his [or her] presence and beyond the present actuality of his [or her] meaning, that is, beyond his [or her]

life itself" (Derrida, "Signature" 313) that is at stake here. Barthes wishes this absence to come to an end, to render this absence finite through his own death, which will supposedly leave the punctum in the Winter Garden Photograph impenetrably obscure. On the other hand, not only his mother's but Barthes's death seems also to have been inscribed in this photograph. Further, as the receiver of all photography, Barthes extends this inscription, which it appears is the condition of all inscription, to mark every photograph. "It is because each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death that each one," he relates, "however attached it seems to be to the excited world of the living, challenges each of us, one by one, outside any generality" (*Camera Lucida* 97). In other words, the challenge, the scandal or the punctum the photograph represents here in the face of the generality or the studium under the siege of which it is found turns out to be the *figuration* of the literal. Of the fact, that is, that photography, as its structural and irreducible necessity and like all pieces of wiriting, "must be able to function in the radical absence of every empirically determined addressee in general" (Derrida, "Signatures" 316). The strange character that qualifies the event of history for Benjmin also shares in this network of absences in that its imagistic retrieval "allows us to speak of our death *before* death;" that "one day we will no longer be here, or, rather, we will only be here the way we have always been here, *as* images" (Cadava 224). Before we can begin to relate absence and history with the photograph, however, let us pause to attend to the general framework in which Benjamin articulates the interaction between the age of technical reproducibility and the image.

The interruption brought about by what he terms reproductive technologies to an uncontested notion of presence is a primary theme for Benjamin in "The

Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In his discussion of the withering of aura, Benjamin no doubt recognizes a difference that comes across between the principle of the empirical presence of objects and the notion of presence in general on the horizontal trajectory aura follows. What is violated, he seems to suggest, is not so much the former per se but the latter, from which it can nevertheless not be thought apart:

> The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought *may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated*. This holds not only for the art work but also, for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie. In the case of the art object, a most sensitive nucleus –namely, its authenticity– is interfered with whereas no natural object is vulnerable on that score. The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And, what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the *authority of the object*. (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 221. Emphasis added.)

Some associations that go beyond the well taken point that the notion of presence is endangered in the time of reproduction that Benjamin evokes here are worth noticing. In recognizing that the changes brought about by reproduction in the name of the reproduced differ along the lines of the separate positions objects take up in history and in society, Benjamin seems to suggest that the ways in which the authenticity of works of art and the authenticity of natural objects are negotiated are not the same. The quality-of-presence of the latter, nevertheless, is also interfered with when it is reproduced, since the time of mechanical reproduction is running against the very frame of time in which it would normally be found to exist. The time of mechanical reproduction, then, renders substantive duration irrelevant in case both of natural and cultural objects. It should perhaps be noted

in passing that Benjamin's suggestions here could thus be taken to mean that reproduction facilitates and thrives in the death of the reproduced. Let it suffice for the moment, however, to record that Benjamin appears somewhat equivocal in coming to terms with the ways in which natural objects are deprived of their authenticity. Since he notes that no natural object is vulnerable on that grounds, it seems reasonable to assume that Benjamin recognizes a difficulty in coming to terms with the depreciation of the authority of the natural here.

To turn to history-in-the-making and tradition: The problems an uncritically linear approach to history and historiography the time of reproducibility subjects to scrutiny are made evident in the formulation just alluded to. The referent's, as it were, as well as the subject's respective historiographies and modes of presence, it turns out, are put into danger. On the other hand, older modes of representation, when reconsidered in the age of reproducibility, are understood to have effectively veiled the ways in which either the referent or the subject could be understood to be 'in the picture' now. Barthes and Benjamin catch up with those ways differently in grabbing two diverse yet interrelated prongs of this rupture. Against the grain of his carnal, blatant inclusion in the photograph, Barthes wishes to "'come out' on paper as on a classical canvas, endowed with a noble expression – thoughtful, intelligent, etc.!" crying for help from the residues of painting: "In short, if I could be 'painted' (by Titian) or drawn (by Clouet)!" (*Camera Lucida* 11). Benjamin, in emphasizing the notion of property in relation to photography, opposes the structure of testimony the camera is responsible for instituting with that of the testimony of the painting, asserting that although photography shares some "figures [that] had long been known in painting," those figures laid claim in painting only "to the art of the

painter" ("Photography" 242). The ownership of an object of art at the time when painting reigned, then, could come to mean the announcement of a possession of the skills of the artist, the endurance of originality. "[N]ow and then someone would ask after the originals … [T]he pictures, if they last, do so only as a testimony to the art of the painter. With photography, however, we encounter something new and strange" (Benjamin, "History" 242). This something, it appears, concerns a novel inability to contain the referent unproblematically in art, or in 'the code,' as it were. Being, like film, a mode of "thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment," and presenting a "representation of reality … incomparably more significant than that of the painter" as much as film, the "thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment" ("Work of Art" 234) the photograph offers, however, differs from the infiltration film is responsible for instituting, and seems to render it distinct for Benjamin. His claim that is to be found inflicting his discussion every time photography is in focus, that photography should be considered in connection to science, that it thrives in "[t]he stripping bare of the object" ("Photography" 250), does certainly remind one of the irretrievability of the structuralist insistence that we leave knowledge of the being of objects (referents) to "'experts' such as physicists and philosophers" (Kirby 24). Further, while the "Work of Art" essay can be followed to devote much thought on how filmic production and reception can be understood to institute equivalent procedures, in that the film expects its audience to perform in much the same way as the camera and the montage table does, adding together what it fragments according to new laws, no such suggestion of a receptive 'culture' accompanies Benjamin's discussion of photography. While it is this strange, somewhat illusory but

nevertheless material system that overwhelms the reception of film, rendering it able to offer "an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment" ("Work of Art" 234), the same statement does not seem to stand entirely verifiable for photography. Reluctant to give in to the 'skill' of the artist, at least in its entirety, the body of the subject of photography endures the action of the photograph in surviving it. 'It is there,' although it is not quite: what is (un)certain is that it is not unproblematically here. Never hitherto have representation problematized presentation as densely, one expects to hear someone utter, as Benjamin relates of his favorite photograph:

> In Hill's Newhaven fishwife, her eyes cast down in such indolent, seductive modesty, there remains something that goes beyond testimony to the photographer's art, something that cannot be silenced, that fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in *art*. ("Photography" 242-3)

But why should this desire that Benjamin is burning with be unruly? Its object, indeed, appears quite impossible, out of reach. Elsewhere Benjamin offered that photographic reproduction "enables the original to meet the beholder *halfway*" ("Work of Art" 220. Emphasis added.). Since it is halfway between the gutter and the stars, photography could, it seems, be defined by an inability as much as it can be announced to be enabling. And there turns up to be more to this inability of absorption. "The associative mechanisms in the beholder," it appears, are prone to being paralyzed through exposition to images defined by "fleeting and secret moments" ("Photography" 256) and which therefore cannot quiet be 'taken-up' easily on the side of the viewer. The evidential powers the photograph bears to view are, at least eventually, as strong even as to resist circumscription by a caption. Benjamin thinks that not many of the critics of photography are aware of

this: It is “[o]ne thing … both Wiertz and Baudelaire failed to grasp: the lessons inherent in the authenticity of the photograph. These cannot be forever circumvented by a commentary whose clichés merely establish verbal associations in the viewer” (“Photography” 256). These lessons, it emerges, have something to teach about history and historiography. The teaching, on the other side, is not always as apparent as it is in the few pictures Benjamin considers, where it is hard to miss. If we ‘immerse’ ourselves in those photographic events he has in mind, we most certainly

> will recognize how alive the contradictions are, here too: the most precise technology can give its products a magical value, such as a painted picture can never again have for us. No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has so to speak seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future subsists so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it. For it is another nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye: other in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. (“Photography” 243)

The contradictions are as visible if not more obviously emergent when the photograph that confronts the subject features his/her own. The problem, further, is precisely one that concerns the subject’s notion of integrity. “This disturbance,” says Roland Barthes, “is ultimately one of ownership” (*Camera Lucida* 13). A significant characteristic of photography that renders it novel in a striking way, then, is buried in Benjamin’s recognition: “To see oneself (differently from a mirror): on the scale of History …” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 12). Barthes considers it as important as to call it ‘a disturbance to civilization’ (*Camera Lucida* 12). The subject being photographed, much like the subject viewing the photograph, is struck by a “sensation of inauthenticity” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

13). This sensation, however, is not carried as straightforwardly as Barthes's definition of the emotions he goes through as he discovers what befalls him as he is photographed seems to suggest: "what I see is that I have become Total-Image, which is to say, Death in person;" 'in my photographic-image-mode,' Barthes seems to suggest, others – the Other – do not dispossess me of myself, they turn me, ferociously, into an object, they put me at their mercy, at their disposal, classified in a file, ready for the subtlest deceptions" (*Camera Lucida* 14). Neither can Barthes manage to put photographs at his own mercy, nor the mode he has in mind seem to be restricted solely to being photographed and photograph, as is evident in his rapturous description of the procedure through which he becomes so:

> In terms of image-repertoire, 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 (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. (*Camera Lucida* 14)

What is worth noting, without necessarily emphasizing the sometimes phenomenological language that Barthes considers the relationship between intention and object, is that the 'photograph with a capital p' for Barthes designates in *Camera Lucida* the ones that exist for him: those in which he recognizes particularly effective the irreducible opening of a door for the intention of the viewing subject. What Barthes advances here in terms of being photographed, it seems, can therefore be extended to all photography, and be taken to mean that no photographic experience manages to sidestep the contradictions and excitements of temporal-spatial dislocation. Thus, the observer can be said to suffer from the parenthetical spectralization Barthes has in mind here as much the observed, caught in a form of ecstatic reaction. "For the

Photograph," in any case, "is the advent of myself as other" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 12). A usually overlooked fact is that this process of 'othering' seldom comes to complete halt, and it should perhaps be noted that Benjamin's remarks on fascism's response to photography and film concerns precisely a full blown attempt to petrify this very process. Its practice consists in producing images in which "'the amorphous mass' could find a face and a voice that it might call its own, or if not its own, that it could at least recognize and use to secure its own position" (Weber 101). According to the suggestive remarks Barthes devotes to this problem that concerns the uncanny nature of the process wherein recognition sets in, however, the alterability involved in the photographic experience leaves the subject stripped bare of the ability to readily recognize himself or herself in the photograph. This lack on the subject's part, Barthes warns, although most operational when the photograph viewed features the viewer, cannot be simply restricted: "today it is as if we repressed profound madness of photography: it reminds us of its mythic heritage only by that faint uneasiness which seizes me when I look at 'myself' on a piece of paper" (*Camera Lucida*, 13).

It would perhaps be necessary to acknowledge at this point that part of the reasons why Benjamin salutes surrealism in "Work of Art" as elsewhere concerns this very process by which the perceptive mechanism which encourages the viewer to recognize things as-they-are is interfered with. The progressive "achievements that surrealist photography" could breach the ground for consist in registering, offering and allowing for "a salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings" (Benjamin, "Photography" 251). Through its practical reluctance to value and put forward anything 'intimate,' any image in which estrangement goes unnoticed and recognition is rendered a continuous possibility,

and by its emphasis “on the illumination of detail,” “[i]t gives free play to the politically educated eye (Benjamin, “Photography” 251). This peculiarity is not exclusive to surrealism. “The enlargement[26] of a snapshot” also “reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject,” rather than “simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear” (Benjamin, “Work of Art” 236). What is at stake appears to concern a process of discernment, inaugurating latently, and operating in contradistinction to first-hand recognition. Early photography, Benjamin recognizes, stood as an empirical evidence of this characteristic: photographs, then, “had to be turned this way and that until, in the proper light, a pale grey image could be discerned” (“Photography” 242). This “ghostly or spectral character” of early photography defines for Benjamin what stands against the brightness of the magazine picture (Cadava 226).

The significance of what he terms ‘surrealist photography’ for understanding the political subsistence of photography-in-general engenders a new dynamic for Walter Benjamin in the case of Eugene Atget. Atget’s photographs “demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them. They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way” (Benjamin, “Work of Art” 226). And it is precisely because of the introduction of the possibility of the agitated viewer with these photographs that captions are deemed necessary accompaniments for photographs. Taking the viewers to be stumbling at this stirred state, illustrated magazines respond to the new politics of interrupted recognition the photograph facilitates by putting up ‘signposts’ for them, in order to be able to present them with ‘directives.’ In understanding the caption to be effectively parasitic on the photograph, Benjamin

[26] The enlargement Benjamin alludes to here seems to bring to mind the action of the ‘politically educated eye’ rather than solely the technical process by which images are blown-up.

thus recognizes here a fundamental difference between photography and film. The directives that attempt to repress the politically educated eye that confronts the photograph, it turns out, occupy the very heart of filmic reception: those edicts "which the captions give to those looking at pictures in illustrated magazines soon become even more explicit and more imperative in the film where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones" ("Work of Art" 226)[27]. But there remains in this distinction something that this characteristic does not quite manage to testify to in and of its own, and which concerns photography's acquisition of a hidden political significance. Benjamin becomes conscious of a peculiarly photographic operation hitherto unrealized and which becomes evident with

> the incomparable significance of Atget, who, around 1900, took photographs of deserted Paris streets. It has quite justly been said of him that he photographed them like scenes of crime. The scene of a crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance. ("Work of Art" 226)

What demands attention in Benjamin's treatment of Atget and the novelty which his photographs bring out is his focus on the posthumous. Benjamin seems here to put forward on the evidential nature of photography does not only concern the 'this was,' the moment of the image's origin, but also the realm of the past perfect, the 'that had been.' Providing traces of traces, reaching out to the anterior of the posterior, Atget's photographs lay claim to the truth of the fact after-the-fact, suggesting a narrative that is difficult to trace but nevertheless laden with

[27] In "The Third Meaning," Roland Barthes aptly demonstrates this principle by focusing on film stills more or less independently of the narrative they normally belong to. See also "Right of Inspection," where Derrida sets up a polylogue of voices that do not come to an agreement on whether such an operation is possible.

traces that can neither be effaced nor petrified[28]. Not only, therefore, the 'here-and-now' is conflated with the 'there-then,' but the 'here-and-now' of the past is also incorporated with that of the domain of the past-perfect. The time of reproducibility, "this 'posthumously shocked', immobilized, dispersed, recollected and finally forgotten moment" (Weber 100), then, does not quite allow for a linear and complete history, and less for a present that can be fully grasped. What it does rather concerns arresting, separating, and reproducing "the 'here-and-now' again and again in a proliferating series of images which go here and there," allowing for a slippage of "a mass of pictures that cannot keep still even if they are instantaneous 'snapshots'" (Weber 100). No wonder, then, in this world "on the verge, traversed and indeed constituted out of such circulating series of images" (Weber 100), the aura of artworks as well of objects is set out on a route to disappearance whose trajectory complicates any conventional understanding of being and history. For the evidence that 'the spark of contingency' Benjamin has in mind lays claim to culminates in a "point of *fissure* of the image: it prevents it from closing up, from hiding behind the appearance of historical continuity or organic interrelatedness" (Abbas 58).

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[28] Perhaps a connection that is hard to miss but that cannot be fully spelled out within the confines of this study should be alluded to here. It would be remembered that Benjamin insists on an enigmatic coupling, 'unconscious optics,' whenever he establishes the characteristics of photography as reproductive technology. Beside the manifest understanding of 'unconcious optics' as the frame in which Benjamin introduces the fragmentary or fetishistic nature of photographic images, a new link can be suggested between the workings of the psyche and of reproducive technology as Benjamin understands them. In "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Jacques Derrida seems to salute the emphasis put on the mystic writing pad as a model for the work of the psychic apparatus by Freud, who in his earlier studies understood the psyche to work in an optical manner. The scene Derrida has in mind, however, appears to be very much like the scene of crime Benjamin alludes to here, in that it is a scene which allows for the old trace and the new trace to exist interdependantly and effectively. At least three oppositions, then, can be taken to be put at stake here: new/old, word/image, conscious/unconscious. Benjamin puts emphasis at this stake elsewhere: "To the form of the new means of production, which to begin with is still dominated by the old (Marx), there correspond images in the collective consciousness in which the new and the old are intermingled" ("Fourier or the Arcades" 159).

4 CONCLUSION: HISTORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY

One aspect of the ‘illusory ’ world-picture the thinkers reviewed in the second chapter of this study argue is by definition held steadfast between the subject and the ‘real world’ through photographs is that it is inconceivable without the introduction of the shadow: “As soon as there is a technology of the image, visibility brings night” (Derrida, “Spectrographies” 115). In undermining the shadow and through participating in the maintenance of an uncritical notion of the history of art and of technology, however, the thinkers under consideration seem to have treated the camera obscura and photography on equivalent grounds, stressing that since the former bears the same unity of the world-picture, the latter, as the uncomplicated follower of the former, is also “a field of projection corresponding to the space of Descartes’s *mathesis universalis*, in which all objects of thought … can be ordered and compared” (Crary 56). Such inadequacy on the part of the ‘postmodern critique of photography’ motivated the trajectory of the discussion advanced here to take a turn toward the work on photography of Roland Barthes, who declared that his intention was to elucidate the ‘mathesis singularis’ involved in the production of photography and to distinguish the floating light of the camera lucida from the ‘illuminating’ totality of the camera obscura. The ‘spooky,’ shadowy nature of that light have thus comprised an important part of the discussion and made it canalize its focus to the relationship between the ‘real world’ and the specter. Its sudden nature, however, remains to

be speculated on, particularly as it relates to event of history. The parallels between that event and the age of technical reproduction, that is, the rupture the technology of the image is responsible for attenuating, will be occupying the center of the arguments that are to follow.

The withering of the artwork's aura that Benjamin locates at the heart of the age of technological reproducibility have been the source of much debate and varied articulations on history and technology. What is important to notice, however, seems to be that in the framework Benjamin sketches, it is not "aura as such but the aura of art as a *work* of representation, a work that would have its fixed place, that would take its place in and as a world-picture" that is interfered with in the age of technical reproducibility (Weber 107). In that, technical reproducibility resembles another concept that demands attention in the thought of Benjamin. Products of technological reproducibility, photographs prominent among them, seem to operate in a way that is reminiscent of the 'dialectical image.' The historical index peculiar to the latter strikes the subject and the viewer of history, like the reproductive image, as a shock that tends to violate the continuity of tradition.

The parallels between Benjamin's concept of history and method of historiography and his understanding of the event of photography are elsewhere articulated with thoroughness[29]. Whereas it would be possible to take those parallels to mean that Benjamin's method of historiography is 'photographic,' the discussion presented here attempts to understand Benjamin's suggestions on the fascination and the politics of the photographic image to complement his understanding of history.

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[29] For instances of arguments that put those parallels at the heart of their sugeestions See Abbas,; Cadava; Haverkamp; and Dant and Gilloch.

Benjamin pictures the ‘angel’ of history as one whose “face is turned toward the past” and who sees in the spectacle history pushes in his face “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet” (Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” [hereafter “Thesis”] 257). This angel, as the true historian, aims to “awaken the dead, and make whole of what has been smashed” (Benjamin, “Thesis” 257). But the storm of progress, of which that does not want to stay, that does not want to admit any living-on or legibility in any kind of the trace that does not fit into a historicist continuum, keeps the angel from being able to do so. In the meantime, “the pile of debris before him grows skyward” (Benjamin, “Thesis” 257-8). The technology of the image, of the photographic image in particular, however, seems to bring to view in an irrefutable way precisely the traces that make up that pile. In that, the modernity with which it is usually associated could better be understood as one that increases the power of the ghost rather than simply efface it.

In *Specters*, a project that is undertaken in the effort to deconstruct approaches to history that treat the catastrophic historical event as mere mistakes in a trajectory that will nevertheless reach the closure it is supposedly destined for – approaches, in other words, ‘of the Fukuyama type’ – , Jacques Derrida posits the specter as an ‘entity’ that is irreducibly iterable and thus troubling to such approaches. The specter

> carries life beyond present life or its actual being-there, its empirical or ontological actuality: not toward death but toward a *living-on* […] namely, a trace of which life and death would themselves be but traces and traces of traces, a survival whose possibility in advance comes to disjoin or dis-adjust the identity of itself of the living present as well as of any effectivity. (Derrida, *Specters* xx)

Like the angel of history that marks the traces of disappearance, the specter, who pays a visit only when it is "past midnight, bitterly cold, and dark except for the faint light of the stars" (*Hamlet* 164), is the trace of that which cannot come to the 'light of the (present) day,' but whose being complicates that very light. It is "beyond therefore the living present in general" (Derrida, *Specters* xx. Italics omitted.). Similarly, although what the photograph photographs is necessarily no longer present or living in the proper sense at the time of its being viewed, its having-been-there now forms a referential structure. By definition, therefore, it "takes the form of a haunting" (Cadava 224). The index of the photographic image, then, can be conceived as doubtfully dualistic: it consists of the recognition of a past time to which the image 'belongs' as well as the time it becomes legible. But since this image is one that comes only to pass and passes only to come back, the time of legibility of the photograph is necessarily extensive, and therefore the history of its readability is by definition incomplete: it renders the context of the photograph's reading forever insaturable. Unlike historicism, which "gives the 'eternal' image of the past" (Benjamin, "Thesis" 262), it does not allow for a present that can be defined in absolute contemporaneity with itself.

The linear passage of time with which historicism is concerned, then, cannot stand erect in the presence of the photographic image, which collapses the past, the present, and the future under a single framework, producing a rupture in the 'natural' extinction of generations. History in this sense arises less from the enactment of time than from the ability to read the image that interrupts such a passage. The specter "strikes a blow at the teleological order of history" in a similar vein: "What is coming, in which the untimely appears, is happening to time but it does not happen in time" (Derrida, Specters 77). The emanation of

historiography in this framework are therefore bound to the survival of the trace and of on the willingness on the part of the subject to understand the trace, as trace. In Benjamin's understanding of it, "there can be no history without the Medusa effect, without the capacity to arrest or immobilize historical movement, to isolate the detail of an event from the continuum of history" (Cadava 230-1). It is here that we find that the experience of shock occupies the heart of photography as a formal principle: in the irreducible delay inscribed in the reception of even the most 'immediate' photograph. Its frequency does not render what is absent 'properly' present, but produces a "non-presence" that "demands that one takes its times and history into consideration, the singularity of its temporality" (Derrida, *Specters* 101).

It is therefore not for simple reasons that Walter Benjamin, who "regards it as his task to brush history against the grain" ("Thesis" 257) and to appreciate the "constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one" ("Thesis" 263), recognizes the photograph as a structurally new object whose patterns of legibility demands careful attention from the intellectual[30]. For the agency of the latter in the face of the historical event comes into play when he or she utilizes an authority that targets to dissociate the image to be read from its context rather than strive to preserve or extend the latter. Historical legibility is advanced when the concern of the reader is dense enough to breach the appurtenance of an image, and the development of the photographic plate can then begin to move toward historical significance. Once that development is undertaken, however, it does not know of a complete stop: the standstills wherein it will be found come always to pass.

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[30] See "The Author as Producer" on this point.

This study took off by stating the dangers involved in approaching photography on the grounds solely of its inclination to 'illusion' and 'oppression.' It tried instead to suggest ways of introducing concepts to the theory of photography that can emphasize the productive aspects of the latter. This stance required that the discussion advanced here paid more attention to the discourse of photography rather than the discourse in the photograph; that the troubling 'existence' of the photograph is posited at the center of its arguments; and that certain concepts which can be understood to surround photography's makeup were brought into the framework. Consequently, a consideration of photography and power was ranked lower than a discussion of photography as power. Stress on the identity of photography, therefore, was taken to be a necessary component of the discussion. That identity, however, is widely believed to be put under danger with the introduction of 'digital' imaging techniques to the world of photography.

The identity of photography has been related in the preceding chapters with the series of material contiguities that photographs are capable of bringing into play. As an 'emanation of the referent,' the experience of the photograph has been taken to 'really' involve the substantial as well as the intelligible, and to concern nature as much as culture. That this involvement, however, was bound to the principle of the absence rather than the presence of the referent of the photograph was also pointed out: the light of photography resembles less the 'broad' light of the day than the flickering spark of the star, necessarily dead at the moment of the reception of its glow. Further, the question of whether this flickering has always been a necessity of the inscription of the "possibility of the reference to the other, and thus of radical alterity and heterogeneity, of differ*a*nce, of technicity, and of ideality in the very event of presence" (Derrida, *Specters* 75)

was also alluded to. In this context, the observation that the photograph is at the verge of becoming the product of a stream of electronic data rather than a series of analogous but untimely contacts between the photographed and the viewer should indeed be taken to comprise a rupture in its identity. Whereas the rupture concerned seems usually to be understood within the context of the presumed demise of photography's capabilities of truth-production, the space of the arguments gathered here demands rather that such capabilities are received critically in analogue or digital photography alike.

It does not seem to be an inhabitable position to suggest that the privileged position of photography among other systems of representation as a more accurate carrier of truth has nothing to do with its mode of production. With the fact, that is, that photographs operate with referents not optionally but necessarily real. The question of whether the 'photographic look' is borne out of the awareness of the viewer of its mode of production or not, however, cannot be met with a fruitful answer. In either way, computer generated images that could refer nothing else than to a bank of digital data are today extremely capable of producing that look. The affect that is peculiar to the reception of photographs and that is immediately tied to the apprehension on the side of the subject of the way photographs are produced, on the other hand, seems to have been leaving the field of retrieval of the latter. This does not mean that the contemporary situation wherein it is very feasible and commonplace to 'fake' photographs is entirely alien to the sphere in which they have functioned. The specter can always be the incarnation of an evil spirit that is faking it through yet another disguise of visual presence. It is precisely the agency of faith in the ghost on the part of the visited, who are obliged to swear on the subject of the apparition as soon as it appears and

disappears, that makes it the ghost of some 'thing.' The specter neverthless is capable of producing work, of concern and of responsibility even in its evil form. None of the characters in *Hamlet* 'knows,' for example, whether the ghost of Hamlet's father is what it claims or is claimed to be. Yet this does not keep that ghost from stealing the center-stage of the play. And this is where, it seems, the photograph does not always share the authority of the specter, whose effect necessarily "corresponds … to a position … of the ghost, a *dialectical* position of the ghostly body as body proper" (Derrida, *Specters* 128).

Whereas the photograph promises "a dynamic temporal depth beneath its calm static surface, digital images fascinate by overtly abandoning any such claim" (Batchen, "Carnal Knowledge" 22). In that, they do not seem to the viewer to resist the lure of the simulacrum-in-general. In other words, the digital photographic image, or the image in general in the time of the digital image, does not take a turn to look at the viewer in its passage: it passes to pass, not to eventually come back. Similarly, unlike the photographic plate which is either saved or discarded, the system of production of the digital image does not defy cases where the material it is made up of is reinscribed with other data. The digital image, consequently, does not cling on the viewer and push its concern on the face of the subject, since the latter is prone to approach it with doubt. Therefore it actually comes to share the contemporary faith of many photographs. Put more appropriately, it seems that what the possibility of the digital photograph contributes to and correlates with are the ways in which the aggravation photography is responsible for is dealt with culturally. This aspect of the way photographs are installed in contexts of reception that are hard to neglect accounts also for the observation that not every photograph is endowed with a punctum in

every case. The singularity involved, on the other hand, comes by no means to mean that the viewer's capabilities of acknowledging his or her asynchronous relationship to photographs and to their existence can be simply and completely concealed through the labor of the associations photographs are made part of as they are 'lost' amidst the plentitude of simulacra. Rather, it reminds us that, potentially, an irreducible spark of contingency that occupies the heart of the production and reproduction of the photographic event always threatens to become the viewer's concern.

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