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LOOKING AT FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS: READING CAMERA LUCIDA WITH MERLEAU-PONTY

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Abstract

Camera Lucida, written by the acclaimed essayist Roland Barthes in homage to Jean-Paul Sartre is one of the most frequently cited books in visual studies. The melancholia and literary flavour of the book, which pursues a history of 'Looking', is influenced strongly by Barthes' mourning and grief of his mother, which he was unable to pass for many years, until his death in 1980. It is stated that the scope and definition of 'punctum' for Barthes, which relates photography strongly to temporality, death and loss, is rooted in Sartre's view of the negative phenomenology of looking, in which the activity of looking and being looked at carries the burden of loss and lacking. This article, asserting that Barthes' insights on photography correlates at many points with M. Merleau-Ponty rather than J. P. Sartre, departs from the experimental idea to reread Camera Lucida in guidance of the optimistic viewpoint on looking of M. Merleau-Ponty rather than J. P. Sartre. Besides enriching the discussions on photography, searching for a possible relation between Barthes and Merleau-Ponty could be considered also as an endeavour to mitigate Barthes's grief, and in this way enable a transition between family photographs and social memory.

Keywords: Camera Lucida, Barthes, Merleau-Ponty

AİLE FOTOĞRAFLARINA BAKMAK: CAMERA LUCIDA'YI MERLEAU-PONTY İLE OKUMAK

Öz

Deneme yazarı ve eleştirmen Roland Barthes tarafından fotoğraf üzerine yazılmış olan Camera Lucida, görsel çalışmalar alanında en fazla gönderme yapılan eserlerden biridir. Yazarın deyişle bir 'Bakma' tarihinin peşine düşen kitabın dilindeki edebi lezzet ve melankoli, önemli ölçüde Barthes'in annesine duyduğu sevgisinden ve ölümüne kadar onu hiç terk etmeyen yas ve keder hissinden kaynaklanır. Camera Lucida Jean-Paul Sartre'in Le'Imaginarie kitabına ithafen yazılmıştır. Nitekim Barthes'in 'punctum' kavramının tanımsal ve duygusal kökleri büyük ölçüde Sartre'in negatif bakış fenomenolojisine dayanır. Sartre, bakmak ve bakılmak ilişkisini, öznenin kayıp ve eksilmenin yüküyle kurulduğu negatif bir deneyim anı olarak kavramlaştırır. Barthes'daki 'punctum' da benzer doğrultuda geri döndürülemez zamansallık, ölüm ve kayıp ile bağ kurar. Bu makalede, Barthes'in fotoğrafa dönük fenomenolojik sorgusunun birçok noktada J. P. Sartre'dan ziyade M. Merleau-Ponty'nin imgelere dönük yaklaşımı ile bağ kurduğu düşüncesinden yola çıkılmış, metin Camera Lucida'yı Sartre'in karamsar bakışı yerine, Merleau-Ponty'nin optimist bakış fenomenolojisinin kılavuzluğunda yeniden okumak deneysel fikrinden hareket etmiştir. Merleau-Ponty ile Barthes arasındaki irtibatın olanaklılığını araştırmak fotoğrafa dönük tartışmaları genişletebileceği gibi, ayrıca bir yanıyla Camera Lucida'daki keder ve yas duygusunu yatıştırmayı/iyileştirmeyi denemek ve fotoğraf ile sosyal bellek arasındaki geçişi açmak çabası olarak da değerlendirilmelidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Camera Lucida, Barthes, Merleau-Ponty

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INTRODUCTION

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 constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your studium: period, clothes, photography; but in it, for you, no wound. (Barthes, 1982: 73).

There is little doubt that the world we live in contains a myriad of photographic images, but among them, this paper focuses particularly on the kind of photographs that come into direct contact with a person’s ‘biographical past’. In this regard, looking at intimate/family photographs is different from photographs in, for example, a magazine or newspaper, because the ‘reference’ of this kind photograph and the viewer are in reciprocal communication; that is, they know each other. To put it more precisely, as they both recognize each other, the person in the photograph is not a total stranger, and the consciousness of the subject/viewer can posit the ‘existence’ of the other in these photographs within a collection of spatio-temporal relations in the world. In Sartre’s words, the viewing subject makes the object of the photograph ‘present’ to him/herself (2004: 15–19). In this manner, looking at family photographs brings with it the peculiar experience of encountering oneself for the viewer, and as a consequence, the exposed emotions, giving breath to the personal history, are various, flitting between life and death, as well as joy, grief and melancholia, etc.

This paper focuses mainly on the experience of looking at family photographs and examines the relationship between the terms ‘looking’, ‘photography’ and the ‘self’ in a social and historical being. There are various conditions and moods encountered when viewing family photographs that touch our personal history. For instance, Hirsch (1997) wrote on post-memory in the context of the transgenerational transmission of the Holocaust trauma, relying on family photographs as a primary medium of analysis. Kuhn (2002) presented some photographs from her childhood, the surface of which she had to scratch in order to find her own memory and narration. Additionally, Spence (1986) extraordinarily photographed herself during her struggle against breast cancer, and reflected on her body and being through those photographs. On the other hand, Barthes, an acclaimed literary critic and essayist, who had been a reference point for these writers above, also experienced this kind of an encounter with family photographs, but in a different way; especially through The Winter Garden photograph, which he depicts in *Camera Lucida* (1982).

In structuring the theoretical frame of this discussion, the main guiding text has been Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* (1982), which he wrote after the death of his mother. The book, which exposes the heavy grief of the writer, is determined strongly by the pessimistic phenomenology of looking manifested by Sartre. It pays homage to Sartre and his book *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (original work published in 1940). Barthes was nourished vigorously by a phenomenologist perspective in his later writings, presents in this book his challenging interrogations

about the potential and power of the photographic image, which according to him, goes beyond the boundaries of the materiality of the photograph itself.

The intention here is, first, to point to the motivation and affection in the background of *Camera Lucida*; and second, to search for a possible link between Barthes and the optimistic phenomenology of vision of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a well-known phenomenologist from the post-World War II French tradition of philosophy, in order to gain insight into the subject of communication with family photographs. Although Barthes did not mention Merleau-Ponty in *Camera Lucida*, this academic essay proposes reading the book from the phenomenological perspective of Merleau-Ponty. Interestingly, some of Barthes' more elementary questions, searching for the enigma of images, relate more closely to the phenomenological examination of Merleau-Ponty on the visible world in his article "Eye and Mind" (original work published in 1961); than to Sartre's view on looking and being looked at. *Camera Lucida* contains many connections to phenomenology, enriched by Barthes' creative and experimental art of writing, including his ultra-subjectivist perspective that also complies with Merleau-Ponty's vision of partiality and subjectivity. In this manner, it is supposed that rereading Barthes through Merleau-Ponty can offer a new vision, widening the intellectual and emotional potentials of looking at photographs in an emancipatory way. In this way, Barthes' grief in *Camera Lucida* may be mitigated; and so his concept of 'punctum', which will be underlined in the following section, can be reframed in order to cross the border from photography to post-photography in the context of history and social memory.

The theoretical discussion is divided into three main sections. The first section deals with Barthes' arguments concerning communication between the subject and family photography; while in the second section, the relationship between the reflections of Barthes and Merleau-Ponty will be considered, and Sartre will be touched briefly to trace the phenomenological sources of Barthes' claims in *Camera Lucida*. Finally, the theoretical background in the first and second sections will be examined in the conclusion, looking at family photographs from the perspective of the relationship between social memory and photographs.

From Roland Barthes to Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Let us begin with Barthes, who was –and still is– an important thinker who drew attention to communication through photographs. Here, the term 'communication' should be comprehended as something occurring between the subject/thing (image) and the observer. As Berger states, "we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves" (1972: 9). In the same way, rather than focusing on the photograph or on the viewer alone, Barthes also focused precisely on the communicative stream between the two.

In his early theoretical writings, Barthes wrote on the ideological and mythical usages of photography (1977: 15–31; 32–51) in terms of semiotics. But his last book *Camera Lucida* (1982) differs considerably in its theoretical ground and emotional motivation in comparison to his previous writings. In this book, besides writing on art and news pho-

tography, he also deals with photographs belonging to the private spheres of life in context of *The Winter Garden* photograph of his mother. Seeking to find the essence (truth) of photography, Barthes distinguished in *Camera Lucida* two moods of communication through photographs: the 'studium' and the 'punctum', of which in this essay 'punctum' is of particular importance. *The Winter Garden* photograph, which has a special significance in the book, is told in the second part. Haunted by ambivalent feelings towards this photograph, Barthes sought out the features of relationship/interaction between photography and reality. For Barthes, photography was more than a mere representation or imitation of reality. Inspired by Sartre (2004), he stated that a "photograph always carries its referent within itself; a specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent" (Barthes, 1982: 5). He continues by agreeing with the following statement of Susan Sontag (1990), the acclaimed essayist/writer also who wrote on photography (1982: 80-81):

Photography is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star.

According to this assertion, photography is apprehended as a real, delayed trace, being in direct contact with reality rather than being a mere representation or technical copy of it. Pursuing this approach, defining the photograph of his mother as "the treasury of rays" emanated from past, Barthes finds himself imprisoned within the frame of his dead mother's photograph, which is unable to tell or show him anything to calm his deep feelings of grief and mourning, but more precisely, his feeling of 'loss', which was a crucial subject matter also for Sartre. In words of Barthes, "[w]hatever 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" (1982: 6).

Nevertheless, despite the gap between "the silent present material image" and "the absence of the referent", contemplating a photograph of him being hugged by his mother, Barthes can relive the rumpled softness of her *crepe de Chine* and the perfume of his mother's rice powder (1982: 65). Asserting that the photograph evades us and does not narrate, Barthes does not denigrate its power, but rather emphasizes that it is more than a mere photograph. In the words of Burnett, "the referential power of the photograph overwhelms its status as a medium" (1995: 36). Aware of this dimension of meta-communication with the photographic image, "Barthes is torn by the desire to foreground the operations of the image as an image, while at the same time wanting to gaze at the photograph as a 'primitive, without culture'" (Burnett, 1995: 36).

Returning to the terms 'punctum' and 'studium', Barthes' desire to control and explain the image refers to his conception of 'studium', which, ultimately, is always coded, and points to the cultural, informative qualities of the photographic contents, including the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions, etc. (Barthes, 1982: 26). The 'punctum', on the other hand, 'breaks' the 'studium' (Haverkamp, 1993: 264). Being uncoded, in other words, transcending the semiotic coding system, the 'punctum' points

to the primitive, wild or unnameable in the photograph. According to Barthes, it is “this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (1982: 27). ‘Punctum’, due to this incapacity to name, causes a disturbance. It pricks, and this makes Barthes shudder in ambivalence. Unlike ‘studium’, ‘punctum’ touches the desired wildness, the desire of being ‘without culture’ in front of the photograph, in which the undeniable presence of the mother in the past refers merely to the flat death in the photograph, to the nothingness of existence in the present. For him, Death is the ‘eidos’ of the photograph that he was ultimately seeking (1982: 15). And there, he found his mother.

Spending a long time looking at the photograph of *The Winter Garden*, Barthes attempts to reach the ‘essence’ he was looking for (1982: 6). Knowing that it is impossible to deny that his mother as a child was there in the photograph, he finds himself in a superimposition of the present and the past. In front of the photograph of “his mother as a child”, he tells himself: this little girl (his mother) is going to die (1982: 96). More precisely, through the photograph he looks at the still living death of his mother, at the future perfect of the photographic image (Lury, 2007: 5). According to Burnett, these feelings of loss contribute to the process of interpretation of photography in Barthes’ writings. As mentioned in the epigraph of the text above, Barthes did not share the photograph of *The Winter Garden* in *Camera Lucida*, but despite its noticeable absence, it is clear that it is the invisible punctum of the entire book (Derrida, 2001: 43), determined strongly by Barthes’ grief. Accordingly, in *Camera Lucida*, positioned within an irresolvable conflict between the “appearance in the photograph” and “its truth in the world”, Barthes desires to understand this meta-communication with the photographic image.

Although mentioning his adornment to Sartre and his book, and leaning largely on the negative, disturbing notion of the gaze of the ‘other’, as borrowed from Sartre, Barthes, while looking at *The Winter Garden* photograph, did not and could not escape the gaze of his mother. In this example, he desires to feel the wounding effect of ‘punctum’, because it underlines his grief and proves his existence in the living world, while also marking him as a social being in mourning. More precisely, in this way, through being seen by his mother in the photograph he becomes a part of the visible world. “Oh, if there were only a look, a subject’s looks, if only someone in the photographs were looking at me!” (Barthes 1982: 111), he writes. “The *punctum*, then, is a kind of subtle [other] beyond – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see” (1982: 59). Looking at *The Winter Garden* photograph for days and days, he studied the little girl and perceives his mother as a child, moving back through time (1982: 69–71). In words of Barthes (1982: 82), “[h]ence *The Winter Garden* photograph, however pale, is for me the treasury of rays which emanated from my mother as a child, from her hair, her skin, her dress, her gaze, on that day.” He says that *The Winter Garden* photograph achieved for him “utopically, the impossible science of the unique being” (1982: 71).

The photograph functioned as a sort of umbilical cord that linked the body of the photographed mother to Barthes’ gaze (1982: 81). Through the emanated rays, he goes beyond that engorged time in the photograph to reach the gaze of his mother as a child,

turning him into the subject and letting him witness his advent as the 'other' (1982: 12). In this way, he comes to touch a 'history' that he defines as a period of time in which his mother was alive, but when he had not yet been born (1982: 65). It is this history that existed before him and will continue to exist after he dies that gives him a body/existence as a 'social being'. The photograph approved his selfhood in grief for his mother, and through it he was able to retrieve his history. As mentioned in the book, Barthes desires a History of Looking. "For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other" (1982: 12), he says. Inspired strongly by Michelet's notion of history, which aims to return the meaning of life to the deceased (Barthes, 2009: 29), Barthes attempts to retrieve his mother. He experiences himself through this photograph as being both the 'self' and the 'dead other' – at the same time both alive and 'will be dead'.

On the other side, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, based essentially on movement and the body as flesh, does not cover photography. He, taking his phenomenological inspirations considerably from paintings (especially Cezanne), maintained a strong degree of discontent towards photography, refusing to participate in discussions regarding its reality. According to Merleau-Ponty, photographs are mere representations and imitations, and so are out of touch with the experience of the phenomenological being (reality). In full agreement with Rodin, the famous sculptor and painter, he asserts (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: 374):

[Photographs] give a Zenonian reverie on movement. We see a rigid body as if it were a piece of armour going through its motions; it is here and it is there, magically, but it does not go from here to there (...). It is the artist who is truthful, while the photograph lies; for, in reality, time never stops.¹

In short, he considers that the photography freezes time. That said, the source of the 'feeling of loss' in both Sartre and Barthes is exactly this frozen Zenonian past-time in photography, which refers to unrecoverable times. In the words of Barthes, "In the Photograph, time's immobilization assumes only an excessive, monstrous mode: Time is engorged" (1982: 91). Yet for Barthes, as mentioned above, photography is not a "copy" of reality, but "an emanation of the *past reality: a magic*" (1982: 88). Conversely, Merleau-Ponty's assertion that photography turns life in motion into stone, and so annihilates any possibility of intertwining, reconfirms his uncanny feelings about the processing of the technical gaze when taking a photograph. Although hitting to the first obstacle between Barthes and Merleau-Ponty, we will not give up with following his reflections on the phenomenology of gaze. In the following pages we will depict the way he rescues the gaze itself in an optimistic way through the chiasmic experience of the viewer being viewed, however excluding the photographic gaze from his phenomenology.

Merleau-Ponty, seemingly, was not over concerned with the question of absence, death and loss, but was fascinated by painting, purporting that "the painter does not depict representations in his mind, but rather paints with his body, which is mingled with the perceived world" (Jay, 1993: 314). In Merleau-Ponty's view, "Immersed in the visible by his body, itself visible, the seer does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by means of the gaze, he opens onto the world" (2007: 354). The gaze in

Merleau-Ponty, never dwelling on the surface, resembles rather a tranquil voyager travelling over it. On the other hand, the same process rather resembles the “medusa gaze” in Sartre, which freezes time, i.e. turns its object to stone. Barthes, at this point, seems to resonate with Merleau-Ponty rather than Sartre. Comparing photography with magic rather than the drilling gaze of the Medusa, or the surgeon gaze of modernism as stated by Benjamin (1968: 233), he writes towards the end of *Camera Lucida*: “I cannot penetrate, cannot reach into the Photograph. I can only sweep it with my glance, like a smooth surface” (Barthes, 1982: 106).

At this point, before returning to the discussion on looking at a photograph, it is important to review the basic concepts of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and his reflections on looking, in comparison to Sartre, who influenced Barthes’ vision of photography in a strong way. First of all, both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, from their phenomenological perspective, focused on the ‘lived body’ and appropriated a critical position against Descartes’ Cartesian scopic regime, which combined and equated the ‘I’ with the ‘eye’. Descartes, defining the self through reference to itself, neglected the “constituting gaze” of the ‘other’. In Descartes, all the dimensions of the reality and appearances are immersed in the I/self as being ‘ideas’, which is best expressed in his phrase “Cogito ergo sum” – I think, therefore I am. Although joining in the notion of phenomenology against Descartes’ philosophy, putting at the centre the ‘other’ rather than the ‘self’, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty differ in their perspective on phenomenology, as described in brief below.

In order to transcend the all-powerful cognitive subject of Descartes, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre first separated the unity of the I/self and the eye/look, by means of the existence of the other. However, in the next stage, Sartre was stopped by his own notion of discontent of being seen, which hindered the transitions and interaction between the self and other. For him, the feeling of being seen (by the other) is related to surveillance. On the other hand, the apotheosis of vision of Merleau-Ponty offers the possibility of intersubjectivity, which can be brought into discussions of photography and photographic images, specifically with reference to Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*.

Although the ‘self’ is defined as the ‘other’s gaze’ in both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, they differ in how they conceptualize the dimension of emotion caused by seeing and being seen. In Sartre’s view, contact with the visible world produces nausea, and the feeling of being seen causes shame (Sartre, 2009). In other words, for the observer, being seen by the other is both disconcerting and impoverishing. Moreover, Sartre, considering the gaze as an abstract power that is apart from the eye, was haunted by the question of how to achieve a totalistic knowledge of reality; and in this regard he could not completely distance himself from the Cartesian approach to gaze. In other words, in Sartre’s thought, there still exists an omnipotent inhuman and external gaze “which turned vision into a view on the world, rather than in it” (Jay, 1993: 304–312).

In contrast to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty gives an account of view, suggesting that in no manner does it exist as an external power. Uniting the extreme subjectivism and the extreme

objectivism in his notion of the world (1962: xix), he proposes that “I do not see it [the space] according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is around me, not in front of me.” (2007: 367). For Merleau-Ponty’s perspective (body as flesh), the gaze does not hurt the body, but rather envelopes and clothes it; and at the same time opens it up to the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: 251–252) as a pervious entity. This is why it is at the same time called alethic.² In Merleau-Ponty’s optimistic and joyful vision, ‘looking’ is apprehended in a dialectic way through his notion of ‘intertwining’ (chiasm) between the ‘world and the self’ and the ‘self and the other’. For him, gaze produces a sense of tangibility and wonder at the same time. In other words, Merleau-Ponty substitutes his interpretive and searching “alethic gaze” for the assertoric “medusa gaze” of Sartre (Jay, 1993: 309).

In Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of vision, the subjective meaning and the formal structure remain in an intertwined relationship (Jay, 1993: 302). In the first place, he defines the subject, instead of being a mere living creature, as being the self-contained absolute source around which the world forms itself and begins to exist through the selfhood of the subject. In other words, without the subject, the world would not exist in perception (1962: ix). At the same time, it is in the world itself that all truths cohere. The subject and the world are united within a reciprocal and intertwined relationship. In words of Merleau-Ponty, “... the world is given to the subject because the subject is given to himself” (1962: x). The notion of intertwining in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of vision is positioned against the dualistic categories of Descartes. The ‘perception and imagination’, the ‘subject and world’, the ‘self and other’, are all defined in an intertwining relationship, instead of being parts of different camps. Since the self and the other exist within the world of coherence, the ‘self’ is indistinguishable from the consciousness and gaze of the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: xi). By means of an encounter with the gaze of the other, the self can witness his/her own being as an object/other, and thus justify the desire for a confirmation of existence for the observer (although not satisfying it).

Barthes, looking at The Winter Garden photograph, indeed desires to share a gaze with his mother in the photograph, as this would bestow upon him a history rather than gorgonising (turning to stone), haunting and impoverishing him like the medusa gaze of Sartre. In other words, in looking at the mentioned photograph of his mother, he is attempting to bring the frozen/imprisoned time in the photography into movement. He wishes to travel with the light that is radiating from the past towards the present in order to get in touch with history. Barthes, in desiring to share a gaze with his mother in the photograph, longs for this kind of a chiasm that would enable him to move between life and death, body and world, present and past, and as a result, to cope with the never-ending grief. In this sense, although Merleau-Ponty has a resolute antipathy to the frozen photographic image, his phenomenological vision of ‘looking’ (through its chiasmic nature) offers Barthes the potential to defrost the imprisoned instance in the photographic image.

The following section makes a rereading of Barthes’ ‘punctum’ from the viewpoint of Merleau-Ponty, with the intention being to identify whether a productive connection

exists between the two. Merleau-Ponty's vision is expected to provide a more positive perspective for looking at family photographs, which would mean reconciling Barthes with death and alleviating his grief.

Re-reading Barthes' 'Punctum' with Merleau-Ponty: Tough Transitions

Can the concept of 'punctum' be reinterpreted within a conception of gaze in the way Merleau-Ponty thought about it? Does this "aletheic gaze" in wonder (rather than intense grief, anchored in the idea of death) suggest any novelty or contribution to the content of the 'punctum'? At first sight, the term 'punctum' itself seems to be open to contributions from this notion. For Barthes, punctum was the prickly disturbance of the selfhood, based on the consciously or unconsciously remembered past via the touch of an arrow that was aroused from the photograph. In the very peculiar case of looking at the photograph of his mother, the emotional aura of 'punctum' referred to death; the pain of the non-presence of the absent. As Barthes looked at the photograph, through 'punctum' he put the emanated light of truth into movement, which was already travelling between the past and present.

Here, it would be appropriate to recall a further definition of 'punctum' by Barthes. For him, "... whether or not it is triggered, it [punctum] is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there" (1982: 55) and he refers to it as time in the photograph. In this manner, Barthes' 'punctum' has the potential to thaw the frozen instant in the photograph, breathing life into the photograph and linking it to the biography of the body. Unfortunately for Barthes, the experience of this chiasmic encounter with his mother (as photograph) is swallowed dramatically by his grief, and so the potential of the aletheic gaze was lost as soon as he had found it.

In order to continue with the discussion, it is necessary to recall the two discontinuities between the thoughts of Barthes and Merleau-Ponty. The first obstacle is, as mentioned in the section above, Merleau-Ponty's approach to photography, in which his phenomenology of vision is very strongly determined by the theory of 'movement', and this gives an existence to the body in a spatio-temporal context. The second obstacle in the way of an optimistic vision for 'punctum' comes directly from Barthes' unrelieved grief; i.e. his dread to the death. The two obstacles are depicted in brief below.

Photography, for Merleau-Ponty, in part resembling the effect of mirror, is comprehended as magic, a "mechanical trick", rather than appearing through a bodily experience, as in a painting (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: 359). In other words, it is almost as if photography is despised as merely a technique in which the self is represented only as a simple surface drawing.

For Merleau-Ponty, seeing doesn't happen through the eyes, as it resembles rather touching with the whole body. In *Eye and Mind*, the experiencing, seeing subject is the whole body, from which the gaze may not be extracted. Merleau-Ponty's indifference to the photographic image may sound reasonable within the logic of his phenomenology of vision, which is determined very strongly by body and movement. Owing to the absen-

ce of movement and the body as flesh in the photograph, death (nothingness) and remembrances of the past also fall outside Merleau-Ponty's concepts of phenomenology, at least in *Eye and Mind*.

It is certain that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of vision is more fluid and transitive in general when compared to Sartre's point of view, in that it intertwines the dualistic categories within a hopeful view of vision. Rather than "seeking a mystical unity in which all shadows are dissolved, Merleau-Ponty sought to explore the field he called 'being in the world'" (Jay, 1993: 308), and united the particular and subjective in the world. That said, Merleau-Ponty's notion of intertwining does not take into account the transition between movement and immobility, as two worldly categories. The kinaesthesia is situated as being out of existence, because existence is possible only because of movement. As a result, his phenomenology of vision does not include photography, in which time is frozen. Accordingly, the superimposition of the past and present that occurs during the act of looking at a photograph does not point to any kind of intertwining or interaction, according to Merleau-Ponty. He is not interested in "the delayed light of time" in photography, and so he ignores photographic materials and their interaction with the social scheme in the world.

However, the most peculiar aspect of photography, the gaze/look, which splits from the body and travels through the photographic material is not immobile. In fact, the absent look of the photographer, who freezes time and gives body to a photograph, proliferates in the world through being seen many times. Moreover, it travels in different times and spaces. In other words, this thoroughly technically mediated look is decentered in a much more radical way, having broken loose from its body as "flesh and blood". As a material product of an absent look, photography stirs different perceptions, imaginations and emotions; and in this way particularly in case of family photographs, it gains access to biographic narration and social memory. It is a pity that this connection is absent from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty's optimistic vision, as Sartre and Barthes are dramatically submerged in these terms. It is certain that later discussions of photography and its relationship with reality would have been a challenge for Merleau-Ponty, had he not died early in 1961.

On the other hand, in front of his mother's photograph, in his desire for the reality of the past, Barthes becomes immersed in deep feelings of grief that he cannot transform into mourning (1982: 76-77).

... in Photography I can never deny that the thing has been there. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past. (...) What I intentionalize in a photograph (...), it is Reference, which is the founding order of Photography. (...) ... no painted portrait, supposing that it seemed "true" to me, could compel me to believe its referent had really existed.

Haunted by the power of a photograph as evidence of a lived past, Barthes is positioned in an in-between (photography: neither merely an image, nor reality; both absent and present; material and immaterial: a reality one can no longer touch); between death and life; inclined to a history ('time before him') and melancholy or grief, rather than

joy and wonder, which would point to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. The death of his mother and his deep mourning determined the entire fabric of his claims and expressions on photography. Through such vigorous emotion he is engorged by the time imprisoned in the photograph, which belongs in Barthes' history, and is lost for forever. As such, the vehemence of his mourning closed the possible transitions between the dualism of life and death, absence and presence, grief and happiness, etc. Even in the example of his experiencing the superimposition of the past and present through looking at The Winter Garden photograph, these two times do not really intertwine. Due to the impossibility of intertwining, he seems to feel shocked and closed, rather than experiencing pain as a social being.

In the view of Merleau-Ponty, the body as flesh touches the world within an aletheic wonderment. For him, the experience of a painter, being immersed in the landscape as seeing and being seen, could very well exemplify this experience. For him, looking at a photograph doesn't merit any kind of account, because in his opinion the photograph doesn't belong to the truth of the world. It would seem that the chiasm of Merleau-Ponty does not involve the deceased, some of whom look back at the world and their acquaintances from behind the pale photographs (at least since the mid-19th century). In other words, the optimism of Merleau-Ponty could not help overcome this deep and strong emotion of mourning in Barthes that created the dramatic impact of 'punctum'. This 'punctum', which, in Barthes' words, "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow" (1982: 27), wounds him. That is to say that, although referring to the frozen time (and death), the imprisoned light in the photograph gets loose from the frame and rushes forward to the present. In this manner in the peculiar experience of looking at the family photographs, it would not be wrong to say that the photographic immobility creates movement and becomes involved in the worldly existence. Nevertheless, in Barthes' vision, the experience of looking at the The Winter Garden photograph in no way resembles to the joyful wonder and the "aletheic gaze" in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. It is rather rooted in Sartre's negative perspective of looking at a photograph and being looked at by it. In this vein, it is possible to say that Barthes himself prevents the possibility of a transition towards Merleau-Ponty's optimism. He does this in two ways. First, he loves his grief; and second, he privileges the photograph's power against his self-power. According to Barthes, a "Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (1982: 91). In this way, by completely attributing the decisive power to the photographic image itself, Barthes' subject, being nothing else than a desperate interpreter, remains powerless to bring about any change or transformation in the mood of communication with the photograph. In short, he, as the mourning subject, seems to be happy because of being subjugated to this intense feeling of mourning, having let the photograph pierce/strike him.

The source of this grief, pushing back the possibility of the chiasmic integration with the living world, is the 'self' (in the visions of both Barthes and Sartre). The self of Barthes is in no manner strong like in Merleau-Ponty's self (body as flesh), which contains

the ciphers of life and death and is open to the world. The look of the subject in Merleau-Ponty is as though “it were in a relation to the pre-established harmony with them [visible things], as though it knew them before knowing them” (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: 250). However Barthes’ subject has broken away from the world through the enigma of death. It has the desire to touch death (which gleams dramatically in the photograph) in order to continue to live just like in Michelet (Barthes 2009: 27–37), but does not have the courage to die. There, the chiasm breaks. In the experience of looking at one another of Barthes and *The Winter Garden* photograph, the aletheia, as a chiasmic feature, is completely absent.

In this discussion, the guiding motivation for pursuing the transitions between Merleau-Ponty and Barthes has been their similar questionings of the enigma of the visible. Unfortunately, the last section seems to have ended with the expression of certain insurmountable obstacles to the possibility of creating a dialogue, yet it can be claimed that the barriers erected by Barthes can be interpreted as being easier to surmount than those of Merleau-Ponty and his reflections about photography. It is important to state that, although Barthes’ mourning dominates the whole process of communication in the example of *The Winter Garden* photograph, he opposes Merleau-Ponty’s vision on photography at least at one point. Through ‘punctum’, he incorporates the frozen time into photography back to the time in flow, but in his state of deep mourning, he himself shoves the flow of time that would travel over the memory back into the photograph and vice versa; the journey that departs from the photograph back into the memory. There he loses the opportunity to reach a conception of history, which he was desperately seeking for. A history, which is being made through the process of an active personal remembering and re-interpretation of the past including images and events. In the process of remembering, i.e. moving through time, also the photograph’s meaning may be reconstructed. We know that, today, photography continues to be considered and reconsidered in terms of ‘new media’, ‘technological mediation’, the experimentally constructed ‘social self’ and memory, and these components of the discussion bring Lury (2007) convincingly into the concepts of post-photography and “prosthetic culture”.³

CONCLUSION: VIOLENT LIKE SUGAR

The concluding discussion of this essay arises out of the motivation in reading Barthes from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty, and is built on the remarks mentioned above, although not strictly confined to this discussion. The attempt to reread Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* with insights from Merleau-Ponty has been important in summoning/inviting Barthes to step outside his mourning. In this way, the ‘punctum’ in Barthes may cross the border of mourning and join different moods related to affection in order to clear a path towards history, memory and remembering rather than being closed into an opaque grief.

As a matter of fact, the act of looking at family photographs can awaken grief associated with a lost past, yet this experience is not limited to a mere emotion of grief. Fortunately, for once, Barthes also himself makes us acquainted with a different kind of affection

as he looks at his childhood photograph. There, he is concentrated on the irreducible evidence of the 'lived time' rather than the loss of it. In this encounter, he experiences the fascination of being in the world, rather than the melancholia of losing/leaving the world. Barthes says (1994: 25):

From the past, it is my childhood which fascinates me most; these images alone, upon inspection, fail to make me regret the time which has vanished. For it is not the irreversible I discover in my childhood, it is the irreducible. Everything which is still in me, by fits and starts...

All photographs, even landscape photographs that are devoid of people in family albums can anchor us to our past and awaken a whole gamut of memories which define and narrate us, as they are in a personal connection with us. Consequently, every encounter with these kinds of photographs will have its idiosyncratic 'violence'. At this point, it is worth remembering Barthes' caution that violence doesn't always have to refer to something painful; in his words, it refers to a kind of intensity/density. As a matter of course, he tries to clarify his subjective notion of violence with following words, "Many say that sugar is mild, but to me sugar is violent" (1982: 91). As a result, the photographic violence in this encounter may vary from grief and mourning, as experienced by Barthes, to wonder and exploration. In this manner, the argument should again be raised that family photographs adhere to our social memory and biographic narrative, occupying a dialectical position between life and death, but functioning on the side of life. For this reason, any attempt to mitigate Barthes' grief, which is deepened by The Winter Garden photograph through the optimistic Merleau-Ponty vision, and thus beckons him towards life, should not be comprehended as a futile endeavour.

ENDNOTES

¹ Although this article focuses on Merleau-Ponty's ideas about photography, it should not be overlooked that Merleau-Ponty has also written about cinematographic image in terms of its relation to movement (2007: 373). Moreover, he also disputes over films in terms of editing, meaning, perception processes, and more importantly gestalt psychology (1964: 58-59). Gestalt psychology correlates with Merleau-Ponty's concept of chiasm (intertwining) in that it regrets the dualistic way of reflections on body and mind.

² Aletheia (ἀλήθεια) in Greek means truth. The term, which is also used by Heidegger can also be translated as "unclosedness", "unconcealedness" or "disclosure. "Aletheic gaze" is used in contrast to the scientific and analytical sort of looking.

³ Prosthetic culture points to a frame in which "the subject as an individual passes beyond the mirror stage of self-knowledge, of reflection of self, into that of self-extension, what Barthes called 'the advent of myself as other'" (Lury, 2007: 3).

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