

Introduction

SHEPHERD STEINER

Mosaic 53.4 is a special issue on Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Forty years after its publication, the book still garners attention. Responses to this short, elegant, and personal text range wildly from irrelevance, anger, and dismissal to constituting something of a recurrent trope in writing on the theory of photography. If artists and photographers have no time for the book and little or nothing to say, theorists of photography and theorists more generally are a different story. And it has been this way since its publication in French in 1980 and in English in 1981.

Mosaic's collection of essays on *Camera Lucida* begins hard against its subject, finds its stride near the middle, where things dig in, and then sets off on a few detours and deflections. The latter set of essays are somewhat kinder to their source text than the former, the very last in the collection using mileage gained from the book's thoughts on photography as a model to think about other photographs—one of at least two critical tropes on Barthes writing. But even those contributions at the centre of the issue—and of course all of the essays in the issue lie near the centre—might be understood to miss their mark, a second critical trope and also a positive valuation, as Blanchot reminds us in *The Space of Literature*. Digging the line between death and signification does not constitute an essay on photography proper, though that possibility

is certainly left open. The subject, photography, the book, its respondents are all split. These form the matrix for a complex set of technical prosthetics and chiasmic exchanges. To this extent, like photography, which is partly the book's subject (I am almost sure of this), *Camera Lucida* exceeds itself. The principle question raised here isn't one of what is and what is not on point, for the essays gathered here make a string of unique, incredibly persuasive, and surprisingly fresh readings of *Camera Lucida*. Together they extend and complicate Geoffrey Batchen's volume of edited essays titled *Photography Degree Zero*, primarily, I think, by confronting interpretative problems (on the level of translation, the literary, autobiographical, intermedial, philosophical, mimetic, and so on) that push photography out of reach. Perhaps the ultimate point of the book, like Barthes's thoughts on the *punctum*, is that *Camera Lucida* can only be grasped in and through its extension. All of which begs the question: What kind of book or supporting apparatus is it that outstrips the details of each and every attempt at its articulation? One that requires for its contemplation a spatializing of the very phenomenon at issue: an allegorical problematic that *Mosaic* issue 53.4 attempts to instance.

The issue opens with a small archive of photographs from the 1950s by André Zougrana, collected, curated, and published here for the first time by the Belgian artist Vincent Meessen. Meessen encountered Zougrana and his photographs while he was conducting research for his 2009 film essay *Vita Nova*. The film turns around Meessen's attempts to track down a young cadet named Diouf, whose closely cropped salute appeared on the cover of the June 25-July 2, 1955 edition of *Paris Match* and was famously singled out in Barthes's *Mythologies*. The film itself seems to provide an alternative history to Barthes's unique contributions to critical theory by mining the conditions of possibility of contemporary critical thinking more generally. In the tender opening scene, which establishes the basic tenor of the ideological work to come, Issa Kaboré, one of the former cadets in Diouf's troop and now an old man, tries in vain to sing the "Le Marseillais." At the end of his tether, he finally remembers the first lines, but slips, substituting what is either the default memory of childhood or a retrospective account of his former self, we cannot tell. "Alons enfants de la patrie" will forever echo through with "enfants de la tyrannie."

Mixing his own voice with aspects of Barthes's thoughts on photography, Meessen's film amounts to a re-narration of the critic's genealogy, pointing beyond the powerful image provided by Barthes's mother as she is conjured in *Camera Lucida*. For Meessen, things boil down to an unsettling stew of French colonial power. Ultimately, the artist pushes things back to Barthes's grandfather Louis-Gustav Binger, who was a crucial figure in the consolidation of French colonialism in West Africa and the principal actor in the exploration of the course of the upper Niger. In

any case, Zougrana was one of a number of former cadets who went on to serve as high-ranking officers that Meessen met during his search. The photographs themselves were taken on the same trip to Paris as Diouf had been on when his picture was taken for *Paris Match*. All of the images seem to fall heavily on the right hand and arm of the young cadets in an oddly Barthesian manner, not as *punctum* as such, but as a case of extended or serial *punctum* that happens through repetition. In *Vita Nova*, and particularly in Zougrana's snapshots, we feel the powerful attraction Meessen feels not only to decolonization and something like Mallarmé's elocutionary disappearance of the artist, but to unpacking one possible motive that drove Barthes to pursue re-invention. Like Meessen's film, which is extended in and as the photographs, the power of the imagery hinges on the effects of a documentary reveal, a vernacular perspective, and the glimpse of an outside that runs counter to the immunological drive, which so often sustains critical thinking and analysis of Barthes's work.



1. Vincent Meessen. Video still of *Vita Nova*. HD Video, 27', sound & colour, 2009.



2. Vincent Meessen. Video still of *Vita Nova*. HD Video, 27', sound & colour, 2009.



3. Vincent Meessen. Video still of *Vita Nova*. HD Video, 27', sound & colour, 2009.



4. Vincent Meessen. Video still of *Vita Nova*. HD Video, 27', sound & colour, 2009.



5. Vincent Meessen. Video still of *Vita Nova*. HD Video, 27', sound & colour, 2009.

The issue begins in earnest with an interview with Vancouver-based photo-conceptual artist Ian Wallace. Wallace was in dialogue with Barthes from very early on—not, however, with the Barthes of *Camera Lucida*, but with a set of other texts, especially the critic's earlier article, "The Third Meaning: Notes on Some of Eisenstein's Stills," published in *Artforum* in 1973. Wallace's *La Mélancolie de la Rue... + Barthes' Third Meaning...Early One Morning* (1972-73), which marks to my mind the first and most important moment of inter-change between contemporary art and theory, is featured on our cover. Barthes's text would be generative for Wallace's specific work as well as practice, and it would also provide an important spur to the development of photography in Vancouver. But again we must remind ourselves that all of this is an evasion of sorts, for *Camera Lucida*, as Wallace puts it at first gingerly and then more sharply in our interview, was "a bit too sentimental, and too much of a vehicle for the extroversion of the subjective sentiments of the reader."

At the crux of Wallace's interest in the one and not the other is a combination of inter-textuality and a theory of expression both haunted by formalist criticism and fortified by a poetic notion of ambiguity. In comparison to the slipperiness of *Camera Lucida*, "The Third Meaning" is a slippery text for a different set of reasons. If, in the former, infinities open up strictly in the face of photography and in light of the sharpness of the *punctum*, then in the latter things go sideways. Vistas open up precisely because of the "blunted" effects with which Barthes describes the "third" or "obtuse" meaning (46-47). Barthes says, in fact, that the third or obtuse meaning "skids," is "deflected," "opens onto the infinity of language" (47), and Wallace's work from 1973 onward responds in kind with as many off-field effects as *La Mélancolie de la Rue* has echoes between its three panel montage construction. And all of this seems to have come attached to a generationally specific notion of inter-disciplinary work, which would have greatly appealed to artists as much as theorists on the lookout for ways to free up the restricted remains of modernism, whether in the novel or painting, and link them together via poetics. The equivalence suggested between painting and the film still, the conceptualization of the film still as photography, the interplay between photography and cinema, how this is played out between the static and durational image, and the easy moves this facilitated between cinema, the novel, the everyday, and onto modernization and urban development in Vancouver and Winnipeg would have provided an unstoppable scaffolding to think the contemporary moment at its fullest. Think of Wallace's work as the love child of French semiotic theory and the Anglo-American tradition of the symbol, best encapsulated in Clement Greenberg's modernism.

Thus, between "The Third Meaning" and *Camera Lucida* one notes very different ways of treating and thinking affect. In "The Third Meaning," the obtuse underwrites

expression and is equated to a kind of content that Barthes is careful to distinguish from what he peels away as over-determined levels of signification. To wit, Sergei Eisenstein's manipulative use of emotion in *Battleship Potemkin*, which works upon us as sympathy, identification, or love for the "working class" (47) with heads bowed, exists in opposition to a "theory of the still" (50). Emptied of its significance, narrative potential, and symbolic loading, the film still suddenly stands alone—at a degree zero—and looks back to the painterly model and formal protocols of modernist abstraction, for Wallace especially the monochromes of Barnett Newman. The link was a "permutative unfolding" that existed at the deepest level of the film still, found an echo in painting (50), but did not go so far as formalizing these features in and as the cinematic. These repetitive structures occurring within the frame, between frames, and which further point to features beyond the frame—"a superior distribution of features of which the film-as-experienced, passing, animated, would be after all no more than one text among others," as Barthes puts it ("Third" 50)—are at the heart of Barthes's "third meaning" and why it proved so pivotal to Wallace's practice. Beginning in late 1972 and 1973, they constitute a set of recurrent tropes he will return to again and again.

Wallace's relationship to *Camera Lucida* is representative of a number of divergent responses to Barthes's last book from within the art field. Jeff Wall, whose position was close to Wallace all through the 1970s—they would collaborate on an unrealized film project in 1973—narrates a similar story. If the genealogy linking the film still to painting presented Wall a sort of skeleton key for remaking photography on the model of painting in the Western tradition, *Camera Lucida* provided no such inheritance or thread for continuance. In an email concerning this issue of *Mosaic*, Wall told me he didn't "take to the book"; that it had "nothing to do with what [he] was interested in, [and] seemed very much beside the point," adding, "I guess I was disappointed because 'The Third Meaning' was so much not beside the point." More on Wall in a moment.

This first series of vestibules broached, the issue begins again with "*L'Antichambre littéraire: Roland Barthes's Regressive Search*," a startling essay by Jeff Fort. Fort argues that *Camera Lucida* is an antechamber to a novel Barthes was planning but never wrote and further structured upon the double model of a Proustian search and Dante's notion of the *Vita Nova*. What I so value in Fort's essay, however, is not the temporal chiasms that Barthes announces here and variously puts into action through his reversals and substitutions of past and present and future, but that the author demonstrates that the book begins precisely in the middle under the studious light of a lamp and proceeds to both the start and finish from that originary moment. Fort's

rhetorical insight is that the purported object of the book is not photography at all, but the mother, what he calls “the book’s first and most factitious trope, its initial structuring distortion.” With this in tow, with further insights into Barthes’s personal melancholy into which we are all submerged to the detriment of hearing the pain of others, as well as with a stab at Oedipal interpretation, Fort’s steely resistance to the text edges more and more towards a well substantiated and argued anger. I think it will take a very long time for readers to truly digest all of the complexity of Fort’s arguments—I myself was fearful of even writing this introduction after reading his essay. Ultimately, the suggestion is that the Barthes of *Camera Lucida*, the Barthes who looks into the eyes of his mother set in a Winter Garden, is as ensconced in that artificial paradise as she is. Updating and reframing something like Alain Badiou’s “balance sheet” in *This Century* (2) and the terror of democracy implicit to Achille Mbembe’s *Necropolitics*, Fort plays the “blessed period” of the Winter Garden Photograph off of all manner of colonial horrors, in particular Barthes’s indifference to the stench and flies that swarm as so many *puncta* in Koen Wessing’s 1979 photograph of a corpse lying in the street.

A third *portico*, whose porch or covered walkway projects from the main edifice of Barthes’s *Le Chambre claire: note sur la photographie*, is dismantled and rebuilt by Johnnie Gratton. In “*Camera Lucida*: Obscured in Translation,” Gratton lays bare an architectural structure that leads to the cloistered precinct of Richard Howard’s acclaimed translation within which so much of Anglo-American criticism on *Camera Lucida* has lived and breathed, thought and played. Howard’s version of literal translation is taken to task in no uncertain terms. One must ask, just how many instructive problems in translation, how many false friends, poor tense choices, or linguistic idiolects (phonology, Buddhism, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, performatives) can one essay tackle? In Howard’s translation, “News updates” become “news backdates,” mode is incorrectly substituted for mood, *gène* (gene) is translated as *gêne* (embarrassment), and “Une hallucination tempérée” becomes “a temporal hallucination” rather than a temperate or moderate hallucination, all of which opens up a world of interpretative issues that will keep scholars busy for some time to come. My favourite of Gratton’s perambulations? The translation of “image folle, frottée du reel,” where the correction whisks us off to a set of precursor texts that does not include Max Ernst, but instead foregrounds André Bazin’s “*Ontologie de l’image photographique*” and Jean Paul Sartre’s *L’Imaginaire*. The torturous path that leads Gratton back through Émile Benveniste to recover J.L. Austin’s pairing of constatives and performatives from out of Howard’s translation of Barthes’s “evidential” and the “exclamative.”²¹ Finally, the path Gratton follows in tracing the history of Barthes’s use of *écrasement*.

From the “defeat of time” found within vintage photographs, we are taken through the “phonetic compression” of linguistics, the narcissistic capture of the image, and the lamination between photograph and referent to mirroric or dialectical closure.

Vestibule, antechamber, and portico aside, a picture window provides Kathrin Yacavone the unlikely entrance point to *Camera Lucida*. Yacavone’s “The Photograph as Trace: Barthes, Benjamin, and the Intermediality of Photographic Discourse” centres on a particularly inert set of traces left within Barthes’s contribution to the theory of photography by Walter Benjamin’s own theorization. She focuses on the visual remains of Barthes’s readings of Benjamin’s texts. Neither Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* nor Benjamin’s “Little History of Photography” are self-sufficient texts. They rely heavily on the inclusion of photographic images to support and bolster, to instance and inform, and lastly to poke holes in the very fabric of their texts in order to make their points on photography come alive, connect to an outside, and so on. In the process, each offers an incredibly riveting model of close reading, and needless to say, it is a very high bar that Benjamin sets and which Barthes surmounts, perhaps nowhere better than in the captions which accompany each of his photographs. For Yacavone, this unique inheritance, which is only dimly registered in the literature, shifts the problem of citationality into the rarified regions of the anxiety of influence. In a sense, Barthes’s stealthy photographic borrowings and substitutions make him far more of a poet or artist than even the stylistically wrought text of *Camera Lucida* lets on. Moreover, as Yacavone suggests, the free circulation and technical reproduction of images along with “the very trace of light that is photography” might just replace the question of reference altogether. On this point she productively inquires as to whether or not “Barthes’s metonymic naming of [...] the Winter Garden Photograph [is] another ‘trace’ of his reading of Benjamin, a textual trace, this time?” her specific reference being an image Benjamin cherished of Kafka in a similar setting. This blind-spot, which marks the place of two absent images, is surely the speculative centre point of her archive-based analysis. Indeed, with an eye to archival evidence that turns on the French publication of Benjamin’s “Little History of Photography” in the *Nouvel Observateur* in 1977, and more speculative work that thinks Barthes’s “idiosyncratic, impressionistic, and affective selection” in terms of the pervasiveness of mass circulation magazines in locations of everyday life, Yacavone compellingly reconstructs Barthes’s image sources in terms of real material culture.

Nearer the centre of our issue still is Bill Scalia’s “The Icon Machine: Expenditure and Third Meaning in *Camera Lucida*,” which brings us well within sight of Barthes’s hallucinatory text. Hinging on a set of philosophical anchor points that recall the work of Michael Fried, Scalia’s intense analysis of the symbol and the object, their

relation to “the world viewed” by Stanley Cavell, and finally the patterned interference attributable to the icon, the problem of temporality, and the subject will be of great interest to art historians. With initial echoes of the theological inheritance of the Anglo-American tradition of the symbol, Scalia skillfully shows that what we see is inseparable from how we see, nowhere better than with recourse to Barthes’s always seductive captions. Our (well, certainly my) constant wonder and amazement in the face of Barthes’s captions—just how he is able to isolate these metaphysical jewels, time and time again, which I, such a sorry subject, would have certainly missed—is explained without emptying any of the mystery. “Barthes,” Scalia writes, “holds us in the perception of his experience of the (I might say *a punctum*.” With a schematic enough diagram of the relationship between object—image—subject to fix the hydro-pneumatic suspension of a Citroen DS Pallas, we are introduced first—to the problem of reference; second—to the problem of inference; and third—to the problem of “ference” itself. With emphasis on this act of carrying or transporting linguistic and phenomenal material, it seems we are not as close to heaven as first suspected. Scalia writes, “an icon is an imminent view towards the transcendent.” If I were to worry too much about misinterpreting things here, I wouldn’t get very far in Scalia’s text, but it seems to me that the movement possessed by cinema is ultimately injected into photography by the subject (both for better and worse) and thereby given transcendental authority. In relation to the camera that strips things back to an objective realism, it seems the icon re-enchants the world. It figures as a +, or Christological event. The essay deserves much study and provocatively ends on a film still from Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona* that captures Liv Ullmann in the act of photographing with a camera the movie camera that records her.

With a view to reading *Camera Lucida* as a precursor of autotheory, Kris Pint and Maria Gil Ulldemolins’s “Roland Barthes and the ‘Affective Truths’ of Autotheory” presents a forward looking analysis of what they characterize as a melancholic and largely backward looking text. Once again this is a text that demands careful attention. It is a far more seasoned analysis of *Camera Lucida* than one expects from its initial move, for if the authors’ imperative to think the new—the kinds of digital “self-revelation” typical of self-imaging practices or “feminist performance practices” on Instagram—these contemporary iterations of the late Barthes, who also leans on his body as heuristic, aim for something more. Pint and Ulldemolins lean on Barthes’s contemporaneous research and teaching at the Collège de France, reveal a poetic project lying beneath a hermeneutics of exposure (in photography and the diary), and bend autotheory back upon itself in order to think the “blended time” implicit to one of the genre’s potential source texts. Autotheory itself emerges in a number of guises:

what Barthes calls “a *tierce forme*, ni Essai ni Roman”; combining intertextuality and intimate experiences; in the name of Maggie Nelson; as autobiography; as a discourse aimed at updating theory; and most importantly, contra hegemonic norms and with an anachronistic relationship with prevailing *doxa*. This sets the stage for the authors’ unique approach to sentimentality in *Camera Lucida*, a point which clearly thematizes the distinction between the sexuality of Part I and the differently embodied experience put to work in Part II. “Intimacy,” they tell us, was what “he so desperately wanted to share” and what he found “inexpressible,” even early on through the science of semiotics. Affect, which is promoted to the lynchpin of novelistic writing, foregrounded as the ultimate horizon of projection and tethered to truth of another order, becomes the chosen path. The temporal elbowroom afforded allows the authors to sidestep many of the nagging problems which typically irk readers of *Camera Lucida*. It seems that the tropes of autotheory are identified at the moment of encountering them, which is to say, both in their doubleness—which leaves none of the affective traits Barthes leans on untroubled—and in the process of becoming. Life’s deepest truths are performed as the very material of a wider culture of narcissism. Inasmuch, autotheory would seem to be precisely the promise of reading the stagework of the confessional-like truths and intimacy within which Barthes’s mourning dwells. In their concluding words, this “enables autotheory to frame and mediate affective truths, while at the same time escaping the deadlock of melancholy.”

Thomas O’Grady’s “At Bear River Station: A Snapshot of Place and Time” is spurred on by optics borrowed from *Camera Lucida*. O’Grady closely attends to a single photograph on his bedside table and in so doing returns to what he calls a liminal moment of family and a pivotal shift in the history of rail travel on Prince Edward Island. With his bedside photograph the focus, we revisit how the *studium* leads to the threads of a culture’s time and place, to the intentions of the photographer, and to expansions on a history that press forward and backward in time. And needless to say, we come face to face with a detail that attracts O’Grady himself, that “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces” him. It will not be the attractive Laura Brothers. Trifling stuff maybe, but when narrated with the fondness of family history and the enthusiasts’ love of trains, these things can have their effects, and when pressed to a limit their defects. Readers of this issue will know well enough there is a special pleasure in contemplating an old photograph of a forebearer. There is that naïve wonder about how much things, or times, have changed. A photograph can come attached to a conversation with someone who speaks of their former. And given that these voices are heard, that we know or know of a figure pictured in an old snapshot, it is curious to reflect upon just how much easier it is to enter into such a scene



6. Jeff Wall. *Passerby*, 1996. Courtesy of the artist. Gelatine Silver Print, 250 x 339.5 cm.

with them, or in and as them. In short, O’Grady treats us to a host of instructive and affective identifications which provide us with another kind of edge on *Camera Lucida*. Mimesis can be a powerful analytic and I think that in tagging along on his adventure—into his family history, the conflict between rail and car travel, a bike ride on the Confederation Trail, and a send off by the town-folk—precisely not Barthes’s adventure but a reproduction of that earlier model, we gain a new perspective on Barthes’s last book.

*Re: Wall and *Camera Lucida*. “Nothing to do with what I was interested in [...] very much beside the point,” or not, I hold onto the idea that Barthes’s book plays a small part in the backstory of Wall’s turn to black and white photography in 1996. The mid 1990s reverberate through with Wall’s own version of a palinode of sorts. He begins to orient his practice towards an ontological investigation of the photographic event, something which leaves a general notion of the medium, its interrelationship with other mediums, and the very notion of a degree zero behind.² I flag *Camera Lucida* here because just one of Wall’s black and white works—the 1996 work known as *Passerby*—has always struck me as being inflected by a dialogue with Barthes, in particular with the detours or wrong turns of desire that tempt the critic in Part I of the book. So many

echoes of St Augustine's *Confessions* here! Love, as a few critics—Eduardo Cadava and Paola Cortés-Rocca, and differently again Elissa Marder—have acknowledged, is one of the great themes that Barthes will carry through to the end of his book.

Passerby itself is a large nighttime photograph taken as if from the seat of a car, perhaps as it rounds a corner. The headlights of the car have always seemed to me to light the work, cutting a swathe through the darkness, as it were. These fictive, apparently accidental lighting effects caused by the vehicle's motion and/or change of direction—oddly durational at far right, highly reflective and over-exposed in face of the stop sign at left, with innumerable flickering shadows and lights punctuating the leaves of a tree at centre—all suggest the photograph is un-staged, taken by chance, seen as if in a flash. Nevertheless, in the strong light and shadows cast by the artificial lighting, we should recognize a highly wrought piece of work. In fact, the lighting is variable—at once blindingly intense with the dumb stopping power of headlights, mottled, seemingly in motion, lit by the high angle of a streetlight and thus trailing off into everyday experience—and hence, “natural” enough in terms of a dark night in the city, but theatrical through and through. More to the point is the theatre of shadows this congeries of lighting effects brings into visibility. Charged with the unlimited power of haptic narrative in this photographic underbrush, we come up against what the critic Gregor Stemmrich describes in another context as “the artistic use of the *idea of the punctum*” (153-54). What seals the deal for me here is the *punctum*-like shadow on the wall at right. Barthes says quite frankly that a “photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me” (*Camera* 27), and this shadow literalizes and actualizes that statement in a way that sheds a strange but revealing optic on the hurried scene which has apparently just taken place on the sidewalk. There isn't only one figure in the scene but two; the one we see looks back to a second partly obscured by the tree. The lewd shadow below the visible man's raised arm characterizes the event, which has just transpired, as a sexual exchange between two figures.

But *Passerby* does more than simply figure this past through the shade's reply; the title itself thematizes the passing moment of a dialectic, which leaves Barthes's *punctum* behind, on the sidewalk and very much beside the point. The allegorical drive here takes one elsewhere, perhaps most importantly to “—Fugitive beauté,” that “fleeting beauty” the poet Charles Baudelaire identifies in his poem “*A une passante*” as “A lightning-flash... then night!” Much loved by Benjamin, Baudelaire's sonnet “To a *Passerby*” takes a unique moment of “the dawn” as its theme (Benjamin, *On Some Motifs* 323). As Benjamin puts it, “The delight of the urban poet is love-not at first sight, but at last sight. It is an eternal farewell, which coincides in the poem with the moment of enchantment.” Wall's *Passerby* should be thought of as a sonnet on the

model of Baudelaire's own love poem as much as a photograph, and importantly in terms of what Benjamin describes in Baudelaire's poem (not to mention Proust's figure of Albertine) as "the stigmata which life in the metropolis inflicts upon love" (324). But these inter-textual links to Baudelaire and Benjamin—both of whom crop up again and again in Wall's corpus—are also beside the point. To put it figuratively, Baudelaire and Benjamin are found on the same bookshelf as the Barthes or even Brassai's *Paris By Night*. A lot of "B's," to say the least. Historical black and white photography, you see, is a very bookish affair, a point which all of Wall's large-scale, black and white photographs intended for the gallery wall reimagine. Here I refer to the so-called photo ghetto, which so many artists and photographers from the 1970-80s used for traction or tried hard to escape. And this includes the black and white photography of Bernd and Hilla Becher, whose wall-mounted typologies remain close to the form of the book.

In any case, folding the mysteries of looking into the certainties of reading is the problem. Thus, to underline a previous distinction, the light in *Passerby* is not the slow, awakening light of Wall's *Dawn*, a large backlit transparency from 2001 where emergent colour slowly blossoms from the shadows of twilight. The subtleties of *Dawn* to which our eyes make slow, timeworn adjustments, much like standing before a Rothko, are substituted in *Passerby* by the many "shock[s]" and "catastrophe[s]" of artificial light (*On Some Motifs* 324). In so doing, *Passerby* points to a different origin than *Dawn*. Rather than originating or given slow birth from an idea, which was then restaged, it seems *Passerby* was most likely born on the streets of the city, not exactly with the photographer out motif-hunting (a favourite pastime), but more likely still caught unaware while driving his car "...then night." This unique origin of the photograph, its "moment of enchantment," is what Benjamin means by "love [...] at last sight."

Allegory in Wall "begin[s] by not photographing" what he sees, and then proceeds by reconstructing the scene with actors from memory on the model of Baudelaire's "The Painter of Modern Life." All of which adds up to saying that if *Passerby* brushes up against the *punctum*, then it does so as part of the scrupulous process of making, not taking, the photograph, a process reiterated time and time again in the darkroom, with the print at stake lying in a bath of developer, when reading has the edge on looking. This renders a detail like the *punctum* intentional, rather than unintended as Barthes argues, as well as beside the point. "The detail is of no great importance," as Benjamin puts it (*Origin* 175).³

This light shed on details should also remind readers of the artificial—or at least, exaggerated optics of—light in the Winter Garden Photograph, and equally the light in that portrait of Kafka as a child mentioned by Benjamin, also in a winter garden. Or,

for that matter, the many portraits that Barthes selects for his book, which key our eye to his eye in a series of reflective gazes. I think few authors will disagree that this doubling of the gaze is another version of his intimate address. From the onset we look at the photographs he looks at, we are beside him at his table going through his archive of photographs, looking over his shoulder as it were, and I think we have little trouble identifying with him when he finds and holds in his hands and fingers the Winter Garden Photograph: “There I was, alone in the apartment where she had died, looking at these pictures of my mother, one by one, under the lamp, gradually moving back in time with her, looking for the truth of the face I love. And I found it” (*Camera* 67).

Like the “the pillars of a baroque balcony in Bamberg”—Benjamin’s special touchstone for Baroque apotheosis—the apartment, the desk, the pictures, the lamp, Barthes’s recurrent trope of fingers on a hand, “his other hand,” like the Sandanista in Wessing’s photograph, “stretched out, open, as if he were explaining and demonstrating something”: these are the supports and props that hold up an artificial transcendence. As Benjamin warns his readers of apotheosis, “never does their transcendence come from within” (*Origin* 180). Lacking the radiance of the symbol, Benjamin and Barthes both suggest, apotheosis is seen under an “artificial light,” under a “lamp” (140). And in Barthes’s case the illusion is held up by what we presume to be the fingers of his own hand—hands and fingers in this book always intriguingly more than simply a fetish.

Perhaps this is why Barthes tells us in confidence, i.e., in the bracketed or closeted spaces that so often literalize his intimate themes, that position us in complicity with his existential predicament and bind us in shared weaknesses:

(I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the “ordinary;” it cannot in any way establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound.) (*Camera* 73).

NOTES

1/ And we all thought it was just Derrida doing what he did best when he glimpses this very tension within the *studium* and *punctum*. See Derrida (267).

2/ Two texts in which one can see the traces of this shift are Wall’s “Frames of Reference” (*Artforum*, vol. 42, no. 1, Sept. 2003, pp. 188-92) and *Depiction, Object, Event* (Stichting Hermeslezing, 2006).

3/ Benjamin writes, “Any person, any object, any relationship can mean anything else. With this possibility a destructive, but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance” (175).

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