• *A Short History of Photography* (1931)
• The essay begins with an evocation of “fog” as an obstacle of both vision and knowledge.
• It is impossible to give a linear historical account of photography’s origins.
• This luminous mist – an allegory of the atmosphere within which memory works – covers nothing that we might understand or encounter in memory.
• Peculiarities of photography: its beginnings, its childhood, its funereal plot, its relationships to printing and inscriptions. They flash the truth of a photo.
• Absence of relation structures the relationship between the photographic image and any particular referent, between the photography and the photographed.

• Seized by a the camera, we are mortified, i.e. objectified, thingified, imaged. As Benjamin writes in *One-Way Street* (1928):

  “The procedure itself caused the models to live, not out of the instant, but into it; during the long exposure they developed, as it were, into the image”

• The image announces our absence and our death before our death.
• After our death, we will only be here as *images*.
• The survival of the dead.
• Conjuncture between death and the photographed as a principle of photographic certitude.
• Photography is a a grave for the living dead.
• It tells their history: a history of shadows and ghosts. It bespeaks a certain horror, because it “certifies that the corpse is alive, as corpse, it is the living image of a dead thing” [R. Barthes, *Camera lucida*, p. 79].

• Photography as bereavement
• “Whatever we know will cease to exist, becomes an image” [Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 87].
• *Le public moderne et la photographie* (1859)
• The flâneur was, first of all, a literary type from 19th century France, essential to any picture of the streets of Paris.
• It was Walter Benjamin, drawing on the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, who made this figure the object of scholarly interest in the 20th century, as an emblematic archetype of urban, modern experience. Following Benjamin, the flâneur has become an important symbol for scholars, artists and writers.
• The most notable application of flâneur to street photography probably comes from Susan Sontag in her 1977 collection of essays, *On Photography*. She describes how, since the development of hand-held cameras in the early 20th century, the camera has become the tool of the flâneur:

  “The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the flâneur finds the world "picturesque." (Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 55)

• The return of the departed: its having-been-there as part of our relationship to photography.
• The return of what was once there takes the form of a haunting: ghosts and phantoms

• “The image wanders ghostlike through the present. Ghostly apparitions occur only in places where a terrible deed has been committed. The photograph becomes a ghost because the costume doll lived.... This ghostlike reality is unredeemed .... A shudder goes through the viewer of old photographs for they do not illustrate the recognition of the original but rather the spatial configuration of a moment; it is not the person who appears in his photograph, but the sum of what is to be deducted from him. It annihilates the person by portraying him, and were he to converge with it, he would not exist” [S. Kracauer, Photography, 1927, pp. 31-32]

• James Coates wrote in his work Photographing the Invisible (1911), it was not uncommon to believe that the spirits had to use ‘reproductions and duplications’ to find a model and so manifest themselves, which gave implicit support to the power of photography to confer recognisable identity, and even to its reproducibility.
• As another medium explained, these reproductions were in fact to be regarded as totally independent of their originary indexical references, working instead as infinitely ‘reprintable moulds’ for the spirits to transmit their presence:
• “Whenever any spirits on our side manifest themselves, either by means of photography or by materialization, it is necessary for them to create what I may call a mould, by which they can impress themselves upon the photographic plate [...] we could, of course, make a fresh mould for every fresh sitting, but this would involve a great deal of trouble to make new moulds any more than there is in [...] taking a negative for every portrait you desire to give away to a friend. You get the block and go on printing. We get the mould and go on reproducing copies when they are wanted. [Cyprian PriestessMystery’, Borderland, July 1895, quoted in R. H. Krauss, Beyond Light and Shadow: the Role of Photography in Certain Paranormal Phenomena: An Historical Survey (Munich: Nazraeli Press, 1994), p. 156].

• The power of the photograph is revealed in death: it continues to evoke what can no longer be there.
• Photograph is exposed at death and it exists before death. In photographing someone, we know that the photograph will survive him - it begins, even during his life, to circulate without him, figuring and anticipating his death each time it is looked at.
• The photograph belongs to the afterlife of the photographed. It is permanently inflamed by the instantaneous flash of death.

• Photography
  • Evoking Death/Dead
  • Memory (Aide-mémoire)
  • Aura (uniqueness)
  • Documentary evidence
  • History
• Cesare Lombroso and the birth of criminology

  - L'uomo di genio in rapporto alla psichiatria, 1888 (Man of Genius, London, 1891)

- Le crime: Causes et remèdes, 1899 (Crime, its Causes and Remedies, Boston, 1911)

• Physiognomic and Phrenology

• Panopticon

• Obsession of observing
• Obsession of surveillance
• The Panopticon is a type of institutional building designed by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. The concept of the design is to allow all (pan-) inmates of an institution to be observed (-opticon) by a single watchman without the inmates being able to tell whether or not they are being watched.

• “At the time (at the beginning of this book) when I was inquiring into my attachment to certain photographs, I thought I could distinguish a field of cultural interest (the studium) from that unexpected flash which sometimes crosses this field and which I called the punctum. I now know that there exists another punctum (another "stigmatum") than the "detail." This new punctum, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the noeme ("that-has-been"), its pure representation. In 1865, young Lewis Payne tried to assassinate Secretary of State W. H. Seward. Alexander Gardner photographed him in his cell, where he was waiting to be hanged. photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the studium. But the punctum is: he is going to die. I read at the same time: this will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose, the photograph tells me death in the future. What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence” (pp. 95-96).

• punctum: personal significance for a ‘reader’ unintended by the ‘author’

  • Studium, Punctum and Aura

• Benjamin’s writings on photography and film are justly renowned for their twin theses of the transformation of the concept of art by its ‘technical reproducibility’ and the new possibilities for collective experience this contains, in the wake of the historical decline of the ‘aura’ of the work of art, a process that film is presented as definitively concluding
• On the one hand, with regard to some of his writings, Benjamin’s concept of aura has been accused of fostering a nostalgic, purely negative sense of modernity as loss—loss of unity both with nature and in community.

• Benjamin had written affirmatively of “the emancipation of object from aura” as early as 1931, in his Little History of Photography, in which he described Ager’s photographs as “suck[ing] the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship” (SW 2, 518). It is here that we find the basic definition of aura: “A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be.”
• Importantly, the examples given with this definition are from nature: mountains and a branch observed “at rest on a summer’s noon ... until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance...”.

• The ‘destruction’ of the aura by transience and reproducibility is judged “a salutary estrangement” (SW 2, 518–9). Similarly, when ‘The Storyteller’ recounts the “dying out of the art of storytelling” and “the incomparable aura that surrounds the storyteller”, it is nonetheless maintained: “nothing could be more fatuous than to wish to see it as merely a ‘symptom of decay’, let alone a ‘modern symptom’. It is rather, only a concomitant of the secular productive forces of history...” (SW 3, 146; 162).

• Aura: art (Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, 1936) = punctum: photography (Barthes, Camera lucida)

• Aura is collective, cultural, shared by a social frameworks: the uniqueness of a work of art.

• What is a punctum?

• Barthes writes: “I wanted to learn at all costs what Photographs was ‘in itself,’ by what essential feature it was to be distinguished from the community of images... I wasn’t sure that Photography existed, that it had a ‘genius’ of its own”. (Camera Lucida, New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2010, p. 3).

• Throughout the course of his book, Barthes discovers what he believes to separate photography from other images: the dual presence of the studium and the punctum. Barthes examines images in relation to his theory to argue that the combination of the studium and punctum create the unique “genius” of photography.

• Barthes defines the studium as “application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general acuity.” (p. 26) and he defines the punctum as follow: “punctum is sting, speck, cut, little hold—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (p. 27).

• Barthes uses logical steps throughout his book to prove his thesis. He begins by investigating his own attraction to certain photographs and finds that, “the attraction certain photographs exerted upon me was advenience or even adventure. This picture advenes, that one doesn’t” (p. 19).

• Adventure: c. 1200, aventure "that which happens by chance, fortune, luck," from Old French aventure (11c.) "chance, accident, occurrence, event, happening," from Latin adventura (res) "(a thing) about to happen," from adventurus, future participle of advenire "to come to, reach, arrive at," from ad- "to" (see ad-) + venire "to come" (see venue).

• He goes on to say that, “the principle of adventure allows me to make Photography exist”,[p. 19] which is to say that, according to Barthes, the existence of photography is determined by the presence of an adventure” [p. 20]. Furthermore, Barthes states that, “in this glum desert, suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; it animates me, and I animate it. I must name the attraction which makes it exist: an animation. The photograph itself is in no way animated...but it animates me: this is what creates every adventure” [p. 23].

• In this quote, Barthes claims that attraction to a photograph is determined by the
animation of the spectator, which in turn creates the adventure of the photograph.

• The images that Barthes analyses in his text support and expand his definition of the *studium* and *punctum*. For example, Barthes discusses Koen Wessing’s photograph, *Nicaragua* (Fig. 1), to introduce the dualistic qualities of the *studium/punctum* relationship. He finds a similar quality in another of Wessing’s photograph from the same *Nicaragua* series (Fig. 2). By referencing two photographs by the same artist, Barthes demonstrates that the tension created by the duality of the *studium* and *punctum* is often a product of the skills of the photographer rather than the subject matter.

• Thus the *punctum* at this point is defined as an element of the photograph that pricks the viewer and cannot be named, and the *studium* is an element of the photograph that can be coded.

• In this section Barthes also further defines the *punctum* as an element that “should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it.” [p. 51]

• For Barthes, both the *punctum* and absolute subjectively lie behind closed eyes; he writes, “Absolute subjectivity is achieved only in a state, an effort, of silence (shutting your eyes is to make the image speak in silence).” [p.55]

• By placing both subjectivity and the *punctum* in the same realm of subconsciousness, Barthes distinguishes the duality of the *punctum* and the *studium* as the subjective and objective interpretations of photography.

• A *punctum* can have different “stages” – performativity of memory - with respect to memory:

  • Individual *punctum*
  • Collective *punctum*
  • Cultural *punctum*

• Barthes, *Camera lucida* (1977)

• “I read at the same time: This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott’s psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe. This *punctum*, more or less blurred beneath the abundance and the disparity of contemporary photographs, is vividly legible in historical photographs: there is always a defeat of Time in them: that is dead and that is going to die. These two little girls looking at a primitive airplane above their village (they are dressed like my mother as a child, they are playing with hoops) - - how alive they are! They have their whole lives before them; but also they are dead (today), they are then already dead (yesterday). At the limit, there is no need to represent a body in order for me to experience this vertigo of time defeated”.
