Chapter 1  RACE AND REPRODUCTION
IN CAMERA LUCIDA

In his influential study of photography, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Roland Barthes famously makes himself the measure of photographic meaning. 1 The book is his attempt "to formulate the fundamental feature" of photography "starting from a few personal impulses" (8–9). In other words, Barthes seeks to discover the essential characteristics of photography through his own particular responses to images. It is this profoundly personal treatment of photography that lends *Camera Lucida* both its most evocative power and its most frustrating limitations.

Barthes's text has been tremendously important and generative, both theoretically and methodologically, for photography scholars. As his work has demonstrated, the personal can be a powerful point of departure for critical analysis, but as feminist scholars have insisted for decades, "the personal is political." 2 Reconsidering Barthes's individual and idiosyncratic path to the universal in *Camera Lucida* reveals the political import of his "personal impulses." A close reading of the text suggests that many of Barthes's most important insights are informed by complicated, and sometimes vexing, personal-political inclinations. Indeed, Barthes's very conception of photography is laden with anxieties about race and reproduction. 3

Barthes's attempts to define the *punctum* consistently register a sensation of racial or sexual inquietude. Further, although the punctum is triggered by the photograph, it ultimately has little to do with the image itself. It is an inexplicable response called forth by a photograph, and its troubling, unsettling effect is always a shock
and surprise. Barthes argues that the punctum "is a kind of subtle beyond—as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see" (59), and for him, the punctum is consistently that detail, that something in a photograph, that triggers a relay of thoughts and emotions back into his personal history. The punctum is the trace that launches Barthes beyond the that-has-been of the photograph, beyond the photograph's referential denotation, beyond what can be seen, and into his own memory and experience. The punctum unsettles the fixity of the image, making it available to Barthes's private narrative.

The Punctum

Barthes defines the punctum in distinction to the studium. As many scholars have rehearsed, he suggests that the studium includes the cultural knowledge that informs one's reading of a photograph; the studium is shaped by "a certain training" (26) that effects a culturally prescribed reading of a given visual field. The punctum is a much more personal response to certain details in the photograph that "wound" or pierce an individual viewer, punctuating, or breaking through the trained reading of the studium (25–27). Barthes proclaims, "In order to perceive the punctum, no analysis would be of any use to me." He thereby suggests that the punctum cannot be codified or predicted for any individual viewer. As readers of Barthes's text, however, we can assess the examples he uses to describe the punctum, and note the subtle patterns that inform them.

In a salient example, Barthes explains the workings of the punctum through his reaction to a photograph by James VanDerZee, a group portrait made in 1926 (see figure 1.1). His studium description of the image is notably condescending: he states that the photograph "utters respectability, family life, conformism, Sunday best, an effort of social advancement in order to assume the White Man's attributes (an effort touching by reason of its naïveté)" (43). Barthes's explanation of the studium is laden with a paternal racism that readers are asked to ignore in pursuit of that which really interests him, the punctum. He calls upon the studium as if it is apparent, transparent, as if this lovely formal portrait could not be read in any other way, as if all readers would share his bemused reaction to the image and its subjects. While Barthes's reading might certainly be attributed to a predictable set of European cultural codes, readers are not asked to "see" those codes as part and parcel of the studium, but instead to see through them to the meaning Barthes presumes. In other words, Camera Lucida asks readers to view a race-based paternalism as natural, or beside the point, rather than as a culturally codified part of the studium to be put under examination.

The foundation from which Barthes moves to a discussion of the punctum, his studium reading of the photograph by VanDerZee, is thus perplexing, and his extended rumination on the punctum vis-à-vis this photograph is also curious. Considering the image further, Barthes proposes that
what truly interests him in the image, the punctum, the details that prick him, are the strapped pumps worn by the woman who stands in the photograph. He notes: "Strange to say . . . this particular punctum arouses great sympathy in me, almost a kind of tenderness" (43). Here the shiny shoes of an unnamed woman provide the inexplicable something that compels him and captures his imagination. But then the punctum shifts. Recalling the photograph in a later explanation of the punctum as latent, as the detail that haunts the viewer only after the image itself is no longer under view, only after it has been transformed into a visual memory, Barthes muses: "Reading Van der Zee's photograph, I thought I had discerned what moved me: the strapped pumps of the black woman in her Sunday best; but this photograph has worked within me, and later on I realized that the real punctum was the necklace she was wearing; for (no doubt) it was this same necklace (a slender ribbon of braided gold) which I had seen worn by someone in my own family, and which, once she died, remained shut up in a family box of old jewelry (this sister of my father never married, lived with her mother as an old maid, and I had always been saddened whenever I thought of her dreary life). I had just realized that however immediate and incisive it was, the punctum could accommodate a certain latency (but never any scrutiny)" (53).

In Barthes's memory, a woman's strapped pumps transmute into the punctum of her necklace, "a slender ribbon of braided gold" that resembles a necklace worn by Barthes's aunt. And yet, if one refuses to rely on Barthes's recollection of the VanDerZee photograph, and turns to look at it again, one finds that both of the women in the photograph wear necklaces, but they are pearl necklaces, not the ribbons of braided gold that prick Barthes. What, then, is the punctum? Barthes says, "It is what I add to the photograph," but it is also "what is nonetheless already there." And yet here it would seem that "what is there" in the photograph, the actual detail (the pearl necklace), can be obfuscated by what Barthes brings to the photograph (the ribbon of braided gold). That which pierces the surface of the photograph may not be visible in the image itself. Indeed, the punctum may refer to an entirely subjective signification system.

Surely Barthes's failure to remember precisely the attributes of a piece of jewelry is a slight offense; it is, however, indicative of a much more fundamental interpretive slippage, whereby personal connotation can efface representational denotation through the mechanism of the punctum. Gold ribbons displace pearl necklaces, and French aunts efface African American women. One is left to wonder whether this erasure, effected by the punctum, is in part a result of the studium, of a race-based paternalism that can disregard an African American woman's self-representation as trite.

The people represented in VanDerZee's photograph are, in fact, the maternal aunts and uncle of their photographer—Mattie, Estelle, and David Osterhout. But Barthes's musings are of little use in discerning this. In fact, in his response to this image he sidesteps his most powerful insight into the distinguishing characteristics of photographic signification, the that-has-been, the undeniable referentiality of the photograph, the uncanny presence of its subject. His punctum reaction to the photograph effaces and replaces those depicted with a personal revelation, obscuring the indexicality of the photograph with a memory that might have been evoked by any other sign system. The punctum evades the photograph itself, enclosing Barthes in a solipsistic reverie. In making himself (and his memories) the measure of photographic meaning, Barthes obfuscates the presence of other historical subjects, and in so doing disregards the evocative, provoking presence, or present absence, of those represented on photographic film. It would seem that the race-based paternalism registered in his studium reading enables Barthes to devalue those who have been, subsuming them under himself, under his own personal history, under the inadequate prick of the punctum.

The Photograph, the Mask, the Slave

Although the portrait by VanDerZee is the image Barthes returns to again and again, it is not the only photograph of African Americans he calls upon to define the fundamental features of photography. In his discussion of Richard Avedon's portrait, taken in 1963, of William Casby, a man who was "born a slave," Barthes proclaims to see "the essence of slavery . . . laid bare" (34), and also to understand photographic meaning as a kind of mask. Barthes argues that the photograph means nothing, that it communicates only that-has-been, unless it becomes a mask, an abstraction greater than a particular subject, a type divorced from an individual, a culturally translated symbol. If one recalls the language he used to describe the photographic sign in earlier studies, the "message without a code" signifies only to the degree to which it can be abstracted and, in fact, codified. It
cannot enter the world of signs proper unless its specificity is transformed. In Barthes's reading, the portrait of William Casby enters the realm of meaning as it comes to signify "slave," and ceases to register a singular face. In other words, Barthes collapses William Casby under the sign of slave, seeing in this portrait not a man who must have lived most of his life as an autonomous subject, but instead "the essence of slavery laid bare." In Barthes's reading, a subject is transformed into an object; in Frederick Douglass's famous words, "a man is made into a slave." Barthes then uses the objectification of Casby to comment on the nature of photographic meaning; photographs become readable through a similar process of abstraction and categorization. The photograph enters meaning as its specific subject is transformed into a cultural object.

Elsewhere in Camera Lucida, this process of objectification troubles Barthes. Indeed, it particularly disturbs him when he thinks about his own photographic portraits. As Jane Gallop has recently noted, Barthes very rarely considers photographs of himself in Camera Lucida, choosing instead the role of spectator, of viewer, of the self as the politically autonomous subject authorized to look." Musing upon the process of being photographed, Barthes says, "The Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object" (14). Resisting such objectification, Barthes proclaims: "It is my political right to be a subject which I must protect" (15). The political right of subjecthood is, of course, precisely what is denied to the enslaved; he or she is not legally recognized as a subject, but as an object.

In Barthes’s analysis, the photograph is in some ways equated with the slave; the cultural meaning of both is accorded by the extent to which they function as objects. Thus Barthes’s choice of the William Casby portrait is particularly telling, for it amplifies the objectification that is central to Barthes’s experience of the photographic process, and central to his description of photographic meaning. For Barthes, the slave figures as the objectified individual that most explicitly emblemsizes photography’s transformation of private subjects into public objects—the slave is the objectified subject par excellence. Through the portrait of William Casby, Barthes transfers to enslaved men and women the position of the objectified that he resists for himself. Maintaining his own political right to be a subject, Barthes collapses William Casby into the category of the photographed that signifies slave.

That-Has-Been

Slavery surfaces again in Barthes’s articulation of the photographic sign’s most unique characteristic, its indexical testimonial, that-has-been. One of the images that registers most powerfully for him the very ontology of photography, this that-has-been, is a photograph of a slave market that he cut from a magazine as a child and carefully saved, a photograph that "showed a slave market: the slavemaster, in a hat, standing; the slaves, in loincloths, sitting." The image provoked the child Barthes’s "horror and fascination," for as a photograph it proclaimed with "certainty that such a thing had existed" (80).

According to Barthes, the photographic sign, unlike the linguistic sign, first exists as both a temporal and a tactile fact—the photograph records light rays reflected off an object, impressing themselves onto photographic film in a fraction of a second. "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent" (80). While the photograph may not be able, without textual interpretation, to tell us much more about the subject it makes visible, it undeniably testifies—that-has-been. Through the magic of light and chemistry, "that," as it existed for a fraction of a second, impressed itself on film. This incontrovertible presence is what fascinated and horrified Barthes about the photograph of the slave market: the photograph gave evidence of slavery, proving its existence with certainty, as Barthes says, "without mediation" (80). In other words, the photograph made slavery uniquely present and even palpable; it impressed the fact of slavery into the time and space of the child Barthes’s consciousness.

Following his brief discussion of the photograph of the slave market, Barthes notes a secondary effect of the photograph’s power to proclaim that-has-been, namely the sense that the viewer is literally touched by the subject photographed. "From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here... A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed" (80–81). The light that touches the surface of the subject photographed, captured on film, also touches the viewer. Rebounding as it were, in Barthes’s imagination, from subject, to photograph, to viewer. Perhaps this then underscores what is so shocking, for Barthes, about the photograph of the slave market, for it not only testifies to the existence of slavery, it also touches him; in his imagination, he shares a skin with the en-
slaved men and women. In this provocative shared corporeality, Barthes's own position as a free, white, self-possessed European viewer is unsettled, for his “shared skin” metonymically links him with slavery, blackness, and objectification under a white gaze. He achieves for a moment, perhaps, a recognition of what Frantz Fanon called the racial epidermal schema of colonial and postcolonial Europe, in which the black man’s subjectivity is subsumed under the sign of his skin.11 The shared skin that links Barthes to enslaved people must unsettle his own sense of (political) self-possession, reminding him of that which he refuses, namely his own potential to be objectified. But even as the photograph instills anxiety, it also enables him to pass off the position of the objectified onto others. The shared skin that might force a recognition of his own fragmentation is finally overcome by the logics of differentiation that reinforce Barthes’s white subjectivity in distinction to black objects. Ultimately, the sameness of shared skin glimpsed in photographic indexicality is psychically repressed.

By nature of its literal absence in the text, the photograph of the slave market occupies a position intriguingly parallel to Camera Lucida’s most famous image, the Winter Garden Photograph of Barthes’s mother as a young girl. This image is the photograph that sets the second half of the book’s meditations in motion (73). It is the image that Barthes, mourning his mother’s death, ultimately seeks, a photograph that captures her essential self, and in so doing also captures the intrinsic nature of photography, the medium’s unique capacity to make the absent subject present. In the Winter Garden Photograph Barthes finds his mother’s essence captured in the photograph’s that-has-been; in this image the mask of photographic meaning suddenly vanishes, and he is left in the presence of his mother’s soul (109). In this instance the that-has-been overwhelms the cultural meaning of the image; the portrait is not confined to or delimited by likeness; it offers truth and identity. As Barthes declares: “The Winter Garden Photograph was indeed essential, it achieved for me, utopically, the impossible science of the unique being” (71). Whereas the portrait of William Casby exemplifies the mask of photographic meaning whereby a unique individual is translated into a cultural sign, the Winter Garden Photograph effects precisely the opposite; it removes the mask to reveal the unique individual. The Winter Garden Photograph becomes, for Barthes, a “treasury of rays” that “emanated” from his mother, “from her hair, her skin, her dress, her gaze, on that day” (82). An image deeply personal and profoundly important to Barthes, it is one he refuses to reproduce for later viewers. Thus, the essential images, those that make the that-has-been most powerfully apparent, are the images that ultimately remain absent from Barthes’s text, the photograph of the slave market and the Winter Garden Photograph.

Barthes’s refusal or inability to reproduce examples of his most powerful evidence is curious in such a heavily illustrated text. One can easily understand, however, his reluctance to share the Winter Garden Photograph, an image deeply important to him, but an image that might prove, for other viewers, “nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the ‘ordinary’” (73).12 And yet, Barthes’s decision not to reproduce this image also leaves his readers only with Barthes’s interpretation. The photographic evidence is obscured, indeed replaced, by his reading. There is no chance for the represented to stand and meet the gaze of others, and there is no opportunity for another viewer to be authorized. Denied one’s own response to the image, ultimately one can only respond to Barthes himself. This accords with Barthes’s preferences, for one of the very things he proclaims to have admired about his mother is that he had never known her to make “a single observation” (69). In Barthes’s account, she never looked and considered and critiqued.13 She never performed the intellectual work that was Barthes’s entire purpose. She was there to be observed only, and in the case of the Winter Garden Photograph, to be observed only by Barthes.

An Umbilical Cord of Light

The metaphor of a shared skin linking viewer and viewed (81), which Barthes evokes to explain the profound impact of the photograph that has-been, its “intractable reality” (119), is a truly provocative image, especially if one imagines Barthes gazing at the photograph of the slave market, which so intrigued and astonished him as a child. Even more provocative, perhaps, is the kind of skin that Barthes imagines links him as viewer to the photographed subject. In his articulation, “light” becomes not simply a “carnal medium” but an “umbilical cord” (81), joining viewer and viewed in a surprisingly filial, in fact, maternal, relation.

If the photograph is the conduit for the umbilical cord of light, exactly who stands in the place of the mother in this relationship, the viewer or the viewed? Once again, Barthes’s discussion of the Winter Garden Photograph is instructive here. In this image, Barthes sees his “mother-as-child” (71), and recognizes how childlike she actually did become in her last days.
Musing on the end of her life, Barthes suggests, “She had become my little girl, uniting for me with that essential child she was in her first photograph” (72). As Barthes’s mother becomes his little girl, Barthes enters, briefly, the procreative model of generation, of reproduction; he becomes a kind of parent. He declares, “I who had not procreated, I had, in her very illness, engendered my mother” (72). Barthes, the gay male intellectual without children, is linked through his mother, by becoming his mother’s mother, to what he deems the universal. He transcends himself, his particularity, his death, by momentarily creating a child (his ailing mother). And yet, because this child will not live past his own inevitable death, Barthes’s parenting provides only a taste of the “Life Force” through which, according to “so many philosophers,” so many heteronormative philosophers, the individual transcends death through his or her procreative role in the reproduction of “the race, the species” (72).

After his mother’s death, Barthes’s vision of himself as gay male progenitor also dies, and he declares that he can no longer do anything but wait for his “total, undialectical death” (72). And yet, he also proposes that his procreative capacity might be reenvisioned in a utopian sense, whereby he might transcend finality through writing, in which he might live beyond himself through the texts he generates. In this sense, writing provides an escape from the body that dies or fails or refuses to procreate; writing enables the proliferation and expansion of the self beyond the awkward limitation and finality of the body.

As Barthes argues in his autobiography, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, writing also liberates the self from the limitations of its “narrative continuity,” from its biography, from its place in the “family romance.” That discreet, continuous self, the self that must be liberated from its singularity and confinement, is construed and anchored by “imagery,” by an “image-repertoire” — by family photographs. It is one’s visual insertion into the family line that connects and confines one to a genealogy. However, writing, marking the beginning of “productive life,” can surpass the image-repertoire. Here, then, photographs represent the domain of the discreet, biographical, ultimately unproductive self, while writing represents the domain of the self liberated from its private definitions and made productive. The photograph adheres one to a body, the written text only to an abstract signifier. In Barthes’s autobiography, as in Camera Lucida, the photograph, like the body it represents, ultimately signifies death. Writing, on the other hand, relying on the abstract linguistic signifier, can liberate one from the body, and thereby signify beyond life and death.

Following Barthes’s ruminations on photography in his autobiography, one might also associate the photograph, as Victor Burgin has, with a kind of expanded semiotic sphere (in Julia Kristeva’s sense), an extended presymbolic stage in which the body and its sensations, and the mother’s body, dominate self-perception. For Barthes, the image-repertoire, and the biography it anchors, ends with one’s youth, as one enters the public social sphere through the production of writing. The semiotic, associated with the image (and the mother), ends with mastery of the symbolic.

The images that introduce Barthes’s autobiography reinforce such a psychoanalytic reading. A photograph of the infant Barthes being held by his mother, both of them looking at the camera, is playfully entitled The Mirror Stage: “That’s You.” Clearly referencing Lacan’s mirror stage, in which the infant comes to recognize himself in and as an image, Barthes’s photograph anchors early self-perception in the image, and in the arms of the mother. Another, later photograph, The Demand for Love, replicates The Mirror Stage, with the child Barthes held in his mother’s arms and both again looking out at the camera. The repetition of the pose is strained, however, by the size of the boy Barthes, no longer able, really, to fit in his mother’s arms. In D. A. Miller’s wonderful reading of this image, the photograph announces what he calls “a certain gay male body.” According to Miller, “His ungaily lower limbs betray the boy. . . . They are too long for short pants, and too long to justify what the boy nonetheless evidently persists in wanting: to be carried by his mother.” Refusing the mythos of the (presumably straight) male body’s autonomy in his display of the “mothered body,” “every image of Barthes, whether fully grown or all alone,” according to Miller, “materially reinscribes his mother in the characteristically dejected posture of his body, always ducking and drooping, as though always wanting, but never any longer able, to drop into her arms.” In Camera Lucida two things are certain: one is a temporal fact, the that-has-been of the photograph; the other is a spatial fact, namely, as “Freud says of the maternal body, . . . that ‘there is no other place of which one can say with so much certainty that one has already been there’” (40).

Those very things that must be superseded by writing in order to liberate the productive self in Barthes’s autobiography — the image-repertoire and the mother’s body — actually become the source of a procreative im-
pulse and power in *Camera Lucida*. Indeed, in Barthes's final text a powerfully procreative image emerges in his thoughts on photography: as light becomes an umbilical cord that links the photographed to Barthes himself, a vision of the gay male progenitor reemerges. Photography becomes, as it were, a doubly reproductive medium. Light becomes a carnal vehicle, and mechanical reproduction serves as a kind of surrogate for sexual reproduction.

In an inventive alteration of what one might traditionally think of as photography's creative function, Barthes does not place the photographer in the position of progenitor, but instead evokes the viewer, the spectator, Barthes himself, as the origin point for reproduction. In a stunning statement, he declares: “I am the reference of every photograph” (84). If every photograph refers to him, if he becomes the subject of every photograph, then the images also reproduce him, they become his reproductions, his generative offspring. Suddenly the that-has-been, the intractable certainty of a temporal real, of the momentary presence in absence of the thing photographed, is subsumed under the sign of the viewer, referring to that viewer, representing and reproducing him. Through this articulation, Barthes becomes, in his own imagination, the mother of all photographs. What is one to make of this?

If one returns, as Barthes himself so often does, to the portrait by VanDerZee, it is illuminating to reconsider the punctum in light of these thoughts on reproduction. Revisiting Barthes’s ruminations on this photograph, one finds that it is really only one woman, Estelle Osterhout, and the details of her attire, that trigger the punctum for Barthes. Her low belt, her strapped pumps, and finally her pearl necklace spark Barthes’s mournful response to the photograph. He describes this woman as “the ‘solacing Mammy’” (43), and once again his punctum response is informed by a specific studium training. The African American woman becomes “Mammy” only through the lens of a racialized and gendered class system. Subsuming the woman of color under the white fantasy of the “Mammy,” Barthes symbolically harnesses her procreative energies to raising a white brood, effacing her own potentially reproductive role as mother.

The necklace Osterhout wears recalls for Barthes that other necklace, the “slender ribbon of braided gold,” which belonged to his aunt. VanDerZee’s aunt reminds Barthes of his own aunt, whom he describes, once again, as follows: “This sister of my father never married, lived with her mother as an old maid, and I had always been saddened whenever I thought of her dreary life” (53). (Remarkably, Estelle Osterhout never married either.) Deeming his aunt an “old maid,” Barthes would seem to denigrate her for failing in her procreative role. And yet, this aunt’s “dreary life” mirrors quite closely Barthes’s own, for he himself never married and lived his entire adult life with his mother. Indeed, Barthes’s pity for his aunt may mask an anxiety about his own family position. In a brief discussion of the photograph’s capacity to capture a “genetic feature,” Barthes declares: “In a certain photograph, I have my father’s sister’s ‘look’” (103).

Ultimately, the punctum in VanDerZee’s photograph is activated by Barthes’s nervous identification with his own aunt. Through a signifying slippage, VanDerZee’s aunt recalls Barthes’s aunt, who finally recalls Barthes himself. What Barthes sees in this image, in the woman who stands behind and to the side of her relatives, slightly in the shadows, is an image of his own aunt, and finally of himself—an image of the one who stands to the side of the family narrative. Barthes is never really the mother of all photographs, but always the aunt.

Barthes’s anxieties about race and reproduction thus merge in his response to the photograph by VanDerZee. The punctum effectively intertwines them, reminding Barthes of that which he might actively seek to repress, namely the instability of his subject position as a white homosexual man. As Barthes understood, one’s relationship to “the race, the species” (72) falters if one does not reproduce, and sexual reproduction has long been the (heavily monitored) site of racial reproduction. But as sex reproduces race, race might also be said to reproduce sex. Early medical discourses of sexual “deviancy” borrowed from the discourses of race science, categorizing the homosexual body in terms similar to the racialized body. In these racialized discourses of sexuality, Barthes might have found himself, once again, uneasily “sharing skin” with black bodies.

The intersection of Barthes’s concerns about race and reproduction in *Camera Lucida* may help to explain his surprising references to Francis Galton, the founder of eugenics. Galton defined eugenics both as a science of race and a program of controlled breeding, and he utilized photographs to construct the physical signs of familial lineage and race. Barthes evokes the eugenicist idea of biological inheritance in his discussion of “the stock” made manifest in the faces of family members caught on film (103–9), and it is here that he bemoans his resemblance to his aunt (103). The family likeness that links Barthes to his aunt also recalls their similar role in refusing to reproduce; they carry, but will not continue, the reproduction of
Barthes offers a different model of the possible relationship between viewer and viewed. Entering into a photograph, one might embrace its subject, allowing one's self to be touched, without demanding reference or representation. One might identify without subsuming or consuming the other. In other words, the presence of the present-absent might be maintained in the face of one's own response. The that-has-been might be allowed to co-exist with the punctum.

This model of photographic engagement acknowledges the that-has-been much more powerfully than mere studium recognition. It maintains the urgency and intensity of response accorded by the punctum, without allowing the viewer's own stories to overwhelm the subject photographed. Such a method of photographic inquiry depends on the labor of the viewer. Such mad recognition requires a viewer willing to enter the spectacle of the photograph, willing to embrace its subject. It requires the effort of a devoted son, perhaps, or an obsessive scholar. This is the viewer Barthes finally commits himself to being, and this is the viewer Barthes cannot be certain his own images will secure.

Barthes persistently places himself in his text, representing and reproducing himself, symbolically grasping at what he calls the Life Force. Once again, it is his search for his mother's trace, recorded in a photograph, that compels Barthes's thoughts on that Life Force. Looking through photographs to find the truth of the one he loved, Barthes must also wonder who will perform this tender act of mourning for him. Will his own photographs, like his aunt's necklace, remain "shut up in a family box" (53), neglected by more distant relations? Will they become the abandoned and disarcaded images David Deitcher describes in his search for a gay archive? Reflecting on one such image, Deitcher states: "The knowledge that no children of my own will survive to remember me contributes to [my] morbid predisposition; as does the suspicion that among my eight nieces and nephews, some will forget me too."52

If the writing life frees one from the family narrative, so does a refusal to reproduce. But the latter "liberation" from the family romance is filled with anxiety for Barthes, because it is also a return to the finitude to which that family narrative, supported by his childhood photographs, seemed to confine him. Surely Barthes has lived on through his writings rather remarkably—his present-absence remains profound. But it is existential mourning and anxiety that pervades Camera Lucida, his last text. After the death of his mother, Barthes cannot be certain his demands for love
The photographs are stunning. Seven images, each side-by-side, are positioned, placed side-by-side in a row. In each image, the man's face is seen close-up, with the focus on the eyes, nose, and mouth. His eyes are closed and he appears to be sleeping. The lighting is soft, creating a serene atmosphere. The images are accompanied by a poem that describes the man's quietness and tranquility, capturing the essence of his peaceful expression.

Chapter 2
THE POLITICS OF PICTORIALISM

Another Look at Holland Day

Holland Day was a prominent photographer and advocate for the rights of women and children. His work focused on capturing the beauty and simplicity of everyday life, often using soft lighting and a focus on the details of his subjects. The photographs in this chapter reflect his commitment to documenting the world around him in a way that emphasized its natural beauty and the dignity of its inhabitants.

Barthes's personal exploration of photography begins with a reflection on the nature of the photograph as a form of representation. He considers the way in which photography can be used to construct narratives and convey meaning, and how it can be used to encode and decode the world around us.

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to cherish his photograph. Barthes finds himself faced with the question of what to do with a photograph that is no longer his own. He considers the ways in which the photograph can be used to evoke memory and nostalgia, and how it can be used to preserve a piece of history.

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Using the punctum as partway to the that-has-been, I will try to meet

and bring together the two sides of Barthes's work: his essay on the photograph and his use of the photograph itself. In this essay, Barthes provides a detailed analysis of the way in which the photograph can be used to construct narratives and convey meaning, and how it can be used to encode and decode the world around us. He considers the ways in which the photograph can be used to evoke memory and nostalgia, and how it can be used to preserve a piece of history.

The photographs in this chapter reflect Barthes's commitment to documenting the world around him in a way that emphasized its natural beauty and the dignity of its inhabitants. Through his use of soft lighting and a focus on the details of his subjects, Barthes created images that were both visually striking and emotionally evocative. The photographs in this chapter are a testament to his dedication to capturing the world around him in a way that was both accurate and poetic.