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Camera Lucida, subtitled "Reflections on Photography", is one of the most famous philosophical inquiries into the nature of photography. Divided into 48 fragments it appears to be just as much a contemplative text of grieving for his mother who had died shortly before the book was written than a rigorous scientific analysis of the medium of photography. Brian Dillon, in a Guardian article on 26 March 2011 states that "Camera Lucida is a distinctly odd volume to have attained, in the 30 years since its publication, such a canonical place in the study of photography" and goes on to ask: "What exactly does one learn from Camera Lucida?" (Dillon, 2011).

Looking for my own understanding of the text, which I found strangely difficult to make sense of, although the language is less demanding than many of Barthes' texts on semiotics. Reading the book in German and English at the same time helped.... trying to answer Dillon's question for myself I came up with several issues that seemed relevant in analysing the media of photography itself as well as photographs that carry a special meaning for the person looking at it.

- The author ascribes a fundamental subjectivity to photographs - and raises the issue of the viewer's emotional response with regard to the photograph as an emanation of a reality that is past and cannot ever be revived in the same way again.
- He draws a strong link between photography and death, ("everything which happens within the frame dies absolutely once this frame is passed beyond. When we define the Photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means they do not *emerge*, do not *leave*: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies." (Barthes, 2000, p.57)
- With regard to temporality, photographs for Barthes represent that which "has been" i.e. the photograph repeats mechanically what could never be repeated in real life.
- The photograph, Barthes informs us, is not a "copy" of reality, but an emanation of past reality. (Barthes, p. 88), going back to his famous argument, made in an earlier text, that the "Photograph is an image without code. . (Barthes, p. 88)
- The most interesting idea in the book strikes me the lengthy discourse on the two levels photographs can be divided into: Barthes calls it "the studium" and "the punctum" - the first one representing the objects represented, their meaning and the knowledge we have of the context in which it was taken. The "punctum" on the other hand is that which captures the viewer in a photograph, with an immediacy that can very often not be explained and is of an emotional quality that defies intellectual analysis.
- At the time it was written considered 'unacademic', the insistence on the "punctum", the subjective quality (caused no doubt as he describes by the sight of photographs of his mother with whom he lived almost his whole life) which can "hit" us looking at photographs, which brings Barthes close to a psychoanalytical discussion on the effect photographs can have on the viewer. This phenomenon is certainly something I can identify with and remains, for me, the most valuable insight I have on reading Barthes' text, even though it took another essay (David Bate's essay on "Photography and Memory" for me to be able to fully understand and appreciate the meaning of this distinction in the theory of photography.