

Chapter 10

The Photographic Attitude: Barthes for Phenomenologists

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Roland Barthes' essay *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* is probably the most famous essay written on photography after WWII. Barthes' essay is usually taken as a theory of realism, especially since Barthes claims that a photograph is "somehow co-natural with its referent" (Barthes 1982, 76). This thesis, however, as I intend to show in this chapter, is misunderstood if we understand it to imply a simple form of causal realism; for almost all major commentators overlook that Barthes' essay is written in a phenomenological spirit. In this chapter, I intend to correct the aforementioned view of Barthes' position as a simple causal realism by arguing that the relation between photograph and referent should instead be understood as a relation between the *looking subject* and the referent, which will lead to a non-naturalist thesis about the relation between photography and referent. I shall first demonstrate that Barthes' essay is primarily not about photography taken as an object; rather, Barthes tries to describe the *experience of photograph*, which comprises both the noetic and the noematic part of what I will call the *photographic attitude*. The photographic attitude is the *consciousness of photographs*. I, finally, argue that a phenomenological theory remains ultimately unsatisfactory because the mentalist underpinnings of this approach to photography do not permit us to understand photographs as a medium.

Introduction

One of the most discussed and most celebrated essays on photography after WWII is Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. The text appeared in 1982 and has been taken ever since as the introduction of a strong "realist" position in photographic theory, which is to say, a theory that claims that photography is ruled by its relation to the referent. This characterization is

Barthes

given because Barthes' ideas are taken as a "have-been," and the "indexicality" to his claim that the photograph is a "being" (Barthes 1982, 76). Barthes' essay has been admired for its revelatory power, since, mainly by theorists who understand the referent is itself a historical, textual

Two aspects of this debate about the photographic attitude has paid much attention. The first introduces right at the beginning of the essay to Sartre's analysis of the photograph from which his essay is written. The second is Barthes' introduction of the concept of a form of "epoche." (2) Only a closer look at Barthes' reflective attitude and lack of an appropriate philosophical position on the side of cultural theorists and phenomenologists can correct the aforementioned view of the photographic attitude by arguing that the relation between photograph and referent should instead be understood as a relation between the *looking subject* and the referent, which will lead to a non-naturalist thesis about the relation between photography and referent. I shall first demonstrate that Barthes' position is satisfactorily described by the relation between the "reality" and the photograph. The thesis it should not come of an analysis of the referent can only satisfactorily be understood as a general analysis of *looking* on the photograph and what it represents.

In this chapter, by revealing the structure of the essay, I shall first deal with the question of photography taken as a medium, elucidating the following thesis: the way of looking at photographs is a way of looking at the photographic attitude is a way of looking at the attitude, noematically speaking. [Phantasie-Erinnerung]. Finally, I shall argue that a phenomenological theory of the picture, remains ultimately unsatisfactory because the underpinnings of this approach to photography do not permit us to understand the photograph as a medium.

given because Barthes' ideas about the temporal character of photographs as a "have-been," and the "indexicality" of photographic images contribute to his claim that the photograph is "somehow co-natural with its referent" (Barthes 1982, 76). Barthes' beautiful and masterful essay not only has been admired for its revelatory force, but it also has been under attack ever since, mainly by theorists who claim that the priority of the photographic referent is itself a historical, technological, and cultural construction.

Two aspects of this debate are astonishing: (1) almost none of the commentators has paid much attention to the theoretical position that Barthes introduces right at the beginning of his essay: not only did he dedicate his essay to Sartre's analysis of imagination,¹ he also claims that the position, from which his essay is written, is a phenomenological position, framed by Barthes' introduction of concepts, such as "noema" and "eidos," and even a form of "epoche." (2) Only a few US American philosophers have taken a closer look at Barthes' reflections, which is even more surprising, given the lack of an appropriate philosophical understanding of these issues on the side of cultural theorists and art historians.² In the following I intend to correct the aforementioned view of Barthes' position as a simple causal realism by arguing that the relation between photograph and referent should instead be understood as a relation between the *looking subject* and the referent, which will lead to a non-naturalist thesis about the relation between photograph and referent. I do not believe, in other words, that Barthes' position is satisfactorily described if understood as an essay on the relation between the "reality" and the "photograph;"³ rather, and for phenomenologists it should not come of any surprise, the relation of photograph and referent can only satisfactorily be addressed if we take the relation to be a part of a general analysis of *looking at* photographs. We should, accordingly, focus on the photograph and what (and how it) shows up *in* the photograph.

In this chapter, by revealing the phenomenological background structure of the essay, I shall first demonstrate that Barthes' essay is not primarily about photography taken as an object or as a praxis. I shall do this by elucidating the following three theses: (a) the photographic attitude is a way of looking at photographs (or a consciousness of photographs); (b) the photographic attitude is a way of belief/positing; and (c) the photographic attitude, noematically speaking, is a form of *imagined re-presentation* [*Phantasie-Erinnerung*]. Finally, on the basis of these considerations I will argue that a phenomenological theory, even if enriched by the Husserlian picture, remains ultimately unsatisfactory insofar as the mentalist underpinnings of this approach to photography do not permit us to understand the photograph as a medium.

The Photographic Epoche

I shall begin with a few comments on the starting point of Barthes' understanding of photography. Dale Jacquette has argued that Barthes' essay is solely based on a "personal" phenomenology (Jacquette 1982, 17), since he transforms the phenomenological task into a description of his own subjective reactions and intentions towards selected photographs, which is most visible in his central interpretation of his mother's photograph. According to Jacquette, Barthes arrives at a non-scientific and non-philosophical theory of photography on the basis of his inability to develop a universally shared idea of his subject.⁴ I think that we should reject Jacquette's argument though, given that he overlooks the overall development of Barthes' essay. While formulated in non-Husserlian and non-Sartrean terms, Barthes (in his own theoretical context) carries out his investigation in the following two—overall phenomenological—steps.

First, Barthes reduces "photography" to the first-person Cartesian perspective. Instead of taking a general notion of photography into account, i.e., instead of following certain historical patterns and existing cultural codes, Barthes tries to find a point from which he can address photography with subjective *certainty*. According to Barthes, this means that one is forced to start with what oneself and not someone else *takes to be* a photograph: "So I resolved to start my inquiry with no more than a few photographs, the ones I was sure existed *for me*" (Barthes 1982, 8). Barthes does not mean, at this point, that there were only a few photographs that *existed* in the world; rather, he starts with the assumption that we must start with a selection of images that *we take to be photographs* and not other kinds of images. This seems to imply that the nature of photography cannot be found—at least not immediately—by addressing "the" photograph, given that "the" photograph only *exists* in the form of *experiencing* photographs.

Second, Barthes combines this first step with what might be called the "photographic epoche:" he writes: "... looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be a primitive, without culture" (Barthes 1982, 7). What else could he mean if not the Husserlian attempt (in regard to consciousness in general) to bracket all pre-judgments regarding the invested (Husserl 1983, § 56–62)?⁵ What makes Barthes's text, accordingly, so interesting for phenomenologists, is its attempt to investigate *first, before anything else*, the pure and conscious relation between him (the onlooker) and the object (photographic image), i.e., to bracket external knowledge, historical constitutions, codes, and genres that might be constitutive of an image in an empirical sense. Barthes, in other words, implies with his methodological

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Consequently, the aforementioned important because they establish not, as some of the opponents would claim, as a *cal praxis* (Belting 2006a; Bourdieu 1985), (c) a sign (Scholz 2004), (d) a *2000*), which focuses on the photographic context in which photographs are *anti-postmodern* if by "postmodern" we refer to photography to an effect of disorientation (Barthes 1988). Barthes' argument is in itself as much as he does not claim that it is from another angle; he instead claims that it is *prior* to any other take on this subject. It means to deal with photography on its own within which photographs constitute themselves. Above all, Barthes attempts to go back to the mode within which we are looking. Husserl would certainly support this looking and a form of vision. Finally, photography as a *specific* form of looking is distinguished from other forms of looking and from the photographic attitude: p

The Photographic Epoche For

The turn towards vision and the look at photographs should be understood as the establishment of the being of photography. The photographs and language/television "really" see photographs if we do (Barthes 1982, 16). We all know that we live with images and pictures. We know that images, namely when there is something that interests and attracts our desire to have, pictures become objects of our

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Consequently, the aforementioned two “methodological” steps are important because they establish photography as a form of looking, and not, as some of the opponents would prefer, as (a) a social or anthropological praxis (Belting 2006a; Bourdieu 1990), (b) a material object (Maynard 1985), (c) a sign (Scholz 2004), or (d) a technology (Stiegler 2002; Flusser 2000), which focuses on the photographer, her intentions and the historical context in which photographs appear. Indeed, his position is prominently *anti-postmodern* if by “postmodern” we mean the recent attempt to reduce photography to an effect of discourses, power, politics, or ideologies (Tagg 1988). Barthes' argument is in this sense very Husserlian in its core, inasmuch as he does not claim that we are unable to look at photography from another angle; he instead claims that the consciousness of photographs is *prior* to any other take on this subject. Put differently, all levels of what it means to deal with photography are *founded* upon a specific experience within which photographs constitute themselves *as* photographs. In this way, Barthes attempts to go back to the intuitions within which phenomena constitute themselves. Above all, photography has to be investigated from the mode within which we are *conscious of* photographs. Photographs, as Husserl would certainly support, are only alive in and through a form of looking and a form of vision. Finally, then, we are able to establish photography as a *specific* form of looking because it differs in its *noematic* features from other forms of looking and vision. I shall now turn to the first aspect of the photographic attitude: photography as a form of looking.

The Photographic Attitude I: Photography as a Form of Looking

The turn towards vision and in Barthes' language towards the *desire* to look at photographs should be seen as a result of his attempt to establish the being of photography through establishing a difference between photographs and language/texts. Here Barthes' thesis is that we do not “really” *see* photographs if we do not take them to be of interest for a viewer (Barthes 1982, 16). We all know that we are bombarded in our daily life with images and pictures. We only turn our attention to some of those images, namely when there is something *in* those images that stirs our interest and attracts our desire to have a closer look at those objects. Only then pictures become objects of our *gaze*. As Husserl already remarked, pictures

can function as signs. For example, in a book with thumbnails we usually do not take the pictures *as pictures*; rather, we take them to be signs pointing to their meaning outside of their material bearer. In contrast to signs, however, pictures are constituted for Husserl as constituting the signified *in the signifier*. Barthes is basically repeating the same argument: in order to constitute photographs *as photographs* the viewer has to move away from taking them as simple signifiers and constitute them as objects of the *gaze*. The motivation for this move, according to Barthes, is the *attraction* selected photographs have for us, which turns them into meaningful and *animated*, i.e., intentional, objects (Barthes 1982, 19–20). Desire and attraction point to the very moment in which a viewer turns her attention *to the photograph as a photograph* and begins to *see* the photograph *as what it is*, namely as a photograph. For example, this is at work when we—flipping through a newspaper or a picture album—suddenly become interested in a specific photograph or a specific detail of a photograph. In this moment, we switch from taking the photographs or thumbnails as signs—being part of a larger semiotic context—to taking them *as what they are* and thereby establish the photograph as a picture and as an object of a special act of looking. Consequently, if photography has an “*eidos*” and if this “*eidos*” is not a mere abstraction, then we must find it in and as a form or a mode of looking (consciousness) attracted *by* the photograph. Though it is rather astonishing, given his writings on semiotics, Barthes establishes in *Camera Lucida* a clear phenomenological paradigm.

This move towards consciousness is very important for the following four reasons: (a) it constitutes the photograph *as photograph*; (b) it constitutes the photograph *in relation to the viewer*; (c) it constitutes the materiality of the photograph as secondary to the act of perception;⁶ and (d) it constitutes the photograph—primarily, though not ultimately—as an object *beneath* or beyond language and cultural systems.⁷ A photograph, as Barthes puts it, “cannot *say* what it lets us see” (Barthes 1982, 100). The looked at photograph and the turn towards what is the object of the gaze, in other words, overturn (for a moment) all attempts to “read” and take photographs as a form of cultural texts. It is precisely at this point that Barthes leaves behind his earlier theory of photographs as objects of semiotic theorizing. Perception, vision and intentionality, we might say, cut through cultural codes.⁸

It should therefore come of no surprise that commentators who focus on the causal relation between referent and photograph miss Barthes’ main point, insofar as they do not recognize Barthes’ attempt to establish photography as a mode and an object of vision and consciousness (instead of

a semiotic mode). According to Barthes, vision should, from now on, be taken as a *mode* which requires us to think about intentionality, i.e., as a *specific cogitatum*. Taking the latter in the sense of the sudden discovery of photographic codes (Barthes 1982, 21). For vision is based on a moment of *seeing* instead of *listening*. The moment (Elkins 2007, 316) makes us see a moment within which discourse deals with trauma and shock. “The Message” (Barthes 1977); he treats photographic photographs as having a *message* etc. (Barthes 1985, 19). In *Camera Lucida*, the “*punctum*” from the “shock,” which is such as a surprising aspect of the *Camera Lucida*, though, the *punctum* is verbal character. We might say that are not photographs in the *Camera Lucida* that photography deals with codes and codes (if we take meaning as constructed and internally determined).

Barthes pushes the conflict further by his distinction between *vision* and *text* (or “reading”). The concept of the *punctum* is a subjective or private moment of the photograph (Burgin in Kemp 2000) as Rosalind Krauss points out, hence a ‘blocking of meaning’ which Barthes calls the *punctum* through a code and signs.¹⁰ It is its visual nature. It constitutes its difference from something we can read. Though they constitute themselves *as images* that is meaningful on the level of vision are *founded* upon vision. To

with thumbnails we usually take them to be signs point-bearer. In contrast to signs, constituting the signified the same argument: in order the viewer has to move away substitute them as objects of the to Barthes, is the *attraction* them into meaningful and (19–20). Desire and attraction turns her attention to the the photograph as what it at work when we—flipping only become interested in photograph. In this moment, thumbnails as signs—being part what they are and thereby object of a special act of "eidos" and if this "eidos" is and as a form or a mode of graph. Though it is rather Barthes establishes in *Camera*

important for the following photograph; (b) it constitutes the material of perception;⁶ and (d) is not ultimately—as an systems.⁷ A photograph, "see" (Barthes 1982, 100). what is the object of the attempts to "read" and is precisely at this point photographs as objects of intentionality, we might say,

commentators who focus on graph miss Barthes' main attempt to establish phenomenology (instead of

a semiotic mode). Accordingly, all debates about the status of the referent should, from now on, be taken from a phenomenological point of view, which requires us to think about photography in terms of a specific form of intentionality, i.e., as a *specific* relation between a *specific cogitare* and a *specific cogitatum*. Taking the latter into account, we also understand why the sudden discovery of photographs as objects of *vision* functions as a "wound" (Barthes 1982, 21). For vision inhibits and "violates," for a moment, all cultural codes and all textual interpretations of pictures, which is to say, it is based on a moment of the *absence of language*. By turning to the image we *see* instead of *listen*. The photograph as an "uncanny object" (Lowry in Elkins 2007, 316) makes us speechless, so to speak. It functions like a shock moment within which discursive meaning becomes inhibited. Barthes also deals with trauma and shock in his early semiotic essay "The Photographic Message" (Barthes 1977); however, in this essay he interprets *possible* traumatic photographs as having to do with their *contents*, such as catastrophes, etc. (Barthes 1985, 19). In *Camera Lucida* Barthes differentiates the "*punctum*" from the "shock," which is still defined as being an event in the system, such as a surprising aspect, a unique perspective or a new intention. In *Camera Lucida*, though, the photograph *as such* is characterized by its non-verbal character. We might say that photographs that are fully readable are not photographs in the essential sense.⁹ Consequently, Barthes' thesis that photography deals with the referent *before* it deals with meaning, signs and codes (if we take meaning here as a result of "reading") is thoroughly constructed and internally coherent.

Barthes pushes the conflict between language and image one step further by his distinction between *punctum* and *studium*. The conflict between *vision* and *text* (or "reading") is echoed in this distinction; for Barthes' concept of the *punctum* is not, as a few commentators have suggested, a subjective or private moment that the viewer builds up towards the photograph (Burgin in Kemp 2006/IV, 31; Michaels in Elkins 2007, 439); rather, as Rosalind Krauss points out, it is "a traumatic suspension of language, hence a 'blocking of meaning'" (Krauss in Elkins 2007, 341). Accordingly, what Barthes calls the *punctum* is the moment at which a photograph breaks through a code and signs.¹⁰ The *force* of the picture, for Barthes, is precisely its visual nature. It constitutes itself and comes alive *as* an image through its difference from something that is of a different nature, namely, something we can read. Though photographic images can also be read, they constitute themselves *as* images beneath and in difference from something that is meaningful on the level of texts. Photographs as signs, accordingly, are *founded* upon vision. To put this differently, the *punctum* is the moment

when a viewer leaves the photograph as an object of textual investigation and constitutes the photograph as an event that breaks through a cultural code, knowledge or instruction (Barthes 1982, 30, 55). Whereas the *studium* is a "procedure," the *punctum* is an "arrest" (Barthes 1982, 51)—it literally *stops* movement. In addition, with the *punctum* the viewer necessarily comes into the picture, too: for vision and looking are only possible in relation to a viewing and looking subject.¹¹ Consequently, Barthes introduces the *punctum*—the wound—because it establishes both the photograph as a photograph *and* the viewer as a viewer *beneath* or *prior* to the photograph as a text and the viewer as a reader. Barthes' theory of photography, accordingly, turns into a theory of viewing photographs.

If we take this into account, then it also becomes clearer why Barthes takes the photograph to be an object of what he calls "affective intentionality" (Barthes 1982, 21), given that it is the *punctum* as the moment that draws our attention to the photograph that lets us *want* to look and *desire* to see (something in) the photograph. Through the "work" of the *punctum*, the traumatic event that leads to a turn, the photograph animates our desire to see it. Whereas the viewer is suddenly confronted with an "I see!," the photograph itself becomes, as Krauss puts it, a moment of pointing: "You see" (Krauss in Elkins 2007, 342). The viewer, accordingly, is constituted *as* a viewer through or *with* the photographic image, insofar as the viewer feels called forth to look at the picture. It is not only the image that is looked at; rather, it is also the viewer who is looked at. In exchange for *cogito* and *cogitatum* viewer and photograph are on the same level. Neither of them can be described as an effect of the other.

The Photographic Attitude II: Photography as a Form of Positioning

If this consideration is correct, then we should come to the conclusion that Barthes—in a Husserlian fashion—does not simply refer to the "reality" or the "real" referent in and of photographs; rather, he is concerned with the way in which the referent is given and intended in an act of photographic looking or of *looking at photographs*. It is, accordingly, not only the noematic side, but also the noetic side that we should take into consideration.¹² It is no wonder, then, that Barthes himself mentions, at one point in his essay, the "ur-doxa" (Barthes 1982, 107), which, as phenomenologists knows, is taken from Husserl's *Ideas I* and means a *mode* and belief, within which an object is intentionally given *and* posited. As Husserl states, "the intentionality of

the noesis is mirrored in the noema. The viewer feels forced to speak again even in the act of the noetic 'intentionality,' which is the *noema* (Husserl 1983, 251). What Husserl means by *noesis* and *noema* in every act of intention, even an act of hallucination, is the act of being and originally posited. Indeed, the act of intention (*noesis*) and being intended (*noema*) are identical.

Given this, we can easily see why Barthes has doubt about whom, what, or where is presented in a photograph, all of which are posited in Husserl 1983, § 103ff.) go back to the act in which the *noematic* object itself is intended, "existing." After the *epoche* is in place, the object is no longer "existing." No other art, except photography, is able to *believe* its referent had really existed. Put in Husserlian language, the photograph is an *akt* [*setzender Akt*]. The key term here is *akt*. Barthes bases his claim.¹⁴ Here, the photograph "really" presupposes the existence of its referent, rather, from a phenomenological point of view, as we *see* a photograph, we are already at the point.¹⁵ Put in Husserlian terms, the photograph's *noematic* correlate (determined by its *noesis*) (Barthes 1982, 77). If we would not have an existing referent would *not* be possible, then we would need *additional* intentionality, anism that underlies the photograph. Barthes' point that *while I am looking at a photograph*, which is to say, I do not reason about it, *because*, for example, I know that the photograph is a photograph. With rare exception, the distinction between intentionality and the object is blurred.

This confusion is mainly because of the identical with "intentions." In the act of intention between intentionality and the object, *presupposes* intentionality, for the act of intentionality. Put differently, the act of intentionality (and not in different modes) is the act of intentionality. We can apply this structure to

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the noesis is mirrored in these noematic respects [*Beziehungen*], and one feels forced to speak again even of a 'noematic intentionality' as a 'parallel' of the *noetic* 'intentionality,' which is 'intentionality' properly so called" (Husserl 1983, 251). What Husserl calls "*ur-doxa*" is the primordial relation of *noesis* and *noema* in *every* act, in which something is given. For example, even an act of hallucination has a *noema*, insofar as something is *believed* and originally posited. Indeed, all modalities and modifications of intention (*noesis*) and being intended (*noema*) go back to an original position.

Given this, we can easily see what Barthes has in mind: whereas we can have doubt about whom, what, and how something or someone is represented in a photograph, all possible belief and being-modifications (see Husserl 1983, § 103ff.) go back to a position-taking moment, by means of which the *noematic* object *itself* is both taken and given as "being there" or "existing." After the *epoche* is in place, this simply means *being given* or "is."¹³ No other art, except photography, as Barthes points out, "could compel me to *believe* its referent had really existed" (Barthes 1982, 77, my emphasis). Put in Husserlian language, looking at a photograph is a position-taking akt [*setzender Akt*]. The key term in the last sentence is the "belief" on which Barthes bases his claim.¹⁴ Here, the question is not whether a photograph "really" presupposes the existence of its referent (by virtue of its causality); rather, from a phenomenological point of view we must claim that, as long as we *see* a photograph, we are in the *belief* that the referent existed at some point.¹⁵ Put in Husserlian terms, the *noetic* moment of positioning (and its *noematic* correlate) determines the "founding order of Photography" (Barthes 1982, 77). If we would claim that our certainty about the real existing referent would *not* be founded on the *noetic-noematic* correlation, then we would need *additional* empirical knowledge about the causal mechanism that underlies the photochemical process. In contrast, it is precisely Barthes' point that *while I am looking at a photograph I see* the referent, which is to say, I do not reason or *conclude* that the referent has been there *because*, for example, I know that the photochemical process produced the photograph. With rare exceptions, commentators confuse this important distinction between intentionality and causality.

This confusion is mainly based on the assumption that intentionality is identical with "intentions." In addition, the problem is not simply the *distinction* between intentionality and causality; rather, causality is *secondary* to and *presupposes* intentionality, for the causality of objects must itself be constituted in act intentionality. Put differently, that objects are experienced *as* causal (and not in different modes) presupposes the experience of them as causal.¹⁶ We can apply this structure to the experience of photographs: looking at

a photographic image I primarily do not constitute the image as such as a causal object or as the result of causal processes. This is because taking the image as an object that is related to causality either requires external knowledge or reducing the image to its material bearer. Examples might be when a photograph slips out of my hands and falls down, or when I investigate the chemical structure of the image: both of these examples require switches in my attitude, since I no longer see the image as an image and instead I see the image as a falling object or as a chemical and natural object.

There has been a lot of critique of Barthes' supposedly realist position, which we would do well to analyze briefly. Two of the main arguments against Barthes are the following: first, he does not realize that which he takes to be "the" essence of photography is only "one" mode of photography, namely, photography as documentary praxis. Accordingly, what Barthes calls "essence" is itself historical; second, he does not take into account that—with the advent of manipulated images, abstract photography and digital photography—the founding order of photography has been shaken up. I contend that both arguments should be rejected from a phenomenological perspective for the following reason: the question is not whether the referent of a photograph "really" existed or was manipulated; for all modalities and modifications of how and what is intended in picture experience are based on a *subjective* and *noetic* side that ultimately, put in Husserlian terms, goes back to an "unmodalized primal form of the mode of believing" (Husserl 1983, 251). Consequently, even if we admit that abstract photography and digital photography have shaken up the field, they do not allow us to lose our belief and the position-taking act itself, since without this moment the photographic image would no longer be a *photographic* image. For example, in order to see a photo montage or a manipulated photo I must first take it to be a photograph before I can take it as a manipulated photograph. I must presuppose, accordingly, that *in principle* there is an original mode of which the manipulation is a manipulation. The fact that, empirically, we can be confused about what we have in front of us, does not change the intentional relation itself. In this connection, it is certainly true that photographs can not only be given in doubts, uncertainties, and hypothetical circumstances, but can also be given as hypothetical, doubtful, etc.; such modifications do not change the fact that they go back to an original mode of *belief*. To repeat this point: Barthes is, in *Camera Lucida*, a "subjectivist" since he claims that the photograph can be explained as a form of intentionality.¹⁷

As to the problem of whether Barthes' essentialism favors a specific genre of photography, we should in this case also take into account that Barthes'

theory is not about the photo to it. Accordingly, as long as that different genres of photo conscious of them, we should photography ultimately go ba

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theory is not about the photograph itself, but about the relation we have to it. Accordingly, as long as anti-essentialists are unable to demonstrate that different genres of photography presuppose different modes of being conscious of them, we should subscribe to Barthes' thesis that all modes of photography ultimately go back to a mode of looking at.

The Photographic Attitude III: Photography as Imagined Memory

In addition to the *noetic* and *doxic* moment of acts, Barthes' thesis about the temporality of the photographic *noema* has stirred intensive debates. According to Barthes, the photograph is constituted by a "mad" structure, as a "bizarre medium," and through a "temporal hallucination" (Barthes 1982, 115), since, on the one hand, we have the absence of its referent (in perception), and, on the other hand, we posit the photograph's referent as something that "has-been."¹⁸ Our belief, in other words, does not constitute the photographic *noema* as something currently there, but as something that had been there.

The definition of the photograph as the "has-been" has been often quoted in the literature, but with no real understanding, in my view, of the phenomenological impact of Barthes' conclusion. Given what we have developed so far, we are now able to put all aspects together. The point is not that the photograph's *noema* is defined in past terms, that is, in the form of memory; rather, what we really find in the *noematic* structure of *looking at* photographs is a structure that Husserl has in another context described as a mixture and coincidence of two acts, namely, imagination and perception. For example, sitting in a theater play, Husserl claims that something strange happens: on the one hand, we are perceiving a scene (including the stage, tables, etc.); on the other hand, this positioning is negated because we do not take this scene to be "real." Accordingly, what we find here is a mixture of a *present imagination*. Husserl speaks of certain aesthetical situations as "perceptual ficta" (Hua XXIII, 515; Husserl 2005, 616), by which he means that theater plays are "as-if perceptions." In this way, the imaginary picture object coincides (*deckt sich*) (see Hua XXIII, 507; Husserl 2005, 608) with and covers over the perception, the synthesis of which can be more or less harmonized, but never totally fulfilled.

In a similar fashion, Barthes' considerations allow us to claim something similar for photography: while looking at photographs *noematically* we find two aspects: first, we *see* what is depicted in the photograph (that is,

we do not see the photograph itself), and second, we *see* something that is given noematically and temporally as *has-been*. Put in Barthes' more mythological terms, the photograph "is the living image of a dead thing" (Barthes 1982, 79). Accordingly, what we find in the photograph is not a *quasi-perception*; rather, our consciousness is constituted as a *quasi-memory* (phantasized memory). Photographs are "as-if recollections," i.e., we are related to them as if they were recollections (although we have them right in front of us). Put in Husserlian terms, the photographic attitude (now taken as a form of consciousness) is characterized as a *phantasized recollection*: (1) it is experienced as an "as if," (2) the referent is posited as really existing, and (3) the noema is posited as "having-been." I would like to come now to my last point.

The Photograph: The Problem of Materiality

Having outlined how a phenomenology of photography—which can be found in Barthes' *Camera Lucida*—is possible, we can now go one step further and outline a few critical aspects. For the purpose of this chapter, I shall only deal with the following problem: Barthes' "mentalist" position comes at a high price, since it is built on the assumption that photography is a *general form of consciousness* and not, as I would maintain, a specific mediativity and materiality that cannot be reduced to a general form of consciousness. The reduction of a specific praxis to a general type of consciousness comes at the price that the plurality of the picturing activities of human beings is analyzed as *one* form of intentionality (as picture consciousness). The decisive step within this reduction is the thesis that the materiality of the photograph as such is not important for the experience of photography. As we saw above, Barthes claims that "normally" we do not pay attention to the material presentation of the photograph because the *first* and *founding* moment of what we see is what is *in* the picture. As Barthes' writes, "whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see" (Barthes 1982, 6). What he has in mind here is quite simple: if we take photography as a form of looking and a mode of our gazing, then we are primarily not interested in the materiality of the photograph itself. In fact, we must switch into an artificial position if we want to investigate the materiality of the photograph, i.e., the colors, the paper, the frame, etc. Barthes' claims that we *either* see the photograph as a photograph, *or* we see the material bearer as material bearer, but never both at the same time, is not convincing, for it

is impossible to see a photograph in our hands, or at least positioned in our hands, and at the same time be unable to understand the photograph (at least possibly) touching and being touched. The moment of looking is bound to differentiate from a pure phenomenological attitude toward the photograph,¹⁹ the distance between the photograph and non-photograph. In other words, it would be impossible to see a photograph as a photograph.

The boundary between the photograph and the non-photograph, however, is *not* a noetic boundary. The difference between photographs, in other words, is not a noematic relation since our act of looking is always already directed at the photograph. It is precisely this material dimension of the photograph that we want to understand the *specificity* of the photograph, and other forms of pictures and images. On the noematic side we encounter a multiplicity of noetic moments, that is to say, a surplus of noetic moments, that is to say, a surplus of noetic moments to take into account as a *surplus* of noetic moments. The noema.²⁰ Consequently, materiality is a point of view—constituted as the surplus of noetic moments—precisely because it makes it possible to see the photograph as a photograph.

This surplus on the side of the photograph is somehow beyond our consciousness. It implies that my looking at the photograph cannot be immediately analyzed as a looking at the image. The image, if taken in this sense, is constituted—and therefore it is not constituted within the framework.

This brief outline of a critique of Barthes' position on the materiality of the photograph—that Husserl—though he himself is not interested in the materiality at least in the form of the photograph—must be subjected to a similar critique. In regard to Husserl is the question of the contribution to the debate about the

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is impossible to see a photograph without a frame, without taking it into our hands, or at least positioning ourselves in front of it. Accordingly, we are unable to understand the photograph without a bodily dimension of (at least possibly) touching and moving it (and us) around. In addition, the moment of looking is bound to certain other factors that we cannot investigate from a pure phenomenological point of view, such as the position of the photograph,¹⁹ the distance to the viewer, and the *boundaries* between photograph and non-photographic environment. Without a frame, in other words, it would be impossible to constitute an act of looking *at* a photograph.

The boundary between the photograph and its non-photographic environment, however, is *not* a noetic effect. The necessary condition of looking at photographs, in other words, cannot be reduced to a pure noetic-noematic relation since our act of looking is noematically over-determined. It is precisely this material dimension that we have to take into account if we want to understand the *specificity* of the photograph in distinction from other forms of pictures and images. Phenomenologically speaking, on the noematic side we encounter a moment that *cannot* be reduced to a parallel of noetic moments, that is to say, we encounter something that we have to take into account as a *surplus* to what we find as a noetic correlate in the noema.²⁰ Consequently, materiality is—seen from a phenomenological point of view—constituted as that which escapes the turning of the gaze, precisely because it makes it possible.

This surplus on the side of the noema does not imply that materiality is somehow beyond our consciousness of the photograph, however; rather, it implies that my looking at the photograph *depends* upon something that cannot be immediately analyzed as a relationship between viewer and image. The image, if taken in this way, transcends the act within which it is constituted—and therefore it cannot be fully analyzed in a Husserlian framework.

Conclusion

This brief outline of a critique of Barthes' analysis leads to the consequence that Husserl—though he himself went one step further (by taking the materiality at least in the form of "picture things" into account)—should be subjected to a similar critique (see Lotz 2007a). The real question in regard to Husserl is the question of whether a Husserlian theory can contribute to the debate about the status of photography, especially since the

transcendental setup of Husserl's phenomenology exclusively focuses on the problem of picture consciousness and not, what is necessary in the case of photography, on a *specific* "empirical" mode of this consciousness. As I attempted to show at the end of this chapter, we should come to the conclusion that from a "pure" Husserlian standpoint, a satisfactory investigation of photography is impossible, since this point of view is unable to take into account satisfactorily the specificity and materiality of photography (and other arts).²¹

Notes

- ¹ As Burgin points out, Barthes' concept of intentionality, taken over from Sartre, is decisive for an appropriate understanding of Barthes' masterful essay (Burgin in Kemp 2006/IV, 32); however, he does not go on to explain how intentionality is operative in *Camera Lucida*.
- ² The failure of commentators to take Barthes' phenomenological background seriously has led to the astonishing consequence that so far there is not a single essay published on Husserl and Barthes, with the only exception of Fisher 2008. In his contribution, Fisher argues that a phenomenological analysis of photography is possible, despite the fact that the contemporary debate is focused on questions regarding photography as a medium, as a technology and as a social practice. Fisher is unable though (as other commentators) to really clarify the systematic phenomenological background of Barthes' considerations.
- ³ For a critique of this naïve conceptualization see Snyder in Elkins 2007, 369–85.
- ⁴ Jacquette writes: "In *Camera Lucida* he does not identify the nature of photography, but only some coincidentally shared properties in a handful of images which he happens to like" (Jacquette 1982, 27).
- ⁵ It is certainly correct to claim that Barthes does not establish a rigorous transcendental phenomenology; however, such a task is impossible because the task is not to investigate picture consciousness in general, but rather, to investigate the consciousness of photographic pictures. As I have claimed elsewhere (Lotz 2007), Husserl does not clarify this distinction and consequently runs into aporias with his theory of picture consciousness. Put briefly, a general theory of picture consciousness overlooks that it can only be exemplified in regard to *specific* material practices, which would force every phenomenological investigation to take the materiality, mediality, and historicity of these practices into account (see Lotz 2007). I will make a similar subjection to Barthes at the end of this chapter.
- ⁶ I shall come back later to this rather important point.
- ⁷ The move away from language to vision is followed by Barthes' attempt to reveal photography as an authentic mode of an otherwise functionalized praxis of picture taking. As Fisher puts it, Barthes' turn to phenomenology is based on "the 'breaking out' of authentic significance from banalized social reality" (Fisher 2008, 22; also see Barthes' final comments in Barthes 1982, 117–19).

- ⁸ At this point we can see how lytically oriented scholars, s and 1977b). It is precisely th guage that is introduced by
- ⁹ In his early essay, Barthes' po language is central to his a moment it is perceived; or b image . . . exists socially onl that of the categories of lan Barthes later believes that la photographs. The opposite depends only on their abilit language.
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- ¹⁶ See Ross 1982, 10; Brook 19 the discussion about the inc
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Barthes' attempt to reveal functionalized praxis of phenomenology is based on "the idealized social reality" (Fisher 1982, 117-19).

- 8 At this point we can see how photography can become of interest for psychoanalytically oriented scholars, such as Rosalind Krauss (see especially Kraus 1977a and 1977b). It is precisely the *move away* from language to what operates in language that is introduced by Barthes.
- 9 In his early essay, Barthes' position differs from *Camera Lucida* because the role of language is central to his analysis: "the photograph is verbalized at the very moment it is perceived; or better still: it is perceived only when verbalized . . . the image . . . exists socially only when immersed in at least a primary connotation that of the categories of language" (Barthes 1985, 17). This is not to say that Barthes later believes that language no longer plays a role in the constitution of photographs. The opposite is the case; however, the *essence* of photographs depends only on their ability to appear as something that is independent from language.
- 10 It is incorrect, accordingly, to claim that Barthes "focuses on how the photographic image is read" (Dant and Gilloch 2002, 15). On the contrary, Barthes' whole project in *Camera Lucida* can be defined as the attempt to describe the photographic experience as the *breakdown* of language.
- 11 This does not exclude the possibility of taking photographs as the result of the "unconscious" (Benjamin 1991, 371, Kraus 1999), i.e., as the result of what we do not see. In addition, photographs are of interest because "they slightly disrupt our sense of the security of the visual" (Lowry in Elkins 2007, 314).
- 12 It is precisely the noetic moment that moves Barthes' considerations closer to Husserl than to Sartre (who neglected the noetic side of the intentional relation).
- 13 We should note at this point that Barthes' thesis about the act of positing pushes him away from Sartre's analysis of imagination, to which Barthes' essay is dedicated; for, according to Sartre, imagination (and he includes pictures) is based on a fictionalization of the world, which echoes his neglect of *noetic* elements (following Heidegger).
- 14 To repeat my point, interpretations of Barthes' essay as an essay on realism should be rejected because the relation of the photograph to its referent cannot be defined without the "belief" of the viewer. Accordingly, we have to correct the following account of the relation between photograph and its referent: "So my photograph of you stealing my wallet is evidence of you stealing my wallet whether or not I believe that you stole my wallet" (Michaels in Elkins 2007, 434). The point is the following: the relation between photograph and stealing my wallet depends upon one major condition, namely my *belief that this is a photograph*.
- 15 One difference between the perceptive and the imaginative act, according to Husserl, is that imagination is not a position-taking act [*setzungslos*]. For example, when looking at a picture we phantasize ourselves *into* the picture and our acts thereby turn to position-less acts (Hua XXIII, 467–70).
- 16 See Ross 1982, 10; Brook 1983, Scruton 1981, 579; and all of the participants in the discussion about the index in Elkins 2007, 129–204.
- 17 Also note the following: Barthes claims that the arrest of the photograph is not the effect of causality; rather, it is an intentional moment and the intentional implication of looking at a photograph: "*I project* the present photograph's immobility upon the past shot, and it is this arrest which constitutes the pose" (Barthes

1982, 78, my emphasis). Another aspect of this debate about the status of the referent is the *ethical* aspect: *should we take photographs as photographs* (messages without code) or should we take them as coded pictures? For this question in regard to the Holocaust, see the fascinating book by Didi-Huberman 2007, who discusses the status of photographs in relation to four shots that survived Auschwitz. The question of whether photographs (and representations in general) are cultural constructs ("just" images) or have something to do with the certainty of the "have-been," becomes, in this debate, *the central question*.

¹⁸ The "mad" structure that Barthes has in mind goes back to a religious and anthropological problem, namely the problem of whether we have a "true" image of Jesus and of whether images can function as the presence of the dead (for this see Belting 2006b, 47–52, 63–7).

¹⁹ Husserl points to the fact that every picture has a "normal" way of being seen (Hua XXIII, 491) and claims—because of the sharp distinction he draws between picture thing and picture object—that the normality of how pictures want to be seen has to do with the thing (and not with the imagined object).

²⁰ Interestingly, Barthes himself refers to at least one of those moments (without noticing that he begins to contradict his main thesis), namely, to what he calls the "flatness" and the "impenetrability" of the photograph (Barthes 1982, 106–7). Although he claims that the impenetrability of the photograph is an effect of the limitations that a photograph puts on our attempt to *interpret* the photograph (i.e., the limitations that looking puts on reading), the impenetrability is the consequence of the *bodily* moment in photographs (in comparison with other forms of picturing).

²¹ For an anthropological critique of contemporary notions of mediality see Belting 2006a, especially 11–14; for a critique of Greenberg's notion of materiality see Krauss 1999. A phenomenological concept of materiality, in my view, must be developed on a comparative basis and from the concept of bodily intentionality.

Ethics and th