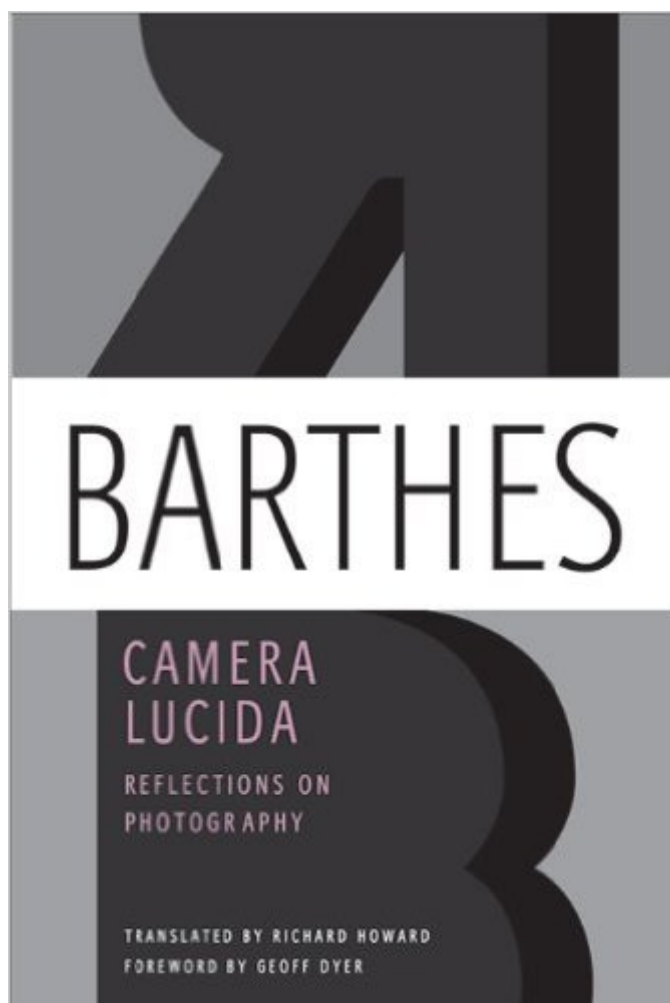


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# Camera Lucida: Reflections On Photography



## Synopsis

A graceful, contemplative volume, *Camera Lucida* was first published in 1979. Commenting on artists such as Avedon, Clifford, Mapplethorpe, and Nadar, Roland Barthes presents photography as being outside the codes of language or culture, acting on the body as much as on the mind, and rendering death and loss more acutely than any other medium. This groundbreaking approach established *Camera Lucida* as one of the most important books of theory on the subject, along with Susan Sontag's *On Photography*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I got this book for an Art History class (History of Photography). I gave myself exactly one week to read this book. It wasn't enough time; this book is incredibly complex for Undergraduate reading. I had to reread the book several times, but thanks to my teacher, TA and fellow students, we managed to break it down and begin actually seeing what Barthes is saying. He wrote this book as an essay not necessarily to teach but more so to explain why he was attracted to photos more than others while looking for his perfect photo of his recently deceased mother. The first part of the book breaks down and explains the different parts of photography. The most important term to remember is punctum (and studium which goes with it) and enimos, or essence. The Second part breaks down his discovery of the Winter Garden photo (which is never seen in the book) and why he is attracted to it, or other words, he uses the terms from Part One to explain the photo. As a student I highly dislike this book because of its difficult reading, but as an Art Historian, I find it incredibly useful, especially for any students planning on going into Contemporary art, which is highly dominated by

the field of photography.

This book never ceases to make me think about the role of pictures and the way it seduces our senses and memory that is difficult to explain by words. A lot of people arguing on the Barthes insistence on the aura of the pictures, though it's remaining true since the early invention of photography. I'm intrigued by this essay and continually fascinated by this search for meaning in the object of picture. Highly recommended!

One of the most important books on experience, society, and culture, written in the 20th century. The reflection is on photography, but involves aspects from phenomenology, deconstruction, and critical theory. This book should be read by all, not just artist or art historians. There is a massive amount of information in these short passages that read more as a dialog than a formal text. It is often so accessible that it is taken in passing without a thorough engagement.

Quite an interesting documentary of photography by Barthes. I think books like this, and Sontag, are interesting to read as they help us gain perspectives from photography from various approaches. This is simply a nice book to read that happens to reflect on what gifts/memories that images catch and leave behind for society to come. It is philosophical in the sense that it questions what images do, but again a nice story in that it moves from image to image discussing them. Images of places that make you want to live there, images of people and how these images capture the essence of time, culture, and the gift of being alive. It's a great read, for me, as a photographer going to my shelf wanting something to read on photography other than about apertures and technical underpinnings. Of course they are related, and unarguably necessary, for good photography - but like Sontag you experience some of the hidden games of photography. For the deep thinking photographers out there, and admittedly not for all.

Camera Lucida provides a moving and insightful tribute to the author's mother. However, to my mind, the thinking about photography is rather less valuable. Barthes begins by announcing that the subject compels him to dispense with the compulsion to theorizing that seems endemic to French academic writing. A promising and welcome beginning. But Theory keeps intruding, in the form of jargon (the distinction between Operator, Spectator and Spectrum, which is pretty much dropped shortly after being introduced), various dichotomies (which tend to be introduced for the primary purpose of being subverted), the generation of paradoxes, and the usual rather melodramatic "last

word" concerning the inexpressible, the ineffable, and of course Death. Despite his promise to utilize as data his own personal experience of photographs in order to reach the essence of "Photography" [sic], Barthes never manages to get beyond the framework of "representation", "likeness" and "referent", all concepts (dating back to Barthes' early work in semiology) that tend to obfuscate rather than reveal how photographs present themselves to our minds. For the first thing to notice about a photograph is that it does not provide a "likeness" of a thing but rather the thing itself, the difference being that in the photograph the thing doesn't exist (here, now). In other words, the theoretical apparatus surrounding the concept of representation is inherently inadequate to understand what a photograph is, but Barthes relies on it (even if in a negative mode) from start to finish. Also annoying is the preciousity of the writing (its delight in its look and sound, suggesting an aesthete rather than a thinker), and the (again) characteristic striving for brilliance for its own sake. It's easier to appear brilliant when obfuscating than when enlightening, because philosophical and aesthetic truth is discovered not when we learn something new (via fresh information or neologisms) but rather when we are able to recall something we already know, but for some reason are unable to acknowledge. For these reasons, I find Barthes' reflections on photography to be at times very interesting and subtle but of limited value.

An interesting book, not something that I would have read had it not been required. Nonetheless Barthes raises many interesting points and I am sure that for someone involved in photography it would be a much more engaging read. Even for me it proved palatable.

This was a great read. Bought it for class along with 4 other photography books.. history of photography. but this was my favorite by far. read it twice. used it for my final in that class and in another class. great read

This is an excellent book for those who want to understand photography criticism. Ronald Barthes was not a photographer himself, but he greatly helped in the construction of contemporary photography. His writings doesn't make sense some times, but understand that this book was originally wrote in French and at the last living year of Barthes. Then you will understand.

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