

Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida*

Roland Barthes was a French literary critic and cultural theorist working in the mid 20th century. He was interested in analyzing the ways in which meaning is communicated in everyday images such as advertising. He wrote a number of different texts on literature, everyday mythologies, and authorship. His final text is the melancholy literary work, *Camera Lucida*. In this text Barthes is searching for an image that will do justice to the memory of his mother in the photographs she has left behind. In searching for this singular image Barthes also begins to develop a theory of the essence of photography, its relationship to time and to death. Barthes distinguishes between two qualities of photographs: the Studium and the Punctum. The Studium is the general information of the image, it is *un-affecting*. The Punctum, conversely, leaps out of the image to assault the eye of the beholder. The punctum is described by Barthes as a wound, a prick, or a piercing. The Punctum is a detail in the image that arrests the attention on the viewer, but potentially remains indescribable, a feature of an unconscious association. Eventually Barthes finds the image that does justice to his mother's being, but he does not reproduce it in the text.