a visual journal of integral photography

image:

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ron burnett.

editorial: While it seems that the integral Polaroid has been resurrected from the dead by the Impossible Project (so thankfully it isn't that impossible!), and not forgetting the continuing availability of comparable Fuji products, integral photography nevertheless remains a marginal photographic medium (indeed, this is no-doubt one of its charms).

With reference to notions of simplicity, immediacy, physicality, indexicality, proximity and singularity, integral photography can be articulated as the vanishing mediator between (technologically obsolete) analogue production methods - including, of course, the daguerreotype - and (ever-evolving) digital technologies, an issue touched upon by Ron Burnett in the essay Photographs and Images: The Polaroid. Further notes on **Roland Barthes from Cultures** of Vision.

As the medium approaches its fortieth birthday, polarama can be thought of as a means by which to explore not only the possibilities of the medium itself through image object and text, but also the wider field of photographies of which it is a part.

S. Cousin

From an interview conduted by Charlotte Cotton, LACMA's curator of photography. 14/02/2008. americansuberbx.com/200 9/04/interview-philiplorca-dicorcia-om.html

A Polaroid is not very big.
The reason for the landscapes is often because of the fact that there is a reduction of vastness into a small image. Does that concentrate or dissipate the image?

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Mikael Kennedy

His most recent publication, **Passport to Trespass Vol V**, has recently been released, limited to 100 numbered and signed copies. He is represented by the Peter Hay Halpert Gallery in NYC.

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Ron Burnett.

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Photographs and Images: The Polaroid. Further notes on Roland Barthes from Cultures of Vision. This juxtaposition of time and space is at the root of Barthes's meditation on photography in CAMERA LUCIDA.

- [1] Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday Press, 1981) 3.
- [2] Jean-Paul Sartre, The Psychological Imagination (London: Methuen, 1972).
- [3] The book is far from being the literary exegesis which some commentators have suggested. Its playfulness with regard to form, its lack of commentary on the many photographs to which it refers and its use of photographs which are not even reproduced, suggest that Barthes was as worried about the 'word' as he was about the image.

"One day, quite some time ago, I happened on a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother, Jerome, taken in 1852. And I realised then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: "I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor." [1]

The eyes of the emperor's brother once looked straight into a camera, in this case 'manned' by a photographer whose duty it was to take pictures of the rich and powerful. Jerome's eyes had been privileged enough to look into Napoleon's eyes. The photograph as described by Roland Barthes allowed him to establish a relay between Jerome (in the 1850's) and the modern readers of CAMERA LUCIDA This juxtaposition of time and space is at the root of Barthes's meditation on photography in CAMERA LUCIDA. Barthes provides us with the social and cultural matrix at the heart of his activities as a viewer and as a cultural analyst. CAMERA LUCIDA is part analysis, part theory, a personal examination of the role of photography in Barthes's life and an hommage to Jean-Paul Sartre's book, THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMAGINATION. [2] An extraordinary number of essays and articles have been written about CAMERA LUCIDA and Barthes's work. My purpose here is to interrogate the photographic image in historical and cultural terms. Barthes is a focus, but this chapter is designed to raise a primary distinction between photographs and images. My premise is that this distinction will allow us to more clearly understand the role played by the viewer in the experience and interpretation of images.

One of the aims of the project [3] of CAMERA LUCIDA is to discover whether there is an interpretive space betweeen image and photograph which will allow for if not encourage new ways of thinking and seeing. Barthes My concern is with the rich discourse which arises from the human encounter with images and the creative use which is made of photographs as they are placed into different contexts.

- [4] Roland Barthes, The Grain of the Voice trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985) 356.
- [5] In particular, Mary Bittner Wiseman, The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes (New York: Routledge, 1989) and Stephen Ungar, Roland Barthes: The Professor of Desire (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).
- [6] Georges Bataille, Guilty, trans. Bruce Boone (Venice, California: The Lapis Press, 1988) 7.

tests many strategies of interpretation with regard to photographic meaning, but much of the book is governed by an emphsis on death, the death of his mother, the death of photography as a form of cultural expression, the death of the interpreter. "If photography is to be discussed on a serious level, it must be described in relation to death. It's true that a photograph is a witness, but a witness of something that is no more. Even if the person in the picture is still alive, it's a moment of this subject's existence that was photographed, and this moment is gone. This is an enormous trauma for humanity, a trauma endlessly renewed. Each reading of a photo and there are billions worldwide in a day, each perception and reading of a photo is implicitly, in a repressed manner, a contract with what has ceased to exist, a contract with death." [4]

This theme has been researched and commented on by a number of writers [5] but my sense is that Barthes is exploring the meaning of death at the symbolic and imaginary level. Death in this instance speaks to the frailty of memory, but most importantly, Barthes follows the writings of Bataille in recognizing the silence of the photograph in the face of all that is done to it. "Death is a disappearance. It's a suppresion so perfect that at the pinnacle utter silence it its truth. Words can't describe it. Here obviously I'm summoning a silence I can only approach from the outside or from a long way away." [6] The distinction then between image and photograph will allow me to speak about the cacophony of voices which engulf the silent photograph. My position will be different from Barthes. He is worried about loss and absence. My concern is with the rich discourse which arises from the human encounter with images and the creative use which is made of photographs as they are placed into different contexts.

[7] I have borrowed this phrase from Anthony Wilden's book System and Structure . He makes the comment about 'labor of relation' in a discussion of Jacques Lacan. He critiques Lacan's dependence on language, on the symbolic, and Lacan's use of linguistic signification to explain the imaginary and its relationship to subjectivity and identity. Anthony Wilden, System and Structure (London: Tavistock, 1972) 473.

[8] W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Photographic Essay: Four Case Studies," Picturing Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 302. There is a further emphasis by Barthes on the Sartrean ego, the one who is both the master of his/her identity and destiny and also its victim. "In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares)." (Barthes 13) The relationships which Barthes establishes here between the "I" and the "eye," between the dream and the "sense" of oneself both as image and as reality can be better understood if one begins to think of the image in general terms as a 'place' of subjectivity. Thus, what is important with regard to Napoleon's youngest brother is that he has an identity which has been sculpted by Barthes from the photograph as raw material. The 'clay' in this instance is Barthes's imagination which suggests that the photograph is never outside of the subjective, never outside of strategies of interpretation and analysis. Photographs are rarely about anything new. They can startle, shock, inform, but they only offer a hint of what can be done to them. Images, which represent the activities of human intervention and interpretation, which are an amalgam of photographic intentions and subjective placement, images are part of a process that is embodied, the result of a "labor of relation." [7]

This is to some degree represented by a polaroid photograph in the beginning of CAMERA LUCIDA which W.J.T. Mitchell has described as a veil [8] but which I interpret as a curtain over a photographic window, as, in other words, the potential place from which a large

The polaroid is a 'throwaway' but what exactly does it offer us? Is it the same as all other kinds of photographs? What happens to the photographer if they can see the result of their intuition or reaction or sight of an event immediately after it happens? What effect does all of this have on the subjects being photographed?

[9] Rosalind Krauss makes the important point that the discursive space for photography has shifted from informal settings to the museum, to a place of exhibition and this has transformed the aesthetic expectations surrounding photographic images. Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992) 287-301.

number of 'sights' can be inferred or given the right circumstances, constructed. Mitchell refers to Barthes's dislike of polaroids and of colour photographs in general (Mitchell 302-303) but I see the polaroid as an apparatus which encourages the imaginary, which frees the cameraperson to explore his or her experiences. In some senses polaroids are the precursors of small format video producing an instantaneous result to the use of imaging technologies. The notion of instant development, the instant print, runs counter to the 'value' of the photograph as a vehicle of preservation, as a special moment during which an event or person has been captured for the family album or the art museum. [9] As a result of Barthes's ambiguous feelings about photography, the polaroid comes to stand for, if not legitimate the contradictions of vision, the perpetual sense which Barthes has that more is being taken away than is being given. The curtains highlight the levels of mediation which both encourage the imaginary and prevent us from "looking outside." The polaroid is a 'throw-away' but what exactly does it offer us? Is it the same as all other kinds of photographs? What happens to the photographer if they can see the result of their intuition or reaction or sight of an event immediately after it happens? What effect does all of this have on the subjects being photographed?

The temporal collapse here could be described as one of the breaking points between modernity and postmodernity. The sharpness of this shift should not be underestimated. The polaroid is more like a found object in the sense developed by Marcel Duchamp and encourages a radical reappropriation of the world as The polaroid is more like a found object in the sense developed by Marcel Duchamp and encourages a radical reappropriation of the world as image...

image, now being realised to an even more sophisticated degree by digital technology. This movement to a dramatically different level of appropriation was not achieved in the cinema until video appeared. Multimedia computers and cd-rom promise to change the parameters even more. Did Barthes anticipate all of this with the polaroid at the beginning of CAMERA LUCIDA? That would be stretching my point. He did however sense the depth of the change which the polaroid process engendered. And much of his discussion of time and death in CAMERA LUCIDA anticipate the reversals and transformations of instant photography and video. What is even more interesting about polaroids is the way in which they challenge simplistic notions of referentiality, the way the polaroid camera encourages shifts in framing and takes the photographic process away from the extraordinary, the special event, the birth, the marriage. As a result of the polaroid, everyday life can be transformed into an image without any pretense while at the same time all of the pretensions of photography as an art form can be marginalised.

Benjamin/Barthes/Berger

[10] Jacques Derrida explores the emotional connection which he had with Barthes and the impact of Barthes's death in an essay entitled, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty ed. Hugh J. Silverman (New York: Routledge, 1988).

The title of Barthes's book is also a play on Camera Obscura and as such refers to the history of the medium of photography, to its origins as a device which transformed the three-dimensions of the "real" world into a flat surface. The deliberate ambiguity of the term Lucida allows Barthes to 'look' at photographs both for what they are, (he provides the reader with many descriptions and analyses of photographs and they punctuate his argu ments throughout the book) and as triggers for bringing out the 'inner' light of thinking and interpretation. CAMERA LUCIDA plays with questions of 'lucidity' and proposes no clear answers to the now commonplace arguments concerning the relationship between between photographs and reality. Suffice to say that Barthes's book represents an important "site" of the intense debate about images and their role in the development of cultural theory and history. The personal nature of the book contributes to its significance as an exegesis in which the biographical, the historical and the pictorial come to represent the personae of Roland Barthes and his significance in the intellectual world. [10]

CAMERA LUCIDA is characterized by contradictory statements and by theoretical debates which Barthes makes no effort to resolve. "Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see." (Barthes 6) By this Barthes means that the referential power of the photograph overwhelms its status as a medium. Barthes is torn by the desire to foreground the operations of the image as image while at the same time wanting to gaze at the photograph as a "primitive, without culture." (Barthes 7) This tension which the book never resolves is a far more cultural one than Barthes acknowledges. It lies at the heart of our culture's ambivalence about images,

[11] Barthes, would, I think, agree with John Berger who says, "Clouds gather visibility, and then disperse into invisibility. All appearances are of the nature of clouds." John Berger, "On Visibility," The Sense of Sight (New York: Pantheon, 1985) 219.

[12] See Susan Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989) and in particular Benjamin's discussion of the 'wishimage.'

an ambivalence located in the seemingly transparent nature of a medium which nevertheless forms and deforms that which it portrays. Yet, the difficulty is not with photographs per se, but with the process of engagement, with the transformation of the photograph into an image, with the movement from one level of meaning to the next. The primitive in this case is Barthes's mythological other. The primitive represents an innocence which precludes sight. This then is one of the other major themes of CAMERA LUCIDA, to see, is itself an ambiguous way of rendering the irresolvable conflict between appearances and truth. Although Barthes often suggests that appearances can be punctured in order to go further, the paths opened up are themselves in conflict because no direct reading of a photograph is possible. [11] Mitchell puts it well: "...Barthes emphasizes what he calls the 'punctum,' the stray, pointed detail that "pricks" or "wounds" him. These details (a necklace, bad teeth, folded arms, dirt streets) are accidental, uncoded, nameless features that open the photograph metonymically onto a contingent realm of memory and subjectivity." (Mitchell 303) In this strategy, which carries an aesthetic and ideological weight to it, Barthes joins with Walter Benjamin in looking beyond what the eye immediately sees (and I should add, what the ear hears) for as John Berger puts it that which "...overflows the outline, the contour, the category, the name of what is." (Berger 219) [12] Buck-Morss mentions Benjamin's concern for the transitory, for the relationship between technology which represents progress and the imaginary which neither affirms or denies its own mythic underpinnings. The transitory in Barthes can be translated into the instantaneous. To Barthes, photographs are glued to the real because their first effect on the viewer transcends their status as an image.

discusses the shift in Barthes's approach from his earlier more formal analyses in Elements of Semiology to the more phenonmenological strategy in Camera Lucida . He attributes this to an increasing effort on Barthes's part to eliminate all forms of intentionality from the photograph. This contributes to the sense that what photographs as a medium encourage is an instantaneous apprehension of meaning. Comment calls this approach "magical." Bernard Comment, Roland Barthes, Vers Le

[13] Bernard Comment

[14] Jonathan Crary, Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991) 29.

Neutre (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1991) 120.

This is not too different from Benjamin's discussion of the effects of Paris of the nineteenth century upon him, the feeling that he was immersed in a phantasmagoria which overwhelmed his senses and left him with the feeling that all of the mediators for his experience had disappeared. [13]

In alluding to the camera obscura in an historical and theoretical sense, Barthes is also putting the agenda of the viewer or observer in the forefront of his book. As Jonathan Crary has remarked, the history of the camera obscura as a technology is really about a "philosophical metaphor" which dominated the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a metaphor for "how observation leads to truthful inferences about the world." [14] Crary's work is exemplary. He shows how the dominant metaphors used to explain the camera ob-scura changed in the nineteenth century, "In the texts of Marx, Bergson, Freud, and others the very apparatus that a century earlier was the site of truth becomes a model for procedures and forces that con-ceal, invert, and mystify truth." (Crary 29)

It is in the space between these two approaches that Barthes operates. The camera remains an object capable of creating the links be-tween reality and vision while at the same time in-verting if not distorting the simplicity of that relationship. It is this ambiguity and tension between rationalist and non-rationalist approaches to understanding how pho-to-graphs communicate meaning, which Barthes discusses. At one and the same time Barthes tries to avoid the notion that there is a systematic base to the way in which photographs operate as purveyors of meaning (rejecting the more scientific aspects of his earlier work in ELEMENTS OF SEMIOLOGY)

and yet he makes the effort to catalogue their constituent elements, in order to bind photographs to their own specific characteristics. This becomes an entry point into historical and interpretive analysis and for Barthes, particularly with respect to a photograph of his mother as a young child, a meditation on the ability of the image to keep the dead (or meaning) alive.

The difficulty is that visual media resist being defined with that kind of specificity, because as objects, what we say about them is the result of a relation. The relationship will always be contingent, a space inbetween, without the properties normally attributed to subject or object. (Crary mentions the profoundly different approach taken by John Locke and Arthur Schopenhauer. "Unlike Locke and Condillac, Schopenhauer rejected any model of the observer as passive receiver of sensation, and instead posed a subject who was both the site and producer of sensation." (Crary 75) My choice to describe a contingent relationship here will hopefully enable me to talk about a subject not fully in control of vision nor completely out of control, where consciousness is neither a reflection of what has been seen nor the progenitor (dreams which turn into hallucinations which then become real). To me the emphasis has to be on relationships and on the discourses which are produced out of them. These discourses may not be entirely dependent on the binary division between discourse and picture. More often than not they exceed, if not overturn the very idea of that division. At the same time contingency allows for a discussion of daydreams and dreams — relations situated in the tensions between the symbolic and the imaginary, which are in my opinion, a necessary part of any analysis of images. The contingent allows us to challenge the

notion that there is a direct relationship between the "time" of seeing and the "time" of understanding. It brings into play, most importantly, questions of power. "Vision is always a question of the power to see — and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing activities. With whose blood were my eyes crafted? These points apply to testimony from the position of 'onself'. We are not immediately present to ourselves." (Haraway 192)

Barthes's effort to generate a set of observable characteristics which will delimit the medium of photography is itself part of this creation of a contingent "relationship." The potential problems with this approach only come into play when that delimitation of boundary is shifted to the ontological level. I will address the impact of contingency as a strategy for textual analysis later, suffice to say that for the moment the crucial point is that contingency has an effect on how visual media can be interpreted. What must be kept in mind is that although the observer and the text are to some degree "visible" as parts of a complex process of exchange (in the same way that two people talking to each other can be observed by a third person) the relationship between those parts is not. Instead, it is the discursive, performative and interpretive consequences of the relationship which take on a textual quality and for which a variety of analytical strategies can be developed.

Contextual arguments are themselves contingent, often arbitrary, and dependent on the position of the observer or analyst. They are more often than not hypotheses which do not drive towards some conclusive testing of their premises. This of course has always been promoted as the fundamental difference between artistic and scientific activities. In some respects CAMERA LUCIDA is

an unveiling of the history of this tension and difference, but it takes it one step further by implicitly exploring notions of conventionality and codification. For it is through those semiotic and interpretive presumptions that the idea of cultural norms has arisen. The normative argument makes its strongest appearance in arguments about genre and canon and while I will not delve into this at the moment, it is important to note that CAMERA LUCIDA was Barthes's last book and came after a long intellectual career during which he argued for the normative (in his work on fashion, advertising and literature — S/Z and SYSTÉME DE LA MODE) and against it (in THE EMPIRE OF SIGNS and THE LOVER'S DISCOURSE). These divisions don't sit in simple oppostion to each other. They criss-cross Barthes's work and in some respects provide the intellectual energy for CAMERA LUCIDA (and I would suggest for the shift by Barthes from a structural to a poststructural position), but at another level Barthes doesn't seem ready to confront the impact of these divisions on his own praxis as a critic and analyst. It is within the arguments around contingency that one can begin to pose questions about the connections which Barthes develops in relation to politics, context and historical analysis (the important and often over-looked fact that much of MYTHOLOGIES for example, was written as a series of articles for a newspaper in France provides a context for the book which its appropriation as cultural theory has elided).

CAMERA LUCIDA is a return to an earlier politique but makes no effort to foreground that history. Ironically, this is part of the contingent approach so characteristic of Barthes. His work re mains unsure of its purpose, bound to, as Richard Rorty has so beautifully put it, a 'tissue of contingencies.' [15] I should add that part of my

... the photographic image rarely enframes or constrains what is said about it and this may be one of the sources for the frustration which is felt about the form, but it is also one of the most provocative reasons why intentionality and authorship seem to disappear.

[15] Richard Rorty, Contingency, irony, and solidarity (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.32.

[16] See Martin Jay,
Downcast Eyes: The
Denigration of Vision in
Twentieth-Century French
Thought (Berkeley:
University of California
Press, 1993) for an
extended description and
analysis of this tension in
French thought.

[17] Susan Buck-Morss's summary of Benjamin's analysis emphasizes the distorting influences of capitalism as a factor in undermining the potential of photography. Susan Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989)

emphasis on the notion of contingency is related to Walter Benjamin's concern to situate photography within the textual, the imagistic and the mythic. For Benjamin the photographic image both takes away and confers new insights in the ongoing relationship between vision and understanding, but the tensions here are steeped in a set of non-normative and non-perscriptive contingencies which lack the permanence often attributed to the image. The struggle between permanence and impermanence, between the role of images as potential focal points for the expansion of thought and vision and the often distopic and negative perspective on their effects is a central thematic of CAMERA LUCIDA and of Benjamin's work on images. [16] At one and the same time Barthes and Benjamin supported the idea that photographic images extended if not redefined the cognitive experience of the viewer while also contributing to the denigration of meaning, to the simplification of perception and understanding. [17] This tension (in Benjamin's case in the late nineteenth century and in Barthes's at the cusp of the computer age) also expressed itself through conceptions of the popular, notions of mass entertainment and the role of high art in a time of shifting concerns about the impact of new technologies on traditional conceptions of cultural activity. To a large extent these concerns remain relevant today and they are premised on the difficulties of attributing some kind of cause to the use which viewers make of images.

As we shall see, the photographic image rarely enframes or constrains what is said about it and this may be one of the sources for the frustration which is felt about the form, but it is also one of the most provocative reasons why intentionality and authorship seem to disappear. This is a further source of tension with respect to the image,

Barthes quotes Sartre:
"The persons in a
photograph drift
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sign and image, without
ever approaching
either."

the sense that authority has been removed and replaced with the fluidity of subjectivity. But in a reversal, the anger for this loss is channeled into the technology. The camera for example, becomes responsible for a loss of authority and intentionality, which is then transferred to the viewer as a crisis of subjectivity. (As we shall see this is one of the reasons for Baudrillard's distopic vision of modern technologies.)

However, it seems to me that the opposite has happened. The camera rarely appears in photographs which individuals take. This is in effect transfers the power to the viewer who can attribute intentionality to the image or not depending on the context of viewing and the potential use which will be made of the image. The technology will bear as much responsibility as one wishes since "it" cannot answer for its actions. In the final analysis the tensions of attribution here are sources of creativity and not the reverse. Benjamin recognized this when he prioritized the dream as an integral part of the role which human desire plays in the construction of meaning. These desires play themselves out in a variety of ways and only a consensual agreement among a wide variety of viewers ever fixes (and even this is only temporary) the attribution of effect and meaning to images. In this sense the photograph never belongs to anybody. Barthes quotes Sartre: "The persons in a photograph drift between the shores of perception, between sign and image, without ever approaching either." (Barthes 20) It is this territory, this space without a fixed shape but nevertheless with borders, which opens up the potential for exploration and discovery and which moves the photograph from print to image. "The photograph itself is in no way animated (I do not believe in "life like" photographs), but it animates me: this is

what creates every adventure." (Barthes 20). It is as if understanding and interpretation are conflated into a notion of instantaneous recognition and comprehension, an epiphanous moment of effect and affect.

Rhiannon Adam





next issue / submissions

The next issue will concern: **Polaroids of TV/computer** screens, **Polaroids of/about film**, **Polaroid/s and** the moving image.

The theme is, as ever, open to wide interpretation. This can also be taken to mean that the work need not utilise integral photographs. For example, illustrations of integral photographs or stills from film(s) in which the integral photograph are also acceptable. That the work should relate and engage with the medium in some way is the important point here.

Number of images: 1 - 12. Image size: preferably scaled at 1:1. 72 dpi. For larger works (collage, for instance): maximum height: 504 pixels / 7 inches. Maximum width: 396 pixels / 5.5 inches (integral borders included). Other requirements - please email.

Should the image/s have titles, please make these known!

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