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You may cite this version as: Kember, Sarah. 2008. The Virtual Life of Photography. Photographies, 1(2), pp. 175-203. ISSN 1754-0763 [Article] : Goldsmiths Research Online.

Available at: <http://eprints.gold.ac.uk/4167/>

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## **The Virtual Life of Photography**

Sarah J. Kember

*The premise of this article is that although photography is proliferating and diversifying, we still do not know what it is. In order to find out what it is, we must look at it from both the outside and the inside: we must consider both the condition of photography, and its ontology. New media studies, science and technology studies, and other related fields, help to illuminate the condition of photography, or its exteriority. But it is philosophy which enables us to address, directly, and from the inside, the question of ontology. The article proposes that this ontology is one of becoming, not of Being, and that it can be understood through Bergson's terms of memory and intuition. Memory, as an ontology of becoming, constitutes the virtual life of photography, and intuition, as a method of understanding, enables us to apprehend it.*

### **Introduction. What is Photography?**

I want to begin by returning to the editorial statement that introduced the first issue of this journal. This attempted to outline the current condition of photography with reference to an increasing diversity of practices, and a relative poverty of theory:

If continuing proliferation, accelerated reinvention and transformation, of both dramatic and subtle kinds, are key phrases for describing contemporary photography, the range of disciplinary and conceptual frameworks available to us now needs to be joined by others.

*(photographies 3)*

Photography did not die the death of digitisation predicted in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Far from it: 'there is now more photography, possibly of more kinds, than ever before' (3). I will

not further explore the different kinds of photography, or photographies, here. Instead, I will attempt to indicate how photography, as a heterogeneous practice which is very much alive, differs in kind, not degree, from other media and technological forms which endure by constantly changing. In other words, I will address the following question:

Why have the most recent phases of photography's reinvention returned us yet again to the vexed question of its nature?

*(photographies 6)*

After more than one hundred and fifty years, we still do not know what photography is. The reason for this, I suggest, is indeed due to the deployment of a restricted range of disciplinary and conceptual frameworks – but only in part.

In order to find out what photography is, it will be necessary to consider debates on new media, science and technology studies (STS) and philosophy. Where new media studies, STS, and other related fields help to illuminate the **condition of photography** – its role in a complex ecology or, if you like, its exterior environment – it is philosophy which helps us to address, directly and from the inside, the question of **ontology**. I propose that this ontology is one of becoming, not of Being, and that it can be understood through the terms of memory and intuition. Memory constitutes the object, or essence, of photography and intuition constitutes, in Bergson's formulation, an 'empirical' method of aesthetic rather than scientific understanding.<sup>1</sup> Intuition, for Bergson, is at odds with the intellect. The intellect blocks our understanding of life and all things that move and change, including, I would add, photography. We have not understood what photography is, then, because we have relied too much on our intellects, never mind the constraints of specific disciplines.

In his final piece of work, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes made a similar point when he declared his 'ultimate dissatisfaction' with all critical languages and decided to make himself 'the measure of

photographic “knowledge” ( 8-9). I will consider how his approach to the essence of photography, how his “ontological” desire’ (3), might be reassessed through a comparison between intuition and affect, ontology and phenomenology, memory and perception.

Applying intuition as a method, rather than ‘a feeling, an inspiration’ or ‘a disorderly sympathy’ (Deleuze 13) involves the use of certain acts, or rules. The first of these requires us to distinguish between true and false problems, since false problems obfuscate understanding. Coincidentally, for both Barthes and Bergson, the problem of realism which has so dominated debates on photography and philosophy respectively, is a false one. Bergson argues that realism, like its opposite, idealism (or as we might formulate it; constructionism), simply goes too far: ‘it is a mistake to reduce matter to the perception we have of it, a mistake also to make of it a thing able to produce in us perceptions, but itself of another nature than they’ (*Matter and Memory* vii). Perhaps as a result of the historical separation between disciplines, it has taken contemporary thinkers a long time to catch up with this argument, and even now it can be said that the arts are predominantly idealist, while the sciences are predominantly realist. For Barthes, the problem of realism is part of the problem of classification, and classification is always external to the object of photography – ‘without relation to its essence’ (4). The various classifications of photography, including the aesthetic distinction between realism and pictorialism, can be applied to other forms of representation. From this, Barthes deduces that ‘photography is unclassifiable’ (4).

Once he has removed the false problems by means of which ‘photography evades us’ (4), Barthes is able to approach the truth, or essence of photography. He expresses this in terms of the invisibility of the medium – ‘whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see’ – and in terms of the ‘stubbornness of the Referent’ (6). It is important to note that at this point, Barthes has shifted from a discussion of photography to a discussion of ‘the Photograph’. He asks that we accept this universal, for ‘convenience’s sake’,

and as one that refers ‘only to the tireless repetition of contingency’ (5). What he means by this is that the photograph ‘reproduces to infinity’ that which ‘has occurred only once’; namely, the event, the particular, the real. Significantly, he says that ‘the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see’ (4). Which body does he see – it is not that of the photograph itself, since that is invisible – which ‘absolute Particular’, which ‘sovereign Contingency’? What does he encounter in ‘its indefatigable expression’? The answer is postponed in *Camera Lucida*, but it is provided. Barthes encounters his mother, after she has died. His grief causes him to look for her, and of course, he can only hope to find her in ‘this photograph, and not [in] Photography’ (4). Barthes adjures himself to “‘get back to Photography’...”, but he cannot get past the ‘photograph I loved’, in which he sees ‘only the referent, the desired object, the beloved body’ (7). His search for the essence of this mother, supersedes, and overlays, his search for the essence of photography. It leads him to replace photography with the photograph, memory with the memory, virtual existence with actual existence, and ironically, perhaps, (her) life with (his) death.

The second rule of intuition as a method requires us to distinguish between differences in degree, and differences in kind – or between false and true differences. Photographs can only be different in degree, but photography is a difference in kind. What makes it so is the existence, within photography, of memory. Memory, in the abstract, exists somewhere between the particular subject who remembers, and the particular object that stimulates the remembrance (Proust, and his madeleine). Memory, in the abstract, exists virtually – as a potential and endless reserve of actual memories – but its existence is real.<sup>2</sup> One of the false problems which dominates debates on photography, is the failure to distinguish between virtual memory and actual memories.

Photography cannot be equated with, or reduced to, a supply of memories. That is simply how it is marketed. Photography neither fabricates nor fixes memories, and is therefore wrongly judged, when it is deemed to be either more, or less, than them. In fact, it is other than them. Another way

of putting this would be to say that actual memories (like virtual memory) are real, they exist, but not in photography, and not, for that matter, in specific photographs either.

Barthes' photograph, the one he referred to as the Winter Garden Photograph, did not capture or create a memory of his mother. She was five years old at the time, and he, needless to say, was not there. What it does, is to actualise his memory of her (as an adult, as a parent) through a process, or perhaps a method, that he calls affect, and Bergson would call intuition. Neither affect nor intuition can be sustained. They do not last long. Momentarily, they bring the referent, the real, to life, but they do not reside in the image which, by conveying memory into perception (and thus actualising it), simultaneously conveys life into death, movement into stasis. Photographs (analogue or digital) do not move, and are not vital, but photography (analogue or digital) is. By pursuing a sequence of hermeneutic distinctions, in line with Bergson's method (photography/photograph; virtual/actual; memory/perception), I will attempt to demonstrate how memory, as an ontology of becoming, constitutes the virtual life of photography, and how intuition enables us, however fleetingly, to connect with it.

### **The Condition of Photography**

Intuition may afford us a privileged access to the ontology of photography, but there are two reasons why it remains relevant to consider photography from the outside. The first is that we cannot help but do this. Our primary mode of understanding is intellectual, not intuitive, and our intellects are dominated by the sense of sight. Thus, it is inevitable that we will continue to perceive the conditions of a medium that in turn is uniquely, if no longer mechanically, perceptual.<sup>3</sup> The theory of photography as-we-have-known-it,<sup>4</sup> has been preoccupied with the conjunction of perception, representation, knowledge, power and subjectivity which Barthes ultimately assigned, or in fact, consigned, to the realm of the *studium*. The realm of the *studium* is

precisely that of the exterior environment – of ‘culture’ and nature – which provokes, in Barthes, ‘only a general and, so to speak, *polite* interest’ (27), but no real desire. The *studium* engages, in Barthes, that disinterested interest that belongs to science and the intellect, but it is punctuated by a detail or partial object – in the Winter Garden Photograph it is the way in which his mother holds one of her fingers in her other hand – which shoots out of the image, and pierces him, stimulating both pain and longing. Barthes calls the element of the photograph which disturbs the *studium*, the *punctum*. Although the *punctum* itself is the key to Barthes’ phenomenology, the *studium* and the *punctum* always co-exist in a given photograph (42), and together they constitute the ‘two themes in Photography’ (27).

Like Barthes, having distinguished two themes in photography – what he calls *studium* and *punctum*, and what I’m referring to as exteriority and interiority – I will occupy myself first with one, and then the other. However, the second reason for doing this, beyond that of necessity, has to do with their ultimate, and in fact original, co-existence. The condition of photography and the essence of photography will be separated (only) in order to be rejoined. The outcome, I hope, will be some indication, or example, of theory-as-it-could-be which, while bearing little resemblance to theory-as-we-know-it, by no means detaches itself from photography’s (own) past.

Photography’s past is, of course, its own, and yet not its own. That is to say, the history of photography as a medium is the history of a visual technology **and** its social and economic uses. The debates on digitisation, in as far as they have survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, tend to posit what Bergson would refer to as a ‘false evolution’ of photography, by attempting to separate it into its constituent parts – technological, social, economic – and by privileging the former. But photography is not divisible in this way, and a ‘true’ or ‘creative evolution’ of photography must start from this premise. As a medium which is simultaneously technological, social and economic, photography, like other media (we are dealing here with exteriority, and therefore with

differences in degree) can never really be new. Photography can never really be new, because new technologies do not necessarily create new uses; quantitative changes do not necessarily produce qualitative changes of equal extent. There is no cause and effect of digitisation. Thinking in terms of cause and effect is part of the false evolution of photography. The other part is thinking in terms of endpoints.<sup>5</sup> Photography does not culminate in anything, including the variously named phenomenon of ubiquitous computing (or ambient intelligence, pervasive computing, intelligent media) – even if its invisibility as a technology is being enhanced. Photography does not have a teleology, although it might have a genealogy in as far as it continues to highlight aspects of its past as it evolves:

What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer to the challenges of new media.

(Bolter and Grusin 15)

Strictly speaking, Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation reduces the designation of new media to an oxymoron. There is no new media without old media: remediation is the structural condition of all media. The oxymoron is clearly lost on those who maintain that there is a language of new media (Manovich) which is distinguishable from the language of old media. The idea, for example, that the code, the algorithm or the pixel has 'substituted' for the image – rather than engaged in a relationship of continuity and transformation with it – is technologically deterministic, and entirely false. It is false in that it divides the technological aspect of the medium from all others. It is also false in that it equates technological convergence with revolutionary progress towards an ultimate goal:

Today we are in the middle of a new media revolution – the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication.



(Manovich 19)

Manovich argues that as a result of the (technological) convergence between media and the computer, ‘all existing media are translated into numerical data accessible for the computer’ (25). In other words, media cease to constitute differences in degree, let alone in kind. They lose their social and economic, along with their technological specificity, and their history is dissolved into data: ‘in short, media become new media’ (25), and new media are defined without reference to remediation. Compare Manovich’s definition of new media with that of Martin Lister et. al.:

The Internet, Websites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMS and DVD, virtual reality.

(Manovich 19)

Those methods and social practices of communication, representation and expression that have developed using the digital, multimedia, *networked* computer and the ways that this machine is held to have transformed work in other media: from books to movies, from telephones to television.

(Lister et. al. 2)

For Manovich, there are no books or movies, no telephones or television. There is only ‘computer culture’, for which we need computer science – in place of media theories (46, 48).

Most media theories assume that there has been a degree of convergence between media and computer/information technologies, although there is a dispute about the prominence of technological, economic or cultural convergence (Murdock). For Bolter and Grusin, convergence is, in any case, a synonym for remediation that occurs not just between old and new forms of one medium, but between all media:

No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces.

(Bolter and Grusin 15)

However, the picture is a little more complex than this. Our media ecology is part of, and inseparable from, a wider ecology of cultural and technological forms. In as far as there has been a degree of convergence between media and information technologies, there has also been a degree of convergence between media, information and **biotechnologies**. The contemporary condition of various media is no longer separate, if it ever was, from the contemporary condition of technoscience. To this extent, (new) media studies needs to be joined, though not replaced by STS (Kember, 'Doing technoscience as ('new') media').

As a result of the biologisation of technology (cybernetics, artificial intelligence, artificial life) and the technologisation of biology (genetic engineering), 'there is almost nothing you can do these days that does not require literacy in biology' (Haraway 26). That includes understanding photography from the inside and from the outside. The conditions of photography are entangled with those of the 'new' biology – biology 'woven in and through information technologies and systems' (26). Photographs, like the forms of artificial intelligence and artificial life, have the capacity to appear relatively autonomous, animated and agential. They can seem life-like in a way that the introduction of digital photo frames is presently only hinting at, and there is no reason why they should not correspond to the criteria for life established within the field of artificial life: self-organisation, self-replication, evolution, autonomy and emergence (Boden). But despite, or rather because of this reduction of life to computational criteria; because of the problems of mechanism and finalism (Bergson *Creative Evolution*)<sup>6</sup> which undermine the vitality of evolutionism, rendering it false (Kember 'Creative Evolution?'), photographs can only **seem** life-

like. Photographs can never become life-like. Their apparent vitality is simply a mask for their enhanced social and economic utility.

### **The Essence of Photography – Object and Method; Memory and Intuition**

Photographs can never become life-like, but photography already is. It is not (techno)science or the intellect that reveals this to us, but intuition as a method, and as a **biological**, not a psychological tendency:

It is not a psychological process or skill, nor a personal accomplishment, but one of the biological contingencies that mark all of life, a tendency, more or less active or dormant, whose function is not synthesis but an acknowledgement of a mode of belonging to, immersion in, being part of a larger whole...

(Grosz 237)

Intuition brings us into direct contact ‘or community’ with the object. It offers ‘a provisional coincidence with it that precludes projection, mastery, or judgement’ (237). In Bergson’s words:

We call intuition here the sympathy by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it.

(in Grosz 237)

The intellectual tendency constitutes an evolutionary divergence from the intuitive tendency, especially, perhaps, in humans. Its purpose is to know and represent, in order to act and intervene in the material world. This is a world which the intellect perceives to be divided **spatially** into discrete entities or things, which may succeed each other, but do not in themselves change. From an intellectual point of view, the material world, reality itself, is inert. This, for Bergson, is a fundamental misconception. Contrary to being inert, reality is a continuous process of becoming. The intellect, as it culminates in science, cannot know, or represent reality as movement (or time).

It can only misrepresent it as stasis (or space). It does this on the basis of evidence provided by the primary sense of sight, and although the knowledge it produces is, strictly speaking, inaccurate, it is nevertheless useful. The view of reality as a succession of solid things ‘serves our ends’ (Wilton Carr 23). By conceiving only of things, and the relations between things, we are able to manipulate them, adapt them, and control them – albeit at the cost of imagining ourselves to be separate, or distinct from them. If intuition is a kind of bond that connects us to reality, ‘intelligence is essentially external; it makes us regard reality as something other than our life, as something hostile that we may overcome’ (44). Photographs are part of that attitude to reality when they are used, or utilised, as intellectual artefacts. But as Barthes demonstrated in his discussion of the *studium* and *punctum*, photographs are always, potentially, more than that. They can provoke, be disturbed by, a very different attitude. Both are integral to photography.

Intuition is akin to instinct, and in evolutionary terms, it is actually instinct from which the intellect has diverged. Instinct is the unconscious bond with reality that provokes bodily action and reaction in all animals, but perhaps least of all in humans. If instinct has atrophied as human intelligence has evolved, then intuition is the means by which Bergson ‘seeks a way of returning each to the other’ (Grosz 234). Intuition ‘is in contrast to the defiant attitude that we seem to assume when in science we treat facts and things as outside, external, discrete existences, which we range before us, analyse, discriminate, break up and recombine’ (Wilton Carr 45). All of philosophy recognises it, but not necessarily with the same emphasis as Bergson. For him, it is the means by which intelligence may become attuned to itself **and** to the flow of reality.

Paradoxically, but precisely, intuition is method reconciled with immediacy, science reconciled with life. It does not constitute life, or duration, itself, but ‘is rather the movement by which we emerge from our own duration... to affirm and immediately to recognize the existence of other durations...’ (Deleuze 33). It is no more a method of division than it is of reconciliation. Above all though, intuition is a ‘temporalizing’ (Deleuze 35), not a spatialising method:

For intuition the essential is change: as for the thing, as intelligence understands it, it is a cutting which has been made out of the becoming and set up by our mind as a substitute for the whole... Intuition, bound up to duration, which is growth, perceives in it an uninterrupted continuity of unforeseen novelty.

(Bergson in Grosz 236)

Intuition is literally useless. It has no utility. Its domain is that of philosophy, not science, and it promotes an entirely different kind of understanding that Bergson calls 'aesthetic'. It is not exactly anti-science, or anti-intellectual, but it revises science and the intellect – from within. Only in this way does it have anything to offer to contemporary theory. At the same time, it constitutes a real challenge to theory by foregoing 'ready-made categories and concepts', and seeking those 'uniquely tailored to the object alone' (Grosz 236). Since theory can only deal with ready-mades, and as I will attempt to demonstrate: intuition, necessarily, challenges theory through practice. It is a form of understanding which is inseparable from doing. It is not just a method, or technique, but a methodology. Whether or not it can be accepted as a refined empiricism, as Bergson proposes, it operates 'underneath the cuts... that intelligence imposes', and draws attention to interconnectedness, entanglement, or 'the fact that things do not occur in [spatial] isolation from other things but are bound together in a continually changing series of streams that form a dynamic and continuous whole' (Grosz 238). Intuition gives us fleeting access, which is just like the opening and closing of a shutter, to this movement.

Movement, then, is vital to photography. It is what is vital in photography. But if it is not in the actual photograph, where is it? It exists virtually, which is to say, it exists **as** the temporality of photography, not **in** any of its apparent spaces: frame, print, screen or archive. It certainly does not exist in an imaginary succession of states 'from' analogue 'to' digital, 'from' film 'to' code, and so on. If photography can be understood as a phenomenon of creative evolution, or as the

invention of forms ever new (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* ), then those forms are not technological, or rather, technology is a form of life (Heidegger). We, as subjects,<sup>7</sup> can comprehend this form of life intellectually or intuitively. These, for Bergson, are our two ways of knowing. One immobilises movement, and takes us away from life to its representation, and the other truly sees movement, and thereby connects us with life. ‘The first reveals itself most clearly in its manipulations of matter; the second expresses itself most directly in the subject’s own inner cohesion’ (Grosz 239). Intuition expresses itself most directly in relation to mind, not matter. It is a form of ‘pure’ perception (Bergson, *Matter and Memory* 84) which enables us, as mindful subjects, to connect with the object world as it moves and lives. It is not itself that which moves and lives in the subject. It is simply a form of perception that stems from, and feeds back to that which does move and live in the mindful subject; namely, memory. Intuition is that which literally connects the temporality of the subject (memory), with that of the object (photography).

There are two forms of memory, and these constitute a difference in kind. One has more to do with habit, or repeated actions (we remember how to **do** things, like read, or drive), and the other is concerned with the unique, unrepeatable event (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*). Photography, as memory, already constitutes within itself (as a difference in kind) these differences in kind.<sup>8</sup> In other words; photography is both habitual, and eventful. Barthes was clearly more interested in the event – in what ‘has occurred only once... the Real, in its indefatigable expression’ (4) – and so was Bergson. It might also be said that both were interested in the process, or progress of memory from ‘pure memory’ (memory as event), to ‘memory-image’, to perception. These do not consist of successive states, because they are not, in fact, separate. Bergson’s discussion of the inseparability of memory, image and perception goes some way towards helping us understand Barthes’ engagement with photography by means of the Winter Garden Photograph:

Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period in our history, we become conscious of an act *sui generis* by which we detach ourselves from the

present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past – a work of adjustment, something like the focussing of a camera. But our recollection still remains virtual; we simply prepare ourselves to receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude. Little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud; from the virtual state it passes into the actual; and as its outlines become more distinct and its surface takes on colour, it tends to imitate perception. But it remains attached to the past by its deepest roots, and if, when once realized, it did not retain something of its original virtuality, if, being a present state, it were not also something which stands out distinct from the present, we should never know it for a memory.

(Bergson, *Matter and Memory* 171)

Here, the image mediates between memory and perception, the virtual and the actual, the past and the present. Properly speaking, it constitutes both kinds. But once memory has been actualised, **there is no going back**. Barthes might know the Winter Garden Photograph for a memory, but the memory (pure) is not in the image. ‘To picture is not to remember’ (173), but to perceive.

### **Intuition and Affect, Memory and Perception**

When Barthes decided to make himself the measure of photographic knowledge, he famously asked: ‘what does my body know of Photography?’ (9). It might be said that in asking this particular question, Barthes circumscribed, if he did not actually determine, the answer he would get. The body, according to Bergson, knows nothing of memory, but rather more about sensations and actions (179). Memory creates sensations as it materialises, ‘but at that very moment’ it ceases to be memory, and becomes something else, something present, ‘something actually lived’ (179). More than anything, Barthes wanted the experience of his mother to be something actually lived. What he sought, through photography, was not pure memory, but materialised memory:

The function of the body is not to store up recollections, but simply to choose, in order to bring back to distinct consciousness, by the real efficacy thus conferred on it, the useful memory, that which may complete and illuminate the present situation with a view to ultimate action.

(Bergson, *Matter and Memory* 233)

The present situation, for Barthes, was that of intolerable grief. The ultimate (bodily) action for him, as for all of us, is death.

Barthes describes how he found the Winter Garden Photograph ‘by moving back through Time’ (71), starting with her most recent image, and ending with the image of her as a child. He explains how he experienced that same movement in reality. Barthes nursed his mother while she was weak, and dying. She became ‘my little girl, uniting for me with that essential child she was in her first photograph’ (72). The essential child was strong, not weak, living not dying, and Barthes found that ‘I who had not procreated... had, in her very illness, engendered my mother’ (72). As such, he was fulfilling the terms of a life, of life itself; of procreation and succession.

But:

Once she was dead I no longer had any reason to attune myself to the progress of the superior Life Force (the race, the species). My particularity could never again universalize itself... From now on I could do no more than await my total, undialectical death.

(Barthes 72)

Just as his death is undialectical, so, for Barthes, is ‘the Photograph – my Photograph’. Dialectic ‘is that thought which masters the corruptible and converts the negation of death into the power to work’ (90). But here, there is no conversion, no negation; no power. Barthes cannot escape from the photograph in which he brought his mother to a life that neither he, nor she, could sustain. In



engendering her, he was ‘losing her twice over’ (71). He finds himself alone again, in front of the image:

I suffer, motionless. Cruel, sterile deficiency: I cannot *transform* my grief, I cannot let my gaze drift; no culture will help me utter this suffering which I experience entirely on the level of the image’s finitude.

(Barthes 90)

He is caught, trapped, ‘arrested’ in this image; in its finitude, its ‘unendurable plenitude’; its actuality. His memory has materialised and there is no going back. There is no more memory – the photograph is ‘never, in essence, a memory’ (91) – there is only ‘the exorbitant thing’.

Barthes muses at length on the relationship between **the** photograph and death, and on the painful irony of **his** photograph ‘which produces Death while trying to preserve life’ (92). Just like ‘all those young photographers... determined upon the capture of actuality’, Barthes did not know that he would become an agent of death (92). Or rather, he found out what his body knew of photography. His body transformed memory into sensation, action and perception. It took him away from the virtual life of photography to the actual death of the photograph. If he had asked a different question, or stayed with his original question, concerning the essence of photography, he would have got a different answer.

The first rule of intuition as a method ‘concerns the stating and creating of problems’. The second concerns ‘the discovery of genuine differences in kind’, and the third is about ‘the apprehension of real time’ (Deleuze 14). Due to the false problems that have obscured our understanding of photography, we still do not know what photography is. Because we do not know what photography is, we must start with the primary, **ontological** question: ‘what is photography?’ Having asked, and seemingly answered this question (photography is an invisible medium in which the referent adheres), Barthes then asks a secondary, **phenomenological** question: ‘what does my body know of photography?’ This question is driven by a subjective desire to feel, to be

affected by the presence of his mother, and it leads him, as I have shown, away from photography to the photograph. Affect, then, as Barthes' method, cannot address the question of ontology, and is already a compromise with (classical) phenomenology, which does not deal with desire or mourning (21). Ultimately, affect produces a branching off from ontology as 'theme', towards phenomenology as 'wound'. If affect produces another false problem for photography, it is that of sentimentality (21).

However, it is fairer to say that affect is no more equated with sentimentality than intuition is with sympathy. As methods (and methodologies), they are simply the means for answering different questions. Neither question is wholly subjective or objective, and both methods reveal a genuine difference in kind. Affect reveals the existence of matter in perception, and intuition reveals the existence of spirit in memory. The material referent, the real, is only present – actual – in the image as it is perceived. It may be brought to life in a moment of pure perception (intuition) or pure sensation (affect), but it is otherwise inert. The referent, Barthes' mother, does not live in the photograph. She lives only in his memory, and as spirit, not matter. By materialising his memory of her in the Winter Garden Photograph, in order to experience her presence affectively, Barthes effectively destroys it. He destroys memory principally by depriving it of movement.

The third rule of intuition is the most fundamental one: 'intuition presupposes duration, it consists in thinking in terms of duration' (Deleuze 31). Affect, on the other hand, does not. Intuition, rather than affect, would have led Barthes to see, in the Winter Garden Photograph, not so much the stubborn adherence of the referent, but more of its, her, virtuality and therefore vitality. Intuition would have enabled him to know his recollection for a memory. It would also have returned him from the photograph, to photography, and thereby rejoined material with spiritual existence. It is only in the realm of photography as (living) memory that Barthes could really have encountered his mother **after** she had died. Photography is not an invisible medium, but its

mode is other than that of perception. We see photography, or photographically, when we ‘see’, or rather apprehend, duration in an instant.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion. Applying the Method**

Photography apprehends duration in an instant, as if it intuits it. Intuition is a return, each to the other, of instinct and the intellect. As such, it is always already integral to our ways of understanding and doing, our forms of theory and practice. Indeed, we could regard Barthes’ theory-practice of affect as a divergence from intuition, and it is certainly possible to detect intuition at work, intuition in the work of that most intellectual of (photography) theorists; Susan Sontag. If intuition works like a moment of insight that moves theory on (Grosz 237), then Sontag intuited both the condition of photography – ‘it is mainly a social rite, a defence against anxiety, and a tool of power’ (8) – and its ontology as an event.<sup>10</sup> The problem is, as I re-stated at the beginning of this essay, that theory has not moved on for some time, and this is due to our over-reliance on intellect as the dominant, and perhaps increasingly dominating tendency.

Perhaps what we need to do is take bigger, better or just longer ‘leaps’ in to ‘the movement of what is new’ (Grosz 236), and out of what is intellectually familiar, but which nevertheless must be fed back to the intellect, and to intellectual knowledge, **‘because it cannot represent itself’** [my emphasis] (237). Or perhaps this is just part of the problem. This is what leads to the conceptual containment of potential forms of life and science. This is what turns theory-as-it-could-be back into theory-as-we-know-it. Perhaps what we really need to do is become a little less reliant on our intellects and their ritual, defensive tools of power. We need to defer to them less, and challenge them more, by recognising, for a start, that they do not, and cannot, act alone. Our mode of understanding is both scientific and aesthetic, both exterior and interior. Intellect and intuition exist only in terms of their relationality. They are not self-identical, but they remain

differences in kind. What this means, is that neither one can ever illustrate, explain, or be assimilated to the other. Our over-reliance then, is just that. It is a habit, and our intuition is still there, if we want to use it. This doesn't mean that we can make it useful – except by recognising its non-utilitarian existence. What better way of puncturing the banal, repetitive and arrogant insistence that the world can, and will be explained? If intuition works like a moment of insight that moves theory on, it moves theory on by compromising it, even as it is itself compromised.

**Intuition does not need to represent itself** in order for its presence to be felt.

Intuition accentuates the temporal rather than spatial, the internal rather than external aspect of photography. It is a different way of knowing (it), that does not confirm our perception, and 'takes us beyond the human condition' (Pearson 3) to the condition of multiplicity, or of all potential differences in kind. To apprehend a figure photographically, rather than to see a figure in a photograph, entails understanding that 'at any moment in our lives we are neither simply one nor many but an unfolding and enfolding virtual multiplicity: the time of our lives is both continuous and heterogeneous' (5). Photography as memory rather than perception, as something virtual rather than actual, takes us beyond our own experience, to 'experience enlarged and gone beyond' (8).

## Notes

1. Although I'm referring here to an 'aesthetic' rather than scientific understanding of photography, it is worth bearing in mind that photography itself has been a medium of both. It has been associated, for a significant part of its history, with the problems of scientific realism, or with the invisible conjunction of knowledge and power.

2. Keith Ansell Pearson identifies the virtual as ‘a productive power of difference, a simplicity and potentiality, which denotes neither a deficient nor an inadequate mode of being’ (2002: 1).
3. Our psychological, and social investments in photography, are due in part to the fact that it is a medium that confirms our perception of the world around us.
4. In his founding paper on artificial life, Christopher Langton distinguishes between life-as-we-know-it and life-as-it-could-be (in Boden, 1996).
5. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson uses the terms ‘mechanism’ and ‘finalism’ (1988).
6. Problems whereby life is regarded as the emergent effect of code, and human-like life is its ultimate evolutionary end-point.
7. I have not offered a critique of Bergson’s concept of the subject here; a subject which would appear to be humanist (universal), but at the same time, a subject which cannot be fixed.
8. Photography, as memory, is virtual, and ‘the virtual has the power to differ with itself’. It is not some vague idea, but rather it is the very concept of difference (Pearson, 2002: 5).
9. In as far as Barthes did not know, or intuit, this, to what extent did Cartier-Bresson when he identified photography as the ‘decisive moment’?
10. ‘The further back we go in history... , the less sharp is the distinction between images and real things...’ (155).

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