

beyond the impossible

Camera Lucida and the satisfaction of the drive

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Introduction

When one mentions the name Roland Barthes, the first association of course is the theorist. Yet, there is another Barthes, the Barthes of *Camera Lucida* for whom the object of his writing became endlessly interchanged with his love for his mother. His writings in *Camera Lucida* circulate on the unutterable essence of the Thing which we encounter when we face silence. However, where the words fail, there can be no 'object elevated to the dignity of the Thing'.¹¹ In this way, Barthes' writing is not simply a renunciation of a loss, but is rather Barthes himself who is made into an object. We can say that this object is Lacan's *object a*, which, in that it corresponds to the drive, is, as Miller suggests, '*satisfaction as object*'.²

To exemplify this relation between the subject and 'an idealised, forced image of itself', reflected upon a sublimated object, Lacan uses the case of courtly love. In the Lacanian reading of courtly love, the Lady, as idealised other who serves as the inspiration for poetic achievement, must be absent from the scene. Since the 'inaccessibility of the object is the 'point of departure', the Lady becomes a representation whose presence as a desiring subject is radically erased by a process of sublimation. Lacan concludes, 'In this poetic field, the feminine object is emptied of all real substance'.³

The object of desire caught up in the unfulfillable search for an eternally 'lost' pleasure. What this means in the simplest terms is that desire will always exist in the register of fantasy, and of impossibility. But the drive is always a failure which brings satisfaction. That is why the implication of Lacan's traversing of fantasy, as the *being of drive*, is a free assumption of the unavoidable.

I - Impossible Breath

This essay primarily addresses one question: what does Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* stand for? Likewise, the most awkward question demanded of one is the most obvious one: 'Why do you want to study this subject?' or, 'Why do you want to do this?' It is obvious that the question will be asked and, accordingly, we can say that it has already been asked. All the same, one cannot ever be prepared to answer this question. The response will always be different, and failing/lacking. When I asked this question to a friend preparing for a Photography MA interview, the mood turned grim and was followed by a short silence.

I experienced a similar emptiness upon facing an exam paper. I was asked to reply to the question, 'What Photography means to Barthes?' What was (of me) expected was to refer to the earlier 'impersonal' writings of Barthes, which implemented a semiotic and systematic analysis of

photography. Yet, as I engaged Barthes' last book, *Camera Lucida*, I tumbled into a silence and it was then that I realised that *Camera Lucida* is itself 'silenced' by most critics. What can there be in this book which forces it, and the reader into a silence? In this sense, I will suggest that a reading of *Camera Lucida* requires a psychoanalytic approach. In other words, the subjective status of Barthes in *Camera Lucida* should be aligned with the photographic theory he handled in the book. The late, 'personal' Barthes is suppressed by the critics, precisely as he himself was repressed in his earlier works. Reversely, the late Barthes is what was repressed in the earlier Barthes. In relation to this point, it is necessary to explore the way Barthes has been discussed, repressed critically. The once Marxist semiotician and theorist (with responsibilities) is now downgraded because of the subjective writing in *Camera Lucida*, where his words are freely uttered.⁴ The very freedom of these words are attributed to his 'egoism'. However, this freedom which was, in Barthes' words, an 'undecided intention' can be aligned with the Lacanian proposition 'do not compromise your desire' or as Žižek put it, 'do your duty.'

From this point it is possible to predict that what the usual criticism denies, that the condition of the book's existence is a certain silence in Barthes himself. The silence is not the silence of *Camera Lucida*, but is the emergence of silence in Barthes. This silence runs parallel to the painting 'Scream' by Edward Munch. As Lacan suggests, the scream is 'a bone stuck in the throat'.⁵

Barthes' *Camera Lucida* is generally degraded or silenced in order to preserve a more 'meaningful' image of him. The price to be paid for it is that it is ultimately reduced to one side of the opposition between the 'theoretical' and 'subjective'.

Camera Lucida is a book of theory, but it is also a narrative, almost a novel. As it examines the photographic sign, it can be considered as a question of semiology. On the other hand, *Camera Lucida* is not semiological. Rather than exploring the relation of signs, it analyses the individual photograph's relation to the actual object.

In Barthes' earlier work, his method of writing as acknowledged by him, could be taken as a writer's painful detachment from the world. Arriving at *Camera Lucida*, Barthes no longer accepts the reductionism of his earlier model, thus seeking to transcend earlier, troublesome satisfactions. He enters different modes of space, complaining of not enough satisfaction. He said, 'A discomfort I had always suffered from: uneasiness of being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical.'⁶ Within this site of critical language, Barthes contested the ultimate dissatisfaction which is, in Freud's words, 'the alleged satisfaction as suffering.'⁷ The repressed performative aspect in the earlier writings is something which wished to be spoken, yet, it was not attained or has been blocked. It would seem that in some way the 'theoretical' writings of Barthes was blocking what he was wanting to say. That which stands out most glaringly amid this site is the relation to satisfaction, which can be connected to the Freudian notion of the symptom and its relation to the satisfaction and to the defence. Miller points out that the symptom is defined by Freud as a mode of jouissance with its link to the defence.⁸

In this way, Barthes' earlier work can be indicated as a symptom of lack or a blocking of what *Camera Lucida* stands for : the space that is between the impossibility of pure performative and the repressive factor of the language. In the earlier work, what is pure performative has to vanish in order for the theoretical to occur. In relation to this, where then can one disclose the location of the Camera Lucida? What is the space of the text - its boundaries, where does the text begin and end? If Barthes' critical theory of the 60s and 70s relates to the notion of the symptom, how can *Camera Lucida* stop being a symptom? A reference to Miller may be helpful in this context. He refers to a 'formal envelop' of the symptom. In the artistic work, the symptom separates itself from the jouissance and no longer envelops it. In this way, *Camera Lucida* is a symptom which has dropped its 'formal envelop'. Miller writes,

the symptom is jouissance as sense enjoyed by a subject, while a piece of work offers a sense to be enjoyed by whoever wants to enjoy it.... the condition of creation is that the subject realises that the Other does not exist.⁹

The question of the relation between the subject and object brings us to the questions of 'How Barthes can be found in his writing?' 'How can he turn into himself through his writings?'

To complement Slavoj Zizek's recent book *The Fragile Absolute*, Judith Butler comments, 'Discussing Hegel and Lacan is like breathing for Slavoj.' This novelty of comparison between the author and his subject implies a question: 'How can one breathe through writing a book?' or, in other words, 'How can a book breathe?' Let us reply with a story by Paul Auster, *Locked Room*, about an Arctic explorer trapped by a blizzard and who built himself an igloo in which to wait out the storm. While the outside was surrounded by wolves, the major problem was the inside. Because of the specific climate outside, his breath was literally freezing to the walls - with each breath, the walls became that much closer, until at last, there was no space left for his body (254-255) His breath, the very thing needed for his existence, was turned into an object of his catastrophe. Mysteriously, this man wrote a book which was out of print for a long time called *Arctic Adventure*.

In this way, we can say that breath, prior to writing, is caught in an antagonism. We realise the very situation of this impasse in Zizek's words: 'the path to catastrophe turns out to be only a fictional detour bringing us back to our starting point.'¹⁰

II - Impossible Drive

Before proceeding with an analysis of *Camera Lucida*, let us insert some elements of psychoanalytic theory of the drive. The focus of this is to pursue the dialectics of satisfaction and drive.

A 'good old fashioned' case, the Fort! Da! game Freud introduces in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1919) portrays a child's response to a disturbance. The child throws the spool away, says 'Fort' (gone) and pulls it back in, and says 'Da' (here). Freud wrote that this game was a manifestation of the child's anxiety about his mother's absence. When he throws the spool and says 'Fort', he replays the experience of the loss of an object; when he reels it in, saying 'Da', he is satisfied by the restoration of the object.

For Lacan, the game is more than a representation of the absence of the child's mother. It is something that the child cannot utter/represent. It is this lack, this *something unrepresentable*, this absence in the child, as well as that in the mother, which resists symbolisation, that drives him to push and pull the string repetitiously. At this moment, the child's true object of desire (the mother), becomes impossible, unattainable. The spool, the positive object that the child encounters, is already a substitute for the original lost object. This child's work of play reflects a hidden force, a blind compulsion to repeat that which can never be sublated in the medium of symbolisation. That which the child has in the place of this unattainable loss is not what the child is playing with, but the drive that forces him to play with it. This force is what Lacan calls the drive, the libido that is not a 'truth' or a 'knowledge' that the child can remember; neither is it the child's moan. On the contrary, it has to be taken in the realm of myth, of construction. That is what lies behind Lacan's description of the drive as a 'knowledge in the Real'. The mythical status of the drive is explained perfectly by Zizek with a reference to Freud's *A Child is Being Beaten*.¹¹ Freud considered the first phase of the beating-phantasy as represented by the phrase: 'My father is beating the child.' This transforms into a next phase of 'I am being beaten by my father.' This second phase, for Freud, is the most important one and 'never had a real existence'. It is never remembered and it can never become conscious.¹² Zizek attributed knowledge of this phase to the Lacanian non-subjected, 'acephalic' knowledge in the real which produces satisfaction. Thus the 'Fort Da' game is a child's response not to the mother's disappearance, but his or her response to the question (which came about by the mother's going away) of his or her existence. When the symbolic situation cannot give him an answer, the only way he can take it is to go beyond language, to the realm of the phantasy which, for Lacan, 'is never anything more than the screen that conceals something quite primary, something determinant in the function of repetition'.¹³ The determinant and primary *something* hidden behind the fantasy construction is the Freudian *Trieb* that Lacan specified as 'the other reality' which regulates human activities and 'has no day or night, no spring or autumn, no rise and fall. It is a constant force'.¹⁴ It has a determining role to play in the repetition. Thus, this repetition and what determines it is connected with the drive.

The drive is not a matter of serving some need. The repetition here is not at the service of need, but a desire that, always trying something new, and yet something that is the same. The spool in the game of fort-da is 'a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his...'¹⁵ It is a metonymical displacement, a playing at jumping the ditch which surround's one's bed. The assimilation of this object to a signifier is an appeal to 'incantation'.¹⁶ This use of a 'magical' formula is the mythical dimension on which one tries to build a world. This object is what Lacan call the *objet petit a*.

Lacan designates fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) as a particular relationship between the divided subject ($\$$) and the object of fantasy, that is objet a.¹⁷ The lozenge (\diamond) symbolises the relation between the two. this relation is the status of the divided subject being at once attached to (\wedge) and detached from (\vee) object a. Thus, we may say that the spool the child plays is an object a which is always already lost. It is an ersatz of what is lacking in the m/other, that is lack of the signifier. We can clarify this lack of the signifier on the level of demand. The repetition of the fort-da game is not the child's demanding the mother's return. As Lacan suggested, this sort of demand would be properly expressed in a cry.¹⁸ Rather it is the demand of the mother which causes problems for the child (endlessly/infinately). Again, the child can refuse this demand via the cry. But the most horrifying dilemma is far beyond this. What does the mother *really* want? What does she hide behind her demand? This question at last relates to the child's being, to what he is and what he represents for the mother? As the language is structurally lacking, the reply with it is not enough to tell the child what he is. The spool replies where language fails. This is the reply from the dimension of the drive. the drive puts the child amid a motion around which his world is oriented.

In this context, we should be careful not to isolate the object from language. The object reveals the lack of language, and it thereby stands-for this lack. We can say that language confirms the object of fantasy as being irrevocably lost. Thus, for the child, 'The Mother' is a primordial lost and the fantasy object fills this void. Lacan makes it clear that the subject of enunciation is empty, non-functional and inconsistent, although the subject of the enunciated is a fantasmatic 'entity' which fills/satisfies the lack of the subject of enunciation.

Lacan's point in this, that is, the distinction between the enunciation and the enunciated, can be sustained only within the space of desire as determined by the mediation of language. It is this mediation which produces a split. This split separates the reachable, symbolically structured reality and the lack of the Real. The Real is not a material matter or substance but the mark of the lost Thing. What the child has/experiences in the play as 'reality' is constituted by the lack of the Thing, of the mythical object. Any sort of encounter with it would result in the satisfaction of the drive. The satisfaction is not related to the object, but to the impossibility of the desire. The impossibility lies firstly behind the Thing that only comes about by the symbolisation itself. In *Mythologies* (1973), Barthes puts that before speech, the signified is nothing more than 'an undefined mass of concepts which could be compared to a huge jellyfish, with uncertain articulations and contours.'¹⁹

It is clear that the paradox is this: the 'act', the process of symbolisation, produces this Thing. Before this act there is nothing behind the veil of language but the *object a*, which is a fantasy object in that it poses a diverse form of the Thing. We can also see this paradoxical mediation in the relation of mortality and immortality. The entrance to mortal life emerges through the loss of immortal life and the venture of return can never be accomplished because the reply (desire of the Other) is the domain of the signifier. On that point, one should not consider a clear cut opposition. Rather, Lacan's theory is more complex. In Seminar VII, Lacan clarifies his view of the relation between the Law and the Thing. For him one cannot know of the Thing without the Law. One desires the Thing because the Law prohibits it. This paradox precisely corresponds with the notion of Freud's notable proposition: 'the aim of life is death'. Lacan explains:

But the Thing finds a way of producing in me all kinds of covetousness thanks to the commandment, for without the Law the Thing is dead. But even without the Law, I was once alive. But when the commandment appeared, the Thing flared up, returned once again, and I met my death. And for me, the commandment that was supposed to lead to life turned to lead to death, for the Thing found a way and thanks to the commandment seduced me: through it I came to desire death.²⁰

The desire for the return of immortality means eventually the desire for death, which takes place on the realm of the Symbolic. How then, even without the symbolic, was the subject 'once alive'? What would come before the commandment? An attempt to tackle these questions leads us to a paradox that itself can be understood as the Freudian concept of the death drive. In the 'Abyss of Freedom', Žižek offers German idealist philosopher F.W.J. von Schelling's hypothesis. For Schelling, what precedes the Word is the subject's pure-self, the 'infinite lack of being'. Žižek notes that the Schellingian pure-self is the frightful act of shrinking one to oneself, denying every possible existence outside himself. For Žižek, this would be the Hegelian notion of the madness which is defined as the experience of a pure Self, the moment that the subject shrinks into itself, as the 'night of the world'. Žižek uses his favourite quotes from Hegel:

The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity - an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none happen to him - or which are not present. This night, the inner of nature, that exists here - pure self - in phantasmagorical presentations, is night all around it, in which here shoots a bloody head - there another white shape, suddenly here before it, and just do disappears. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye - into a night that becomes awful.²¹

As Žižek puts it, the Word, the commandment, appears only in relation to this fissure. To return to 'being', this pure self, the inner nature must exteriorize itself. The move from innerness to becoming an object can only possibly occur by attaining a name. The 'I' is produced through the name. Žižek alerts us here against a simple opposition of a pure Self and the act of naming. The act that produces the symbolic space is 'the point of utter madness in which fantasmatic apparitions of "partial objects" wander around'.²²

We are forced to a necessary loss of infinite life and to the acknowledgement that it is subjectivity which is itself the cause of this loss. This brings us to Freud's paradoxical claim that the death drive is a concept that explains why life is aimed at death. The drive survives from every annihilation of symbolic order, it stays as an immortal reminder. The Lacanian premises of the drive qua immortal and irrepressible life relates the essence of the void which is opened up by the mortality (symbolic) of the subject.

The Symbolic interference which produces the space of desire, creates the division that detaches accessible reality from the void of the Real. In other words, the emergence of language opens up a hole in reality. Our feeling of 'Reality' actually covers this lack, the void. How the implications of these theoretical points are significant to interpret *Camera Lucida* will be the focus of the next chapter.

III - Possible Satisfaction

In the very first sentences of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes points out a photograph of Napoleon's brother which amazed him. Looking at the photograph Barthes said, 'I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor'. Since he could not share this amazement with anyone he forgot it and began an impossible search to discover the essence of photography. It was impossible because the very essence of the photograph, which Barthes later defined as 'That-has-been', is actually 'originally' lost.

To unfold this we can follow Barthes' path. The essence of photography, for Barthes, cannot be negated. It cannot be repressed and every person experiences it with indifference.²³ We should take this point as the experience itself which everyone experiences with indifference. To open this lets us go back to that photograph and ask our self a question, 'What is in that image that caused Barthes' amazement?' It is precisely the something beyond the 'that-has-been', the gaze of the Emperor, which is actually this 'that-has-not-been' in the visual space. In other words, that which bore amazement was the very essence, noeme, of a photograph, -that-has-been' organised around -that-has-not-been-, around an emptiness. As Lacan puts it, 'In every form of sublimation, emptiness is determinative'.²⁴ For Lacan, this emptiness is not simply a void but it is 'extimite', excluded interior or which 'it is thus excluded in its interior'.²⁵ This precisely corresponds to the state of the Emperor's eyes which is an excluded interior in the image and it is this finding which opens up a wound in the viewer. The unpresence becomes a kind of presence qua the eye of the brother which

turns into an object via a chemical process of photography. Barthes writes: 'Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photography is always invisible: it is not it that we see'.²⁶

Since through his solitude he had forgotten about this amazement, Barthes was overcome by a desire which constantly and steadily pressured him: he 'wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was in itself'.²⁷ This constant force which led him to write *Camera Lucida* was a more elusive tension that he had previously encountered, allowing him to transgress into a different kind of zone where he 'began to speak differently'.²⁸ He rejected the moderation of critical language.

For each time having resorted to any such language to whatever degree, each time I felt it hardening and thereby lending to reduction and reprimand.²⁹

With *Camera Lucida*, as he began to speak differently, Barthes pursued a pleasure more than not too little or not too much, an immoderate pleasure. This ontological desire became a necessity, rather than previously as a need or a survival. This is a relationship of desire which involves a certain form of satisfaction of the drive. Barthes' object of concern is not the narcissistic identification with the Photograph, it is with the sublimation that serves the drive, a satisfaction which has a distinct relationship to the object.

Photography for Barthes resembles other modes of representation, but it is quite distinct from them by its relationship to the referent. What is special to photographic representation is that its relation to the object is uncoded and constant. Due to the chemical process of photography and its capacity to register the light rays from an object, it can be identified as an 'emanation' of the referent.³⁰ For Barthes, in Photography one can never deny that the thing has been there. At the same time, he said,

Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see. In short, the referent adheres. And this singular adherence makes it very difficult to focus on Photography.³¹

As Barthes put it, the stubbornness of the Referent in always being there would produce the essence³² of Photography. The photograph is 'tautological', i.e., '...a pipe, is always and intractably a pipe'.³³ For this reason photography is unclassifiable. The object is not important, the essence of Photography is the same.

In the same way, sublimation is the drive's precise destiny. The drive points to the past and, as Freud puts it, time does not change the unconscious processes. The notion of time cannot be applied to them.³⁴ The libido always stays the same. The detours of the drive always aim in the direction of satisfaction, and can be substituted for a new satisfaction. However, the substitutive satisfaction is, as Miller suggests,

as good as the original satisfaction. The object is not important, the libidinal aim is obtained at all costs and as such it is the same.... Jouissance is jouissance. The drive does not know the 'semblant of jouissance'. The drive satisfaction is real.³⁵

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes acknowledges that because of its exactitude with the referent, the photographic image can bear a traumatic nature. This traumatic character of the photograph shields it against the onslaught of the symbolic. Barthes argues that the traumatic photograph is absolutely literal. It bars connotation because it bars language. In this point of view trauma resembles jouissance. The trauma of a photograph is not located at the matter of content. What is peculiar to photography is the certainty of the object's *having-been-there* before the camera. For Barthes, in the photograph, the past violently enters into the space of the present.

Barthes wanted to ignore the Other. What he now desired existed only in the object, the referent, 'the beloved body'. But the Other, which he called 'the voice of knowledge' always tormented him with a No: 'importunate voice ...adjured me, in a severe tone. 'Get back to Photography'. Barthes profoundly rejected the Other's demand and was opposed to the reduction and classification of photography. The price he paid for this was being at 'an impasse and, so to speak, "scientifically" alone and disarmed'.³⁶ This desire for something other than his accepted social identity (Barthes was always defined as a theorist) results in a kind of death: the death of his identity. His negative gesture

of leaving this accepted space behind, resembles a death and forms a space for *Camera Lucida*, for artistic sublimation.

The dissatisfaction, or better put, *not-enough-satisfaction*, forced Barthes to a position where he was 'witnessing the only sure thing that was in him: desperate resistance to any reductive system.'³⁷ So leaving critical language behind, to achieve a universal theory of Photography, Barthes began to write from personal impulses.

Photography is located at the intersection of the chemical and the physical. While the first is light's action on the surface, the latter is related to photography's opticality.³⁸

Posing to the camera for Barthes is equivalent to having another body. He feels that the Photograph produces one's body or mortifies it. Posing in front of the camera is to attain life from the photographer. Barthes described this as an imaginary dependence through which one is exposed to the anxiety of uncertainty about something that will almost certainly appear at the end of the process. Being photographed attracts him with the prospect of being seen as he would wish to see himself, as well as being intimidated by its *not-enough-satisfaction*. He called this an uncertain filiation. What will be produced is quite different to what is painted or drawn. The subtleness of photography stops one from working *upon skin from within*.³⁹ But, at the same time, as Photography always has a relation to expression, one can only be hopeless by it: 'the body never finds its zero degree, no one can give it to it'.⁴⁰

Barthes compares Photography with Heautoscopy, a way of talking about the sight of self, of the photograph not as mirror but as an access point into a definition of identity. While heautoscopy was associated with hallucination, in photography the wound is related to one's seeing oneself on a piece of paper. Photography is a process which transforms one into a photograph, and through this process, endurance is inevitable. Barthes inscription that '...to become an object made one suffer as much as a surgical operation'⁴¹ is tied to such an imaginary essence.

The photographs that work for Barthes comprise two elements. A first element is a set of ideas to which one gains access to the symbolic. This domain for Barthes opens up a cultural and political prospect that permits interpretation of photographs and the intentions of the photographer. This field generates a kind of general interest and moderate enthusiasm, which Barthes represents by the Latin word *studium*. The word indicates the learned elements *but without sharp acuity*.⁴² In the sense of its effects *studium* corresponds to *pleasure*.

Secondly, the space opened by the *studium* is fractured by *another effect which creates an intense wound* on the looker: this is *punctum* and its effect clearly coincides with the notion of *jouissance*. The *punctum* defies symbolic articulation and it is an element 'which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me'. The *punctum* is also a 'sting, speck, cut, little hole - and a cast of the dice'.⁴³ Despite the fact Barthes begins by associating the *punctum* with the 'detail', one should be careful not to take it with a separate existence: both the *studium* and *punctum* are complementary ways of 'reading' photographs, bearing to a 'structural rule' rather than an independent essence. But the very paradox of the *punctum* is: it cannot be 'seen' (if only because an essence remains by definition unseen), yet, there is no *punctum* outside the photograph. We may propose that the *punctum* is a psychic reversal of the photographic referent to the point that one can no longer distinguish between the referent as 'outer' and the referent as it becomes part of the material substance of the photograph. That is to say that the referent is caught up in the very circularity of the moebius strip. As if influenced by its mythical power, the *punctum* encircles the whole of the photograph along with its hidden essence: from now on a function of drive (unlike that of form), it becomes a 'pure representation' of the *noeme* 'That-has-been'.⁴⁴

The second section of the book is about his looking among family photographs for the *most telling* picture of his mother. Barthes primary concern is with the photograph of his mother as a child and his wish to find in it some 'essence' of his lost mother. It is a blurry snapshot of his mother in the Winter Garden, a photo which he does not include in the book of photos. Nevertheless, when he intimates why their attachment was so intense, it is the voice (or its absence) to which he alludes. He tells us he never 'spoke' to his mother, in the sense of speaking about the world. He writes:

We supposed, without saying anything of the kind to each other, that the frivolous insignificance of language, the suspension of images, must be the very space of love, its Barthes ~~misses~~⁴⁵ said that what makes the Winter Garden Photograph so great is that his mother let herself be photographed. She lent herself to the photographer. She placed herself in front of the lens with discretion. He sees this photograph as a new moment. It has the splendour of her truth, although it does not look 'like' her (being of a child Barthes never knew). He is comforted by its actuality - the fact that it literally emanated from his mother. He writes, 'She did not struggle with her image.'⁴⁶ He finds her neither showing nor hiding herself.

As it always points to the past, Barthes sees death as implicit in each photograph. The photograph's temporal implication of the past necessarily connects it to the death of a person in a future time, a moment which may itself be in 'the past'. Barthes sees the photograph as a kind of resurrection. It continues after the person is gone. It has a life of its own. He likes the fact that what he sees has existed in front of a lens. The Winter Garden image is a though a part of his mother. He asserts its truthfulness: 'Photography never lies: or rather it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature *tendentious*, never as to its existence'.⁴⁷ Whatever meaning may be constructed from a photograph, something has been 'fixed' by the camera, something was *there*. Thus, due to its optical-chemical process, the gaze is 'touched' by the photographed object. By this Barthes takes it that, due to the physical action of light and the chemical action of development, there is a tangible link between what was photographed, something 'that has been', and the photograph as object. It is precisely due to the very reality of this - the certainty of an existence within the past, that photography becomes necessarily bound with Death.

The nature of photography as an indexical imprint of the object means that the photographed object or person has a ghostly presence that can be compared to the return of the dead.

In discussing a photograph of Lewis Payne (from 1865 by Alexander Gardiner, Payne tried to assassinate the US Secretary of State W.H. Seward.) in his cell awaiting execution ('this will be and this has been'⁴⁸), Barthes describes this as a perfect concept: that of an anterior future, a future that is already a past, and this future is death.

The cinema does not convey the same metaphorical meaning as photography, it is not analogous as regards death. In photography, the object has been *captured* within the hole of the camera and can never succeed to escape. However, in cinema something has *passed* in front of this same hole, but one has no time to 'see' as one's eyes shut. The *punctum* cannot be operative in cinema.

Contrary to the notion of the cinematic referent, the photographic referent is distinguished by a *necessary uniqueness*. Barthes holds that photography's referent is distinct from other system of representation. He calls the 'photographic referent' not the *optionally*, but the *necessarily* real thing. The object has been there in front of the lens 'without which there would be no photograph'.⁴⁹

Barthes capitalises 'Photography' in accordance with its unusual 'evidential force' of time and authenticity. For him, with Photography, one can 'never deny that *the thing has been there*'.⁵⁰ This is a necessary relation in every photograph. In this way, this quality of Photography produces a contradictory movement between the present and past. This paradox of Photography precisely is the essence of it.

The photograph belongs to the 'class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both'.⁵¹ In an earlier work, 'The Photographic Message' (1961), the same idea is expressed in different words: a perfect *analogon* of reality - something that in fact defines the photograph to common sense - it is essentially a non-coded message (1982). Summing up, we may say that the referent is caught up in the photograph. The description of the photograph as object is replaced by an interest in the way photographs are generally 'read'.

In relation to a subject a photograph seems simultaneously failing and lacks. The 'self', as Barthes remarks, never coincides with its image, since a photograph *immortalizes* that which is by essence 'light, divided, dispersed'.⁵² On the other hand, the photograph is a failure or a lack in that it creates a total image and in so doing equates its living referent and death. For only the corpse, according to

Maurice Blanchot, is finally its proper image. Thanks to the lacking, the photograph paradoxically opens the site of the representational, pointing to difference there where unity was first assumed.

Barthes writes: 'I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe which has already occurred...* every photograph is this catastrophe'.⁵³ The disaster of this loss is the impossible 'object' of anxiety, impossible since it cannot be appropriated by presence. Nevertheless, this impasse was not enough to stop Barthes writing *Camera Lucida*. On the contrary, something in him caused an endless detour to find some hidden ground, a 'truth' of photography.

IV - The Hidden Ground: The Gaze

The position of the Winter Garden photograph in the book is crucial to the book itself. What is so special about this photograph? What can be extrapolated from his search about the nature of portraits which work? Or, about how they work? It is the invisible kernel around which the text circulates: the text refers to a photograph we never see (as viewers) which this precisely reflects the structure of the gaze.

Barthes' inquiry of the Winter Garden photograph, as well as the rest of the photographs he consults in the book, is nostalgic, in a way that, for him, photography is always about death: the death of the signifier. Nostalgia entails a repositioning of the subject in relation to the gaze. In *Looking Awry*, Žižek notes that what fascinates one is not the exhibited locale 'but the gaze of the naive "other" absorbed, enchanted by it'.⁵⁴ The work of nostalgic object is precisely taming the effect of the gaze of the other. In the nostalgic fascination, one is trapped in an illusion of homogenous self-mirroring. The conflation between the gaze of the other and our own produces a phantasm and this 'blinds us to the fact that the other, the photograph itself is already gazing back at us'.⁵⁵

Lacan's notion of the gaze includes the question he poses regarding the possibility of imagining the gaze at all, as well as the impossibility of perfect self-reflection. Barthes writes, 'I can never see properly, can never include myself in the totality of my field of vision, the point in the other from which it gazes back at me'.⁵⁶

To understand the mechanism of the 'gaze' one has to look beyond the visual. What is in the spectator's eye is what he or she does not see. This object is the traumatic *object a*, the object cause of desire. Behind the narcissistic relationship toward the image we encounter the real, the traumatic object in ourselves as well as in the other. We are all representatives of 'nothing' to represent.

The task of the *object a* in the drive is quite different from the desire. In the case of scopophilic drive, the gaze invokes the discontinuity in the visual space and returns to the gaze, catching us in our voyeuristic act. Amid the moment, when the gaze returns to us, we ourselves were 'seen' by the object of our seeing. Hence, we enter the register of the scopophilic drive. In the case of the voyeuristic act, the desire of the voyeur is to look for the mesmerising Thing, for any remnant of sub rosa behind the curtain. But at the moment when the voyeur makes himself seen to this spot in the picture he actually enters into the register of the drive. Now, the hunter becomes the hunted - now it is he who 'is caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision'.⁵⁷ In this way, the voyeur's activity towards his goal to 'see', and the process he makes to achieve it, starts to work as a goal in itself and produces its own satisfaction. The voyeur repetitiously tries to see something behind the curtain, something that forever escapes its finding. On the level of the drive, there is always a failure which it can bring satisfaction. This leads us to the point which the satisfaction and failure is connected. The circularity of the drive's motion which produces satisfaction is closely related to the failure to which we will now turn.

V - Impossible Loop

In her article, 'On Critics, Sublimation and the Drive', Juli Carson offers a distinctive reading of *Camera Lucida* where she considers the book as a specific space which Barthes fills as a critic-analysand. For her, this space is a 'new "site" of analysis' which is a subjective space and requires a dialectical relation with the 'non-site' that is ultimately material public doxa.⁵⁸ She connects this

distinction with Robert Smithson's elaboration of physical and representational space. What is important for Carson is to show that the necessary relation of the subjective site to the non-site of language produces an illogical condition of the personal. This is precisely the antagonism of both the subject and the photograph which Barthes encounters in *Camera Lucida*. However, Carson suggests that the elaboration of this relation between the subject and photograph was already rooted in Barthes earlier works.

Barthes own subject position in *Camera Lucida* is a kind of relation which is aligned to the drive's detours, to a blindspot that is generally dismissed or unseen by the other critics. This exclusion is itself reflected in the interpretation of Barthes' fundamental notions, *punctum* and *studium*. Carson offers a different reading, based not on the use value of these concepts, but on Barthes' relation to the effect of these elements, where he and his objects are blended together. At this point, Barthes became his own object while his mother turns into his daughter. In parallel to this conflation, *studium* and *punctum* are related to each other. Both are the effects of the photograph's paradoxical quality, something 'has-been'. Nevertheless, the *studium*, as Carson put it, tames this effect while *punctum* disturbs it.

In Carson's text, the book is taken as a process. In order to explain the notion of the *punctum* the first part is connected to the second. This relation was essential to demonstrate the structure of the *punctum*, which is not only a detail in the photograph, but also has an atemporal status which reflects that of the spectator. That is the primary cause of the fascination and anxiety of the photograph.

In this way, the *punctum* belongs to a subject who cannot consciously determine it. How then can a single detail, a partial object in the photograph become a more complicated and larger interrelation between the image and the subject? What is the impulse that put Barthes in a contrary position in front of the Winter Garden photograph? Carson situates her response in the drives' atemporality. She follows a line in *Camera Lucida* that turns out to be a moebius strip where Barthes mother 'becomes his little girl'. In this way, the 'truth' of the *punctum* lies in that structure rather than in the single detail in the photograph. This structure precisely corresponds with the drive's circularity.

But is the issue of the reflexive turn just a reversal of the roles? Is it simply Barthes' becoming a mother to his mother? The explanation of the drive's reflexive motion in a basic reversal reveals only that these oppositions will not be able to yield the complete dimension of the drive's circularity. Why should one disagree with Carson on this point? In the example of scopic drive's loop the active looker is not simply reversed to his or her passive to-be-looked-atness. This misunderstanding exemplifies errors in the film theory of the seventies. It used a Lacanian elaboration of the gaze to explain the classic Hollywood film's repressive structure as women are turned into the passive object of men's active voyeuristic gaze.

However, as the drive constantly participates in the notion of 'se faire' the Lacanian perspective differs from a simple reversal. This 'making oneself' seen in the drive needs to be explained with one more step, one which includes the relation to the Other in the picture. Looking as the Winter Garden Photograph, Barthes sees his mother as a child. Entering into the dimension of the *punctum*, Barthes writes, 'During her illness, I nursed her, held the bowl of tea she liked she had become my little girl, uniting for me with that essential child she were in her first photograph'.⁵⁹ And, he adds that he experienced her as his feminine child and this was for him a way of resolving Death. As he looked at the photograph, Barthes became his mother (the Other), and he qua mother looking out at 'Barthes' from the perspective of the photograph. In this way, the drive's reversal provides Barthes with a pace of 'making himself seen'. In exactly the same way, becoming being-seen in the death of oneself, in the image, reveals the point at which Barthes looks at himself from the future. On this point, we can remember Barthes amazement with the photograph of Napoleon's brother, his relation to the eyes of the emperor. Is not this attachment revealing to the scopic drives' relation with death? The question brings us to the ultimate Freudian proposition that is 'every drive is the death drive'. In this way, we can suggest the important distinction between two premises, 'the Emperor's death and 'the Emperor as death' - or, we may state 'the Death is Emperor'.

The death of Barthes reveals the living Barthes in the figure of his mother. This embodies the structure of photography that he defined as a return of the dead. The death drive then truly is the something that is endless, immortal life itself, and that haunts one unceasingly in a repetitive

pulsation. This, the cause of Barthes' pain, 'unless, utopically, by writing, whose project henceforth would become the goal of my life'.⁶⁰ Then, Barthes utopia, writing *Camera Lucida*, provides him a satisfaction not in reaching the Goal but in the circuit which leads to it and systematically fails to reach the Goal. The last termination can be taken as becoming free from the cycle of this pulsation of the death drive. Barthes writes, '...from now on I could do no more than await my total, undialectical death'.⁶¹ Paradoxically, the writing of *Camera Lucida*, the Goal of his drive, misses the point upon its own satisfaction.

Following a similar path Carson turns to the portrait of Lewis Payne to support her argument for the *punctum's* atemporal status. The image is of somebody, who is sitting, waiting, with the knowledge that his death is imminent. And more importantly, there is nothing to be done. His hands are barred, around each wrist is a metal bracelet and between the bracelets a bar. His hands are held apart, he cannot wring them, they are useless things resting on his legs. Barthes calls this an accordance of past and future. In this photograph death is known by the subject, there are no means left to consider any continuation of his life. This indicates what every image attempts to hide: the end. 'Whether the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe'.⁶²

Carson connects this 'death in the future' with the Freudian notion of life/death drives, life's ultimate goal is death.⁶³ The goal is not the ending but mobility itself. The fundamental function of the drive is the movement in both directions, a circularity. For Carson, Freud's definition of the drive's movement is one which always strives to return to a departure point by his or her leading forward precisely explains the *punctum's* atemporality. This structure of drive is channelled into the book from the beginning. Carson writes,

Such a photographic-subjective operation could only be exposed performatively by Barthes, by putting himself in the picture, so to speak, first as photographed subject in part one and second as the melancholic subject in part two.⁶⁴

In relation to this, the lost mother linked to the lost photograph. How then can the operation of the drive be located, if *Camera Lucida* is taken as a lament for Barthes' lost mother. Is he reproaching himself upon a lost love object?

VI - Impossible Mother

Mourning, as Freud pointed out in the 1917 essay 'Mourning and Melancholia', is the process by which one, compelled to give up an attachment, holds onto the lost object by gradually symbolising or incorporating it within the ego. In Freud's ideal state of resolution, mourning terminates with the eventual withdrawal, or transference displacement of libidinal investment from the lost object to a new found one. If not worked through, Freud pointed out, mourning turns into its continuous counterpart, pathological melancholia. Loss can thus be understood precisely as a kind of transference working through of the ambivalence, as attempt to recover the lost object in and as representation.

Freud treats mourning as a predictable occurrence, a 'reaction to the loss of a loved person...', a 'pain that seems natural to us'. It is, in Freud's view, a type of 'work' in which the libido is 'withdrawn from its attachments' to a lost object. The mourning process involves an identification between the living mourners and the newly deceased in that both are situated 'between the world of the living and the world of the dead'. It is necessary for the mourners to kill the dead a second time. Mourning inspires ambivalence toward the deceased, a merging of love and hatred that, because of the identification between the dead and the living, can also be turned against the surviving self.

Freud kept the narcissistic relation to objects and the process of identification separate. As the first can be related to the *ego ideal*, the second is located in the symbolic order and is termed *ideal ego*. Lacan retained Freud's insight that the narcissistic investments of objects and the process of identification were different phenomena.

The 'romanticised' dyad of mother/child is the paradigmatic coupling on which illusions of oneness and goodness are built. However, from a psychoanalytic perspective, there is no symbiosis between the mother and child *qua persons*. Symbiosis occurs, rather between signifiers, between objects and within the order of the Other. In his suffering at his mother's death, Barthes indicates the originality of the suffering which reflects what was unequivocally in her that cannot be reduced. This is something in her that makes Barthes' suffering *original*. This something that has no signifier, therefore can be related to Barthes' notion of the *punctum*. This surplus value is not accessible, and it is precious to one which gives rise to desire in the realm of impossibility. Barthes quotes Proust, 'I did not insist only upon suffering, but upon respecting the originality of my suffering', and he stresses that 'originality was the reflection of what was absolutely irreducible in her, and thereby lost forever'.⁶⁵ *Camera Lucida*, the book itself is part of his mourning process, turns out to be an irreducible object, and marks the appreciable something through which Barthes seek to replace the loss itself, thereby attempting to fill up the void in himself. Barthes writes, '...for what I have lost is not a Figure (Mother), but a being, and not a being, but a quality (a soul: not the indispensable, but the irrepressible. I could live without the Mother...., but what life remained would be absolutely and entirely unqualifiable (without quality)'.⁶⁶ This important distinction, between the mother as an *object* of love and the *cause* of this love should be maintained. Barthes' mother is simply that which makes him desire. But, for what sake he desires the object of love is the cause of desire. The *object* and the *cause* are not the same. It is not losing the object, but that attachment, that quality, which makes Barthes' life miserable.

Camera Lucida is the effect produced by Barthes' encounter with the real of loss and mourning. In a way, the book itself satisfied by covering over the loss. In representing the psychic disturbances of the real, the symbolic order functions at one remove from the real, placing a mask of alienation over this order which Lacan described as the impossible-to-bear, the place of non-being.

Looking at the Winter Garden Photograph Barthes complains, 'I cannot transform my grief... no culture will help me utter this suffering... the photograph - my Photograph - is without culture: when it is painful, nothing in it can transform grief into mourning'. By writing this impossibility of the mourning process, Barthes is nevertheless attempting to carrying out the drives force against that which resists symbolisation. In this process, Barthes himself becomes this photograph, as the photograph shows his mother as a child who standing there becoming his daughter - ' ... then the photograph is undialectical' and it 'flows back from presentation to retention'.⁶⁷

The uncontrollable, as in *Photography*, still lies in Barthes as if it could break through once again as the book itself. This drive nowhere appears as though the symbolic were original, but rather as if something initially irreducible had been brought to the symbolic. This is the enigmatic ground of reality in both *Camera Lucida* and *Photography*, the irreducible remainder which cannot be resolved into utterance or into the representation but always remains. A residue of Barthes' love remains in the form of a materiality in the form of his book that is forever unresolved by writing it, and that remains as the shape of possibility. This point precisely complements Barthes' notion of the *punctum*. There is no overcoming this impossible to the Symbolic, because the Symbolic is itself this impossibility, the productive grasping for, as Barthes called it, absolute irreducibility in his mother, that is ever more about to be grasped, and that, in truth, grasped , and that, in truth, grasps Barthes as the subject of his desire.

The irreducible longing is Barthes' relation to both *Camera Lucida* and *Photography*, and to what conditions them, but which forever eludes them as an originary lack. Importantly, this is not a veil that can be lifted, not a pathologized melancholy against which one might imagine the work of a more proper mourning, a mourning whose pretended 'success' was for Barthes the ultimate failure of *Camera Lucida* and *Photography*. Indestructible melancholy in fact names an impossible mourning. Impossible because the lost object is absent from the start, and thus, utterly unrecoverable. This mourning is a form of yearning for a loss that Barthes has to negate was never precisely present. How can one 'properly' negotiate with a loss that was never present?

In coming into existence, for Schelling, the subject unhappily takes on a role, puts on a face: it 'cannot grasp itself as what it is, for precisely in attracting itself it becomes an other, and this is the basic contradiction, we can say the basic misfortune, in all being'.⁶⁸ In a sense, Schelling's

foundations display this structure of substitution, putting a human face on the primal yearning which that face also necessarily disavows. Žižek reads this crucial turn of thinking in Lacanian terms. As he says, the price of the subject's positing of itself out of the ground of obscure longing and in the form of the Word is 'the irretrievable loss of the subject's self-identity'.⁶⁹

In life, one must negotiate endlessly with the loss for which there can be no full recompense. There can be no definite renunciation if one is remaining alive. Of course, this fact does not prevent one from trying. For Barthes, 'waiting' became his writing, his carrying out a campaign which is the impossible drive.

This brings us back to starting point that we can conclude with the various perspectives that we have been exploring so far. What then has Barthes done to himself in writing *Camera Lucida*? What has he invested of himself that made such a difference in his life and death? To reply psychoanalytically to this is not to say that *Camera Lucida* is a reflexive mediation of Barthes' desire, but that it is another mode of reflexivity that is neglected by his critics. It is the drive's reflexivity where Barthes is the subject of the drive. The subject of the drive is grounded in a constitutive surplus, something that is impossible and, ultimately Barthes himself. In other words with melancholia for his diseased mother, Barthes sees himself as a *dreadful-Thing*, and, by substituting it through his writing, he frees himself from the meaningless effect of jouissance and succeeds in disengaging himself from its ongoing. So the subjectivization of the drive is this very withdrawal, this pulling away from the Thing that is the realisation of lack in being.

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Notes

¹ Lacan defined the Sublime as 'the object elevated to the dignity of the thing.'

² (1996: 313).

³ (1992: 149).

⁴ An example of such a criticism is Victor Burgin. In 'Re-reading Camera Lucida', Burgin condemns the book since in this work he alleges Barthes represses the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious. Yet, it could be suggested that Burgin's own reading of *Camera Lucida* lacks any psychoanalytic depth.

⁵ For more detail on this point, see Zizek, 1992: 116-117.

⁶ 1993: 8.

⁷ Quoted in Miller, 1998: 43.

⁸ For more detail, see Miller 1998.

⁹ Miller, 1998: 44.

¹⁰ Zizek, 1998: 133.

¹¹ 1997: 19.

¹² 1997: 170.

¹³ 1998: 60.

¹⁴ 1998: 165.

¹⁵ 1998: 62.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

17 1993: 280.
18 1998: 62.
19 118.
20 1992: 83.
21 1999: 8.
22 *ibid.*
23 1993: 77.
24 1993: 130.
25 1993: 101.
26 1993: 6.
27 1993: 3.
28 1993: 8
29 *ibid.*
30 1993: 80.
31 1993: 6.
32 *ibid.*
33 1993: 5.
34 *Beyond*, 299.
35 1998: 50.
36 1993: 7.
37 1998: 8.
38 1993: 10.
39 1993: 11.
40 1993: 12.
41 1993: 13.
42 1993: 26.
43 1993:26-27.
44 1993: 96.
45 1993: 72.
46 1993: 67.
47 1993: 87.
48 1993: 96.
49 1993: 76.
50 *ibid.*
51 1993: 6.
52 1993: 12.
53 1993: 96.
54 1998: 114.
55 *ibid.*
56 *ibid.*
57 1998: 92.
58 4.
59 1993: 72.
60 72.
61 1993:72.
62 1993: 96.
63 Such a notion echoes similar sentiments in the writings of Georges Bataille.
64 25.
65 1993: 75.
66 *ibid.*
67 1993: 90.
68 1994: 115.
69 1996: 47.