

Photography's Courtly Desires:
Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and the Photographic Beloved

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Abstract

Elizabeth Howie: Photography's Courtly Desires:
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(Under the direction of Carol Mavor)

The medieval poetic genre and performance practice of courtly love elaborates the delirious enjoyment and exquisite pain of unquenched desire and celebrates its textual performance; photography visualizes this highly fraught system of desire. Photography is imbued with courtly love because of its relation to desire, distance, and idealization. The photograph's referent appears to be present but is always lost, a paradox which keeps the viewer's desire inflamed; I read the unavailability of the referent, and the desires it arouses, in terms of the desires aroused by the beautiful and idealized but unavailable courtly lady. What photography gives, what it denies, and the desires it arouses are courtly.

I adopt courtly love's nineteenth- and twentieth-century theorizations, particularly the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and semiotician Roland Barthes, as a strategy for reading photography. Both Barthes and Lacan write of a desire that is idealizing, unrequited, and related to the primordial experience of the mother. Lacan specifically addresses courtly love as the epitome of the non-rapport between the sexes and the ultimate example of sublimation. Lacanian psychoanalysis revolves around the issue of the subject's desire; he sees courtly love as the embodiment of desire in the life of the subject. Lacan's discussion of the sublimation of the courtly lady provides a way to theorize the sublimation operative in photography, and the resulting impact on photographic ethics. If subjectivity is based on

lack/desire, the photograph is the perfect object to operate on both: it always represents lack and absence, but simultaneously offers possession, images of wholeness, and illusions of closeness. A close comparative reading of Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1980) with his *A Lover's Discourse* (1977) demonstrates significant affinities between the two and links Barthes's work on photography and desire. The photographs I address include Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Interior Theaters*, photographs commissioned by painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti of Pre-Raphaelite icon Jane Burden Morris, and the recently-identified genre of nineteenth-century portraiture of men commemorating their loving friendships.

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Photography's Courtly Desires: Introduction

The medieval poetic genre and performance practice of courtly love elaborates the delirious enjoyment and exquisite pain of unquenched desire and celebrates the textual performance of desire. Courtly love manifests the infinite cycle of wanting and not having, the impossibility of articulating desire, and the ultimate shattering emptiness behind the object of desire; photography visualizes this highly fraught system of desire. The origins of courtly love lie in eleventh-century Languedoc, in the southern part of what is now France, but I adopt its nineteenth- and twentieth-century theorizations as a strategy for reading photography.¹ No causal or straightforwardly analogical relationship exists between courtly love, the lover's discourse and photography. These fields cannot be synthesized; instead, my project seeks the places where they impinge upon each other.

The kind of desire celebrated in courtly love, if fulfilled, offers the promise of undoing any past pain, even that of death, and of course the photograph promises this as well, allowing us to look on the faces of those we can no longer see in person. Courtly love promises ultimate fulfillment, but this will never happen because the function of the courtly is to keep the object at a distance and thus keep desire in play, eternally postponing satisfaction.

¹ My work posits the viewer of the photograph as the primary desiring subject. This reading does not line up identically with the structure of desire in medieval courtly love, in which the lover/poet, not the audience, is the desiring subject. I am deliberately redeploying courtly love in a way it did not operate historically. I am grateful to Jane Burns for guiding me in defining the parameters of my methodology with regard to historical courtly love. The field of courtly love studies has been richly explored, and my purpose in this project is less to summarize or further that body of work than to re-read aspects of courtly love in terms of how they may be applicable to the reading of photographs and to photography theory.

Although my methodology may not be applicable to every photograph, the types of desires I am discussing permeate many uses and forms of photography. My analyses deliberately shift from fine art photography to studio portraits to photographs commissioned by an artist to snapshots; I have chosen the photographs I work with in order to demonstrate the breadth of potential applications of my methodology and also based on my own desires. These are photographs that enrapture me, and I have given detailed descriptions of them in order to guide the reader into what I see in them.

There are relatively few photographs depicting scenes of courtly love. Julia Margaret Cameron created a photograph of “The Parting of Lancelot and Guinevere” in her series of images illustrating Tennyson’s “Idylls of the King,” 1874 (Fig. 1). In 1863-4 Lady Clementina Hawarden posed her daughters as anonymous courtly lovers (Fig. 2) in medieval costume. Photographs Dante Gabriel Rossetti commissioned of Jane Morris in 1865 perform courtly love by positioning Morris as a courtly lady. But photography is imbued with courtly love because of its relation to desire, distance, and idealization.

There is not a direct analogy between the two, but instead a much more interesting and complex relationship—an impossible one?—of rich intersections where desire seeks, finds, flourishes, and fails, but in its perpetuation maintains subjectivity. Reading photography and photography theory through the not-so-rosy lens of courtly love, particularly through the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and semiotician Roland Barthes, illuminates ways that photography serves and perpetuates desire in its shattering relation to the real.

The canonical courtly lady is perfectly beautiful, idealized, and longed for, but unavailable, which perpetuates the lover’s desire. Photography also operates in the field of

the idealized and unavailable in Barthes's theory, since the referent appears to be present but is always lost in the past, a paradox which keeps the viewer's desire inflamed. In addition, photography has a tendency to idealize its referents. What photography gives, what it denies, and the desires it arouses are courtly. Lacan's theorization of courtly love in terms of idealization, desire, and unrequited love provides a method for a courtly reading of the photograph.

Lacan and Barthes

Of the two, Lacan has approached courtly love most directly. The notorious difficulty of his language and his frequently disrespectful attitude toward his audience mask a beautiful theory about desire. Known for his rewriting of the work of Sigmund Freud, which centers on desire and language, Lacan specifically addresses courtly love as the epitome of the non-rapport between the sexes and the ultimate example of sublimation. Lacan's interest in courtly love has to do with the way it enacts desire.² He clearly demarcates the difference between desire and love: "Love is distinct from desire . . . because its aim is not satisfaction but being."³ When he uses the phrase "courtly love," he is talking about desire. Lacanian psychoanalysis revolves around the issue of the subject's desire; to be a subject is to desire. Because he sees courtly love as the embodiment of desire in the life of the subject, his theory of desire evolves from his understanding of courtly love. The Lacanian subject is based on

² Lacan's primary works addressing courtly love are *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-60*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1991), and *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1998).

³ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1991), 276; cited in Phyllis van Slyck, "Charting an Ethics of Desire in *The Wings of the Dove*," *Criticism* 47 (summer 2005): 320.

lack, the loss of the real that begins when the infant separates from the mother, and which continues as the subject enters the imaginary and symbolic orders. Lack equals desire and generates language: we must ask for what we desire, although we can never fully articulate it.

Lacan's photographic words on courtly love in *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60) court photography. The photograph is also a picture of lack, of absence, in that it always shows us something that is already lost. If subjectivity is based on lack/desire, the photograph is the perfect object to operate on both: it always represents lack and absence, but at the same time, it offers possession, images of wholeness, and illusions of closeness. A photograph is the (impossible) specularization of a perfect *objet petit a*—both the hole in the subject, the lack or gap, and the object that can hide it.

Although Barthes does not directly link courtly love with photography, a close comparative reading of *A Lover's Discourse* (1978) with *Camera Lucida* (1980) demonstrates significant affinities between the two. The lover's discourse is that of the beloved's perpetual remoteness: "Endlessly I sustain the discourse of the beloved's absence."⁴ The tantalizing mediation of such remoteness is integral to what fascinates Barthes about photography. Barthes's interpretation of courtly love in *A Lover's Discourse*, with its courtly erotics of absence, distance, and desire, guides me through *Camera Lucida*, with its viewer often longing for an absent referent, suffering before the photograph's withholding, to photography; his reading of photography takes me back to courtly love with a new approach.

Barthes shows that photography's relation to desire, as well as to death, is what has made it such a central part of modern life. In *Camera Lucida*, the Winter Garden

⁴ Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 15.

photograph—which the reader never sees, showing Barthes’s mother as a child—is the one in which he finds, after her death, the mother he knew and loved. As art historian and photography theorist Carol Mavor has demonstrated, any photograph of a child is especially attuned to loss: the loss of childhood, a reminder that life always ends.⁵ For Barthes to identify his mother, after her death, in an image taken of her before he was born, is an utterly Lacanian moment. The photograph validates Barthes’s relationship with his mother at the same time that it resonates not only with the her death and loss but with his own lack as a subject whose mother’s desire led to his own birth, his entry into the symbolic, and his death, which loomed all too closely in the future. Most importantly, Barthes and Lacan both write of a love (a desire) that is idealizing, unrequited, and related to the primordial experience of the mother.

My bringing together of courtly love and photography was driven by the complicated seduction of analogy.⁶ In “The Photographic Message,” Barthes uses the term “analogical” to refer to the indexical relationship between photograph and referent: “Certainly the image is not the reality but it is its perfect *analogon* and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph.”⁷ Nevertheless, to Barthes, analogy is a dangerous relation of resemblance—a bourgeois way of perceiving as natural that which is in fact constructed; he therefore sees “natural” as repressive.⁸ Analogy’s facilitation of the

⁵ See Carol Mavor, “Introduction: Pictures and Conversations,” in *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 1-6.

⁶ Jane Gallop writes about the seductive qualities of analogy in *Living with His Camera* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 50.

⁷ Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in idem, *Image – Music – Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 17.

⁸ See “Twenty Key Words for Roland Barthes,” in *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. Linda Coverdale (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 208-209; originally published in

avoidance of critique gives Barthes pause; for him, analogy marks a dangerous lapse in analysis.⁹ Rather than analogy, Barthes is interested in

signifiante, which is a regime of meaning, of course, but one that never closes upon a signified, and where the subject, when he listens, speaks, writes, even at the level of his inner text, always goes from signifier to signifier, through meaning, without ever ending in closure. Whereas analogy closes itself off, and justifies this closure by pointing to an identity between the two parts of the sign.¹⁰

However, by finding analogies between these discourses I illuminate in them places where analogy has previously remained hidden, and thereby do not de-mythologize them, but instead use these places where the discourses hail each other to enrich their potential for meaning, with the intention of an intertextual approach like Barthes's.¹¹ Philosopher and literary theorist Max Pensky observes that "Barthes is interested in the expressive

Le Magazine littéraire, February 1975; interview conducted by Jean-Jacques Brochier: "There is no analogy within the linguistic sign, that there is no relationship of resemblance between the signifier and the signified. . . . the denunciation of analogy is in fact a denunciation of the 'natural,' of pseudo-nature. The social, conformist world always bases its idea of nature on the fact that things resemble each other, and the resulting idea of nature is both artificial and repressive: the 'natural' of 'what seems natural to most people.'" Cited in Nancy M. Shawcross, *Roland Barthes on Photography: The Critical Tradition in Perspective* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1997), 12.

⁹ Shawcross, 12: "His concern . . . appears to lie not so much with the existence of an image (a stereotype), a myth, or anything that serves as referent or symbol as it does with the public's falling short of recognizing and understanding these images for what they are: tools at the service of manipulators and deceivers. This failure to reflect on or critique (or decode) the world of signs is a lingering complaint for Barthes." She adds that Barthes's "antipathy to the analogical and the natural is based on political considerations, that is, 'the social, conformist world.' In addition, he finds that Lacan's sense of *l'imaginaire* is closely related to 'analogy, analogy between images, since the image-repertoire is the register where the subject adheres to an image in a movement of identification that relies in particular on the coalescence of the signifier and the signified," ("Twenty Key Words," 209). Barthes is conflicted between his abiding disdain for or suspicion of analogy, of which the image seems to partake, and his exploration of *l'imaginaire* as witnessed in his writings of the 1970s."

¹⁰ Barthes, "Twenty Key Words," 209.

¹¹ See Bruce Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 187.

relationship between social conditions and aesthetic works,” and I hope that my work operates in that relationship as well.¹²

For Lacan, in contrast, analogy aids his discussion of abstract ideas. Medievalist and psychoanalytic theorist Erin Labbie points out that

analogy and application provide a methodological means of engaging disciplines and ideas that seems otherwise distinct and unrelated. Since Lacan’s work is usually focused on an abstract subject but often digresses in the forms of examples that reveal or demonstrate that subject, application and analogy are crucial aspects of his methodology.¹³

An obvious example is the analogy Lacan draws between the practice of courtly love and the function of desire.

Courtly Love, Lacan, and Feminism

In the first wave of its theorization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, courtly love was a practice that objectified women, idealizing them and ostensibly giving them power over their enamored lovers. This model is derived specifically from, according to medievalist and literary theorist E. Jane Burns, troubadour lyric, Arthurian romance, and Andreas Capellanus’s *Art of Courtly Love*.¹⁴ Yet their power operated from a place of silence and a lack of volition. Stereotypes of womanhood under which modern theorists operated played into this objectification. However, extensive feminist critiques of courtly love have demonstrated that even in misogynistic texts written by men, the courtly lady can speak.¹⁵

¹² Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 157.

¹³ Labbie diss, 164.

¹⁴ Burns, “Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27 (autumn 2001): 12.

¹⁵ Jane Burns’s work on this topic has been crucial; see “Courtly Love” for a comprehensive overview on feminist readings of courtly love.

Feminist scholars have also brought to light the work of women troubadours, unknown in Lacan's time.

Lacan takes a sort of snapshot of courtly love from the past—not that he is not well-read in medieval studies, but he takes bits of the genre that are useful to him, bringing moments of the past forward—and inserts it into the framework of his psychoanalytic theory to get at the heart of what desire is and how it operates. He chooses twelfth-century troubadour Arnaut Daniel's non-canonical and even obscene poem to demonstrate his theory, yet his understanding of courtly love is limited to a strictly gendered canonical form that reiterates the nineteenth-century conception of the genre.¹⁶

Lacan works from the objectifying understanding of courtly love. He derives his paradigm of courtly love from the *canço*, the love song, in which the lover is always male and the beloved always female.¹⁷ This is a restricted genre which involves neither dialogue nor debate. Lacan's use of courtly love not representational of the extant texts; nor, admittedly, is mine.

Medievalist and intellectual historian Bruce Holsinger has demonstrated the extent of Lacan's influence by and interest in the Middle Ages. Lacan cites numerous works of courtly love in French and German to support his theory.¹⁸ Holsinger points out that Lacan's utilization of the material is not in keeping with standards of the discipline. Although Lacan's rarified language requires that his audience become specialists, Sarah Kay comments,

¹⁶ Presented in its entirety in Lacan, *VII*, 162.

¹⁷ Discussion with Jane Burns. See also Burns, "Courtly Love," 29 fn 10.

¹⁸ Lacan, 145. He cites Ovid's *Ars Amandi*, *De Arte Amundi* by Andreas Capallanus, Chrétien de Troyes, Guillaume de Poitier, Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World*, Pierre Perdu's *The Joy of Love*, Benjamin Peret's *Anthology of Sublime Love*, René Nelli's *Love and the Myths of the Heart*, and Henri Corbin's *The Creative Imagination*. Later he cites the troubadours Arnaud Daniel, Trumelac, and Raymond de Dorfort, 162-3.

“Lacan, who despised specialists, knew relatively little about the Middle Ages.”¹⁹ It is not hard to suspect that Gaston Paris, champion of disciplinization, would condemn him as a dilettante. Yet Kay acknowledges that “although Lacan is frequently accused of disregarding historical difference, he is in fact very emphatic that the various ways in which we unconsciously situate ourselves, and our conscious representations of our concerns, are all historically conditioned.”²⁰ Lacan is not the medievalist that Georges Bataille is. Yet it is his freedom to utilize medieval concepts as he chooses that make his theoretical work on courtly love so compelling. It is at once transhistorical and deeply imbricated in his own moment of history.

Lacan’s problematic relationship to woman, women, and femininity has been explored and critiqued by Judith Butler, Jane Gallop, Elizabeth Grosz, Toril Moi, and many other feminist writers. His work troubles feminists because of his insistence on the phallus as signifier lack and sexual difference; it is not, he argues, the anatomical penis, but the signifier of signification. Although his theory may thus be called phallogentric, Judith Butler’s and Jane Gallop’s readings of Lacan demonstrate that his work does have the potential to be useful to feminists in its positing of masculine and feminine as positions that either gender can occupy; yet he consistently assumes that women occupy the feminine and men the masculine.²¹

Feminist literary critic and Romance language scholar Toril Moi points out that for Freud and Lacan, there is an apparently obvious “question of femininity” yet no parallel

¹⁹ Sarah Kay, “The Contradictions of Courtly Love and the Origins of Love Poetry: The Evidence of the *Lauzengiers*.” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26 (spring 1996): 28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

²¹ See Toril Moi, “From Femininity to Finitude: Freud, Lacan, and Feminism, Again,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (spring 2004): 854.

question of masculinity: “In this way, *femininity* and *sexual difference* come across as synonymous terms. Men become the norm, women the problem to be explained; men embody humanity, women remain imprisoned w/in their sexual difference.”²² Nevertheless, Moi argues that “since Lacanian theory defines femininity as a specific relationship to the phallus, no discussion of femininity in Lacan can afford to overlook what he has to say about this contested symbolism.”²³ Thus it is nonetheless true that his theory does reflect cultural attitudes towards women.

It is in this spirit that I use Lacan, deeply indebted to those who have analyzed the troubling association of the feminine with lack, but also finding in his work an important way to think about objectification, idealization, absence, lack, identification and desire in their relationships to photography. As Moi notes, “I take for granted that psychoanalysis has been and will remain an immensely useful theory for feminism. Psychoanalysis has given us a whole series of concepts that are invaluable to feminists and other cultural critics: the unconscious, desire, fantasy, identification, projection, transference, countertransference, alienation, narcissism,—the list could continue for a long time.”²⁴ I see courtly love’s construction of desire (the oversimplified form of courtly love as understood by Lacan and others prior to the revolutionizing work of feminist medievalists), to be vastly illuminating in the possibilities it creates for a reading of photography, which itself is also a product of Western patriarchal culture. It is my hope that my reading of the way the photograph arouses and maintains desires, which I will refer to as “courtly,” within these specific parameters,

²² Ibid., 844.

²³ Ibid., 851.

²⁴ Ibid., 845.

will, rather than reiterating stereotypes, shed light on ways that desire plays into the way photography functions.

Chapter 1 situates courtly love historically as it was first defined in the late nineteenth century. I assess its place in Lacan's theorization of desire and language, and demonstrate the courtliness underlying some of Barthes's later work. I argue for ways in which their work may be used together while respecting Barthes's avowed distrust of psychoanalysis. I situate Barthes's and Lacan's work in terms of the broader revival of interest in the Middle Ages in the mid-twentieth century.

Chapter 2 addresses the theoretical underpinnings of this project, specifically in terms of Lacan's theory of courtly love and how the theories of anamorphosis and the vase relate to photography theory. Lacan's discussion of the sublimation of the courtly lady in relation to *das Ding* provides a way to formulate a theory of the sublimation operative in photography, and the resulting impact on ethics.

Chapter 3 presents Barthes's work on love, desire, and photography through a comparative reading of *Camera Lucida* and *Lover's Discourse*. Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Interior Theater* photographs elucidate places where the two texts overlap. This comparative reading provides a way to analyze the slippage between mother and beloved as objects of desire.

Chapter 4 revolves around the Pre-Raphaelite icon Jane Burden Morris as she is represented in photographs commissioned by painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Taken most likely before their legendary affair, these photographs of Morris portray her as the nineteenth-century courtly lady: unavailable, lovely, beloved, desired.

Chapter 5 addresses the courtliness of the recently-identified genre of nineteenth-century portraiture of men posing in ways that demonstrate deep emotional and physical

affection, poses that homophobia scourged from later conventions. The recuperation of these portraits of loving friendships has a powerfully subversive political capacity.



Introduction, Fig. 1: Julia Margaret Cameron,
"The Parting of Lancelot and Guinevere" from "The Idylls of the King," 1874



Introduction, Fig. 2: Lady Clementina Hawarden,
“Clementina and Isabella Grace Maude, 5 Princes Gardens” 1863-64

Chapter 1: Historicizing Courtly Love and Its Theories

The concept of courtly love as a poetic genre and performance practice has been fraught with disagreement. Some scholars have argued that it doesn't even exist as a medieval genre, and that the umbrella term courtly love distorts the study of medieval literature. Others claim that courtly love was a poetic form only, with no bearing on actual practices.²⁵ Nevertheless, *amour courtois*, or courtly love, has accumulated a broader, generic meaning in medieval studies and the vernacular.²⁶ More importantly for this project, it has been taken up as by writers such as Lacan and Barthes as part of a broader mid-twentieth-century revival of interest in the medieval.

Gaston Paris and Courtly Love

Medieval love poetry was not identified as *amour courtois* until the work of French medievalist Gaston Paris in the early 1880s. In France in the first half of the nineteenth century, medieval literature gained popularity thanks to accessible translations by scholars like Gaston's father Paulin Paris, the first chair of medieval literature at the Collège de

²⁵ See Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977). He cites as examples D. W. Robertson and John F. Benton, 47, and E. Talbot Donaldson, 51.

²⁶ Burns, "Courtly Love," 23, cites as examples of courtly love's absorption into American culture country-western music lyrics and even Ellen Fein and Sherry Schneider's *The Rules: Time-Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right* (New York: Warner, 1995).

France.²⁷ His rendering of medieval tales of chivalry, until then relatively unknown, led to the popularization of medieval literature. However, popular medievalism alarmed some scholars and thus contributed to the nineteenth-century project of academic disciplinization. Gaston Paris was an important leader in the scholarly refinement of medieval studies. One of the outcomes of his disciplinizing project was his coining of the term *amour courtois*²⁸ and his unintentional founding of a new field of medieval literary criticism.²⁹ Subsequent interpretations of *amour courtois* consolidated the heterogeneous body of medieval love poetry into a specific science of love.

Paris used “*amour courtois*” in two articles published in 1881 and 1883 in the journal *Romania* to express the idea of love represented in Chrétien de Troyes’s *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* (1170), the earliest text of the story of Lancelot and Guenevere,³⁰ although his articles did not chiefly concern courtly love. *Amour courtois* referred specifically to the parameters of the relationship between Lancelot and Guenevere. Chrétien wrote of a love that was disciplined and ethical, but also sexually passionate,³¹ and Paris wanted to distinguish it from more straightforward romantic love.

²⁷ See David Hult, “Gaston Paris and the Invention of Courtly Love,” in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, ed. R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 192-224.

²⁸ According to Donaldson, “The equivalent of the phrase occurs once in Provençal, in a poem by the troubadour Pierre d’Auvergne. But it never caught on until the end of the nineteenth century.” He adds that courtly love is an inaccurate mistranslation of *amour courtois*: “Paris placed the adjective *courtois* in italics, probably in order to suggest the relationship with Provençal *cortezia* . . . ; ‘courtly love’ has a sober, confining sound beside which the normal English accentuation ‘courtly love’ seems positively intoxicating—a fact that may have influenced for the worst the subsequent history of the project.” “The Myth of Courtly Love,” in *Speaking of Chaucer* (Durham: Labyrinth Books, 1979), 16.

²⁹ Gaston Paris, “Etudes sur les romans de la table ronde, Lancelot du Lac,” *Romania* 10 (1881): 478, and *Romania* 12 (1883): 459-534.

³⁰ Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 44.

³¹ F.X. Newman, Introduction to *The Meaning of Courtly Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1968), viii.

The phrase he coined took on a life of its own, inspiring, medievalist and literary theorist David Hult writes, “entire books and articles, and enter[ing] our common vocabulary—indeed, our collective imagination—as the expression designating *the* ideal of love and desire in refined Medieval society.”³² While Paris’s own conception of medieval eroticism was complex and heterogeneous,³³ the theory of courtly love was so influential that, according to medievalist F.X. Newman, “to a degree unusual in literary scholarship, his formulation of the question has remained normative.”³⁴ For this reason any theorization of courtly love must take Paris’s into account. His restricted theory of courtly love poetry founded the field of courtly love studies, but, as Sarah Kay argues, courtly love poetry actually draws attention to the contradictions in attitudes toward desire.³⁵ If, as medievalist Herbert Moller has argued, the advent of courtly love poetry in the twelfth century represents the crystallization of a collective fantasy,³⁶ then the great interest in courtly love that followed Paris’s article must also be seen as having struck a cultural chord.

In Paris’s conception, courtly love was practiced by troubadours who wrote of their endless desire for idealized aristocratic women, who were unavailable to the troubadours because they were of a higher class and were married. The unavailability of the beloved and her rejection of the troubadour inflamed desire, inspiring the poetic works of the troubadours: medievalist and literary theorist Jane Burns writes, “Within the curiously antithetical system

³² Hult, 193-4.

³³ Ibid., 199.

³⁴ Newman, vi.

³⁵ See Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: the Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

³⁶ Boase, 44, citing Herbert Moller, “The Meaning of Courtly Love,” *Journal of American Folklore* LXXIII (1960): 41.

of *fin'amors* . . . poetic creation is generally motivated by the Lady's rebuke; the choice of the poet to be composer of love songs depends precisely on his not being loved."³⁷ In his overview of courtly love scholarship, romance-literature scholar Roger Boase provides a brief summary of Paris's conception of courtly love:

it is illicit, furtive and extra-conjugal; the lover continually fears lest he should by some misfortune, displease his mistress or cease to be worthy of her; the lover's position is one of inferiority; even the hardened warrior trembles in his lady's presence; she, on her part, makes her suitor acutely aware of his insecurity by deliberately acting in a capricious and haughty manner; love is a source of courage and refinement; the lady's apparent cruelty serves to test her lover's valor; finally, love, like chivalry and courtoisie, is an art with its own set of rules.³⁸

Paris's conception of love in terms of strict rules was in accord with his scholarly interest in imposing rules on the study of medieval history.³⁹

Courtly love's idealization of an oppressed group plays a significant role in Lacan's ethics. While some roots of courtliness can be traced back to Plato and Ovid, what is striking about courtly love is its idealization of the lady. Because Paris's theory of love ostensibly gave women power over their suitors, the social position of the courtly lady was clearly in contradiction to the typical status of medieval (and nineteenth-century) women. Despite appearances, any power the lady possesses over her lover is power he has ceded her.⁴⁰ This aspect of courtly love is of particular interest to Lacan, who states that medieval women were

³⁷ Burns, "The Man behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric," *Romance Notes* 25 (1985): 264.

³⁸ Boase, 23-24.

³⁹ See Hult, 208, 212.

⁴⁰ Burns, "Man Behind the Lady," 268-9.

“nothing more than a correlative of the functions of social exchange . . . essentially . . . identified with a social function that leaves no room for her person or her own liberty.”⁴¹

When the male lover willingly plays the role of the slave to the lady, he humiliates himself, creating, says medieval art historian Michael Camille, “his own sensational and long-suffering subjectivity.”⁴² Switching traditional roles by making the lady his master, the lover’s voluntary abasement before his lady feminizes him. The master of his own affliction, his new position as lover one of subservience, tears, and longing, the courtly lover’s stance serves as “an emblematic appropriation of the feminine on behalf . . . of the advancement of the male.”⁴³

Gender and Homosocial Aspects of Courtly Love

Despite the apparently strictly gendered nature of courtly love, with the lady as object of the male suitor’s desire, the poetry of courtly love evinces possibilities of more ambiguous gender positioning. Medieval literary theorist Jane Burns comments that “standard readings of courtly love for over 100 years have tended to reify this model of potential gender fluidity into normative paradigms of courtly coupling.”⁴⁴ Only relatively recently has the deceptively heterosexual structure of courtly love been dismantled. Both lover and lady occupy spaces of potentially unstable gender.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Lacan, *VII*, 147.

⁴² Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Abrams, 1998), 7.

⁴³ Hult, 216; see also Burns, “Man Behind the Lady,” 268, and Toril Moi, “Desire in Language: Andreas Capellanus and the Controversy of Courtly Love,” in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*, ed. David Aers (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), 11-33.

⁴⁴ Burns, “Courtly Love,” 27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

The courtly lady, remote, aristocratic, and masterful, with a male troubadour submitting to her whims, is masculinized. In some ways, Burns argues, the lady is “less a woman . . . than a representation of male nobility.”⁴⁶ Psychoanalytic theorist Julia Kristeva asks, “Woman, was she ever the main preoccupation of courtliness?”⁴⁷ The lady’s high status and the fact that she is married to a man of high status are integral aspects of her allure; her troubadour suitor longs for the high status of the lady’s husband. In this way the heterosexuality of courtly love is a relay for the homosocial, as queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued.⁴⁸ Yet the courtly lady carries that masculinity within an idealized female body.⁴⁹

The troubadour, entering into a state of desire likened to madness, is deprived of his socially sanctioned mastery.⁵⁰ Because the lady is positioned as the dominant figure, the troubadour is caught in a trap: “to not please the lady is to not be a man, yet to bend to her will is to not be a man.”⁵¹ Burns points out that in their attempts to impress the lady, troubadours adopted decorous clothing which was seen as unmanly. St. Bernard asks,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). See “The Troubadours: From ‘Great Courtly Romance’ to Allegorical Narrative,” 280-296.

⁴⁸ Burns, “Courtly Love,” 40, citing Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 27, citing Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 91-95.

⁵⁰ Rouben Cholakian, *The Troubadour Lyric: A Psychocritical Reading* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 46.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Fay, *Romantic Medievalism: History and the Romantic Literary Ideal* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 18.

“Why . . . do you blind yourselves with effeminate locks of hair, and trip yourselves up in long and flowing tunics with cumbersome sleeves in which you bury your tender, delicate hands?”⁵² Bernard expresses concern that the men are abandoning too much of their manliness, trespassing too far into the realm of the feminine: “Are these the trappings of a warrior, or are they not rather the trinkets of a woman[?]”⁵³ The courtly lover, read as feminized, humiliated, debased, is presenting himself as desirous and therefore in Lacanian terms lacking, castrated.⁵⁴

Psychoanalytic theorist Slavoj Žižek demonstrates the mutability of gender in courtly love with his analysis of the 1992 movie *The Crying Game*, in which the hero, Fergus, falls in love with a woman named Dil, who he later discovers is a gay transvestite. Fergus ultimately goes to jail on Dil’s behalf, and the film ends with the couple separated by a pane of glass, a physical obstacle to that relationship that Žižek argues is courtly.⁵⁵ The glass draws attention to the courtliness of the relationship, and also to impossibility of consummating the relationship because Dil is a gay transvestite and Fergus is a heterosexual male.⁵⁶

Barthes draws attention to another literary example of transvestism and love in *S/Z*, a semiotic re-reading of Honoré de Balzac’s “Sarrasine,” in which he analyzes the operation of codes and signification. *S/Z* performs a very close re-reading of Balzac’s tale of a sculptor

⁵² Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 133. She cites Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus et opuscula*, Vol. 3 of *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. Jean Leclercq and H.M. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963), 216.

⁵³ Burns, *Courtly Love*, 133-4, citing *Tractatus*, 216.

⁵⁴ Ellie Ragland, “Psychoanalysis and Courtly Love,” *Arthuriana* 5 (spring 1995): 18.

⁵⁵ Slavoj Žižek, “From Courtly Love to the Crying Game,” *New Left Review* I (1993): 106.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

who falls passionately in love with the opera singer Zambinella, who represents perfect beauty and desirability. The courtliness of Barthes's reading of *S/Z* is revealed quite clearly from his choice of text, which he claims was quite arbitrary.⁵⁷ She flirts with him, but when he professes his love she refuses it. Sarrasine falls into a helpless state of desire for the singer. When told that Zambinella is a castrato, not a woman, Sarrasine refuses to believe it, and has Zambinella kidnapped. Zambinella admits to Sarrasine that he is actually a man, and Sarrasine declares that his heart has been destroyed. In the next moments the sculptor is murdered by assassins working for Zambinella's protector, the Cardinal. His mistake is in believing that beauty is feminine, and he is thus trapped in a heterosexual logic of comprehending the world. Labbie argues that "By calling attention to the repressed (language, sexuality, alternative logic systems), Barthes exposes the dangers implicit in a strict adherence to a heterosexual system . . . The representation of Sarrasine accomplishes the bifurcate task of instructing the reader how to read by instructing he/r how not to read texts and beings."⁵⁸

Professor of English Frances L. Restuccia demonstrates that the heterosexist symbolic is founded on the idea of reproduction.⁵⁹ Courtly love, however, is non-reproductive because unconsummated; the combination of its non-reproductive nature and its homosocial aspects make it markedly queer. And while in *A Lover's Discourse* Barthes describes a male lover as feminized by his desire, he does not specify the gender of the beloved.

The courtly lady, for Lacan, is gendered female because she is metonymic for the

⁵⁷ Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 16.

⁵⁸ Erin Labbie, "Lacan's Medievalism," (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2001), 91.

⁵⁹ Frances L. Restuccia, *Amorous Acts: Lacanian Ethics in Modernism, Film, and Queer Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 149.

Mother, the original object, the desire of whom is prohibited, who is at the heart of the subject's relation to *das Ding*, or the Thing, the place where the real and the symbolic converge, where representation faces the threat of its failures and lack, where signification creates gaps in the real. By using the term "sexuation," Lacan emphasizes that gender is related to the signifier. Psychoanalytic theorist Ellie Ragland explains that "whether the sexual imperative is heterosexual or homosexual makes no difference within Lacanian thinking."⁶⁰ Lacanian courtly love is concerned with the impossibility of the sexual relationship in terms of gender positioning, not biology.

Paris the medievalist, cold, objective, demanding, and openly disdainful of his father's accessible approach to medieval literature,⁶¹ becomes a sort of courtly lady himself, one of the many ways in which courtly love troubles gender. In his practice, Paris disdained the poetic and the affect expressed in the works, and focused on the historical and the objective, an approach which is so distanced as to actually preclude reading.⁶² The courtly lover, however, becomes an expert reader of signs; this aspect of the courtly relationship is of great significance for Lacan's and Barthes's writing on desire and love. Moi describes the way desire makes the lover a hermeneutical specialist:

The lover's happiness depends on his ability to decipher the lady's words and uncover their hidden meaning . . . it is *love* (desire) itself which requires the lover to become an expert reader . . . deciphering the beloved's discourse would not be particularly painful if the lover could be reasonably sure of reaching the correct interpretation.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ragland, "Psychoanalysis," 18.

⁶¹ See Hult, 202-203.

⁶² Ibid, 205-6.

⁶³ Moi, "Desire," 26.

Yet ultimately the lover must learn that the reading of signs is a highly inaccurate science, one that leads not to certainty but only to increasing frustration and redoubled searches for meaning.⁶⁴ Hence part of courtly love's attraction for Lacan: meaning eludes language.

The lady's unavailability, unpredictable behavior and temperamental demands keep the lover in a state of torment, a condition which he assuages with language.⁶⁵ Lacan argues that desire does not exist until it is represented in language, although language cannot fully symbolize desire or anything else. The courtly lover's song is the elaborate attempt to manifest his desire. The *cansos* had highly structured frameworks within which poets were challenged to be innovative and to convey complex and hermetic meanings.⁶⁶ A specialization of courtly poetry known as *trobador clus* ("closed poetry") highlighted the difficulty of reading the beloved with its own celebration of convoluted language hiding secret meanings.⁶⁷ The elusiveness of meaning mirrors the elusiveness of the lady; courtly poetry maintains the distance between troubadour and lady as it bemoans that same distance.⁶⁸

Barthes and Desire

It may be startling to couple Barthes and Lacan theoretically. Barthes is known for his avowed dislike of psychoanalysis. He strongly disagrees with what he views as the psychoanalytic tendency to denigrate the state of passion, to see it as potentially

⁶⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁵ Burns, "Man Behind the Lady," 267.

⁶⁶ Fay, 3.

⁶⁷ Camille, 13.

⁶⁸ Cholakian, 103.

pathological.⁶⁹ He objects to what he perceives as psychoanalytic privileging of normality and conformity, although the ethics Lacan theorizes in his work on courtly love specifically condemn normality and conformity as goals of analysis. Yet psychoanalysis is one of the few theoretical languages that Barthes finds useful in discussing desire:

We see no important language that is able to deal with the feelings of love. Among these major languages, psychoanalysis has at least attempted descriptions of the state of being in love; there are some in Freud, Lacan, in the work of other analysts. I had to use these descriptions, they were topical, they cried out to me, they were so pertinent.⁷⁰

Barthes clarifies that his “relation to psychoanalysis in [*A Lover’s Discourse*] is quite ambiguous; it’s a relation that uses psychoanalytical descriptions and ideas, as usual, but uses them a bit like the elements of fiction, which is not necessarily credible.”⁷¹ Throughout *A Lover’s Discourse* Barthes refers to Lacan, specifically *Seminar I: Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-54* (in which Lacan discusses Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which plays a significant role in *A Lover’s Discourse*) and *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.⁷² In addition, both Barthes and Lacan read Stendhal’s *On Love* and Denis de Rougemont’s *Love in the Western World*. Both also refer to Mlle de Scudery’s *Carte du Tendre*.

⁶⁹ “The greatest attacks on love are those mounted by the ‘theoretical languages.’ Either they ignore love completely, as do political or Marxist languages, or they speak about it with subtlety, but in a deprecatory fashion, in the manner of psychoanalysis.” See “The Greatest Cryptographer of Contemporary Myths Talks about Love,” from an interview conducted by Philippe Roger in French *Playboy*, 1977, in 291.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 286.

⁷¹ Barthes, “A Lover’s Discourse,” originally published in *Art Press*, May 1977, interview conducted by Jacques Henric, in *Grain*, 287-88.

⁷² See Barthes, “Tabula Gratulatoria,” in *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (Paris: Éditions du Seul, 1977), 280.

More tellingly, perhaps, a reference to Lacan surfaces in *Incidents*, a posthumously published collection of writings from Barthes's journals.⁷³ One section of this text focuses on Barthes's amorous adventures in Morocco. In an undated fragment, Barthes writes,

Happiness at Mehiula: the huge kitchen, at night, the storm outside, the simmering *harrira*, the big butane lamps, the whole ballet of little visits, the warmth, the djellaba, and reading Lacan! (Lacan defeated by this trivial comfort.)⁷⁴

The relaxing pleasures of a stormy Moroccan night may have prevented Barthes from reading Lacan, but the fact that Lacan's work accompanies him on his travels to an erotic destination makes coupling them theoretically seem less unlikely.

While Barthes is perhaps best known for semiological writings and advocacy of the neutral, his interest in the asymmetrical relationship that typifies much of courtly love poetry, and which is central to the work of Lacan, is evident in works such as *S/Z* and *A Lover's Discourse*. The relationship between Sarrasine and Zambinella attests to both the rapturous desire which characterizes courtly love as well as the impossibility of the sexual relation which Lacan theorizes via courtly love.

A Lover's Discourse drowns in the anguished delight of the unrequited love typical of courtly love poetry. The book's title emphasizes love, but the text revolves around courtly desire for an elusive beloved. Barthes does not address courtly love as specifically as Lacan does, but references to courtly love in *A Lover's Discourse* reveal that it operates beneath the surface. In "How this book is constructed," the first section of the book, Barthes writes,

What is to be said of Languor, of the Image, of the Love Letter, since it is the whole of the lover's discourse which is woven of languorous desire, of the image-repertoire of declarations? . . . all he [the lover] knows is that what

⁷³ Barthes, *Incidents*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

passes through his mind at a certain moment is *marked*, like the printout of a code (in other times, this would have been the code of courtly love, or the Carte du Tendre).⁷⁵

Barthes is not necessarily saying that his lover's code *is* the code of courtly love, yet the lover's discourse is a courtly one, in its emphasis on unrequited love such as Werther's, and how such relationships perpetuate desire. In the section titled "To Love Love," he writes, "the other is annulled by love . . . I soothe myself by desiring what, being absent, can no longer harm me;" he footnotes this sentence with the word *Cortezia*.⁷⁶ In this section, he also writes, "it is my desire I desire, and the loved being is no more than its tool."⁷⁷ Barthes's use of the word "desire" alternates with "love," but for the most part the love he describes is for a beloved who does not return the lover's desire.⁷⁸ In "Domnei," he states that "The mechanics of amorous vassalage require a fathomless futility." His footnote for this sentence reads, "*Cortezia*: courtly love is based on amorous vassalage (*Domnei* or *Donnoi*)."⁷⁹ He refers to *cortezia* again in a section called "At Fault," stating "Any fissure within Devotion is a fault: that is the rule of *Cortezia*." In "Jealousy," he writes "Jealousy is ugly, is bourgeois: it is an unworthy fuss, a zeal." The footnote refers to courtly love: "Etymology: ζήλος (*zêlos*)—zelosus—*jaloux* (the French word is borrowed from the troubadours)."⁸⁰ These references,

⁷⁵ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 32. Barthes is describing the lover's observation that what he desires is desire, not the beloved, but this realization is so painful that "I blame myself for abandoning the other. A turnabout occurs: I seek to disannul it, I force myself to suffer again."

⁷⁷ Barthes is describing the lover's observation that what he desires is desire, not the beloved, but this realization is so painful that "I blame myself for abandoning the other. A turnabout occurs: I seek to disannul it, I force myself to suffer again."

⁷⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 146.

while few, demonstrate Barthes's consciousness of the ways that his lover's discourse overlaps with that of the courtly lover. Most importantly, in "Love's Languor," Barthes cites Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World*: "Desire for the absent being and desire for the present being: languor superimposes the two desires, putting absence within presence." He footnotes this quote with the word *Cortezia*.⁸¹ This sentence emphasizes the relation of presence, absence, and desire, which are so crucial to his theory of photography.

Beyond his specific references to courtly love in *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes focuses on unrequited love in his attention to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a romanticized tale of longing that ends in tragedy. Unrequited love is not solely the province of courtly love; the path of writing on love from eleventh-century Languedoc through the Renaissance and the Romantic era to the present is not a direct one. However, Romantic writing on love did draw on the medieval love tradition. Werther, the epitome of the suffering lover, idealizes Charlotte, an act which Barthes describes in terms very similar to Lacanian sublimation:

Charlotte is quite insipid; she is the paltry character of a powerful, tormented, flamboyant drama staged by the subject Werther; by a kindly decision of this subject, a colorless object is placed in the center of the stage and there adored, idolized, taken to task, covered with discourse.⁸²

However, Barthes notes, if Werther had not committed suicide, he would surely have fallen just as passionately in love with another woman.⁸³ Barthes sees Werther's beloved in a way that is consistent with the courtly lady, who is always described as having the same characteristics. Describing the languor of love, Barthes cites *Werther*: "The wretch whose life

⁸¹ Ibid., 156. While Denis de Rougemont's work is of limited historical value, it nonetheless elaborates the narcissistic desire for desire and the importance of obstacles to the perpetuation of desire. *Love in the Western World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 260, 267-8.

⁸² Ibid., 31.

⁸³ Ibid., 102.

gradually dies away in a disease of languor nothing can check.” Barthes elaborates on this citation with a courtly explanation: “In amorous languor, something keeps going away; it is as if desire were nothing but this hemorrhage. Such is amorous fatigue: a hunger not to be satisfied, a gaping love.”⁸⁴ Unsatisfiable “gaping love” is a hunger, a desire, of the type central to courtly love.

The lover’s ravishment by the image which arouses desire, a compelling but treacherous engulfment, signals the existence of the image-repertoire. For Barthes, “the amorous subject . . . develops mainly in a register that, since Lacan, is called *l’imaginaire*, the image-repertoire—and I recognize myself as a subject of the image-repertoire.”⁸⁵ Barthes’s use of this term is another example of Lacan’s influence on Barthes. “Image-repertoire” is derived from Lacan’s *imaginaire*, or imaginary order. Barthes writes that “what Lacan means by *imaginaire* is closely related to analogy, analogy between images, since the image-repertoire is the register where the subject adheres to an image in a movement of identification that relies in particular on the coalescence of the signifier and the signified.”⁸⁶ The image-repertoire is the illusory theater in which the subject exists, the repertoire to which he or she unconsciously compares everything, and the basis of the illusion of whole subjectivity. In French, the term *repertoire* has a sense of the theatrical, and, importantly, of illusion.⁸⁷ Illusion is key to Lacan’s imaginary, with its roots in the mirror stage and the infant’s misrecognition of itself as an integrated subject.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 156.

⁸⁵ Barthes, “A Lover’s Discourse,” 283.

⁸⁶ Barthes, “Twenty Key Words,” 209.

⁸⁷ Discussion with art historian Laurel Fredrickson. In English, repertoire is “a stock of dramatic or musical pieces which a company player is accustomed to perform; one’s stock of parts, tunes, songs, etc.,” *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* vol. II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 2495.

The image-repertoire is a field of illusory identification in which Doxa, that which has become so generally accepted and assimilated that it is evidently natural, becomes established; it is the register in which the subject accepts cultural norms.⁸⁸ The image-repertoire is the code, like that of courtly love, which marks the Barthesian lover's thoughts.⁸⁹ The etymology of the word repertoire also carries the idea of repetition. Thus the image-repertoire works as a sort of unconscious lexicon by which the subject assimilates experience; experience may be identified unconsciously, and illusorily, as a repetition of something in the image-repertoire.

In *A Lover's Discourse*, for example, Barthes writes, "the amorous subject draws on the reservoir (the thesaurus?) of figures, depending on the needs, the injunctions, or the pleasures of his image-repertoire."⁹⁰ Barthes's lover prefers the illusions of the image-repertoire, in which he or she may continue to believe that love may be reciprocated. Thus the lover's image-repertoire is a private, yet culturally influenced, theater of images and of the emotions in which the lover suspends time to re-experience a series of signs which he reads as proof of the beloved's returned love. Alone inside that theater, the lover keeps the signs of love in play. Although imaginarily accompanied by the beloved, the lover protects his or her image-repertoire from external incursions which could destroy the fragile structure he has wrought from various signs. The illusions of the subject's wholeness and agency are delicately maintained, as is the fantasy of desirous love; the language of others can violate

⁸⁸ Graham Allen, *Roland Barthes* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 96, 101, 117.

⁸⁹ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 6.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

and compromise that space of inflamed desire.⁹¹ Language can destroy the illusion that the signs the lover cherishes are not what they appear to be.

Lacan famously argued that the unconscious is structured like a language. And like language, the unconscious image-repertoire hungrily assimilates life's singular experiences and myriad details into the already-known.⁹² Barthes abhors this devouring power of language. Trinh T. Minh-ha notes that for Barthes, "One annihilates what one names...the [imperative of] the entire system of Western rhetoric...is still the 'desperate filling-in of any blank space which would reveal the void of language.'"⁹³ Like a thesaurus, the image-repertoire has a word or image to fit everything. *Camera Lucida* is written in part to resist, or even demonstrate against, the way in which language feeds on what is new and singular and turns it into culture, to banality.⁹⁴ As the Oxford English Dictionary seeks out and catalogues new words, entrapping them in the history of language and draining the poignancy and freshness of their meaning, the image-repertoire draws novel experience into its net of pre-established meaning. For Barthes, writing provided the best way to address the treacherousness of the unconscious image-repertoire, writing in a writerly rather than readerly way:

Writing (*écriture*, as opposed to *écriture*, the unself-conscious writing of these discourses [he is referring here specifically to the sciences]) is the type of practice that allows us to dissolve the image-repertoires of our language. We make ourselves into psychoanalytical subjects by writing. We conduct a

⁹¹ Colleen Donnelly, "The Non-Homogeneous I: Fragmentation, Desire, and Pleasure in Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*," in Mike and Nicholas Gane, eds., *Roland Barthes*, vol. 2 (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), 381.

⁹² This of course horrifies Barthes of course in terms of his mother's potential loss of singularity in his writing about her. Allen writes, "*Camera Lucida* strives to defend the image of his mother from acculturation (the generalizing violence of language, knowing that such a defence is impossible," 132.

⁹³ Minh-Ha, "The Plural Void: Barthes and Asia," in Knight, 211. She cites Barthes, *L'Empire des signes* (Geneva: Skira, 1970), 90-92.

⁹⁴ Allen, 132.

certain type of analysis on ourselves, and at that point the relationship between subject and object is entirely displaced, invalid.⁹⁵

Écriture, unlike traditional writing, avoids closure, keeps meaning in play. *Écriture* is the writing of *jouissance* rather than pleasure. In *Sollers Writer*, Barthes outlines the distinction between *écrivance* and *écriture*: “When language is used to transmit ideas or information – as in *l’écrivance* – it can be summarized. When used for its own sake – as in *l’écriture* – it cannot.”⁹⁶ *Écrivance* is writing that still has an author, and that is thus in the service of ideology and power.⁹⁷ *Écriture* then is capable of dissolving analogy, of unearthing the singularity so easily devoured by language and the image-repertoire. *Écriture* can resist crystallization into *Doxa*.⁹⁸

The idea that failure to read and analyze signs adequately might be a source of pleasure emerges in Barthes’s *Empire of Signs*, which provides an example of a different system of signification, with its celebration of the evocative yet unread and empty (to him) signs Barthes experiences as a visitor to Japan. There, he finds signs delightfully celebratory and self-consciousness of their disconnectedness and fragmentation. They are free from what he sees as the West’s tendency to deceive. Failure to read and comprehend signs leads, there, to *jouissance*. For example, in the Bunraku puppet theater, the puppeteers are perfectly visible, and the audience is not asked to pretend that the puppets have an independent existence, as a Western audience would be.⁹⁹ For Barthes, this type of cultural attitude

⁹⁵ Shawcross, *Barthes*, 12, citing Barthes.

⁹⁶ Barthes, *Sollers Writer*, trans. Philip Thody (London: Athlone, 1987), 84, cited in Allen, 97.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁹⁹ Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1952), 54.

demonstrates a preferable relationship of signification, one in which deception plays less of a role.

Photography, in contrast, can transgress the deadening mediation of culture, and the death of Barthes's mother allowed him to realize this. Driven by her absolute absence from his present, he found in her image the *noeme* of the photograph, the "that-has-been," a magic that affirmed that she had indeed, intractably, existed. If the *noeme* of the photograph is "that-has-been," then surely, although Barthes does not say so, the *noeme* of the lover's discourse is "that-must-be;" we are accustomed to believing that the photographic *noeme* is true, but work diligently to maintain the image-repertoire that protects us from realizing that the amorous *noeme* is not, from acknowledging that the image-repertoire of love is an illusion.

The danger of the lover's image-repertoire is illustrated in *S/Z*. Sarrasine pays with his life for his failure to read signs, for his "passive acceptance" of them, and for believing entirely in the illusion of his image-repertoire.¹⁰⁰ Sarrasine reads the individual, separate perfections of Zambinella as signs which add up to a perfect, whole woman,

he marveled at the ideal beauty he had hitherto sought in life, seeking in one often unworthy model the roundness of a perfect leg; in another, the curve of a breast; in another, white shoulders; finally taking some girl's neck, some woman's hands, and some child's smooth knees, without ever having encountered under the cold Parisian sky the rich, sweet creations of ancient Greece. La Zambinella displayed to him, united, living, and delicate, those exquisite female forms he so ardently desired.¹⁰¹

Wholeness as a form of *Doxa* is a warning of acculturation, assimilation, analogy. Sarrasine perceived Zambinella's beauty as natural, as ideally suited to his own desires, failing to see

¹⁰⁰ Allen, 89.

¹⁰¹ Barthes, *S/Z*, 237-38, cited and discussed in this context in Barbara Johnson, "The Critical Difference," in *Critical Essays on Roland Barthes*, ed. Diana Knight (New York: G. K. Hall, 2000), 178.

that as a castrato, this performer's beauty was entirely constructed, drastically engineered to deceive. Yet it is this very site of danger and fantasy into which Barthes throws himself in *A Lover's Discourse*.

Barthes's lover has fallen in love and into the image-repertoire. The beloved is an image, not the real person the lover believes he or she desires. The image-repertoire is a theatrical space of fictions and suspension of disbelief. In *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes describes waiting for the lover to arrive. Waiting has "a scenography," which is "acted out as a play." When the beloved does not arrive on time, the lover "'decide[s] to take it badly'." Barthes then describes a variety of scenarios with which the lover may deal with the situation: he wonders if he has the right time, the right café; should he telephone? Barthes's use of quotes around "decide[s] to take it badly" indicates that the lover is operating within the image-repertoire. Cultural studies theorist Brian Highmore suggests that the lover's performance is

caught up in the cultural scene of the lover's discourse and all the possible images that circulate in it. . . . This is not a scene of pure volition. . . . The image-repertoire is the lived-ness of culture as it articulates and enlivens your body. It is culture played out in the minute twitches and gestures of your arms and legs. It is the inescapable staging of history in the muscles which produce this smile and not another. The image-repertoire allows for the recognition (but not the naming) of culture in the body's reflexes.¹⁰²

Like Lacan's screen, the image-repertoire is a field of pre-selected choices in which all options are already dictated. This is the culture Barthes wishes to abandon in *Camera Lucida*.

The lover idealizes the beloved with his or her own ideals, failing to see that they are not inherent in the beloved, and failing to see the beloved for who he or she is. The

¹⁰² Brian Highmore, "Crashed-Out: Laundry Vans, Photographs and a Question of Consciousness," in *Crash Cultures: Modernity, Mediation, and the Material*, ed. Jane Arthurs and Iain Grant (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002), 261.

ravishment of the image-repertoire first expresses itself in the feeling that “something accommodates itself exactly to my desire (about which I know nothing.)”¹⁰³ Barthes’s lover says, “I cannot get over having had this good fortune: to meet what matches my desire; or to have taken this huge risk: instantly to submit to an unknown image.”¹⁰⁴ Like a mirage in the desert, in which what the desperate lost traveler needs and desires most desperately suddenly appears, the image-repertoire supplies the illusion that the beloved is the perfect fulfillment. The image-repertoire colonizes the lover, reality, and the beloved.

Inside the theater of the image-repertoire, the lover imagines being glued together with the beloved. In Lacan’s Mirror Stage, as the infant longs to be the competent body in the mirror, the amorous subject longs “to be the other, I want the other to be me, as if we were united, enclosed within the same sack of skin, the garment being merely the smooth envelope of that coalescent substance out of which my amorous image-repertoire is made.”¹⁰⁵ The amorous subject feeds on the idea of the beloved as a parasite, devouring the other, like a silkworm on mulberry leaves; the beloved is the nutriment that permits the lover to continue spinning the cloudy softness of the image repertoire. The “smooth envelope of that coalescent substance” is, for the lover, a glowing screen on which his image-repertoire plays its images. The image hypnotizes the lover because it coalesces the signified and signifier, appears natural and truthful, and sustains the misrecognition inherent to the image-repertoire;

¹⁰³ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 190-1.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 194.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 127-8.

ideology also functions and appears natural through a coalescence of signified and signifier, Barthes argues.¹⁰⁶

Lacanian Courtly Love

While courtly love is a performance as well as a textual discourse and photography a visual one, Lacan uses visual art as way to discuss courtly love, although he uses it more metaphorically than art historically, and he considers poetry to be an art that functions similarly to visual art in his theorization of courtly love. In the chapter “Courtly Love as Anamorphosis” in *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan uses the optical phenomenon of anamorphosis, a distorted or deformed image that is legible only from an oblique position or in a curved mirror, as a metaphor for the courtly lady and her emptiness. His story of art revolves around the relationship between art and emptiness.

Lacan’s history begins with early temple architecture which, built around emptiness, also creates and celebrates that emptiness.¹⁰⁷ This is not unlike the delicious emptiness Barthes finds in his travels in Japan, for example in elaborate packaging that is disproportionate to the trivial object it contains.¹⁰⁸ Lacan locates art in the empty (yet full) space of *das Ding*.¹⁰⁹ When artists painted images on the interior walls of architecture, those

¹⁰⁶ Barthes, “Leaving the Movie Theater,” in idem, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 348.

¹⁰⁷ Lacan, *VII*, 135. Lacan cites Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphic Art*, French edition (Paris: Olivier Perrin Éditeur, 1969). Lacan accents the name as “Baltrusaītis.” I am using the spelling in the American edition, trans. W. J. Strachan (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977). In *Seminar VII*, Lacan states that “Religion in all forms consists of avoiding this emptiness [of the Thing]. . . . A phrase like ‘respecting this emptiness’ perhaps goes further. In any case, the emptiness remains in the center, and that is precisely why sublimation is involved,” 130.

¹⁰⁸ Barthes, *Empire*, 46.

¹⁰⁹ Žižek, “Modernism and the Stalinist Sublime,” *Parkett* 58 (summer 2000): 6.

art works too, Lacan argues, were structured around emptiness.¹¹⁰ Thus for Lacan, “to a certain extent, a work of art always involves encircling the [*das Ding*].”¹¹¹

The desire to depict sacred emptiness in two dimensions led to the discovery of perspective during the Renaissance, creating the illusion of space.¹¹² “Illusion” is the operative word; the illusion of space is quite different from actual emptiness.¹¹³ Perspectival painting situates the viewer, illusorily, as master of the visual field.¹¹⁴ Anamorphic representations, emerging in the sixteenth century, subvert the properties of perspective, Lacan argues, to enact the impossibility of representing emptiness illusionistically. The experience of viewing an anamorphosis is a metaphor for the subject’s relation to the real; the legible (symbolic) image in the painting must be abandoned if the subject is to see the anamorphic (real) image.¹¹⁵

Lacan gives two examples of anamorphoses, most famously Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* (1533), in which the men’s confidence and the abundance of their material possessions contrast with the distorted human skull which spreads at their feet. Lacan comments that “the skull emerges when, having passed in front of it, you leave the room by a door located so that you see its sinister truth, at the very moment when you turn around to

¹¹⁰ Lacan, *VII*, 136.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 140.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Margaret Iverson, “What Is a Photograph?” *Art History* 17 (September 1994): 461. She footnotes Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1998), 111.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 457.

look at it for the last time.”¹¹⁶ Evoking Orpheus’s fateful look back at Eurydice, Lacan suggests that that last look over the shoulder frames a scene of death beyond death, of trauma’s return and repetition, of appalling, shattering absence. Seen from head on or a sharp angle, the painting represents the nihilation of the subject.¹¹⁷

Lacan’s other example is a small, evidently anonymous work that when viewed in a curved mirrored surface represents a copy of Rubens’s *Crucifixion* (Fig. 1 is an example of a similar image).¹¹⁸ The device which makes the image visible is a phallus-shaped mirror, a polished silver column¹¹⁹ placed at the correct spot on what Lacan describes as a bib-shaped piece of paper. When the viewer looks at the mirror at the correct angle, the undistorted image is seen on the reflective surface of the cone. The phallic signifier, appropriately empty in its mirror form, makes the chaos legible; the signifier imposes order on chaos. This type of anamorphosis may also be seen as a metaphor for the mirror stage, in which the totalizing image in the mirror is a misrepresentation of the chaotic self.

Lacan borrows Heidegger’s model of the vase to illustrate the way that art, beyond the example of anamorphoses, surrounds *das Ding*. Like Lacan’s example of the temple, the vase is created around emptiness and also creates that emptiness.¹²⁰ The vase is a metaphor

¹¹⁶ Lacan, *VII*, 140. Baltrušaitis, 91, states that the skull is “restored to normal when one stands very close, looking down on it from the right;” on 105 he describes the scenario Lacan repeats.

¹¹⁷ Discussion with Fredrickson. The skull was a particularly popular subject for anamorphoses. Baltrušaitis states that a number of artist’s manuals gave instructions for how to depict skulls anamorphically, (105). He also reproduces an example in which a non-anamorphic skull designates the location for the mirrored column; the anamorphosis is a portrait of Charles I, made after he was beheaded in 1649 (105, fig. 20).

¹¹⁸ Anonymous, Netherlands, c. 1640, cylindrical anamorphosis: Crucifixion with the Virgin, St. John and an Angel, painted on wood (50 cm x 62 cm). Amsterdam, Collection Elffers. In *Anamorphoses: chasse à travers les collections du musée* (Paris: Musée des Arts Decoratifs, 1976). Lacan, *VII*, 136. It is unclear to which Rubens *Crucifixion* Lacan is referring.

¹¹⁹ This is called a catatropic anamorphosis; Baltrušaitis, 105. Mirrored cones were also used.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

for the signifier in that “the fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a gap or a hole in the real is identical.”¹²¹ The vase signifies signification:

It is in its signifying essence a signifier of nothing other than of signifying as such, or, in other words, of no particular signified. . . . It creates the void and thereby introduces the possibility of filling it. Emptiness and fullness are introduced into a world that by itself knows not of them. It is on the basis of this fabricated signifier, this vase that emptiness and fullness as such enter the world, neither more nor less, and with the same sense . . . it is exactly in the same sense that speech may be full or empty.¹²²

The vase, created around an empty space, creates emptiness or nothingness. Like the vase, the courtly lady is constructed around the emptiness of *das Ding*.

Art makes the Thing present and absent. Medieval literary and psychoanalytic theorist L. O. Aranye Fradenburg writes that the subject deals with *das Ding* as void by “decorating that spectral absence with the signifier, as the Invisible Man’s clothes make his invisibility visible.”¹²³ The clothes don’t show what cannot be shown, but merely designate the space of the invisibility/emptiness that is simultaneously a presence. Those clothes/decorations point to *das Ding*, the site of something/nothing. The beloved courtly lady is in the position of *das Ding*, and therefore is the emptiness that the troubadours decorate with song. Similarly, Barthes declares that the lover “cover[s] the other with adjectives,”¹²⁴ and that Werther covers Charlotte with discourse.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 120.

¹²³ Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press), 21. Fradenburg’s work is on English literature, not French, but I find her explication of Lacan to be quite useful to my argument nonetheless.

¹²⁴ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 220.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 31.

Anamorphosis points to *das Ding*; so does courtly love. Ultimately, Lacan argues in *Seminar XX: Encore*, courtly love was a social system that created an illusion that was “the only way to elegantly pull off the absence of the sexual relationship.”¹²⁶ The courtly obstacles to love hide the impossibility of the sexual relation.

The importance of Barthes’s relationship with his mother in his work on photography links it to both courtly love and Lacan. The culture of courtly love emerged around the same time as the cult of the Virgin, and the lady can be related to the figure of the Madonna in terms of idealization and sublimation. The mother and the maternal body are at the heart of *das Ding*, the terrifying place or effect which the courtly lady masks and keeps at a safe distance. Roberto Harari, in a book exploring Lacan’s seminar on anxiety, writes, “What is there at the beginning? The desire of the mother . . . this consists in reintegrating her own product . . . The Mother appears before the infant as *das Ding*,”¹²⁷ the very void that is hidden by the artificial shell of the lady in Lacan’s theory.

Lacan, Barthes, and the Medieval

Yet another way to link the theories of Lacan and Barthes is through their shared interest in the medieval. Holsinger’s *Premodern Conditions* demonstrates the extent to which the French intellectual avant-garde of the 1960s was engaged with the culture and writing of the Middle Ages.¹²⁸ He uncovers an archaeology and genealogy of the significance of the European medieval for the work of the French intellectual avant-garde, including Georges

¹²⁶ Lacan, *Encore*, 69.

¹²⁷ Roberto Harari, *Lacan’s Seminar on Anxiety: an Introduction*, trans. Jane C. Lamb-Ruiz, rev. and ed. Rico Franses, forward by Charles Shepherdson (New York: Other Press, 2001), 72.

¹²⁸ Holsinger, 3.

Bataille, Philippe Sollers, Jacques Derrida, and Pierre Bourdieu. His work grounds both Barthes and Lacan in a specifically medieval intellectual milieu: “Medievalism was part of the everyday fabric of the intellectual culture of twentieth-century France, its diffusion coextensive with the emergence of structuralism, post-Freudian psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and French feminism.”¹²⁹

Holsinger notes that in particular Georges Bataille, to whom both Lacan and Barthes refer,¹³⁰ trained as a medievalist and paleographer, and as “the best trained and most erudite medievalist of the avant garde” was deeply influential on other leading thinkers.¹³¹ Bataille’s writing was clearly influential on Lacan’s work on courtly love. Holsinger finds that Lacan appears to have “cribbed” much of his knowledge of the Middle Ages from Bataille’s three-volume *La Part maudite* [*The Accursed Share*].¹³² He suggests that

it was the inspiring influence of . . . Bataille that prompted Lacan to ground such a large portion of his ethical project in a certain medievalism, a field of desire and transgression that modeled the salient distinction between morality and ethics—a distinction of course fundamental for Lacan’s ethical thinking (and for much postmodern ethical thought in general.)¹³³

While Lacan’s concept of *das Ding*, the Thing, is generally proposed as an Heideggerian term, Holsinger points out that Bataille refers to *das Ding* in an essay, and that based on the

¹²⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹³⁰ Lacan, VII’s bibliography lists Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986). *Fragments* cites Bataille, *L’Oeil pineal, Oeuvres complètes*, II: *Écrits posthumes, 1922-1940* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

¹³¹ Holsinger, 52.

¹³² In addition, Holsinger notes that Lacan was influenced by material from “Lucian Febvre’s history of unbelief and recent anthologies of medieval heretical writings by René Nelli and others,” 82.

¹³³ Ibid, 60. Holsinger adds in a footnote that “This is of course one of the main theses defended in [Zygmunt] Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*,” (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).

similarities of Bataille's and Lacan's versions, he argues that Bataille inspired Lacan's version of *das Ding*.¹³⁴

Holsinger also demonstrates that Lacan's use of Andreas Capellanus's *De arte honeste amandi* is critical to the seventh seminar: "For Lacan, the text of Andreas captures that moment when giving ground relative to one's desire became an aesthetic and cultural imperative for perhaps the first time in the history of love literature. In this sense, courtly love models for Lacan the nature of sublimation and emerges as a powerful proving ground for the ethical practice delineated in the seminar."¹³⁵ Holsinger also finds roots of Lacan's theory of courtly love in Bataille's *La Part maudite*, which figures the European Middle Ages as "a society of limitless expenditure constantly in tension with the demands of religious asceticism and self-denial."¹³⁶ The second volume concerns eroticism, in terms of these themes of indulgence and asceticism. For Bataille, love and duration are utterly antithetical, and he argues that literature feasts on love, in turn providing duration. For Bataille the relationship between love and literature is most splendidly exemplified by courtly love.¹³⁷ In

¹³⁴ This concept comes from Bataille's essay "Medieval French Literature, Chivalric Morals, and Passion," originally published as "La littérature française du Moyen Âge, la morale chevaleresque et la passion," in *Critique* 38, 1949; trans. Lawrence Petit, published in Holsinger, 204-220. Heidegger's "Das Ding" was published in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954). Holsinger writes, "perhaps the most provocative passage in [Bataille's essay] concerns Bataille's vision of the nature of human desire as the pursuit of transcendent and impossible things—or, to be more precise, *the* transcendent and impossible *thing* . . ." 48, and "'It is the *thing* that is transcendent': it would surely be too much to suggest that Jacques Lacan was thinking of this essay when, in December 1959, less than a month into his seventh seminar, he first introduced his own rendition of 'The Thing,' the 'absolute Other of the subject.' . . . For Bataille, the chivalric ethic of the Middle Ages is the responsibility of a religion that crafted courtly love as constraint, without recognizing that the sacrifice of the loving subject's desire would become inextricable from the thing as impossible object of an annihilating passion," 49. Lacan's concept of *das Ding* is generally referred to as having been derived from Heidegger and Freud, in his 1895 article "Project for a Scientific Psychology."

¹³⁵ Holsinger, 81.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 45. It was published, like the third, from Bataille's manuscripts in 1976.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 42-46.

an essay published in 1949 that is closely related to his writing in *La Part maudite*, Bataille writes:

By means of brakes applied to the animality of our most common violent impulses, passion reached, in one fixed point, its preferred object, which is, for man, a woman, or for woman, a man. There is no doubt that this woman or this man did not have the power to condense in themselves the promises that the world brings, at birth, to the being in the process of coming to life. But luckily, for a man, a particular woman suddenly has the power to be an opening onto the totality of the world.¹³⁸

“Here,” Holsinger writes, “cast in miniature, is Lacan’s theory of courtly love as anamorphosis, a form of desire seen from two radically different angles.”¹³⁹ The lady is fervently desired but is also emptiness:

that which the loving subject not only will never possess but which, by virtue of that non-possession, will organize the subject’s own relationship with the symbolic. The perpetual “fire” of chivalric love thus burns an effigy of its own fantastical making, and the “totality of the world” that the lady opens up for the lover is an apocalypse, promising annihilation.¹⁴⁰

Where Bataille approaches ethics through this dialectic of expenditure and asceticism, Lacan “watches the entire tradition of ethical philosophy play itself out in the crystal ball of courtly love.”¹⁴¹ Holsinger’s summary of Bataille’s theory is a snapshot of the way photography is courtly.

¹³⁸ Bataille, “Medieval French Literature,” in *ibid.*, 218.

¹³⁹ Holsinger, 50.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

Barthes's education was also steeped in the medieval.¹⁴² Holsinger demonstrates that Barthes's writing style and method were heavily influenced by traditions of medieval scholarship. For example, Henri de Lubac's *Exégèse médiévale* (1959), which served as an importance reference work in Biblical study, appears to have been quite familiar and important to Barthes. Holsinger argues convincingly that Barthes's reading of de Lubac on the four senses of scripture laid the groundwork for the five-tiered system of structural analysis he uses in *S/Z*.¹⁴³

Courtly love's theoretical uses have drifted from the heterogeneous body of extant troubadour poetry. Its nineteenth century conception by Paris and its subsequent popularity academically and in the vernacular are embedded in nineteenth and twentieth century culture. It is this specific, historicized concept of courtly love that my project utilizes in reference to photography.

¹⁴² Barthes was deeply influenced by his youthful theater experience in the medievalist dramatic milieu led by Sorbonne literature professor Gustave Cohen, who in 1935 oversaw a student production of the thirteenth-century French play the *Miracle de Théophile*, written by the troubadour Rutebeuf. Cohen's student actors learned to "understand the Middle Ages through enactment. 'Every understanding comes to us through love,' he asserted in his inaugural lecture on medieval literature in 1932," (Gustave Cohen, 'Jedes Verstandnis kommt uns durch die Liebe,' in "La Littérature française du moyen âge," delivered 1 December 1932; published in *Annales de l'Université du Paris* (January-February 1933): 71. See Helen Solterer, "The Waking of Medieval Theatricality, Paris 1935-1995," *New Literary History* 27 (summer 1996): 358, which provides a comprehensive look at this era.

¹⁴³ Holsinger, 167.



Chapter 1, Fig. 1: Anonymous, Netherlands, c. 1640,
cylindrical anamorphosis: Crucifixion with the Virgin, St. John and an Angel,
painted on wood (50 cm x 62 cm). Amsterdam, Collection Elffers

Chapter 2: Lacan, Courtly Love, and the Photograph

The easy attainment of love makes it little prized.

Andreas Capellanus¹

Courtly love is, for man—in relation to whom the lady is entirely, and in the most servile sense of the word, a subject—the only way to elegantly pull off the absence of the sexual relationship.

Jacques Lacan²

Lacan models his theory of desire on courtly love. For Lacan, courtly love allows the troubadour to believe that the obstacle to love is created by humans—cultural obstacles like marriage, class, etc.—rather than being inherent in relations between the sexes. It permits the lover to believe that without those obstacles, he could achieve satisfaction with the object; courtly love hides the object's inherent unavailability.³ Ragland writes that “in Lacan's view, courtly love was the greatest admission in the history of Western love practices of the non-rapport at the heart of sexual relations. Yet, in admitting the impasse between the sexes, this practice, paradoxically, did not give up on love, or on desire.”⁴ The impossibility of the relationship between troubadour and lady is representative of the asymmetry of any relationship between the sexes. Lacan's positing of the impossibility of the sexual

¹ Cited in Boase, 92, Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love [De Arte honeste amandi]*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 184.

² Lacan, *Encore*, 69.

³ Žižek, “Courtly Love,” 100.

⁴ Ragland, “Psychoanalysis,” 2.

relationship led him to state, in *Seminar XXI: Les non-dupes errant*, that love is courtly,⁵ permanently asymmetrical.⁶

In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* Lacan describes courtly love as an erotics⁷ of withholding, absence, distance, unattainability, and unsatisfiable desire, centered on the courtly lady, a formulaically idealized and necessarily unavailable beloved. Courtly love poetry may be an artifact of the Middle Ages, but for Lacan its effects persist into the present: the ideals of courtly love, “first among which is that of the Lady, are to be found in subsequent periods, down to our own. The influence of these ideals is a highly concrete one in the organization of contemporary man’s sentimental attachments, and it continues its forward march.”⁸ Courtly codes and regulations serve as barriers between the troubadour and the lady, and cause desire to take what Lacan calls a detour, promoting desire by denying its fulfillment.⁹ These obstacles, Lacan writes, like Freud’s *Vorlust* or foreplay, “are techniques of holding back, of suspension, of *amor interruptus*. It is only insofar as the pleasure of desiring, or, more precisely, the pleasure of experiencing unpleasure, is sustained that we can speak of the sexual valorization of the preliminary stages of the act of love.”¹⁰ Differing social status and the elaborate etiquette of conduct keep the lady at a remove from the lover,

⁵ Ragland, “Psychoanalysis,” cites Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XXI (1973-1974): Les non-dupes errant*, unedited seminar, n.p., n.d..

⁶ Žižek provides a good definition of Lacanian asymmetry: it is “a discord between what the lover sees in the loved one and what the loved one knows himself to be. Therein consists the deadlock that defines the position of the loved one: the other sees something in me and wants something from me, but I cannot give to him what I do not possess—or, as Lacan puts it, there is no relationship between what the loved one possesses and what the loving one lacks,” “Crying Game,” 106.

⁷ Lacan uses this term in *VII*, 145.

⁸ Lacan, *VII*, 148.

⁹ For more on the Lacanian detour, see Žižek, “Crying Game,” 101, and *VII*, 152.

¹⁰ Lacan, *VII*, 152.

so that he is always in a state of anticipation. Her coldness is a necessary part of her unavailability. The troubadour's attachment to the lady is thus based on her ability (albeit granted by him) to keep his desire in play by never satisfying it, and by the impossibility of her satisfying it.

Lacan's work is notoriously hermetic, convoluted, and open to contradictory interpretations; in that way it is not unlike the hermetic *trobar clus* poetry of the troubadours. And like the poetry of the troubadours, Lacan's work was originally a performance rather than a written text. His at times seemingly unfathomable language dances around complex meanings that require intricate graphs and mathemes that are supposed to clarify his theory but which are so complex that they deter understanding. Meaning always slips away, pulling the reader on with repeated suggestions that he will explain something shortly, although that explanation is rarely localized in one part of the text.¹¹ Where scientific discourse strives for clarity, Lacan deliberately courts obfuscation in order to demonstrate the limitations of language, the failures of the symbolic order. The poetry of courtly love and Lacan's writing can deny the desire of the reader to access meaning and knowledge, like the courtly lady who refuses to give the troubadour that for which he longs and asks.¹² Yet each new glimpse of understanding perpetuates the reader's desire.

In *Encore*, Lacan revisits courtly love, positing it as "the only way to elegantly pull off the absence of the sexual relationship."¹³ Žižek calls attention to the fact that much more

¹¹ Labbie, *Lacan's Medievalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 5.

¹² Cholakian, 35: "If she is more idealised in Guillaume's later poems, the woman is by no means without imperfections, not least her indomitable will to torment the lover by denying him what he asks."

¹³ Lacan, *Encore*, 69.

is involved in the scenario of courtly love than the prohibition of desire, and that Lacan builds on Freud's theory regarding desire and its prohibition. For Freud,

the psychical value of erotic needs is reduced as soon as their satisfaction becomes easy. An obstacle is required in order to heighten libido; and where natural resistances to satisfaction have not been sufficient men have at all times erected conventional ones so as to be able to enjoy love.¹⁴

Courtly love is such a conventional erected obstacle, but Lacan, in contrast to Freud, demonstrates that the object of desire is never accessible.

This discord, and the compulsion lack creates to obtain what cannot be had, feeds the poetic words of the troubadour. Language, Lacan writes, “functions in order to make up for the absence of the sole part of the real that cannot manage to be formed from being (*se former de l'être*)—namely, the sexual relationship.”¹⁵ It therefore follows that “everything that is written stems from the fact that it will forever be impossible to write, as such, the sexual relationship. It is on that basis that there is a certain effect of discourse, which is called writing.”¹⁶ Ovid, a source of courtly love lyrics, said that “Love is a kind of military service.”¹⁷ Yet as Burns points out, the service involved in courtly love is that of creating poetry or song.¹⁸ Barthes also believes in this relation between writing and desire: “You write in order to be loved.”¹⁹ By celebrating the impossibility of the sexual relationship, as well as to the impossibility of symbolizing desire, courtly love poetically *lives* desire, circling around

¹⁴ Žižek, “Courtly Love,” 100, citing Freud, “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love,” [1912], *Standard Edition* vol. XI (London 1986), 187.

¹⁵ Lacan, *Encore*, 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 36: (*ne peut pas s'écrire*); Labbie, referring to this citation, writes: “The troubadour poets are central in having produced a repertoire of texts about the impossibility of articulating desire,” 11-12.

¹⁷ Lacan, *VII*, 153. “*Militiae species amor est.*”

¹⁸ Burns, “Man Behind the Lady,” 267.

¹⁹ Barthes, *Barthes*, 107-8.

itself in its attempt to articulate desire, and rising to higher and higher levels of poetic accomplishment with hidden meanings.²⁰

For Lacan, the troubadour's object of veneration, the courtly lady, occupies this position where desire and language meet and language cannot be adequate. The inaccessible lady is "presented with depersonalized characteristics. . . . The feminine object is emptied of all real substance."²¹ Rarely described in terms of specific attributes, the lady is merely a shell both hiding and calling attention to Lacan's *das Ding*.²² An unobtainable object of desire, both image and empty illusion, she is despite her inherent emptiness necessary for the construction of the lover's desire; desire depends on that illusion.²³ Thus she is approached from two quite divergent viewpoints. Lacan discusses this duality in terms of anamorphosis.

Photography also has an anamorphic quality: it appears to keep the subject alive while simultaneously, as Barthes argues in *Camera Lucida*, always representing the death of not only the subject pictured but also of the viewer. And, Barthes states, firmly situating his photographic theory in Lacanian territory, "the Photograph . . . (this photograph, not Photography), [is] what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression."²⁴ Photography sings of courtly love, its referents mortified and

²⁰ Labbie, 2006, 125.

²¹ Lacan, *VII*, 149.

²² In *VII*, Lacan defines the object in psychoanalysis as "a point of imaginary fixation which gives satisfaction to a drive in any register whatsoever," 113. On 118 he states, "The object is by nature a refund object. . . . It is . . . refund without our knowing, except through the refinding, that it was ever lost."

²³ Camille, 25.

²⁴ *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 4-5, Barthes's italics and capitalization. Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Consulting in the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Ghent, Belgium and practicing psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe describes tuché as "the real as 'unassimilable.'" The word comes from Lacan's article "Tuché and Automaton" in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (53-66). Verhaeghe adds, "Automaton and tuché are two sides of the same coin that can never meet but are bound to try. Automaton is the not-whole, the

created, distant and desired. Courtly love is an anamorphosis that casts its shadow on Barthes's text.

For Lacan, the beloved addressed in the poetry is not only not human but is "being as signifier."²⁵ Critical of the historical interpretation of courtly love, Lacan writes,

the inhuman character of the object of courtly love is plainly visible. This love that led some people to acts close to madness was addressed at living beings, people with names, but who were not present in their fleshly and historical reality—there's perhaps a distinction to be made there. They were there in any case in their being as reason, as signifier.²⁶

Courtly love embodies the function of desire in its relation to this condition. The lady conceals an emptiness, and Labbie summarizes Lacan's theory of the courtly lady as signifier in terms of that emptiness:

Courtly love is more than a metaphor for desire, in that it actually enacts the process of desire in language . . . [it] replaces the empty center of being with the signifier. . . .Lacan's comments on the Being of the subject coalesce around the problem of the nothingness of subjectivity and the impossibility of properly naming that nothingness . . . the impossibility of articulating the lack in subjectivity."²⁷

The lady's emptiness, her interchangeability, speak to the fragility and illusory nature of subjectivity. The lady veils an absence of the most threatening kind.

***Das Ding* and Sublimation**

A beautiful thing, alert, serene,
With passionate, dreaming, wistful eyes,
Dark and deep as mysterious skies,

not-enough of the network." In "Lacan's Answer to the Classical Mind/Body Deadlock: Retracing Freud's *Beyond*," in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), 116.

²⁵ Lacan, *VII*, 214.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

²⁷ Labbie, *diss.*, 51.

Seen from a vessel at sea.
Alas, you drifted away from me,
And Time and Space have rushed in between,
But they cannot undo the Thing-that-has-been,
Though it never again may be.

“Reverie of Mahomed Akram at the Tamarind Tank,” Laurence Hope²⁸

The absence that the lady veils is *das Ding*, which Lacan describes as follows: “This Thing will always be represented by emptiness, precisely because it cannot be represented by anything else—or, more exactly, because it can only be represented by something else,”²⁹ such as the courtly lady. Lacan explains, “it was the first thing that separated itself from everything the subject began to name and to articulate.”³⁰ Operating in the split that founds the subject, the initial separation that makes possible the subject’s entry into the symbolic, *das Ding* is an emptiness than can be neither known nor symbolized, both a gap, a nothingness, but also “an irreducible kernel where the pressure of the real is condensed;”³¹ . . . it gashes the structure of representation.”³²

After the *Ethics*, Lacan rarely uses the term *das Ding*, but many of its features are found in the *objet petit a*. For example, both concepts bridge Lacanian registers: *das Ding* is impossible to imagine or symbolize,³³ therefore of the real,³⁴ but at the same time occupies

²⁸ Laurence Hope, *India’s Love Lyrics* (New York: John Lane Company, 1902), 7.

²⁹ Lacan, *VII*, 129-30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

³¹ Kay, 153.

³² *Ibid.*, 156.

³³ Lacan, *VII*, 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

the space where “the real suffers from the signifier;”³⁵ the *objet a* traverses all three registers. In addition, both are objects of desire. In the *Ethics*, Lacan states that “in forms that are historically and socially specific, the *a* elements, the imaginary elements of the fantasm come to overlay the subject, to delude it, at the very point of *das Ding*.”³⁶ He specifies that that is exactly why he will address courtly love.

As a “pure, irreducible alterity” outside that chain of representations, *das Ding* is beyond the pleasure principle.³⁷ It operates in relation to ethics. In terms of classical ethics, Lacan situates the “good” as that which can reduce tension in the subject or bring pleasure: “An object is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ insofar as it bears qualitative attributes that form part of the chain of unconscious representations and submit the object to the pleasure principle.”³⁸ *Das Ding*, a particular kind of good that is so extreme as to also be evil, is occupied by the ultimate object of desire, the good/evil primordial mother, who is also the ultimate forbidden object.³⁹ Because *das Ding* is associated with primary symbolization, it is inextricably bound up in the child’s desire to fulfill its mother’s desire, and its realization that it lacks the phallus it believes she desires. Desire is desire for *das Ding* because the subject is a subject of the symbolic. Not only the mother but every Woman, “insofar as men take Woman as an equivalent of the mother,” Ragland writes, “. . . is de facto associated with *das Ding*.”⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid., 125.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Richard Halpern, *Shakespeare’s Perfume: Sodomy and Sublimity in the Sonnets, Wilde, Freud, and Lacan* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 88.

³⁸ Ibid., 88.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ragland, “Psychoanalysis,” 6.

The space of *das Ding* is of critical importance to Lacan's theory of sublimation. Whereas Freudian sublimation involves the channeling of libidinal energy away from destructive acts into socially acceptable and productive ones, Lacanian sublimation does not have anything to do with desexualization.⁴¹ Instead, for Lacan, sublimation means the act of raising an everyday object so that it occupies the space of *das Ding*. Courtly love, according to Lacan, "is, in effect, an exemplary form, a paradigm, of sublimation."⁴² Sublimation converts the impossible (*das Ding*) into the prohibited (in this case, the courtly lady).⁴³ *Das Ding* is the aspect of the real that is absent from representation; the subject uses signifiers and images to try to fill this space. Thus *das Ding* is a representative of representation,⁴⁴ like the potter's vase, and like courtly love.

Sublimation posits that an object that is prohibited can imaginarily fill the impossible lack that constitutes subjectivity. The place of the Lacanian Thing can be occupied by any object, but "it can do so only by means of the illusion that it was always already there, i.e., that it was not placed there by us but *found there*," Žižek explains.⁴⁵ The object elevated to the place of the Thing must allow us to "fall prey to the illusion that the power of fascination belongs to the object as such."⁴⁶ Such an object has that fascination of being surprisingly perfectly appropriate, and of signifying far more than it actually can.

⁴¹ Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 74.

⁴² Lacan, *VII*, 128.

⁴³ Žižek, "Courtly Love," 101.

⁴⁴ Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 84.

⁴⁵ Žižek, "Courtly Love," 33.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

By raising the object to the dignity of *das Ding*, the subject puts a face and a name on something that possesses neither.⁴⁷ Raising the object in this fashion increases the value of the object thus idealized, consequently making sublimation an ethical issue. Film theorist and art historian Kaja Silverman links the processes of idealization and sublimation via the identification that takes place in Lacan's mirror stage. This foundational identification points to the narcissistic and visual nature of the identification operative in desire.

The first object elevated to the place of the Thing, Silverman argues, is the *moi*, in Lacan's mirror stage. When the infant, held up by its mother and consequently appearing more capable than it yet is, identifies with the seemingly whole body seen in the mirror, "the subject imputes a fictive reality to him- or herself, and thereby elevates the *moi* to the status of *das Ding*."⁴⁸ In Lacanian terms this is a splitting of the subject, and the subject henceforth submits to that imaginary version of itself.⁴⁹ In this process the subject assumes lack, and hence desire as well; desire is an intimate part of sublimation and idealization. Because the infant identifies with the more accomplished self seen in the mirror, this identification is idealization. That original identification with the body in the mirror sets the stage for the way future identifications operate in that they maintain a distance between subject and object: the mirror keeps the idealized, identificatory body separate. Barthes refers to this type of imitative idealization in *A Lover's Discourse* when he says, "I must resemble whom I love. I postulate (and it is this which brings about my pleasure) a conformity of essence between the

⁴⁷ Silverman, 74.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁹ Lacan, *VII*, 98.

other and myself. Image, imitation: I do as many things as I can in the other's fashion. I want to be the other, I want the other to be me."⁵⁰

Sublimation transfers the narcissistic idealization of the self, stemming from the mirror stage, on to the other in elevating it to the status of *das Ding*,⁵¹ as in Stendhal's idea of "crystallization," from *De l'amour*. To describe the way a lover pictures the beloved as perfect, Stendhal uses the metaphor of the "Salzbourg Bough," in which a dead tree branch placed in a salt mine becomes entirely engulfed in beautiful salt crystals.⁵² Identification is always with an external, or heteropathic, object, like the body seen in the mirror—other, not self, but identified as self. Passive idealization allows the subject to relate to the object "only insofar as it is perpetually interchangeable with the love that the subject has for its own image."⁵³

In the case of courtly love, the sublimated object, the lady, is also idealized.⁵⁴ The passion the lady inspires is the richest, deepest, most compelling passion there is, because it is invested with the lover's passionate attachment to his own imaginary self. As Kristeva comments, "The lover is a narcissist with an *object*."⁵⁵ "Indeed," Silverman writes, "to idealize an image is to posit it as a desired mirror."⁵⁶ It is precisely this type of visual experience that is described by some troubadours. Bernart de Ventadorn, a twelfth-century poet, wrote:

⁵⁰ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 127-8.

⁵¹ Silverman, 74.

⁵² Stendhal, *De l'amour*, Chapter XVII.

⁵³ Silverman, 75. Citing Lacan, *VII*, 98.

⁵⁴ Lacan, *VII*, 160.

⁵⁵ Kristeva, 33.

⁵⁶ Silverman, 44.

I have never had the power of myself,
I have not been my own man since that moment
when she let me look into her eyes,
into a mirror that gives great pleasure, even now.
Mirror, since I beheld myself in you
the sighs from my depths have slain me,
and I have lost myself, as fair Narcissus
lost himself in the fountain.⁵⁷

The beloved is a mirror who makes the lover as fair as the legendarily beautiful Narcissus.

Although the sublime object must appear to be found, not placed, culture tends to pre-select appropriate objects to be thus elevated, “coloniz[ing] the field of *das Ding* with imaginary schemes,” Lacan states.⁵⁸ The colonization of *das Ding* by culture is the Lacanian screen, a veil between the gaze and the object that the subject sees; it can, art historian Margaret Iverson comments, be thought of as the “cultural image-repertoire.”⁵⁹ These collectively idealized objects seduce libidinal investment. Troubadours, and poets and artists, all contribute to such collective sublimations.⁶⁰ Barthes recognizes this aspect of desire when he writes, “The loved being is desired because another or others have shown the subject that such a being is desirable: however particular, amorous desire is discovered by induction.”⁶¹ As an example, he describes the way Werther is told about Charlotte, and how beautiful she is, before he meets her. Barthes goes on to say, “This ‘affective contagion,’ this induction, proceeds from others, from the language, from books, from friends: no love is original. (Mass

⁵⁷ Gourlay, 63-64, citing F. Goldin, trans., *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1973), 146-47: “Anc non agui’ de me poder / ni no fui meus de l’or’ en sai / que’m laisset en sos olhs vezer / en um miralh que mont me plai./ Miralhs, pus me mirei on te, / m’an mort li sospir de preon, / c’aissi’m perdei com perdet se / lo bels Narcisus en la fon.”

⁵⁸ Lacan, *VII*, 99.

⁵⁹ Iverson, 461.

⁶⁰ Lacan, *VII*, 99.

⁶¹ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 136.

culture is a machine for showing desire: here is what must interest you, it says, as if it guessed that men are incapable of finding what to desire for themselves).”⁶²

Such objects must nonetheless be idealized on an individual level in order to be elevated to the dignity of *das Ding*. In cases when both culture, or the screen, and the individual idealize the same object, that object “assumes the status of something intrinsically or essentially ideal, before which the idealizing subject must subordinate him- or herself.”⁶³ Because no object, no matter how pervasive or idealized in the cultural screen, can be sublimated except by individual libidinization, the subject has the final ethical obligation in terms of which objects are sublimated.⁶⁴ Sublimation of culturally valorized objects represents not only capitulation to ideology, but destroys the subject’s “capacity to put its images to new uses, or to work transformatively upon them. This subject can only passionately but passively reaffirm the specular status quo.”⁶⁵

For Lacan, sublimation’s ethical potential lies in its making it possible for the subject to move beyond this “mirage relation” to the object through the “gift of love,” an “idealizing exaltation.”⁶⁶ Silverman explains that what is crucial about the ethical implications of the gift of love is that it is idealization at a remove from the self, ideality displaced from self to

⁶² Ibid., 136-7. Barthes refers to La Rochefoucauld and Stendhal.

⁶³ Silverman, 79.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 73, citing Lacan, *VII*, 151.

other.⁶⁷ It can create a situation in which the subject “agrees to posit the other rather than the self as the cause of desire—to see perfection in the features of another.”⁶⁸

In the case of courtly love, the subject’s identification with the lady is narcissistic, but because courtly love defines the loved object as unavailable, it keeps the lover separate from the beloved. This anamorphic, off-center, asymmetrical relation—a relation that embodies the impossibility of the sexual relationship—makes possible the gift of love, Silverman argues, citing Lacan:

Whereas identification normally operates cannibalistically to annihilate the otherness of the other, sublimation or the active gift of love works to inhibit any such incorporation by maintaining the object at an uncrossable distance. The *objet a* is “presented precisely, in the field of the mirage of the narcissistic function of desire, as the object that cannot be swallowed, as it were.”⁶⁹

Lacan mentions, but does not go into at length, the idea of an active gift of love. Silverman argues that Lacan invites the association of sublimation and the gift of love,⁷⁰ and she finds in Lacan’s later seminars ways to link the active gift of love to sublimation. She differentiates it from passive idealization, in which the subject fails to recognize that his or her idealization of the other is not actually the other’s essence, as Stendhal’s salt crystals hide the tree branch that supports them. Instead, the active gift of love

prevents the congealing of ideality into an intrinsic quality of the beloved. . . . He [Lacan] thereby encourages us to think of the luster which the subject confers upon an other through the active gift of love as something which does not seamlessly adhere to the other, but—unlike that which illuminates the ideal-ego or ego-ideal—retains a borrowed and provisional quality.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid., 74-5.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 77, citing Lacan, *VII*, 270.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 74.

⁷¹ Ibid., 77.

The subject giving the gift of love acknowledges that the idealization he or she bestows is separate from the idealized other. This, Silverman contends, provides a way in which

identification might function [resulting] in neither the triumph of self-sameness, nor craven submission to an exteriorized but essentialized ideal . . . the active gift of love . . . provides the basis for conceptualizing how we might idealize outside the narrow mandates of the screen; how we might put ourselves in a positive identificatory relation to bodies which we have been taught to abhor and repudiate.⁷²

Ethical sublimation, for Silverman, is the knowing bestowal of ideality rather than the finding of it.⁷³ It is resistance to the pressure of the cultural image repertoire. In the active gift of love, the subject consciously identifies with and idealizes a body which is not like the familiar body in the mirror, and acknowledges that that body is a subject marked by lack.⁷⁴ Moreover, Lacan states, the active gift of love “is directed at the other, not in his specificity but in his being;” it is “to love a being beyond what he or she appears to be.”⁷⁵

In the time of the troubadours, women were disenfranchised. Courtly love’s idealization of woman raised her far above that marginalized position, in some ways. Thus Silverman argues that in the troubadour’s idealization of the lady is an example of how “the active gift of love conjures into existence something genuinely ‘new.’”⁷⁶ Silverman explains that the courtly gift of love takes the form of the troubadour placing

the lady in a position which was startlingly divergent from that to which she was socially confined. He thereby inadvertently gestures toward the possibility of idealizing outside the normative parameters of the screen. . . .

⁷² Ibid., 79.

⁷³ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 72, 78.

⁷⁵ Lacan, *I*, 276, cited in Phyllis van Slyck, “Charting an Ethics of Desire in *The Wings of the Dove*,” *Criticism*, 47: 3 (summer 2005): 320.

⁷⁶ Silverman, 79.

Lacan also suggests that although it transformed relations between the sexes, courtly love made no attempt to effect a close match between the images through which it exalted the lady and the physical attributes of the real women who benefited from this exaltation.⁷⁷

Because the lady is always described in the same way, Silverman argues, “the ideality conferred upon the other through this most exemplary of all sublimations is described as fitting the other more like a draped toga than a luminous skin.”⁷⁸ The active gift of love rejects the screen’s positing of supposedly self-evident ideality.

The active gift of love does not do away with desire. Cultural critic and theorist Mieke Bal explains the connection between idealization and desire:

Without idealizing one is incapable of loving; only when one is able to put one's narcissism in the shadow of an ideal other can relationships become possible. By replacing an unattainable ideal by an other, or another image, one can place oneself at a distance from it, and thus gain access to “lack” —that term at the core of Lacan's theory—the lack that makes desire possible.⁷⁹

As Bal points out, the active gift of love rewards the subject in a particular way:

The innovative force of the “active gift of love” is based on a mutual strengthening of two of its aspects: once one realizes that one bestows ideality instead of just encountering it, it becomes even more attractive to confer this ideality upon subjects less likely to be thus endowed. In this sense it “pays off” to bestow ideality upon culturally nonvalidated objects.⁸⁰

The Answer of the Real

In *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes describes the lover's desire for any kind of sign that can imply that the beloved also loves. A voracious reader of signs, the lover can read

⁷⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁸ Ibid. Silverman specifies in footnote 36 that this by no means supports stereotyping as a “strategy through which to open up a distance between the loved other and the images through which the subject idealizes him or her,” and that such a strategy is the polar opposite of “the project of loving the other in his or her ‘particularity’ outlined in *Seminar I*.”

⁷⁹ Mieke Bal, “Looking at Love: An Ethics of Vision,” *Diacritics* 27:1 (1997): 63.

⁸⁰ Bal, 63.

meaning into anything, and particularly into coincidence. Random events suddenly foretell the satisfaction of desire. Žižek terms this kind of interpretation of coincidence as symbol as “the answer of the real.” Describing the effect of the answer of the real in psychic readings and astrology, Žižek writes,

a totally contingent coincidence is sufficient for the effect of transference to take place; we become convinced that “there is something to it.” The contingent real triggers the endless work of interpretation that desperately tries to connect the symbolic network of the prediction with the events of our “real life.” Suddenly, “all things mean something,” and if the meaning is not clear, this is only because some of it remains hidden, waiting to be deciphered. The real functions here not as something that resists symbolization, as a meaningless leftover that cannot be integrated into the symbolic universe, but, on the contrary, as its last support.⁸¹

The answer of the real, Žižek writes, is a form of madness. It is “a traumatic return, derailing the balance of our daily lives, but it serves at the same time as the very support of this balance.”⁸²

Žižek discusses the answer of the real specifically in order to address courtly love, and the surprising and destabilizing effects of the beloved’s returning the love of the lover:

In courtly love itself, the long-awaited moment of the highest fulfillment, called *Gnade*, mercy (rendered by the lady to her servant) is neither the Lady’s surrender, her consent to the sexual act, nor some mysterious rite of initiation, but simply a sign of love from the side of the Lady, the “miracle” of the fact that the Object answered, stretched its hand back to the suppliant.⁸³

⁸¹ Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1992), 31.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Žižek, “Crying Game,” 106.

Such an act reverses the position of lover and beloved. For Žižek, “This reversal designates the point of subjectivization: the object of love changes into subject the moment it answers the call of love.”⁸⁴ This shift permits the appearance of true love:

We witness the sublime moment when *eremenos* (the loved one) changes into *erastes* (the loving one) by stretching his hand back and “returning love.” This moment designates the “miracle” of love, the moment when “the real answers.”⁸⁵

This is an instance, Žižek says, when “the real waves back.”⁸⁶ Of course, this does not make the Lacanian impossible sexual relationship possible, as both subjects in that situation recognize the other’s lack.

By making possible the umbilical connection, the shared skin, the photograph provides a window facilitating the real’s answer; in the photograph this answer is the *punctum*, which for Barthes should not be something intended by the photographer, perhaps not even seen by the photographer, but found by the viewer, reaching out to him. Barthes asserts: “Certain details may ‘prick’ me . . . the detail which interests me is not, or at least is not strictly, intentional, and probably must not be so; it occurs in the field of the photographed thing like a supplement that is at once inevitable and delightful.”⁸⁷ Although the *punctum* is a detail of the photograph visible to any viewer, it is not engineered as an object of interest by the photographer but is of import purely because of its impact on the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 106.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 105.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 47.

viewer: “it is an addition . . . : it is what I add to the photograph and *what is none the less already there*.”⁸⁸

Like the *punctum*, the real that answers “must appear to be *found* and not *produced*.”⁸⁹ Like the referent of a photograph, randomly rescued from the abyss of time, with, as Barthes says, no reason to mark it specifically, the place of *das Ding* can also be occupied by any object. However, “it can do so only by means of the illusion that it was always already there, i.e., that it was not placed there by us but *found there as an ‘answer of the real,’*” like the *punctum*. This view fits with Silverman’s, that a sublimated and idealized object may be pre-designated as part of the cultural screen, but requires investment by the individual’s libido in order to be sublimated.

Barthes’s comments on the 1975 Mapplethorpe self-portrait he reproduces in *Camera Lucida* (Fig. 1) are a perfect example of the *punctum* as the desirous answer of the real. Describing the erotic appeal of this image, Barthes writes, “the photographer has caught the boy’s hand (the boy is Mapplethorpe himself, I believe) at just the right degree of openness, the right density of abandonment . . . the photographer has found the right moment, the *kairos* of desire.”⁹⁰ Mapplethorpe’s half-naughty grin, muscular shoulder and single visible nipple would all be more predictable details to point out. Yet it is Mapplethorpe’s open hand, ready to caress, that reaches out with desire to Barthes. The openness of the hand is an erotic detail that calls out to Barthes the viewer, and to Barthes the lover as well, with its relaxed,

⁸⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁹⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 59. The photographer’s capture of the hand, according to Barthes’s own theory, would have to be unintentional.

eminently tactile summoning gesture.⁹¹ The *punctum* unravels the one-sidedness of the relationship between viewer and photograph, providing a sign of reciprocity of the type for which the lover waits and hopes.

Barthes's performative photograph is the courtly lady returning the suitor's love. It is, as Mavor has written, "a visual caress between the viewer and the subject(s) of the picture."⁹² In fact, Lacan states in *Seminar VII*, the word *domnei*, associated with the gift of mercy given by the lady to the suitor, corresponds to the verb *domnoyer*, one of whose meanings, he reports, is "to caress."⁹³

Art and Anamorphosis

Idealization and identification, Silverman contends, always relate to the human body because of that first identification in the mirror stage.⁹⁴ The subject wishes to be like, thinks he or she is like, that superior, whole body in the mirror. Consequently, idealization in general involves bodily forms with which the subject would like to feel him or herself equal. Hence, stemming from the initial idealization of the mirror stage, idealization is typically narcissistic. But since the idealized mirror image is a mirage hiding the subject's nothingness, desire, in its relation to idealization, is addressed at nothingness, the emptiness

⁹¹ I am grateful to Haverford College Professor of Photography William E. Williams for his helpful comments on this photograph.

⁹² Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 28.

⁹³ Lacan, *VII*, 150. Its other meaning, he adds, is "to play around." He notes that although the first syllable seems to be related to the French word for gift, "don," it is actually related to "the Domna, the Lady, or in other words, to her who on occasion dominates."

⁹⁴ Silverman, 70.

of the subject, like the image of the courtly lady.⁹⁵ The body, then, for Lacan, “is the cloak of all possible fantasms of human desire. The flowers of desire are contained in this vase whose contours we attempt to define.”⁹⁶

The figuration of the courtly lady as “being as signifier,” as an emptiness, enables Lacan to make a link between courtly love and art. To place an object in the position of *das Ding* is to remove it from the system of aims, making it a Kantian “aimless” art object. The lady onto whom the troubadour “projected his desire, on to the empty, and isolated beloved, the distant, static, and unattainable body of the woman,” Camille writes, “. . . became increasingly identified with the work of art.”⁹⁷ The poetry of courtly love, in its creation of the courtly lady, is the art that surrounds *das Ding*; the troubadour poet lover is an artist. “Love,” Lacan states, “must be ruled by Art.”⁹⁸

The Abject Courtly Lady

Lacan, notoriously, owned Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde* (1866). Žižek argues that the painting depicts “the exposed female body . . . the impossible object. . . . It takes realist painting to its furthest possible point; it is Lacan’s ‘incestuous Thing,’”⁹⁹ the mother who is the prohibited object of desire. This “incestuous naked body,” Žižek argues, is there in every work of art, sublimated, *das Ding* decorated by art; Courbet shockingly “desublimated” this body in *L’Origine*. For Žižek,

⁹⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁹⁶ Lacan, *VII*, 298, cited in Silverman, 43.

⁹⁷ Camille, 7.

⁹⁸ Lacan, *VII*, 153.

⁹⁹ Žižek, “Modernism,” 9.

the illusion of traditional realism does not reside in the faithful rendering of the depicted objects; it rather resides in the belief that, behind the directly rendered object, there effectively is the absolute Thing which could be possessed if only we were able to discard the obstacles or prohibitions that prevent access to it.¹⁰⁰

Art, like the courtly lady, is a human-made obstacle to *das Ding*, a pretense that *das Ding* is somehow approachable.

Courbet's desublimation revealed, Žižek writes, "in Kristevian terms, the reversal of the sublime object into an abject, into an abhorrent, nauseating excremental piece of slime."¹⁰¹ Courbet balances the body represented in the painting, its creamy flesh contrasting against its nakedly carnal, visceralized sexuality, between beauty and repugnance. His realism makes the radically exposed woman's body excessively attractive, an excess that takes it over the edge into the repulsive, Žižek argues.

The duality of *L'Origine* is representative of the duality of the courtly lady, whose idealization masks abjection. To illustrate his theory of courtly love, Lacan's selection of Arnaut's poem calls attention to this side of the courtly lady.¹⁰² Arnaut's poem, with its emphasis on the anamorphic and carnal aspects of courtly love, provides an imaginary narrative to accompany Courbet's *L'Origine*.

Scatological and perverse, Arnaut's poem calls attention to the lady's duality, horrific as well as sublime, and hence provides Lacan a way to align the position of the courtly lady with *das Ding*. Lady Ena makes obscene demands of her suitor Lord Bernart. The narrator vividly describes the disgusting nature of her body and the acts she wishes Bernart to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. This association of *das Ding* with both the feminine and maternal as well as with the abject is deeply misogynistic, yet reflects historical associations of woman with the abject.

¹⁰² Lacan, *VII*, 162.

perform. Lady Ena's obscenity makes her appear to be antithetical to the traditional courtly lady, when she differs only in the fact that she reveals her emptiness in an obscene way.¹⁰³ Her monstrosity reveals the terror of *das Ding*, the same horrific emptiness hidden behind the idealized inhumanity of the lady.¹⁰⁴ This relation between the ideal and the horrific demonstrates the anamorphic nature of the lady,¹⁰⁵ and the lady's impossibility demonstrates Lacan's idea of the impossibility of the sexual relationship which is at the heart of his interest in courtly love. Like Courbet's painting, the too-close availability of the female body is nevertheless a reminder of the impossibility of the sexual relation, a most disturbing lack, the lack that engendered the poetry of courtly love in the first place. Labbie argues that Arnaut's poem pushes the difficulties of proximity and availability to the limit.¹⁰⁶

This issue of the dialectic of repulsion from and attraction to the woman's body is one that was commented on in the Middle Ages as well. Johan Huizinga, one of the founders of modern cultural history, cites the medieval monk Odo of Cluny's comments on the abject hidden behind the beautiful:

The beauty of the body is that of skin alone. If people could see what is underneath the skin, as it is said of Boethia that the lynx can do, they would find the sight of woman abhorrent. Her charm consists of slime and blood, of wetness and gall. If anyone considers what is hidden in the nostrils and in the throat and in the belly, he will always think of filth. And if we cannot bring

¹⁰³ Halpern, 90-1.

¹⁰⁴ Labbie, diss., 50. She cites Lacan: "The idealized woman, the Lady, who is in the position of the Other and of the object, finds herself suddenly and brutally positing, in a place knowingly constructed out of the most refined of signifiers, the emptiness of a thing in all its crudity, a thing that reveals itself in its nudity to the thing, her thing, the one that is to be found at her very heart in its cruel emptiness. That Thing, whose function certain of you perceived in the relation to sublimation, is in a way unveiled with a cruel and insistent power;" VII, 163.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 98-9.

ourselves to touch slime and filth with our fingertips, how can we bring ourselves to embrace the dirt bag itself?¹⁰⁷

The horror beneath the skin, Žižek, writes, is a form of the real: “one of the definitions of the Lacanian real is that it is the flayed, skinned body, the palpitation of raw, skinless red flesh.”¹⁰⁸ (Barthes refers to the lover as the “Flayed Man.”)¹⁰⁹

The ideal and the abject are the Möbius strip of courtly love as veil for *das Ding*. The loveliness of the lady only prefigures, photographically, her eventual horrific decay. The work of photographer Manabu Yamanaka hovers on the continuum between life and death (Fig. 2). His series of portraits called “Gyahtei” are of women in their nineties, posed nude against a plain light backdrop. These photographs were all taken very shortly before the women’s deaths. Their skin is so thin that it seems like it could shatter like antique fabric, or it wrinkles like leather or a withered apple over atrophied muscles. Many have lost most of their hair. They are literally on the verge of the beyond. Yet they are portrayed with dignity and tenderness, as well as sadness. Several smile at the camera. Their vulnerability is devastating at the same time that their tenacity is astonishing.

Barthes notes the dialectic of the beautiful and the grotesque in photography. Photography is the mirror that does not change; in so doing, it always reminds the viewer of

¹⁰⁷ Johann Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 160, citing Odo of Cluny, *Collationum lib. III*, Migne t. CXXXIII, 556.

¹⁰⁸ Žižek, “The Lamella of David Lynch.” *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, eds. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 20.

¹⁰⁹ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 95; he states that he is parodying Socrates's *Phaedrus* in which Marsyas is flayed.

what has been lost to time, youth, and as a consequence what lies ahead. Barthes calls photography “an *uncertain* art . . . a science of desirable or detestable bodies.”¹¹⁰

Photography and Courtly Love

Photography’s relation to courtly love has to do with Lacan’s theorization of courtly love as anamorphosis, and Lacan’s understanding of the function of art. Barthes specifically relates photography to the real because of its indexicality. For that reason the complicated workings of Lacan’s theory must be engaged in order to get at photography’s courtliness.

Photography’s tendency to idealize is an important aspect of this courtliness because of the centrality of sublimation to Lacan’s work on courtly love. Literary theorist Susan Stewart characterizes the photograph in a courtly manner, describing “the photograph’s idealization and distancing of an event, a still and perfect, and thereby interpretable and unapproachable, universe whose signified is not the world but desire.”¹¹¹ Historically, the photograph has tended to miniaturize. For Stewart, the idealization of the miniature has to do with “its erasure of disorder, of nature and history, [versus] the grotesque realism of the gigantic.”¹¹² She argues that the stillness of the photograph also promotes idealization because the illusory perfection of the whole, that delusion stemming from the mirror stage, may be undone by the body’s movement: “the ideal of the body exists within an illusion of stasis, an illusion that the body does not change and that those conditions and contingencies

¹¹⁰ Barthes, cited in Kris Cohen, “Locating the Photograph’s ‘Prick:’ A Queer Tropology of Roland Barthes,” *Chicago Art Journal* 6, no. 1 (1996): 10, citing *Camera Lucida*, 18.

¹¹¹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 115.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 88.

which shape the ideal are transcendent and ‘classic’ as well.”¹¹³ Stewart adds, “Between the here-and-now of lived experience and this ideal is a distance which creates and maintains desire.”¹¹⁴ The courtly lady is another form of static ideal; from text to text she is practically identical, frozen and static like a photographic image. Photography is the perfect vehicle for this stasis of the ideal which foments amorous desire.

For Barthes, one of photography’s sciences is the idealization of the body, which he terms “photogenia.” In photogenia “the connoted message is the image itself, ‘embellished’ (which is to say in general sublimated) by techniques of lighting, exposure, and printing.”¹¹⁵ Like Stendhal’s salt crystals, the photograph can re-present the subject in an ideal light; a photograph can hide the deathly behind a façade of beauty. Paradoxically, photography can call attention to the abject body in its strenuous avoidance of it.

Barthes alludes to the anamorphic quality of the photograph in *Camera Lucida* in his discussion of the *punctum*, and its necessary separation from what the photographer has intentionally photographed. Only the viewer, seeing the image from a radically different place than the photographer’s position while making the image, can see the *punctum*. If the anamorphic skull in *The Ambassadors* dissolves the representational world occupied by the two men, the *punctum* has a similar function, according to professor of English and film theorist Colin MacCabe, in the moment when the *punctum* and subject perform on each other, “destroying the world of objects,” the *studium*.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid., 116.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 117.

¹¹⁵ Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” 24.

¹¹⁶ Colin MacCabe, “Barthes and Bazin,” in Rabate, 74.

What is singular to photography is that “here the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message *without a code*.”¹¹⁷

In an interview from 1980 relating to the publication of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes elaborates on his ideas about the relationship between photography and art. The photograph is incapable of copying as successfully as painting because of the indexicality of the referent, which makes the photographed object appear real. For that reason, and for the additional reason that photography copies mechanically, it cannot, he argues, be an art.¹¹⁸

Lacan is also concerned with the issue of art’s imitation of what it represents.¹¹⁹ Lacan’s conclusion is that:

Of course, works of art imitate the objects they represent, but their end is certainly not to represent them. In offering the imitation of an object, they make something different out of that object. Thus they only pretend to imitate. The object is established in a certain relationship to the Thing and is intended to encircle and to render [the Thing] both present and absent.¹²⁰

Lacan argues that “The more the object is presented in the imitation, the more it opens up the dimension in which illusion is destroyed and aims at something else.”¹²¹

The photograph, unable to imitate, always points to its referent. Furthermore, Barthes observes, “The camera’s optical system has been chosen from among other possible systems inherited from Renaissance perspective. That implies an ideological choice in relation to the

¹¹⁷ Barthes, “Photographic Message,” 19.

¹¹⁸ Barthes, “On Photography,” February 1980, from interviews conducted by Angelo Schwarz (late 1977) and Guy Mandery (December 1979) in *Grain*, 355-6.

¹¹⁹ Lacan, *VII*, 141.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

object.”¹²² Because of that ideological implication, and because the photograph is one-dimensional, a photograph cannot be a copy of an object. Instead

a photograph is a witness, but a witness of something that is no more. Even if the person in the picture is still alive, it’s a moment of this subject’s existence that was photographed, and this moment is gone. This is an enormous trauma for humanity, a trauma endlessly renewed. Each reading of a photo, and there are billions worldwide in a day, each perception and reading of a photo is implicitly, in a repressed manner, a contact with what has ceased to exist, a contact with death . . . that is how I experience photography: as a fascinating and funereal enigma.¹²³

Barthes maintains, in the 1980 interview, that photographic connotation as it exists in terms of style is a kind of language.¹²⁴ But connotation, generated by indexical denotation, is trumped in Barthes’s eyes. Despite the presence of the connoted, in *Camera Lucida* Barthes insists that the indexicality of the referent makes the photograph, as a technological event and object, invisible. The photograph is a witness that inarguably shows that the object it pictures was there, existing, in front of the camera. Iverson argues that if there is any art or method to the photograph, any connotation, “the sharpness of the *punctum* cuts through the deliberate decorum of the pose and the prop and reactivates a trauma, . . . actually awakens the Real of [a] loss.”¹²⁵ Francophone scholar and literary theorist Beryl Schlossman argues that “the *punctum* pierces the subject’s heart; in a Lacanian image of the symptom, it produces an intensity of emotion that takes effect in the Real.”¹²⁶

¹²² Barthes, “On Photography,” 355.

¹²³ Ibid., 356.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 353.

¹²⁵ Iverson, 456.

¹²⁶ Beryl Schlossman, “The Descent of Orpheus: On Reading Barthes and Proust,” in Rabate, 156.

Early in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes writes:

In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This* (this photograph, and not Photography), in short, what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression.¹²⁷

What does he mean by saying the photograph—not photography—is the real, “in its indefatigable expression”? The photograph is the expression of the real for three reasons. First, because for Barthes photography presents the referent in a “weightless, transparent envelope,” unmarked by its production.¹²⁸ The photograph makes it possible for the photographer, Barthes says, “to *conceal elusively* the preparation to which he subjects the scene to be recorded,”¹²⁹ the preparation being the art of the photograph, the connoted message. The photograph, Barthes writes in “The Photographic Message,” “transmit[s] . . . the scene itself, the literal reality.”¹³⁰ In *Camera Lucida* Barthes insists on photography’s indexicality when he writes: “I perceive the referent (here, the photograph really transcends itself: is this not the sole proof of its art? To annihilate itself as *medium*, to be no longer a sign but the thing itself?)”¹³¹ Second, the photograph is the real because it is the field of the *punctum*, the real which irrupts into the symbolic world of the viewer. Lacan argues that doubt is a defense against the real;¹³² photographs are representations that we do not doubt.

¹²⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 4. In *Chambre Claire*, he cites Lacan’s “Tuché and Automaton,” XI, 53-66.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁹ Barthes, “Photographic Message,” 21.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹³¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 45.

¹³² Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 1, refers to Joan Copjec’s discussion of Lacan and doubt in her “Vampires, Breast-feeding, and Reality,” in “Rendering the Real: a Special Issue,” guest ed. Parveen Adams, *October* 58 (autumn 1991): 25-44.

Not doubting, the viewer is open to the irruption of the real, the expression of the unrepresentable, unsignifiable, the nihilation of the self, for all that the photograph can represent a self with which one can identify. Finally, the photograph is real because the *noeme* of photography that Barthes discovers at the end of *Camera Lucida* is that every photograph announces the subject's future nihilation.

Lacan argues that a painting veils *das Ding* behind perspective and illusion, and that furthermore, like the vase, is a creation encircling *das Ding*. The vase and the courtly lady don't avoid the Thing but also point to its presence, marking its unrepresentability. They also, as objects which stand in for the Thing, reveal their substitutability.¹³³ Works of art, "in offering an imitation of [the] object"—that which photography is categorically incapable of—"make something different out of that object."¹³⁴ Therefore, Lacan argues, works of art render *das Ding* both present and absent.¹³⁵ If, as Žižek says, art hides "the real presence of the incestuous Thing behind the deceptive surface of the painting,"¹³⁶ what happens when that deceptive surface hides its deceptiveness, pretends to be absent?

If art is the decoration or veil for *das Ding*, and photography has the capacity to hide its art, then photography is calling attention to the void that usually lurks behind art, inside the vase or temple, or in the place of the courtly lady. Appropriating Octave Mannoni's phrase describing the fetishist, "*je sais bien, mais quand-même*," to characterize the viewer's seeing the referent rather than the photograph, film theorist Christian Metz writes, "I know

¹³³ Silverman, 77.

¹³⁴ Lacan, *VII*, 141.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Žižek, "Modernism," 9. He gives the example of Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) in which "the matrix of sublimation [is] at its most elementary, reduced to the bare marking of the distance between foreground and background, between a wholly 'abstract' object (square) and the place that contains it."

very well, but . . . you know the photograph is a photograph . . . but [it] still [has] a strange feeling of reality—a denial of the signifier.”¹³⁷ Courtly love raises an obstacle blocking access to *das Ding*, an obstacle that veils the actual impossibility of the sexual relationship; courtly love lies to the subject about what is possible and what is not.¹³⁸ Photography tells a different lie, admitting to no such obstacle.

The photograph depicts its referents with an “illusory naturalness.”¹³⁹ Just because we don’t see the photograph doesn’t mean it isn’t there. The photograph is there, a frame, a support, but it is invisible, like Fradenburg’s Invisible Man without his demarcating garments and bandages, naked and fleshly, partially nihilated, and consigned to an untenable existence. For Lacan, Renaissance paintings pretend to show emptiness, *das Ding*. Photography’s illusion is of course immeasurably stronger than that of painted three-point perspective, from which, as Barthes commented, it draws its optical system, but it still relies on the illusion of perspective and the anamorphic distortion of forms effected by that illusion.

Like Lacan’s vase, photography is full and empty, the image full of objects that announce their truthful imitation of the real; but the image is just a piece of paper, and the objects depicted always already lost along with the stolen moment. This quality of the photograph, however, does not undo its indexicality, the fact that the referent actually was there in front of the camera. Tension between illusory naturalness and indexicality is at the heart of photography’s courtliness, and the way that it functions in terms of *das Ding*, the empty object of desire.

¹³⁷ Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l’imaginaire, ou, L’autre scene* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 9-33; Christian Metz, “Photography and Fetish,” *October* 34 (autumn, 1985): 81-90.

¹³⁸ Ragland, “Psychoanalysis,” 14.

¹³⁹ Barthes, “On Photography,” 354.

Yet the photograph is not a vase constructed around a space full of emptiness. It pretends to hide the pretty decoration for *das Ding* offered by painting and poetry. It shows emptiness in a different, but no less authentic, way than the vase, via its indexicality to the referent. That emptiness takes the form of the loss of the referent, always absent despite its appearance in the photograph. The paradox of the photograph is that for all its breathtaking indexicality, it is also always empty. The sublimated object renders *das Ding* both present and absent; the photograph renders the referent both present and absent.

The fractional moment the photograph saves simultaneously points to the loss of that moment, in addition to the loss of what Metz calls the off-frame, everything that escaped the lens of the camera. Thus each photograph pictures a double loss, the loss of the moment and the reference to the subject's unavoidable death, multiplied rather than lessened with every reprint. Metz describes one aspect of this simultaneous presence and absence:

The click of the shutter excludes the off-frame like a form of castration. It marks the place of an irreversible absence, a place from which the look has been averted forever. The photograph itself, the "in-frame," the abducted part-space, the place of presence and fullness—[is] undermined and haunted by the feeling of its exterior, of its borderlines, which are in the past, the left, the lost.¹⁴⁰

Metz argues that the photograph always prefigures death; but by referring to the shutter's click as a form of castration, he marks the off-frame as the real, from which the subject is permanently separated. At the same time, Metz refers to the in-frame as a place of fullness, thus likening it to the real as well. Ultimately, the lost real of the off-frame accentuates the real found in the photograph.

In addition to the referent imaged in the photograph, the photograph shows or references, as Metz and Barthes have demonstrated, the brutal and inexorable passage of time

¹⁴⁰ Metz, 87.

that is always drawing the viewer forward toward his or her demise.¹⁴¹ The loss inscribed in every photograph, which unfolds over time, adds a dimension to photography that is absent from painting. Barthes thinks of the camera as “a clock for seeing;”¹⁴² thus each click is a marker toward death.

What the photograph lacks in the third dimension it makes up for with its relationship to the Einsteinian fourth dimension, time. In the relationship of the viewer to the photograph, time is relative; the photographic moment has stopped, and the viewer’s time with that image is up to the viewer. Einstein’s theories of relativity demonstrate that time is enmeshed with space, and is thus dependent on the observer’s frame of spatial reference, suggesting that the time itself is anamorphic.¹⁴³ Quantum theory posits that physical reality is only defined when observed in an interactive way. This holds true whether that reality is in the past or the future. Like Lacan’s real, a space of unrepresentable timelessness, the reality of quantum physics does not exist until observed, noted, and thus symbolized.

In the photograph time and its loss adds a dimension of emptiness lacking from other imitative arts, including film, which unfolds over a set time in order to be legible. The movie viewer participates in pre-ordained cinematic time, and the “this-has-been” *noeme* of the photograph does not persist long enough for the viewer to recognize the lost frozen moment.¹⁴⁴ Thus while the detours of anamorphosis as sublimation postpone the object in a future tense, the photograph’s temporal anamorphosis, via a captured shadow, pulls the past

¹⁴¹ See Metz, and *Camera Lucida* Part 2.

¹⁴² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 15.

¹⁴³ See Brian Green, *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 39-77.

¹⁴⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 78.

as real forward, and collapses the subject's future. In the photograph, a specific referent from the past tells the story of every viewer's future.

The photograph is already anamorphic, seen two ways at once: as full and empty, present and absent, past and present. The real, "which is ultimately an encounter with the persistently denied fact of one's own mortality,"¹⁴⁵ has a presence in every photograph. The photograph is a reminder of one's unavoidable eventual extinction, serving as what Barthes calls an "imperious sign of my future death."¹⁴⁶ Photography's relation to time precludes the necessity of an anamorphic skull.

The inseparability of photograph and referent situates the photograph in "that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both," one of which is desire and its object.¹⁴⁷ For Barthes, this is a bodily relationship: "A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, thought impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed."¹⁴⁸ Barthes shares a skin with the referent as if in the real, when all the skin, all the flesh, mother's and child's, is part of the infant. This shared skin is impossible in the symbolic, where the Lacanian subject has been cut, sliced, and separated, the price paid for the illusion of wholeness. This sets the stage for Barthes's visceral relation to photography, which makes the real the (necessarily) unrepresented referent of every photograph.

¹⁴⁵ Iverson, 458.

¹⁴⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 97.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 81.

Barthes sees in the photograph “only the referent, the desired object, the beloved body.”¹⁴⁹ This for Barthes is the fatality of the photograph: there is “no photograph without *something*, or *someone*.”¹⁵⁰ Barthes’s photographic search for the visual essence of his late mother ultimately leads him to find that while the photograph is a kind of resurrection, the resurrected is always still lost, only available as “reality in a past state: at once the past and the real.”¹⁵¹ The maternal, umbilical link he finds in all photography cannot give him back his mother, but does give him “a treasury of rays which emanated from my mother as a child, from her hair, her skin, her dress, her gaze, on that day.”¹⁵² Psychoanalytic theorist Jacques-Alain Miller, editor of Lacan’s seminars, has argued that “love is the gift of presence itself.”¹⁵³ By certifying presence, even if it is in the past, the photograph can provide this gift.

Barthes’s description of the indivisible join between photograph and referent provides a longed-for if ultimately unsatisfying closeness with his late mother. But the mother is also the forbidden object in the place of *das Ding*, the dangerous place the subject must not approach. The indexicality of photograph and referent thus also has a quality that is intensely indicative of bodily nihilation:

The photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures, or even like those pairs of fish (sharks, I think, according to Michelet) which navigate in convoy, as though united in eternal coitus.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 82.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Jacques-Alain Miller, *Donc*, unedited course given in the Department of Psychoanalysis at the University of Paris VIII, Saint-Denis (1993-1994).

¹⁵⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.

The indexical relation between the photograph and the referent is like knowing your death is imminent while horrifically fettered to a corpse, the abject presence of the absence of life, in its appalling, liminal state of decay. It is like two powerful human-devouring monsters—monsters with very small brains, their existence based on instinct alone—in a permanent state of *jouissance*, which the subject would be unable to tolerate. Photographic indexicality is unmanageable; it is unsignifiable; it is a confrontation with the real—the place where infant and mother share one flesh, the place where death stares life down.

It is Barthes's description of the condemned man and the corpse which would most interest Lacan, who describes a space in which "the false metaphors of being (*l'étant*) can be distinguished from the position of Being (*l'être*) itself . . . the situation or fate of a life that is about to turn into certain death, a death lived by anticipation, a death that crosses over into the sphere of life, a life that moves into the sphere of death."¹⁵⁵ This is what Lacan refers to as the space "between two deaths," a state of pure desire, the place where he locates Antigone after her refusal to permit her brother's body to go unburied, where he locates Oedipus after he has scratched out his own eyes. Lacan describes the space as "the situation or fate of a life that is about to turn into certain death, a death lived by anticipation, a death that crosses over into the sphere of life, a life that moves into the sphere of death."¹⁵⁶ Labbie elaborates on this definition: "Put briefly and reductively, the two deaths is a mode of existing in relation to the self that perceives the self as already dead, such that physical death

¹⁵⁵ Lacan, *VII*, 248.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. See Labbie's discussion of the implications of Lacan's trajectory from the medieval (courtly love) to the classical (Antigone) to the modern in *diss.*, 164-181.

is an end to a life of fragmented subjectivity.”¹⁵⁷ The referent, withdrawn from the life of the passage of time, is in a limbo where it neither exists nor lives.

In making the veil of *das Ding* invisible, the photograph makes the forbidden object appear to be a bit more approachable and manageable, less annihilating. Part of the fascination of the photograph is that it lets the viewer approach, a little more closely than anywhere else, the real with which the subject longs to be rejoined, as a result offering the promise of filling lack, while keeping the viewer at a safe distance from those satisfactions and from the onslaught of *jouissance*. Photography, hiding the vase, pretends that *das Ding* is representable and pretends to tame it. The result is the *punctum*, an irruption of the real, which reaches out to the subject: a fragment of totality, nihilation, and absence of lack.

Desire, Courtly Love, Ethics, and the Photograph

The signifier, Lacan states, with “an artificial and cunning organization . . . lays down at a particular moment the lines of a certain asceticism,” the abstention that promotes desire. In the case of courtly love, “the negotiation of the detour in the psychic economy” is, in some instances, “organized so as to make the domain of the vacuole stand out as such. What gets to be projected as such is a certain transgression of desire.”¹⁵⁸ That transgression of desire comprises the ethics of eroticism, *Vorlust*, the holding back that prolongs desire and allows unpleasure to be pleasurable. As Fradenburg points out, “Sacrifice means to get back, with interest, whatever it renounces.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Labbie, diss., 163.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 152.

¹⁵⁹ Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, 15.

The sublimated and idealized object that veils the Thing is something sought by the subject “in the paths of the signifier.”¹⁶⁰ “The function of the pleasure principle,” Lacan states,

is to lead the subject from signifier to signifier, by generating as many signifiers as are required to maintain at as low a level as possible the tension that regulates the whole functioning of the psychic apparatus. We are thus led to the relation between man and this signifier . . . how can the relation of man to the signifier, to the extent that he can manipulate it, put him in relationship with an object that represents the Thing? We thus come to the question of what man does when he makes a signifier.¹⁶¹

Using the example of the vase as signifier, Lacan says that just as God could say on the seventh day that creation was good, “You could say the same thing of the potter when he has made his vase—it’s good, it’s right, it holds together. In other words, it’s always fine from that side of the work.”¹⁶² Like the potter who creates the vase, Lacan adds, “man fashions this signifier and introduces it into the world.”¹⁶³ “In this connection the human factor will . . . be defined . . . in the way that I defined the Thing just now, namely, that which in the real suffers from the signifier.”¹⁶⁴

In her profoundly influential *On Photography* (1977) Susan Sontag referred to the photograph as “atomic,” criticizing its ability to break the world into easily manageable pieces. Lacan is also concerned with the atomic in the *Ethics*; describing the way that *das Ding* is a register of good and evil, of the true ambivalence of love and hate, he says:

¹⁶⁰ Lacan, *VII*, 118.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 118-9.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 122; the French word “conscience” refers to both consciousness and conscience.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 124-5.

Or world and society now bring news of the shadow of a certain incredible, absolute weapon that is waved in our faces in a way that is indeed worthy of the muses . . . that weapon suspended over our heads which is 100,000 times more destructive than that which was already hundreds of thousands of times more destructive than those which came before. . . . Confront that moment when a man or a group of men can act in such a way that the question of existence is posed for the whole of the human species, and you will then see inside yourself that *das Ding* is next to the subject. . . . It is not just a matter of drawing close to *das Ding*, but also to its effects, to its presence at the core of human subjectivity, namely, in that precarious existence in the midst of the forest of desires and compromises that these very desires achieve with a certain reality, which is certainly not as confused as one might imagine.¹⁶⁵

In the register of *das Ding*, “Freud suggests there that which in life might prefer death.”¹⁶⁶

Das Ding is “the forest of desires and compromises” through which the subject must navigate.¹⁶⁷

Lacan’s ethics of courtly love have nothing to do with any conception of the courtly lady as a spiritual being who ennobles the lover toward the divine.¹⁶⁸ Instead of focusing on the spiritual, Lacan’s ethics focus on the subject’s relationship to his or her desire. Both Freud’s *Vorlust* and courtly love operate in contradiction to the pleasure principle. This is the paradox of the pleasure principle, the place where law and desire meet, what Lacan refers to as “the ethical function of eroticism:” “It is only insofar as the pleasure of desiring, or, more precisely, the pleasure of experiencing unpleasure, is sustained that we can speak of the sexual valorization of the preliminary stages of the act of love.”¹⁶⁹ The pleasurable sacrifice of *Vorlust* is where the ethics of courtly love are located.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 104-5.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 104.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 105.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 152.

Lacanian ethics posit that the most grievous ethical transgression is to give ground relative to one's desire. This takes place in the most mundane, day-to-day fashion, when we are more likely to submit to conventional rules of behavior than to pursue our desires. As Fradenburg puts it:

Psychoanalysis reorients previous ethical thinking by asking why we so readily (if not always graciously) give way on our desire—not why we have so much trouble restraining it. . . . Psychoanalysis distinctively insists that we are capable of desiring suffering, for ourselves, not just for our loved ones or our enemies, because the subject *tout court* is a function of desire.¹⁷⁰

The problem is not that we seek to fulfill our desires to the point of harming ourselves or others, but that we sacrifice our desires. This is in part because, Fradenburg writes, “desire desires, above all, its own continuation, not its fulfillment.”¹⁷¹ One of the ways desire continues desiring is through the proscription supplied by the Law. Desire, Fradenburg explains, desires the Law because the Law allows desire to go on desiring:

The intimacy between desire and the law is not one we readily acknowledge. We are so accustomed to pitting morality against desire that it is simply hard to believe that morality *is* a form of desire, or desire is what morality *is*. Most of us prefer to think that we are split between restraint and passion, because doing so helps us to conceal the more radical splitting on which the subject is founded, the fact that the subject is founded on ‘the desire of the other.’¹⁷²

Lacan addresses this issue through Freud's writing about the neighbor in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. “Freud,” Lacan says, “was literally horrified by the idea of love for one's neighbor.”¹⁷³ Freud's horror invokes “the presence of that fundamental evil which dwells within this neighbor. But if that is the case, then it also dwells within me. And what is more of a neighbor to me than that heart within which is my *jouissance* and which I don't dare go

¹⁷⁰ Fradenburg, 3.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷² Ibid., 7.

¹⁷³ Lacan, *VII*, 186.

near?”¹⁷⁴ The tragedy of loving one’s neighbor is that “that is how I spend my life, by cashing in my time with a dollar zone, ruble zone or any other zone, in my neighbor’s time, where all the neighbors are maintained equally at the marginal level of reality of men of my own existence.”¹⁷⁵

To love one’s neighbor is to give way to one’s desire; to love one’s neighbor implies a willingness to sacrifice oneself: “If I can do something in less time and with less trouble than someone near me, I would instinctively do it in his place, in return for which I am damned for what I have to do for that most neighborly of neighbors who is inside me.”¹⁷⁶ Altruism satisfies the ego but sacrifices desire, and “even becomes the pretext by means of which I can avoid taking up the problem of the evil I desire, and that my neighbor desires also.”¹⁷⁷

In courtly love, submitting to the desires of another is not to give ground relative to one’s desire, but to persist in that desire. “In figuring the Lady, or indeed, the beloved *finamen*—the subject, and thereby living being, says that possessing the goods or the ‘good’ is not how it will find satisfaction. It will find satisfaction in not fully possessing good or the good; it will find satisfaction in having trouble with its objects. Courtly love shows that desire is in fact what we find most difficult to renounce.”¹⁷⁸

The ultimate goal of Lacanian psychoanalysis is for the analysand to “traverse the fantasy.” This means that the subject recognizes that *objet petit a* cannot satisfy desire, and

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 186.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 187.

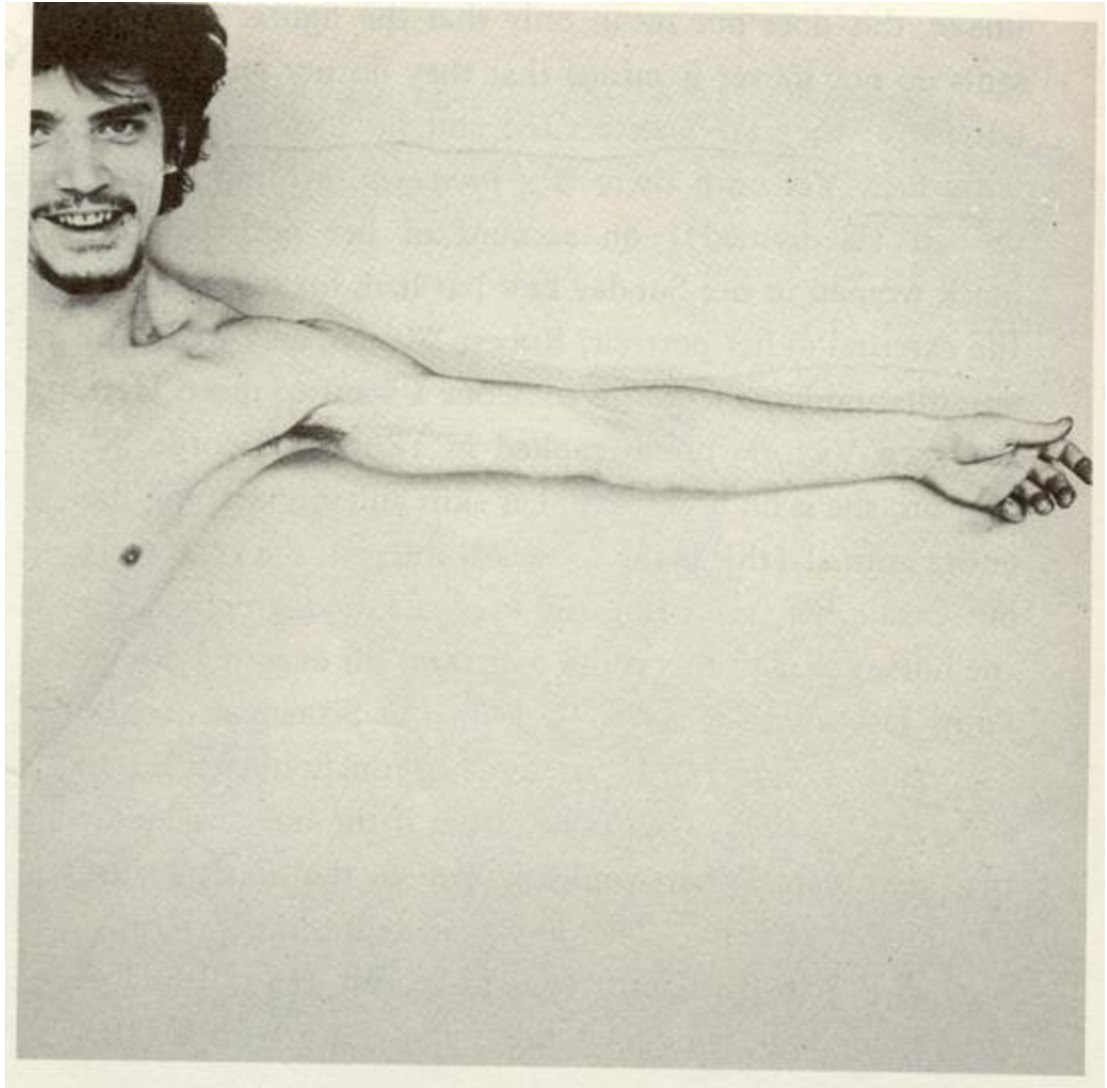
¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 186.

¹⁷⁸ Fradenburg, 23.

that therefore the Other does not have it but is also a lacking subject. The subject realizes that the *objet a* is an imaginary compensation for castration, and accepts that he or she is a subject of lack. This subject has not given ground relative to desire, but has instead realized that desire has no fixed object which can satisfy it. By ceasing to believe that the Other has what can satisfy the subject's desire, the subject frees him- or herself from thinking that his or her location in the symbolic is fixed. To traverse the fantasy means to move beyond the idea that desire can be satisfied.

Like courtly love, photography has trouble with its objects. Instead of erecting obstacles between subject and desired object, the photograph's insistence on its indexicality to the referent pretends that there are no obstacles. By keeping the referent present and absent, photography metaphorically atomizes belief in the availability of the object and can remind the viewer that there is no fixed object that will satisfy desire. At the same time, the photographic *punctum*, reaching out to the viewer, acting as an answer of the real, has the potential to defeat narcissistic idealization. By idealizing each referent as it simultaneously calls attention to the viewer's mortality, the photograph makes possible an ethical identification with the other.



Chapter 2, Fig. 1: Robert Mapplethorpe,
"Self Portrait," 1975



Chapter 2, Fig. 2: Manabu Yamanaka,
“Gyahte,” 1999

Chapter 3: The Beloved Referent and the Beloved Mother

Isn't desire always the same, whether the object is present or absent? Isn't the object *always* absent?¹

Roland Barthes

In the work of Roland Barthes, love—courtly and unrequited, love as desire—and photography theory share themes of perpetuated desire sustained by distance and absence. The lover and the viewer of the photograph experience tenuous connections sought in rays of lights and displaced touch, flashes of realization and recognition, time suspended as if in a dream, idealization of the everyday to the realm of the extraordinary and perfect. The inseparability of the photograph and referent, their perfect fit, is like that of ideal, inseparable lovers, like the relationship for which the Barthesian lover always hungers. But both viewer and lover are always kept at a desirous distance. The longing for a totalized love of perfect affinity derives from longing for the lost oneness with the mother; a photograph of Barthes's mother shows him the ultimate meaning of photography.

The courtliness of the lover of *A Lover's Discourse* permeates *Camera Lucida*, and the photographic permeates *A Lover's Discourse*. They differ in the fact that the lover's discourse operates within the image-repertoire, while the *punctum* is an irruption of the real which pierces the symbolic. Barthes's sublimation of his mother in *Camera Lucida* and his ultimate realization that the image-repertoire must be abandoned in *A Lover's Discourse* situate his lover/viewer as courtly troubadours who defend desire against acculturation.

¹ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 15.

From the hauntingly perfect images projected by the *camera obscura*, to the all-too-fleetingly fixed images of the first photographic experiments, and to the flickering but lasting images of the daguerreotype, the capability to fix the photographic image was sought passionately.² When that was achieved, what completely overwhelmed the first viewers, what led the world to fall in love with photography in such short order, was its indexical relation to the referent. In its perfect replication of the visible, its rendering of every detail in minute replication, photography achieved magic, even alchemy; instead of turning lead into gold, photography used silver to turn the past into the present, light into reproduction of a past image. The alchemy of the photographic image is as magical as the chemistry the lover senses with the beloved.

Culture's relationship to photography, Barthes laments, has grown jaded; he deliberately tries to see it as if it is brand new, giving it the fresh desirability of an alluring recent acquaintance. By insisting on an atavistic experience of photography, Barthes provides a metaphorical photograph of photography, capturing a moment of the historical experience of photography that had been lost to the past. He resists the cultural taming of the photograph which subdues it into being simply another medium of representation.

The world-changing, one-of-a-kind daguerreotypes of the Boulevard du Temple made by Daguerre were taken over a period of several minutes, and captured something the human eye cannot see: a suspension of time that erased all moving objects. This quality of early photography has been appropriated by Hiroshi Sugimoto in the photographic series *Interior Theaters*. Like those early daguerreotypes, Sugimoto's photographs show an image which is visible only in photographic time, not human time. Sugimoto's *Theaters* are photographs in

² See Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997).

which Barthes's theories of desire and photography converge. Both desire and photography are capable of engulfing the desirous subject, but another form of Barthesian engulfment takes place in the movie theater.

As a high school student, Sugimoto was an ardent fan of Audrey Hepburn: "I fell in love with her on the screen. I wanted her portrait, so I brought my Minolta SR7 camera into a movie theater, and I studied how to stop the image on the screen."³ Sugimoto expressed his desire for Hepburn by photographically stilling and stealing a fleeting image of her from the movie screen. Thus for Sugimoto, stilling the image on the screen, taking an image of the beloved away with him from the theater, and illicitly, is related to desire and the limitations surrounding its fulfillment. His *Interior Theater* photographs also explore desire, but by doing the opposite of what he accomplished with the Hepburn photograph. Instead of catching a still moment from a moving picture, he extends the length of the photographic exposure to the length of the film. This compresses the duration of the film into a single moment; rather than leaving the theater with one frame of the film, he accumulates all of them. The result is that the film's imagery vanishes in a moon-like glow, softly illuminating the interior of the theater in a space of courtliness.

Coupling A Lover's Discourse and Camera Lucida

Photography was one of Barthes's last loves. In the first half of *Camera Lucida*, his study of photographs is guided by his desire; he writes, "I decided then to take as my guide for my new analysis the attraction I felt for certain photographs."⁴ He approaches

³ Tracey Bashkoff, "The Exactness of the World: A Conversation with Hiroshi Sugimoto," in *Sugimoto Portraits*, ed. Bashkoff and Nancy Spector (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2000), 26.

⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 18.

photography as an infatuated lover, fascinated by the viewer's flickering relationship to the photographic referent. Yet while that method teaches him about his own desire, he confesses that

I had not discovered the nature (the *eidos*) of Photography. I had to grant that my pleasure was an imperfect mediator, and that a subjectivity reduced to its hedonist project could not recognize the universal. I would have to descend deeper into myself to find the evidence of Photography, that thing which is seen by anyone looking at a photograph and which distinguishes it in his eyes from any other image.⁵

Photography, his beloved, remains elusive. Seeking the universal aspect of photography that makes it unique from other forms of representation, Barthes nevertheless looks deeply into himself. And in that process, he discovers that desire does play a part in the *eidos* of photography.

In the second half of the text Barthes analyzes photography in the context of his mother's death and his search for a photographic image of her in which he recognizes her true self. This search culminates in his discovery of the "Winter Garden Photograph," where his mother is around five years old, standing in a conservatory with her brother. Barthes does not share this photograph with the reader, arguing that it is only of deep meaning to him, and that no other viewer can see it as he does. But keeping the beloved's image hidden is a tendency of the courtly lover.

My coupling of Barthes's two texts is driven by analogy; I see the works as lovers who deeply identify with each other, recognize themselves in each other. Yet as always that identification is imperfect. The depth of those differences, particularly in the relation between the beloved of *A Lover's Discourse* and the mother of *Camera Lucida*, enrich my reading.

⁵ Ibid., 60.

The Amorous Image-Repertoire and Engulfment in the Movie Theater

Barthes's essay "Leaving the Movie Theater" describes his experience of the cinema as one of delirious engulfment couched in desire, as was Sugimoto's viewing of the Audrey Hepburn film:

It is in this urban dark that the body's freedom is generated; this invisible work of possible affects emerges from a veritable cinematographic cocoon; the movie's spectator could easily appropriate the silkworm's motto: *Inclusum labor illustrat*; it is because I am enclosed that I work and glow with all my desire.⁶

The movie theater is a place where the specific body is submerged into delicious anonymity, a shared experience of audience members watching a film together.⁷ Barthes dissolves into the audience just as in Sugimoto's photographs the frames of film lose their individual recognizability and blur together.

The filmic image functions for Barthes as a lure, a mirage equal to that experienced in the mirror stage and which founds the image-repertoire. Lacan has called the infant's recognition of its image in the mirror "jubilant," a sudden revelation. For Barthes, the amorous image-repertoire is also a jubilant revelation associated with the discovery of the beloved other, of a reality in which everything harmonizes for the lover, and in which the lover identifies narcissistically with the beloved. Barthes's lover is "greedy for coincidence." The lover believes that all the little signs he discerns related to the beloved have meaning; they are all perceived in terms of the answer of the real, the promise of the fortune-teller fulfilled.⁸ Thus "Every amorous episode can be, of course, endowed with meaning."⁹ Once

⁶ Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater," 346.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 186.

⁹ Ibid., 7.

inside the amorous image-repertoire, the lover can line up all experiences the way a magnet does metal filings, in a split-second, magical and elegant sweep.

Evoking the entrancing atmosphere of the theater, Barthes writes in *A Lover's Discourse*, "Engulfment is a moment of hypnosis. A suggestion functions, which commands me to swoon without killing myself."¹⁰ The lover's engulfment is "an outburst of annihilation which affects the amorous subject in despair or fulfillment."¹¹ Engulfment is annihilation by desire.

Barthes's description of the engulfments of lover and moviegoer offer a new way to read Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Interior Theater* photographs. The precipitation of moments on the negative during the long exposure creates enough light that the theater's darkness lifts, light picking out the details of the theater like the first rays of dawn. Sugimoto's photographs picture the envelope of the image-repertoire, inside which the lover lives in the same world of love as the beloved, and strives to erase the line between lover and beloved, between self and other. Sugimoto's *Interior Theater* photographs draw attention to the Barthesian confluence of the engulfments of the theater, love, desire and photography, by totalizing the filmic envelope into a single image.

The long exposure time does away not only with the movie but also with the audience, whose members, if visible, are often reduced to barely legible blurs, for example in "Radio City Music Hall, New York, 1978" (Fig. 1).¹² The movie and the people who came to see it are revealed to be transitory and immaterial in the context of the solid, immobile, beautifully detailed theater. Apparently empty seats with only blurs where figures filled the

¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

¹² Bashkoff, 28.

space stand in for already absent bodies, expressing the futility of all desire, and the absence central to photography.

Presided over by Venus, Sugimoto's "Avalon Theatre, Catalina Island" (Fig. 2) of 1993 is a perfect venue for the Barthesian lover.¹³ The name of the theater suggests the courtly adventures of Arthur and his knights. Venus is suspended in her elegant clam shell over the fantastic interior, raising her head to look at a single star over her head, glowing with the bright glimmer of her namesake planet Venus at dusk. Two other big stars and scattered smaller ones are arranged symmetrically but are so delicately placed as to give the feeling of randomness. All hover above the full moon of the glowing screen. Patterned on Botticelli's *Venus*, the Avalon goddess's hair flows to her left; she holds her right hand over her chest, her left hand entwined in winding tresses which she uses to modestly cover herself. Her legs are chastely held together, and her knees turn elegantly to the side. Her coy posture is at odds with the pre-code freedom from censorship of the films of the era in which the theater was built.

The center aisle of the Avalon is carpeted; it puckers gently like a calm sea, dappled as in moonlight where it is indented and where clean and dirty spots contrast with each other. The aisle is also like a pier, heading out through the sea of seats toward the moon of the screen, lit by the reflections off the seat arms, becoming a perfect place for a lovers' promenade. Stylized waves roil in the shadows to the sides of Venus, and then repeat themselves as they lap around the walls. Above the screen a furled edge of curtain invokes

¹³ The single screen art deco/Mediterranean revival theater opened in 1929 and was designed by Sumner A. Spaulding and Walter Weber; it seats around 1100 people. See <http://cinematreasures.org/theater/22>. Its murals are by John Gabriel Beckman. See http://www.visitcatalinaisland.com/avalon/acti_casinoTheater.php. When Sugimoto made this photograph, their colors had faded, but the murals were restored in 1994. See <http://www.hemagazine.com/Extraordinary-Theaters/Avalon-Theatre.asp>.

the tiny gobbling waves where the sea meets the shore.¹⁴ The floor of the stage is divided into two horizontal fields of light and dark, dark in the foreground like a dark sea, light in back like a cloudless sky in a black-and-white photograph. The sea of the carpet and stage reduplicate the preternaturally calm waters of Sugimoto's sea photographs (Fig. 3), which are always divided equally between sea and sky. The calm seas of the aisle and stage contrast with the turbulence of the painted seas.

In the 2004 exhibition *History of History*, a show he curated of his own work along with Japanese antiquities and other artifacts, Sugimoto inserted a tiny print of one of his seascapes, "Japan Sea, Oki, 1981," into a silver art deco compact with a mirror (Fig. 4). In the photograph of the Avalon Theatre, it's as if he slid one of his seascapes into the photograph where the stage is, tucking the corners into little slots, or as if the sea outside the theater is mirrored within it. Sugimoto's nod to his own work within another photograph gives his work the complicated layers of meaning found in courtly love's hermetic *trobar clus*.

In *Michelet*, Barthes cites that historian's fascination with the unity of the sea, the inseparability of the sea and its creatures. Remembering the first time he saw a fish as a child, Michelet writes,

I tried to capture it, but I found it as difficult to catch hold of as the water that ran through my tiny fingers. It seemed to me identical with the element in which it swam. I had the vague notion that it was nothing but water, animal or animate water, organized water.¹⁵

¹⁴ Just in front of the stage on the left is the Catalina's fabled 4-manual, 16 rank theater pipe organ, the largest organ ever manufactured by the Page Pipe Organ Company of Lima, Ohio, here shrouded in a protective covering. <http://cinematreasures.org/theater/22>.

¹⁵ Barthes, *Michelet*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 42. Barthes cites Michelet's *La Mer*, 1861, vol. 2, 2.

He agrees with “the ancients” and eighteenth-century scientist René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, “who simply called such creatures *gelatinized water*.”¹⁶ In this way the submersion of the viewers into the theater in Sugimoto’s photographs is like the unity of Michelet’s sea. Sugimoto’s sea photographs were prompted by his desire to imagine what the sea might have looked like to the first humans, before it even had a name.¹⁷ Like Barthes, Sugimoto seeks atavism via photography. For Barthes, the sea is one of the few non-signifying fields we encounter: “Here I am, before the sea, it is true that it bears no message.”¹⁸ Sugimoto’s photographs of the sea embody zero-degree photography.

Absence, Distance, and One-Sidedness

The lover exists inside the encompassing sea of the image-repertoire, which narcissistically revolves around the lover, not the beloved. A real person, the beloved nevertheless becomes an object/image to the lover when the lover falls in love, demonstrating the one-sidedness of the relationship. As Barthes says of love, “the subject’s place and the other’s place cannot permute. . . . ‘I am loved less than I love.’”¹⁹ By turning the beloved into an object, the lover keeps that object at a distance, like the troubadour does with his lady. The photograph also makes the referent an object by stilling it. Barthes writes, “Photography transformed subject into object,” especially in early portraiture, which required long poses, often aided by uncomfortable devices to ensure stillness during the lengthy exposure.²⁰ Like

¹⁶ Barthes, *Michelet*, 42.

¹⁷ Sarah Milroy, “Hiroshi Sugimoto, At Home on an Ocean of Time,” *Globe and Mail*, June 9, 2007.

¹⁸ Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 112, n. 2.

¹⁹ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 13.

²⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 13.

the referent of the photograph, the “beloved is both constituted and silenced, elevated and subdued, idealized and smothered by the discourse of desire.”²¹

The relationship of the viewer to the photograph has a one-sided aspect, otherwise the sense of loss and desire aroused by the photograph would not be so important. Photography theory also embraces absence and distance. Although the referent is absolutely absent, existing in the past, it is visible in the present; the photograph brings it tantalizingly, magically close to the viewer, but keeps desire unfulfilled. In the photograph distance is not only physical but temporal, and the photograph’s infinite reproducibility only makes the referent more lost. Absence is what is permanently embedded in every photograph. As a consequence, so is loss; loss, in Lacanian terms, implies desire. Although the *noeme* of photography is “that-has-been,” “has” is the temporal linchpin of its existence, signifying the past, and the incontrovertible separation of time. The *noeme* of the lover’s discourse, “that-must-be,” is perpetually deferred. Instead of capturing life, the photograph insists on absence and death; instead of promising fulfillment, desire can only promise lack.

Describing the centrality of absence to desire, Barthes writes, “Amorous absence functions in a single direction, expressed by the one who stays, never by the one who leaves: an always present *I* is constituted only by confrontation with an always absent *you*.²²” The second part of this quote could just as easily have come from *Camera Lucida* as from *A Lover’s Discourse*. This type of absence is beautifully illustrated by the first photograph reproduced in *Camera Lucida*, Daniel Boudinet’s *Polaroid* (Fig. 5). This image, the only photograph reproduced in color in the book, is also the first one the reader sees and the only

²¹ Laurie J. Churchill, “Discourses of Desire: On Ovid’s *Amores* and Barthes’s *Fragments*,” in Gane, 8.

²² Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 13.

one completely lacking commentary. It functions as a stand-in for the absent Winter Garden Photograph.²³ Boudinet's empty bed, pillow still indented from where someone's head has rested, intimates longing and loneliness, and demonstrates Barthes's interest in the relation between photography, amorous desire, and absence. *Polaroid* speaks of absence and loss, not only in its evocation of a missing human body but also its color, a palette of deathly gray blue-greens that reinforce the idea of decomposition heralded by the shattered drapes. It is an aqueous dark green sea of absence.

Displaced Touches

In the absence of the referent/beloved, viewer and lover must settle for substitute contact. For Barthes, the absence of the referent is mitigated by rays of light which connect viewer and referent. This path of emanation, from the subject to the photographic plate to the photograph and then to the eyes of the viewer, borrows from the medieval theory of visual rays called intromission.²⁴ Barthes writes,

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. 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.²⁵

²³ Mavor, "Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina Hawarden, 1859-1864," *Genre*, nos. 1-2 (1996): 93-134.

²⁴ Margaret Olin, "Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes's 'Mistaken' Identification," *Representations* 80 (autumn 2002): 100, citing David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 61-85, and Kenneth Scott Calhoun, "Personal Effects: Rilke, Barthes, and the Matter of Photography," *Modern Language Notes* 113 (1998): 612-34.

²⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80-81. He cites Sontag, *La Photographie*, Paris: Seuil, 1979, 173. Ralph Sarkonak, in "Roland Barthes and the Spectre of Photography," *Gane*, vol. III, cites Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell, 1980), 154.

The beloved also produces emanations that touch the lover: “From a loved being emanates a power nothing can stop and which will impregnate everything it comes in contact with, even if only by a glance.”²⁶ The lover’s substitute contact operates through the lover’s being able to touch objects touched by the beloved: “Every object touched by the loved being’s body becomes part of that body, and the subject eagerly attaches himself to it,” Barthes writes.²⁷ Boudinet’s *Polaroid* pictures both kinds of contact. Touch is emphasized by the gentle indentation in the pillow, the cool, aqueous atmosphere of the photograph which contrasts with the lingering warmth of the beloved’s head, and likely scent of hair and skin on pillowcase and sheets. The photograph allows the viewer to be in the presence of those fetishized surfaces even as it shows drastic emptiness.

The Photographic Fall

Barthes states that what the lover falls in love with, the beloved object, could “assuredly” be called an image,²⁸ and it is an image that clearly relates to the photographic. While falling in love may be triggered by a sound or a smell, the visual holds metaphoric primacy; falling in love is a flash, a photographic moment of suspended time:

The first thing we love is *a scene*. For love at first sight requires the very sign of its suddenness (what makes me irresponsible, subject to fatality, swept away, ravished): and of all the arrangements of objects, it is the scene which seems to be seen best for the first time: a curtain parts: what had not yet ever been seen is discovered in its entirety, and then devoured by the eyes . . . the scene consecrates the object I am going to love.²⁹

²⁶ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 173.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See Barthes, “The Greatest Cryptographer.”

²⁹ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 192, cites Lacan (both *I* and *XI* are cited as references, and it is not clear to which he refers).

Like a camera lens, love frames and separates from reality, and captures in a moment an object, a scene. Barthes writes,

The first time I saw X through a car window: the window shifted, like a lens searching out *who to love* in the crowd; and then—immobilized by some *accuracy* of my desire?—I focused on that apparition whom I was henceforth to follow for months; but the other . . . whenever he was subsequently to appear in my field of vision . . . did so with every precaution . . . impregnating his body with discretion and a kind of indifference, delaying his recognition of me, etc.: in short, trying to keep himself out of the picture.³⁰

Love-at-first-sight, ravishment, *coup de foudre*: it is experienced in a split second, like the click of a shutter.³¹ Instead of light registering on film, a scene, a face, or a body is indelibly burned into the mind.

The Perfect Beloved

In the revealing flash, what is it that makes the lover recognize the beloved, or that connects the viewer to the photograph? Why does that particular person or photograph incontrovertibly move the lover/viewer? In the case of photography, Barthes posits the idea of the *punctum*, the fragmentary element which forges a strong connection between photograph and viewer. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes describes the *punctum* as “a floating flash,” drawing attention to the immediacy of the experiences of both falling in love and being struck by a photographic *punctum*.³² Like Cupid’s arrow finding the lover, “this element . . . rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.”³³ And just as

³⁰ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 192.

³¹ At least this is how the lover tends to recall the moment of the realization of his or her passion. See Grain: this may be something the lover tells himself later. See Barthes, “A Lover’s Discourse,” 286.

³² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 53.

³³ Ibid., 26-27.

Cupid's arrow causes the subject to fall in love, "The *punctum* . . . is a kind of subtle *beyond*—as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see."³⁴ Like an alluring detail that reveals the beloved as the lover's greatest desire, the *punctum* reveals the photograph's relation to the viewer, and illuminates desire.

By making possible what Barthes describes as the umbilical connection, the shared skin, the photograph provides a window facilitating the *punctum*. Thus the *punctum* creates an intimate and desirous relationship between viewer and photograph; it is a wound that transforms the photograph into one with which the viewer has a mutually animated relationship.³⁵ Both photography and courtly love wound the body: in "Guigemar," a twelfth-century *lai* by Marie de France, "love is a wound in the body,/ and yet nothing appears on the outside."³⁶ As a wound, the *punctum*'s impact on the body situates the viewer as a lover, who experiences the shock of love as a wound which arouses the amorous image-repertoire.

The detail which becomes the *punctum*, profoundly personal, is akin to the beloved's attractions, each of which individually entices the lover. But while Barthes discusses the *punctum* of an image as a solitary event, the alluring details of the beloved are myriad. The fragments of the beloved's body bombard the lover like multiple and insistent *puncta*, and the desire they arouse designates the beloved as the one being who matches the lover's desire. As the photograph convinces the viewer that it seamlessly correlates to its referent, so the beloved, exquisitely faultless and idealized in the eyes of the lover, completely matches

³⁴ Ibid., 59.

³⁵ In the latter half of Part I of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes comes to recognize that the photographic *punctum* may also be what awakens desire. Shawcross, "The Filter of Culture and the Culture of Death: How Barthes and Boltanski Play the Mythologies of the Photograph," in Rabate, 62; *Camera Lucida*, 49.

³⁶ Marie de France, "Guigemar," 481-484, in Labbie, diss., 79-80.

the lover's desire. Barthes describes the lover's desirous attention to the repertoire of the beloved's bodily details:

I was looking at everything in the other's face, the other's body, coldly: lashes, toenail, thin eyebrows, thin lips, the luster of the eyes, a mole, a way of holding a cigarette; I was fascinated . . . by a kind of colored ceramicized vitrified figurine in which I could read, without understanding anything about it, *the cause of my desire*.³⁷

This imagined perfect indexicality of desire and desired results in a failure of language.

Barthes cites Sappho:

For when I glance at you even an instant, I can no longer utter a word: my tongue thickens to a lump, and beneath my skin breaks out a subtle fire; my eyes are blind, my ears filled with humming, and sweat streams down my body, I am seized by a sudden shuddering; I turn greener than grass, and in a moment more, I feel I shall die.³⁸

Sappho finds that all it takes is a glance at the beloved to commandeer the senses so that only the beloved may be perceived.

Sappho's clumsy tongue causes her to suffer what Barthes calls "the kind of aphasia . . . generated by the excess of love."³⁹ Referring to Stendhal's journals from his sojourn in Italy, "which betoken a love of Italy but do not communicate it," Barthes laments that "*one always fails in speaking of what one loves*."⁴⁰ Similarly, the Barthesian *punctum* escapes language: "What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance."⁴¹ The *punctum* Barthes discovers in the second half of *Camera*

³⁷ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 72. Barthes's reference to the cause of the desire is an allusion to Lacan's *objet petit a*.

³⁸ Cited in *ibid.*, 155, source and translation not given in French or English edition.

³⁹ Barthes, "One Always Fails to Speak of What One Loves," in *Rustle*, 303.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 304, his italics.

⁴¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.

Lucida, the catastrophe that the subject is dead and is going to die, as is the viewer, also escapes language: its horror is that there is

nothing to say about the death of one whom I love most, nothing to say about her photograph. . . . The only thought I have is that at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed; between the two, nothing more than waiting; I have no other resource than this irony: to speak of the nothing to say.⁴²

The object of desire also thwarts language: “The more I experience the specialty of my desire, the less I can give it a name; to the precision of the target corresponds a wavering of the name; what is characteristic of desire, proper to desire, can produce only an impropriety of the utterance.”⁴³ The lover, Barthes observes, “speaks in bundles of sentences but does not integrate those sentences on a higher level, into a work; his is a horizontal discourse: no transcendence, no deliverance, no novel (though a great deal of the fictive).”⁴⁴ In the *Interior Theater* photographs, the seemingly empty seats and blank screen embody the failure of language and of signification in relation to desire and the photograph.

Love, Photography, and Anti-Narrative

Unraveling the significance of Western culture’s obsession with the lover, Barthes writes:

Why does mass culture focus so much on the problems of the amorous subject? What are really being staged in these cases are *narratives of episodes*, not the sentiment of love itself. The distinction is a subtle one, but I insist on it. This means that if you put the lover in a “love story,” you thereby reconcile him with society. Why? Because telling stories is one of the activities coded

⁴² Ibid., 92-93.

⁴³ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 20.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.

by society, one of the great social constraints. Society tames the lover through the love story.⁴⁵

Acculturation is Barthes's nemesis. In the lover's refusal to be "tamed," by resisting narrative in the form of the love story, Barthes sees not pathology but strength. Although the lover may capitulate to the image-repertoire, his or her resistance to narrative opposes cultural mandates. The lover with perpetually inflamed desire, unable to enter into narrative, refusing to abandon desire and hope, is Barthes's hero. Immune to the pressures of narrative, the illusion of progress which founds subjectivity in the mirror stage, the lover exists in a state of perpetual desire. Desperately awash in signs that seem to promise fulfillment of desire, the lover heroically maintains the stasis of unfulfilled desire rather than submit to culture, which through its assimilative force medicates the pain of ceaseless desire.

Resistance to narrative is a quality the lover shares with the photograph, especially Sugimoto's *Interior Theaters*, which intentionally do away with narrative. Although the photograph's myriad details authoritatively pronounce its indexicality to the referent, it leads nowhere, and the photograph's story vanishes further into the past with every passing second instead of swelling with information. In that lack of progression, the photograph's fullness nonetheless maintains lack and thus desire. As Barthes writes, it is an experience of "So, yes, so much and no more."⁴⁶ As in the case of the lover, chronology has become fragmented and discontinuous.

With regard to *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes emphasizes one important aspect of the fragmentary nature of his work:

⁴⁵ Barthes, "Greatest Cryptographer," 302-303.

⁴⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 109.

The subject of [*A Lover's Discourse*] is not *the* amorous discourse [but] the discourse of *a* lover—a “pieced-together” discourse (the result of montage) . . . the lover’s discourse is essentially fragmented, discontinuous, fluttering . . . I was careful to preserve the radical discontinuity of this linguistic torment unfolding in the lover’s head. That is why I cut the work up into fragments and put them into alphabetical order.⁴⁷

The “radical discontinuity” and fragmentary nature of the lover’s discourse prevents the discourse’s assimilation into narrative. Barthes affirms the value of passionate love in that it specifically resists the acculturating, conformist forces of story, of narrative, and even of time:

I absolutely did not want the text to seem like a love story. I’m convinced that the well-constructed love story, with a beginning, an end, and a crisis in the middle, is the way society hopes to persuade the lover to be reconciled with the language of the Other, by constructing his own narrative, in which he plays a role.⁴⁸

This may seem to be at odds with the poetry of courtly love; however, courtly love too resists the narrative with an end, since the lady may continue to make demands on the lover, postponing availability. Susan Stewart elaborates on the assimilative power of narrative in its relation to desire, arguing that “narrative is seen . . . as a structure of desire . . . that both invents and distances its object and thereby inscribes again and again the gap between signifier and signified that is the place of generation for the symbolic.”⁴⁹ The lover in resisting narrative avoids at all costs anything that could contribute to the already painful distance between lover and beloved.

Sugimoto’s extension of the usual time frame of the photograph could be interpreted as being at play with Barthes’s idea of the intractable lover, who won’t take no for an answer,

⁴⁷ Barthes, “A Lover’s Discourse,” 284-5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 284-286.

⁴⁹ Stewart, ix.

who begs for a little more time with the beloved, a little more time before the inevitable (for Barthes) disillusionment and disappointment set in.⁵⁰ The intractable lover has “withdrawn from all finality.”⁵¹ Having become aware of the possibility of being completed by the beloved, the lover suffers a new kind of pain that makes the suspension of time even more intense: “For now, while waiting, ‘before’ and ‘after’ become merged into a fearsome ‘never.’ Love and the loved one erase the reckoning of time.”⁵²

Barthes, as the lover, writes “In languor, I merely wait: ‘I knew no end to desiring you’ (desire is everywhere, but in the amorous state it becomes something very special: languor.)”⁵³ The suspension of time in which the lover exists, Kristeva writes, is the “nontime of love . . . instant and eternal, past and future, abreacted present, [which] fulfills me, abolishes me, and yet leaves me unsated.”⁵⁴ The image-repertoire engulfs the lover, wraps the lover in a delicious blanket of unending possibility and pain, in which the intractable lover can only repeat as a mantra Mannoni’s “I know, I know, but all the same...”⁵⁵ as he or she struggles to maintain desire. Sugimoto’s photographs create a visual version of this cocoon. The castrating and violent click of the shutter is transformed into a benign and merciful embrace.

In the world of the image-repertoire, the “*Reasonable* sentiment: everything works out, but nothing lasts,” is obliterated by the “*Amorous* sentiment: nothing works out, but it

⁵⁰ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 22.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵² Kristeva, 6.

⁵³ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 155.

⁵⁴ Kristeva, 6.

⁵⁵ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 22.

keeps going on.”⁵⁶ The way Barthes describes the diabolical denial of desire’s fulfillment, the amorous cessation of progress, is akin to how he discusses the temporality of photography: “In the Photograph, Time’s immobilization assumes only an excessive, monstrous mode: Time is engorged.”⁵⁷ Time itself is inflamed by desire. In love and in photography, the moment goes on forever, becomes timeless.

The timelessness of love is gelatinous, a Micheletist suspension in which the lover and perhaps unknowing beloved precipitate out of everyday reality into the lover’s own time.⁵⁸ In the lover’s image-repertoire, the lover and beloved are suspended together, like chemical and paper in the developing tray. Impossibly, time moves quickly (the rush of the fall) and slowly (it halts absolutely as that first glance unfolds) at the same time. The lover’s senses perceive only the beloved and the lover’s own body, trembling and immobilized, chilled and feverish at once. A precious extended moment of stillness with the beloved stretches into a perfect infinity of potential, like Sugimoto’s stilling of the image of his beloved Audrey Hepburn. Light and air emanate only from the beloved, and the lover’s time becomes gravitationally fixed by the beloved, like a planet around a star. The lover longs for a union with the beloved, an eternal evaporation into ghostliness to forever haunt the theater together. While the *punctum* is a form of the real, the compelling sense on the part of the lover of “the perfection of the loved being, i.e., the un hoped-for correspondence between an object and my desire” is imaginary.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid., 140.

⁵⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 90.

⁵⁸ Barthes, *Michelet*, op. cit.

⁵⁹ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 197.

Mother and Lovers

A Lover's Discourse is ostensibly addressed to a romantic love, but *Camera Lucida's* ultimate object of desire is Barthes's late mother, Henriette. These different loves are not irreconcilable. Mavor points out that in *Incidents*,

Barthes writes himself and his lover as a mother-child couple. Just as Winnicott subtly eroticizes the early relationship between mother and child as a couple (naming them in his own funny words as a "nursing couple," Barthes maternalizes his erotic relationship with his lovers.⁶⁰

Barthes's preeminent lover, Werther, first sees his beloved Charlotte when she has a baby in her arms, as Lacan points out in *Seminar I*; part of her instant appeal to his image-repertoire is her maternal quality.⁶¹ Barthes suggests that the image-repertoire has a maternal aspect when he writes that the lover longs to be "united, enclosed within the same sack of skin" as the beloved, a metaphorical womb.⁶² The French word for film, *pellicule*, Barthes reports, means "a skin without puncture or perforation."⁶³ The cinematic image-repertoire allows the lover to imaginarily revisit the register of the real, when all needs are met and there is no fragmentation. Michelet's sea is also a maternal space of nurture:

Our skin, which throughout consists of tiny mouths, and which in a way absorbs and digests even as the stomach does, needs to accustom itself to this powerful nourishment, to drink the *mucus* of the sea, that salty milk which is its life, out of which it makes and remakes all beings.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Mavor, "Pulling Ribbons from Mouths," *Representing the Passions: Histories, Bodies, Visions*, ed. Richard Meyer (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003), 194, citing D.W. Winnicott, "Further Thoughts on Babies as Persons," in idem, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1964), 88.

⁶¹ Lacan, *I*, 142, 182, 282.

⁶² Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 127-8.

⁶³ Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 54-55.

⁶⁴ Barthes, *Michelet*, 170; 1861, *La Mer*, IV, 5.

The envelope of the subject's skin opens to the nourishment of the maternal sea with which it merges.

The tension between mother and beloved is also present in the discourse of courtly love from both an historical and a psychoanalytic point of view. Historically, courtly love emerged around the same time as the cult of the Virgin, and the two have been seen as influential of each other.⁶⁵ Kay comments that "There is only one little step between the elevation of the Dame and that of the Virgin Mary to Holy Mother in Catholicism. But that step is crucial, for a virgin mother does not desire, not inspire sexual desire. She is the purified object . . . drained of all passion, of all hate . . . reduced to a myth of pure love."⁶⁶ Furthermore, Kay argues, "many twelfth-century troubadour lyrics have been seen as ambiguous between addressing a secular Lady, or Mary."⁶⁷ Thus the courtly lady, while distinguished from the Virgin in many ways, is a sort of eroticized alter-ego for Mary.

In addition to the relation between the courtly lady and the Virgin as mother, the courtly lady could also be seen as a more earthly maternal figure. Boase observes that "several Provençal poets referred to the lady to whom they addressed their songs as the person who reared and educated them, and in some cases fear of her anger seems to have aroused childhood memories of a punishing mother."⁶⁸ Furthermore the putative role reversal in the courtly relationship, in which the disenfranchised medieval woman becomes the

⁶⁵ Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*, 180. fn 3. She refers to Chaytor, *Troubadours* (1912), 14-15.

⁶⁶ Kay, "Contradictions," 16.

⁶⁷ Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*, 181.

⁶⁸ Boase, 44-45.

master of the troubadour, has been interpreted in terms of the troubadour taking on a child-like relation of submission to the lady.⁶⁹

Psychoanalytically, the courtly lady is a veil for *das Ding*, the location occupied most primordially by the desired and prohibited incestuous mother. Ragland states that “Woman, usually circumscribed by her maternal function within the drives is, in courtly love, celebrated as the primordial object cause of desire.”⁷⁰ Furthermore,

Woman does inspire desire which . . . gave rise . . . to a rhetoric enshrining the mystery that Woman incarnates for men at the limit point of her inaccessibility. When the lover is deprived of the sexual “real,” he finds himself . . . back at the point of pure desire where he first encountered these gifts in a paradox—at the site of the mother’s body which he is quickly required to renounce.⁷¹

The Lacanian primordial mother whose loss is constitutive of the subject is behind all of desire’s operations; the maternal beloved is always necessarily lost, and desire is always structured around that original loss.

Psychoanalyst Elizabeth Wright explains the slippage between mother and lover by writing that Barthes’s lover “addresses the (absent) mother. Here the archetypal lover/reader is the infant looking for links in the world/text which will bridge the gap left by the primal experience of separation.”⁷² Barthes is open about this slippage. In *A Lover’s Discourse* he specifically equates the child’s desire for the mother with the lover’s desire for the beloved by saying, “the lover could be defined thus: the child having an erection.”⁷³ The lover feels

⁶⁹ Boase, 100.

⁷⁰ Ragland, “Psychoanalysis,” 12.

⁷¹ Ibid., 16.

⁷² Wright in Knight, *Critical Essays*, 186.

⁷³ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 109, discussed in Knight in Rabate, 135.

the absence of the beloved as abandonment, as the child feels the mother's absence as abandonment, as if the mother is dead.⁷⁴ When waiting for a phone call from the beloved, the lover's anxiety is akin to "running the risk of missing the healing call, the return of the Mother."⁷⁵

The Barthesian lover is "two subjects at the same time: I want the maternal and the genital."⁷⁶ Barthes's confluence of the adult lover and the child is a recognition that, Francophone scholar and Barthes specialist Diana Knight argues, "The maternal embrace is a metaphor for an illusory moment of total and eternal union with the loved person, a regression to a moment (that of the real mother) when desires are abolished because they seem definitively fulfilled."⁷⁷ Barthes describes the layering of child and adult desires in this type of embrace:

Besides intercourse (when the Image-repertoire goes to the devil), there is that other embrace, which is a motionless cradling: we are enchanted, bewitched: we are in the realm of sleep, without sleeping; we are within the voluptuous infantilism of *sleepiness*: this is the moment for telling stories, the moment of the voice which takes me, siderates me, this is the return of the mother ("In the loving calm of your arms," says a poem set to music by Duparc). In this companionable incest, everything is suspended: time, law, prohibition: nothing is exhausted, nothing is wanted: all desires are abolished, for they seem definitively fulfilled.⁷⁸

This moment, for Barthes, is proof of the fulfillment of desire:

A moment of affirmation; for a certain time, though a finite one, a *deranged* interval, something has been successful: I have been fulfilled (all my desires abolished by the plenitude of their satisfaction): fulfillment does exist, and I

⁷⁴ Ibid., 16, 38.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 38-9.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 104-5.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁷⁸ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 104.

shall keep on making it return: through all the meanderings of my amorous history, I shall persist in wanting to rediscover, to renew the contradiction—the contraction—of the two embraces.⁷⁹

This moment of fulfillment cannot last; it cannot be rescued from time like the photographic referent. “Within this infantile embrace,” Barthes notes, “the genital unfailingly appears; it cuts off the diffuse sensuality of the incestuous embrace; the logic of desire begins to function, the will-to-possess returns, the adult is superimposed on the child.”⁸⁰ It passes and is gone, although its return is longed for. The lover’s discourse is not a narrative, so this experience cannot function as a happy ending.

Barthes’s description of the interrelationship between desire for the maternal and desire for the beloved thus makes his relationship to the Winter Garden Photograph clearer. Before his mother’s death, Barthes nursed her; “she had become my little girl . . . Ultimately I experienced her, strong as she had been, my inner law, as my feminine child. . . . I who had not procreated, I had, in her very illness, engendered my mother.”⁸¹ Non-procreation is courtly, since the courtly relation remains unconsummated. Barthes’s relationship to his mother as her child shifts to one in which the adult—the (sexual) parent—is superimposed on the child. Reversing roles with his mother at the end of her life, and near the end of his, Barthes the child who longs for his mother finds her in her child body as both her grieving mother and son. Roles of mother, lover, son and daughter collapse into themselves.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes reproduces a Nadar photograph which he captions “The

⁷⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 104.

⁸¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 72. This positing of his mother as his “inner law” places her in a paternal position, like the courtly lady.

Artist's Mother (or Wife)" (Fig 6). The confusion in the title Barthes gives the photograph reflects uncertainty as to whether Nadar *père* or *fils* took the picture. Psychoanalytic and feminist theorist Jane Gallop suggests that Barthes includes this photograph as a substitute for the Winter Garden Photograph:

Rather than showing us the mother he loves, Barthes introduces into *Camera Lucida* the image of a woman who could be either mother or wife. The inability to make that distinction ("no one knows for sure"), that particular confusion, is the very heart of the oedipal taboo.⁸²

And this picture exquisitely combines the attractions of mother and beloved: Ernestine Nadar, hair gleaming in white waves, holds a flower to her lips, hiding them behind its petals. Her face is aged but soft and glowing. Her elegant hand extends from a beautiful lacy sleeve that peeks out from beneath a velvety cape. It is an unusually sensual portrait, for the time, of an older woman.⁸³ As it turns out, the photograph was taken by her son, not her husband.

Barthes's relationship with his mother was an uncommonly idyllic one. His descriptions of her resist specificity, yet nonetheless impart his deep love for her, his devastation by her death, and his utter, unswerving sense of her perfection as a human being. One of the reasons that Barthes withholds the Winter Garden Photograph is to protect her singularity; to reproduce it could allow her to slip into reification as *the* Mother, rather than remaining *his* mother. Shortly after his discussion of the photograph of Ernestine Nadar, Barthes informs the reader that he spent his whole life with his mother. "It is always maintained," Barthes writes, "that I should suffer more because I spent my whole life with her; but my suffering proceeds from who she was; and it is because of who she was that I

⁸² Gallop, *Living*, 35.

⁸³ Mavor, "Pulling Ribbons from Mouths," 186.

lived with her.”⁸⁴ Gallop points out that Barthes distinguishes her as “‘a being’ as opposed to ‘a Figure’ (the Mother). If he insists on this distinction, it is because he expects our reductive response. Able only to see the Mother, the psychoanalytic reading misses *his* mother, the individual being he loved.”⁸⁵ Barthes, who has made clear his impatience with the willingness of psychoanalysis to pathologize love, flouts his extraordinarily close relationship with his mother.

By choosing to base his theory of photography on a photograph to which only he has a personal relationship, literary theorist Graham Allen argues, Barthes replaces the impasse of the first half of the book with a similar impasse in the second; furthermore, Barthes doesn’t want to generalize his mother into theory but to protect her singularity. It is a resistance to the type of codedness that comprises the lover’s discourse. This theory, Allen explains, “is then, precisely impossible; but more importantly, it is self-consciously presented as impossible.”⁸⁶ Allen eloquently describes how Barthes’s impossible theory operates:

Far from presenting a general theory of photography, Barthes’s text brilliantly captures the impossibility of committing to language . . . a personal, emotional response which he, in defiance of language’s generalizing violence, wishes to honour and express. Barthes’s last book is a stunning act of defiance, a text which defies . . . the knowledge of its own impossibility . . . *Camera Lucida* strives to defend the image of his mother from acculturation (the generalizing violence of language), knowing that such a defence is impossible.⁸⁷

What Barthes seeks to avoid is exactly what happens to the courtly lady, who is entirely depersonalized by idealization and sublimation.

⁸⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 75.

⁸⁵ Gallop, *Living*, 35.

⁸⁶ Allen, 128.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 131-2.

Barthes defies acculturation, but at the same time he idealizes and sublimates his mother. *The* mother is the Sovereign Good, as well as the prohibited incestuous mother; Barthes discusses his mother in terms of the good, but her good is based on her singularity, which escapes his generalized language. His emphasis on her singularity, her specialness, is an aspect of his idealization of her.

In his insistence on his mother's irreplaceability as *his* mother, not *the* Mother, Barthes brings to mind the tragedy of Antigone, who is punished for her insistence that her brother Polynices be buried regardless of any crimes he may have committed. Antigone argues that her brother may have been brave or cowardly or criminal or any number of things, but those qualities do not matter to her; the only thing that matters is that he is her irreplaceable brother. Antigone explains that had she married and lost a husband, she could remarry, and had she lost a child, she could have another. But her parents would have no more children, so her sibling cannot be replaced.

In Barthes's case, a lost mother is certainly as irreplaceable as a brother. Barthes, however, insists that his mother's irreplaceability has everything to do with who she was, with the fact of her goodness, not just the fact that she was his mother. There is no criminality or cowardice against which Barthes must defend her irreplaceability. Moreover, Barthes's and his mother's exchange of roles at the end of her/their life/lives, when she is both his mother, and his child, raises questions about irreplaceability, if he can replace her as parent. Nevertheless, Barthes, as a gay man who draws attention to his non-procreativity, can no more replace a child than a mother.⁸⁸ His mother's irreplaceability is different from that of Antigone's brother, but Barthes's insistence on it is just as grounded. Finally, Antigone's

⁸⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 72, "I who had not procreated."

refusal to allow her brother to be denied his burial relates to her insistence on his irreplaceability, which “must be protected and remembered” by being covered, buried.⁸⁹ In this sense Barthes’s withholding of the Winter Garden Photograph takes on a new resonance as a kind of burial.

In declaring Polynices to be unique because he is her brother, Antigone declares that she is only a sister, his sister, and thus cuts off all of her other ties to life, making her desire a “pure” desire.⁹⁰ This act exiles her, not yet physically dead, but removed from the symbolic, into Lacan’s zone between the two deaths. Antigone laments, “Ah, wretched as I am...to dwell not among the living, not among the dead.”⁹¹ Barthes situates himself in a similar zone as he discusses the effect the Winter Garden Photograph has on him. Utterly bereaved by his mother’s death, he writes:

Once she was gone I no longer had any reason to attune myself to the progress of the superior Life Force (the race, the species). . . . From now on I could do no more than await my total, undialectical death. This is what I read in the Winter Garden Photograph.⁹²

Like Antigone, but for different reasons, Barthes feels himself suspended between the living and the dead: “The only ‘thought’ I can have is that at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed.”⁹³ Furthermore, the space between the two deaths, as Labbie writes,

contributes to historiography a sense that the past is always already impossible to represent, not simply because it is irretrievable, but also because subjectivity itself exists in a zone of phantasmatic relation to itself. Lived

⁸⁹ Philippe Van Haute, “Death and Sublimation in Lacan’s Reading of *Antigone*,” in *Levinas and Lacan: The Missed Encounter*, ed. Sarah Harasym (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 113.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 115.

⁹² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 72.

⁹³ Ibid., 93.

experiences that recognize this disjunction between coherence and fragmentation defined by the two deaths also accept that what is called the real is the limit of desire.⁹⁴

The *noeme* and the *punctum* of photography is this realization of one's own presence in a space between two deaths, and the tension between the "coherence and fragmentation: of subjectivity. *Camera Lucida* itself is about Barthes's struggle with the real and with the representation of the past.

In the space between the two deaths, Antigone epitomizes the Lacanian beautiful, which is characterized by pure desire and an absolute separation from the ordinary. This space creates the possibility for an anamorphic change of perspective which permits the sighting of the beautiful. At this limit, which the human eye cannot tolerate, "the personal sinks into (passes over into) the impersonal form of emptiness."⁹⁵ Barthes has been pushed close to the inhuman unbearable position of Antigone. Caught in the impossible tension of trying to create a general theory from a personal event, Barthes resists sinking into the impersonal to which Antigone finds herself relegated. The impersonal, "so intense, so lacerating" is what breaks his heart:

What is it that will be done away with, along with this photograph which yellows, fades, and will someday be thrown out, if not by me—too superstitious for that—at least when I die? Not only "life" (this was alive, this posed live in front of the lens), but also, sometimes—how to put it?—love. In front of the only photograph in which I find my father and mother together, this couple who I know loved each other, I realize: it is love-as-treasure which is going to disappear forever; for once I am gone, no one will remain any longer to be able to testify to this: nothing will remain but indifferent Nature.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Labbie, diss., 164.

⁹⁵ Haute, 110.

⁹⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 94.

Antigone renounces all love but that of her brother and places that sibling relationship above all others, even above that with her other siblings. Oedipus, who Lacan also situates in the zone between the two deaths, punishes himself when he learns that he has murdered his father and married his mother by tearing out his own eyes. He further alienates himself from the world by cursing the sons to whom he gave his kingdom. But Barthes insists on the meaningfulness of family relationships, and of treasuring the memory of love between family members, even in his despair.

Discussing the theories of *Camera Lucida*, Silverman approves of Barthes's success in "irradiating otherwise insignificant—or even culturally devalued—details in photographs."⁹⁷ This approach, Silverman argues, "dramatizes the possibility of apprehending the image-repertoire from an unexpected vantage point," from, she suggests, the zone between the two deaths.⁹⁸ Yet she is critical of Barthes for the very reason that his theory is ultimately impossible: in its insistence on the personal in *Camera Lucida*, she argues,

his own sovereignty vis-à-vis the object remains unquestioned . . . he seems . . . less motivated by the desire to shift the terms through which we apprehend the world than by that more conventionally aesthetic wish to assert the superiority of his own look and the uniqueness of the sensibility which informs it.⁹⁹

Silverman goes so far as to call *Camera Lucida*'s implications "disturbing:"

In another very disturbing way, *Camera Lucida* attests to the unquestioned primacy of the *moi*. . . . The figures depicted in the photograph serve only to activate his own memories, and so are stripped of all historical specificity.

⁹⁷ Silverman, 183.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 183.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 183-4.

Barthes's recollections might thus be said to "devour" the images of the other.¹⁰⁰

Returning to her concept of the active gift of love as an ethical idealizing sublimation,

Silverman asserts that

productive looking necessarily requires a constant conscious reworking of the terms under which we unconsciously look at the objects that people our visual landscape. It necessitates the struggle . . . to recognize our involuntary acts of incorporation and repudiation, and our implicit affirmation of the dominant elements of the screen, and . . . to see again differently. . . . productive looking necessarily entails . . . the opening up of the unconscious to otherness.¹⁰¹

Yet Barthes's deliberate positing of a theory that is impossible because it is personal is a more complex act than simply privileging the *moi*. In the Winter Garden Photograph he sees his mother in her essence, as a being other than himself, the very type of idealization for which Silverman calls. Finding the Winter Garden Photograph, Barthes writes,

I stare intensely at the Sovereign Good of childhood, of the mother, the mother-as-child. Of course I was then losing her twice over, in her final fatigue and in her first photograph, for me the last; but it was also at this moment that everything turned around and I discovered her *as into herself*...¹⁰²

By seeing her "as into herself," Barthes idealizes her as other, keeping her at a distance; this is the active gift of love.

Toward the end of *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes employs the Sanskrit word *tat* to designate the lover's recognition of the beloved not as enfolded in the lover's image-repertoire but as the beloved is, that the beloved is, rather than what the beloved is.¹⁰³ In *Camera Lucida*, he uses *tat* to designate the photograph as real. *Camera Lucida* laments not

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 184.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 71.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 5; *Lover's Discourse*, 221-22.

only death but also the fact that time erases love, because of its particularity. *A Lover's Discourse* repeatedly insists that passionate love is not pathological. In an interview related to the publication of that book, the interviewer asks him if it has a moral. Barthes answers, "Yes, there is a moral. . . . A morality of affirmation. One should not let oneself be swayed by disparagements of the sentiment of love. One should affirm. One should dare. Dare to love."¹⁰⁴

In the lover's attempts to escape the codes of the image-repertoire, he or she purposefully tries to undo the devouring aspect of desire. Taking his inspiration from the Taoist concept of the non-will-to-possess, Barthes writes,

The will-to-possess must cease—but also the non-will-to-possess must not be seen: no oblation. I do not want to replace the intense throes of passion by "an impoverished life, the will-to-die, the great lassitude." The N.W.P. is not on the side of kindness, the N.W.P. is intense, dry: on one hand, I do not oppose myself to the sensorial world, I let desire circulate within me; on the other hand, I prop it up against "my truth": my truth is to love absolutely: otherwise I withdraw, I scatter myself, like an army which abandons a siege.¹⁰⁵

Barthes acknowledges that to willfully forgo the will-to-possess creates other difficulties, like renouncing the beloved in order to win him, or as a display of virtue. But he sees the "N.W.P." as the best strategy to break free of the image-repertoire. To enact this, the lover

must manage (but the determination of what obscure exhaustion?) to let myself drop somewhere outside of language, into the inert, and in a sense, quite simply, *to sit down*. . . . And again the Orient: not to try to possess the non-will-to-possess; to let come (from the other) what comes, to let pass (from the other) what goes; to possess nothing, to repel nothing: to receive, not to keep, to produce without appropriating, etc.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Barthes, "Greatest Cryptographer," 305.

¹⁰⁵ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse* 232-33, citing Nietzsche.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 233-34.

Desire still inhabits this lover, but it is a desire which struggles to be free of the image-repertoire. As one fourteenth-century mystic put it, “what is lufe bott transfourmyng of desire In to pe Pinge Lufyd?”¹⁰⁷ Barthes closes *A Lover’s Discourse* by citing twelfth-century Flemish mystic John of Ruysbroeck: “The best and most delectable wine, and also the most intoxicating . . . by which, without drinking it, the annihilated soul is intoxicated, a soul at once free and intoxicated! Forgetting, forgotten, intoxicated by what it does not drink and will never drink!”¹⁰⁸ Unlike Antigone who finds herself in the zone between the two deaths as a result of the purity of her desire, Barthes’s lover ultimately (although Barthes denies that his text has any progression) embraces multiple desires with the acceptance of their unfulfillability, recognizes that the Other does not have the lost object, recognizes how not to give ground relative to his desire, even if it is a perpetual struggle.

Barthes suggests a similar escape from the image-repertoire in the experience of the movie theater, a way to transcend the imaginary/ideological spell, to experience a “situation” rather than a “relation:”

by letting oneself be fascinated twice over, by the image and by its surroundings—as if I had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, lost, into the engulfing mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize not the image but precisely what exceeds it: the texture of the sound, the hall, the darkness, the obscure mass of the other bodies, the rays of light, entering the theater, leaving the hall.¹⁰⁹

The images which exceed the film, the details of the hall, are exactly the details which Sugimoto’s long exposure times reveal, even as they erase the hypnotic mirror of the film and replace it with a saturated emptiness. This two-bodied relation to the film is one which

¹⁰⁷ Fradenburg, 31, citing Richard Misyn’s fifteenth-century translation of Richard Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris*.

¹⁰⁸ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 234.

¹⁰⁹ Barthes, “Leaving the Movie Theater,” 349.

frees him from being glued to the screen in a compelling narcissistic identification. Instead, this “situation” hypnotizes him with distance, a distance that is not critical or intellectual, but amorous.¹¹⁰ As I have discussed in terms of Silverman, it is distance that makes possible ethical sublimation.

For Barthes the *noeme* of photography is the inevitability of death. Each photograph represents past and future loss, and is thus a figure of the Lacanian space between the two deaths, although Barthes doesn’t specify that. Barthes realizes this in relation to the loss of his mother. He also openly acknowledges that romantic, sexual desires are related to the experience of the maternal, and that the anxiety-provoking aspects of the lover’s discourse are related to the child’s fears of abandonment by the mother and of the mother’s death. The lover’s catastrophe is to be rejected by the lover, an event which calls up childhood terrors.

Cause? Never formal—never by a declaration of breaking off; this comes without warning, either by the effect of an unendurable image or by an abrupt sexual rejection: the infantile—seeing oneself abandoned by the Mother—shifts brutally to the genital.¹¹¹

Such a rejection leads the lover to believe that he or she is “doomed to total destruction.”¹¹² Thus photography and the lover’s discourse share related catastrophes of loss which imply the loss of the lover/viewer as well.

Lacan calls attention to the duality of love and death and decay by his choice of Arnaut Daniel’s poem of abject love. Lady Ena’s monstrosity is the other side of the perfect courtly lady in that the courtly lady occupies the space of *das Ding*. The relationship of the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 349.

¹¹¹ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 48.

¹¹² Ibid.

beautiful to the abject is the subject of great interest to medieval poets.¹¹³ Baudelaire's poem, "A Carcass," draws attention to the relationship of young love and beauty to death and decomposition. The speaker and his beloved have gone for a walk on a beautiful June morning and come across the hideous body of what is apparently a dead mule. The speaker describes the horrific details of the body and then laments, also with horror,

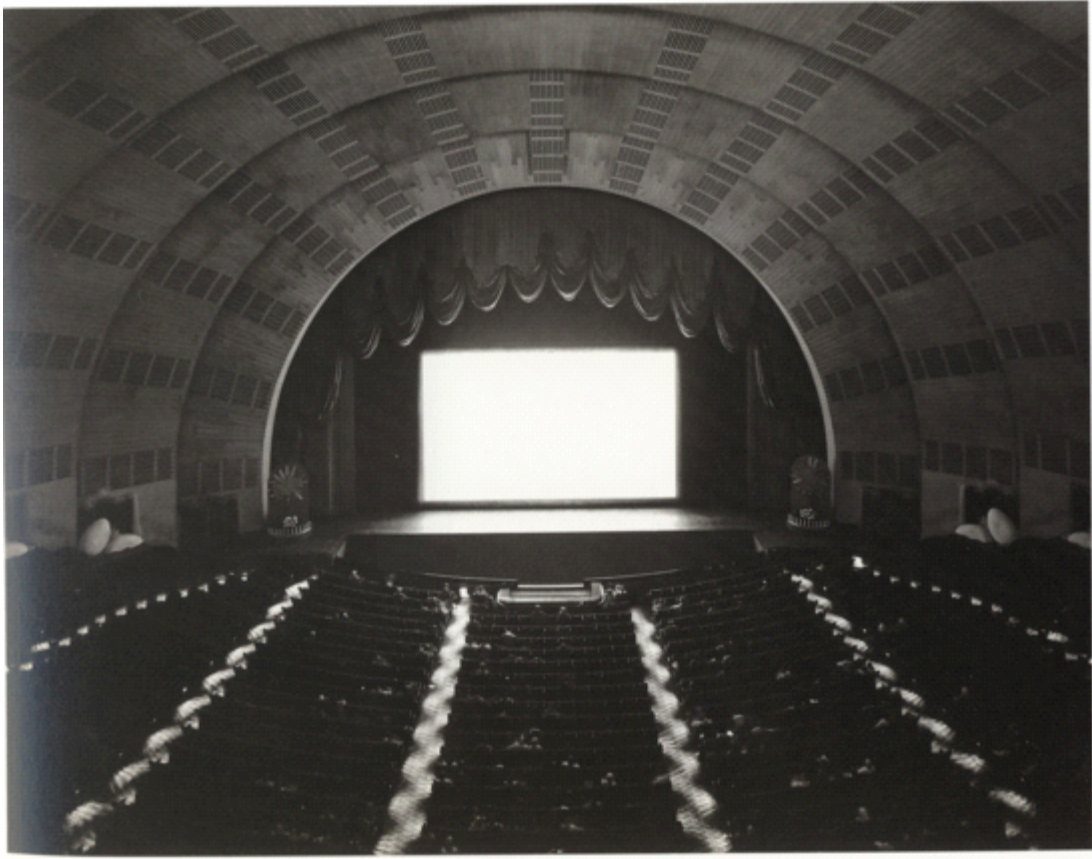
—And you, in your turn, will be rotten as this:
Horrible, filthy, undone,
O sun of my nature and star of my eyes,
My passion, my angel in one!¹¹⁴

Baudelaire's lover, like the medieval lover, is unpleasantly reminded of the inevitability of death. Death and decomposition are the real of desire, as they are the real of the photograph. Barthes states this clearly in *Camera Lucida*; recalling the photographs whose *puncta* wounded him, he writes: "I entered crazily into the spectacle, into the image, taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die."¹¹⁵ Barthes's photographic catastrophe is the abject side of Lacanian courtly love.

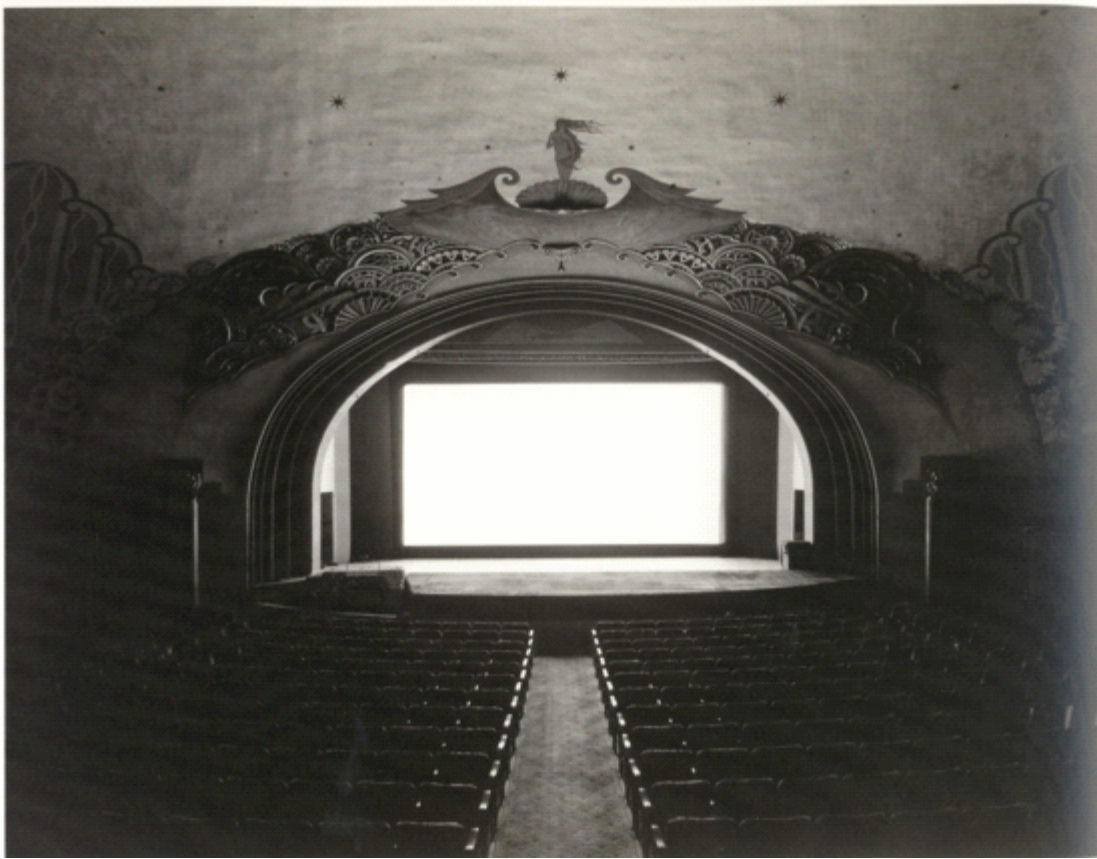
¹¹³ See Chapter 1, section entitled "The Abject Courtly Lady."

¹¹⁴ Charles Baudelaire, "A Carcass," in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 61.

¹¹⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 117.



Chapter 3, Fig. 1: Hiroshi Sugimoto,
“Radio City Music Hall, New York, 1978”



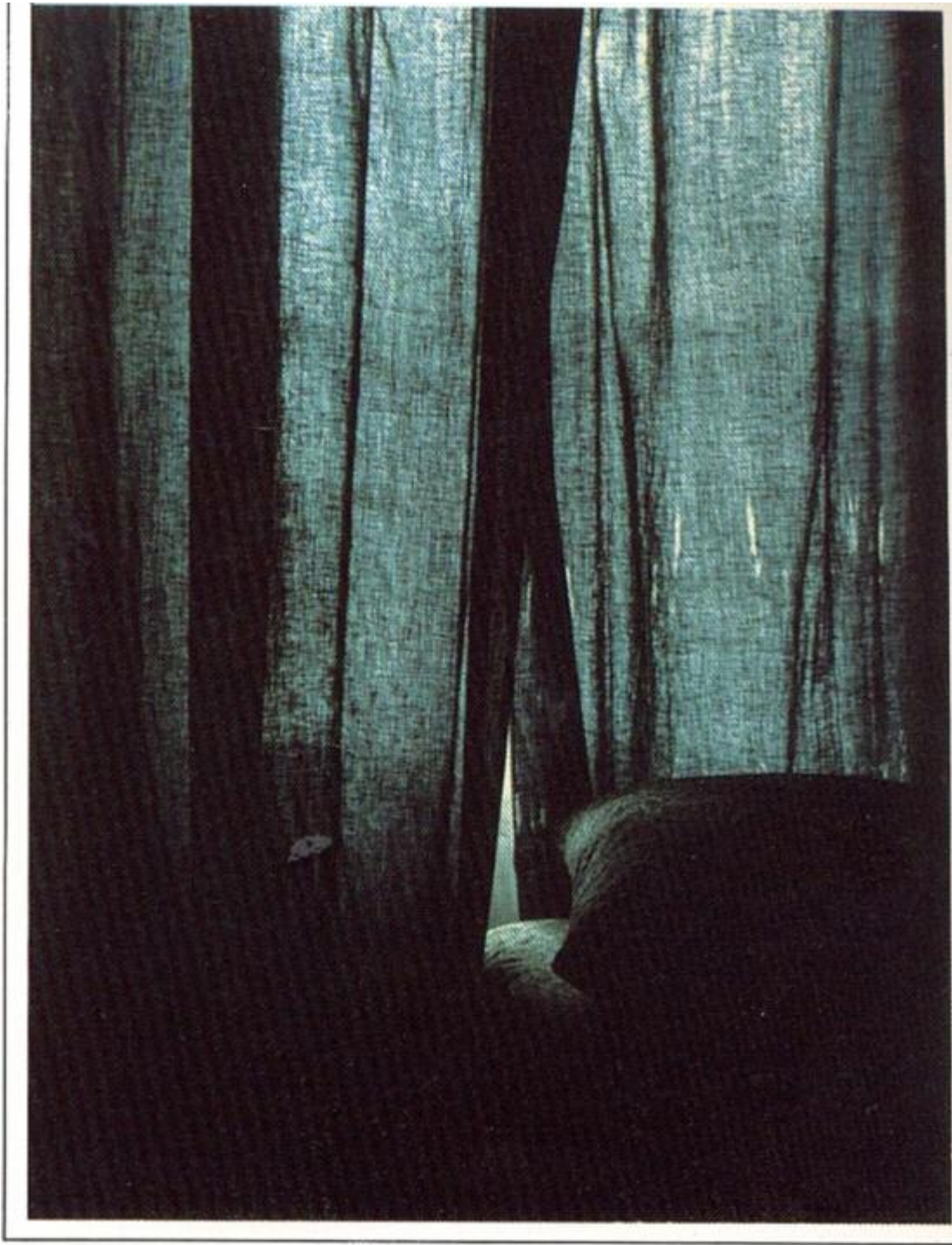
Chapter 3, Fig. 2: Sugimoto,
“Avalon Theatre, Catalina Island,” 1993



Chapter 3, Fig. 3: Sugimoto,
Baltic Sea, Rügen, 1996



Chapter 3, Fig. 4: Sugimoto,
“Morning Sun Illuminates the Waves,” 1999;
“Japan Sea, Oki, 1981,” inserted into Tiffany and Co. silver art deco compact



Chapter 3, Fig. 5: Daniel Boudinet,
“Polaroid,” 1978



Chapter 3, Fig. 6: Paul Nadar,
“Ernestine Nadar,” 1854-5

Chapter 4: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Photography in the Garden of Courtly Love

In July of 1865, painter, poet and founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood Dante Gabriel Rossetti orchestrated a photographic session featuring Jane Morris, the wife of his friend and fellow Pre-Raphaelite William Morris. Staged in the garden of Rossetti's home at 16 Cheyne Walk in London's Chelsea, the series of images were made as working photographs from which Rossetti could create art, and they featured a variety of dramatic poses. They were taken by professional photographer and painter John R. Parsons,¹ but it is Rossetti's beguiled gaze that the viewer follows through the lens. These are not only photographs of Jane Morris; they are photographs of Rossetti looking at Jane Morris, desiring Jane Morris, idealizing Jane Morris, forming ideas of how to canonize and celebrate her beauty, and planning a body of work based on her, her appearance and her/their effect on him.

The legendary affair between Morris and Rossetti and the medievalist milieu in which they lived and worked suggest a courtly analysis of these photographs.² The barriers to any

¹ Michael Bartram, *The Pre-Raphaelite Camera: Aspects of Victorian Photography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), 136. John Robert Parsons was a painter and photographer who had photographically documented Rossetti's (and also Whistler's) work. He also did some photographic portraiture [see Colin Ford, "A Pre-Raphaelite partnership: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Robert Parsons," *The Burlington Magazine* CXLVI (May 2004)]. He used wet collodion negatives on glass plates, requiring a brief exposure time of only two to three seconds; the prints were albumen; see *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, eds. Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn, and Edwin Becker (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 202. Today they are collected, along with later reprints by Emery Walker, in an album at the Victoria & Albert Museum bound in Morris and Co. fabric.

² Jeffrey L. Spear, "William Morris and the 'Speech Friend': Triangles, Gender, and Romance," *Annals of Scholarship* 7 (1990): 239. He states, "These paintings go well beyond the suggestion of intimacy between painter and subject that may be read in(to) a portrait and, reinforced by pendant verses; they virtually invite the biographical speculation that has become part of the fascination, indeed, the *value* of these paintings."

romantic relationship between Rossetti and Morris that existed at the time also situate the photographs in a space of courtliness, pounding with apparently unfulfillable and forbidden desire. Rossetti is positioning himself as Morris's troubadour; the photographs are a visual *canzo* to his lady.³ Some of the story of their courtly affair is known. Unlike the ladies of many courtly romances, Jane Morris did return Rossetti's feelings, at least for a time. Where is that story located in the Parsons photographs?⁴

Walter Benjamin addresses the potential to see the future in a photograph in "A Small History of Photography," referring specifically to a photograph taken by Hill and Adamson of German painter and author Max Dauthendey and his fiancée. After the birth of their sixth child, Benjamin reports, Mrs. Dauthendey committed suicide, and her husband found her on the bedroom floor with her wrists slashed.⁵

No matter how artful the photograph, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has so to speak seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the

³ Jane Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites and their models have been the subject of feminist scholarly study, for example by Deborah Cherry, Jan Marsh and Griselda Pollock. Because my project relates to Rossetti's idealization and sublimation of Morris as a courtly lady, this chapter consciously does not address the issue of Morris's agency. It is clear that Morris, as Rossetti's model, collaborated with him in the creation of these works (see Treuherz et. al., 199, 202). The degree to which she may have participated in the development of her own mythical stature is unclear. Clearly very intelligent and perceptive, Morris transformed herself, albeit under the tutelage and guidance of William Morris initially, from being an uneducated girl from an impoverished family to being quite well-read, artistically accomplished in her work with Morris's company, musically adept, and socially successful. Those accomplishments did not come about simply because William Morris wished them to, or because she felt pressure to achieve them. She was obviously a strong, intelligent, curious, and motivated woman.

⁴ Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 338: "At some date, Rossetti sketched into one of the miniature memorandum books that he always carried a design for what looks like a bracelet of linked rosettes. Beside this is penciled 'Sept. 57 ☒ April 14 1868', as if for an inscription" (*VS 207; BL Ashley 1410). Marsh suggests that "maybe April 14 marked the day they acknowledged a mutual feeling," 340.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," in *One Way Street and Other Writings* (London: NLB, 1979), cited in Iverson, 453.

immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future subsists so eloquently that we, looking back, may discover it.⁶

What might an “inconspicuous spot” in the Parsons photographs foretell? It is unlikely that any mutually acknowledged relationship between Rossetti and Morris existed when the Parsons photographs were taken. In seeking a sign of the future of an image in that image, we are engaging in a desire for fortune-telling. For Žižek, fortune-telling is finding what seems to be a response from the real in the symbolic.⁷ The Parsons images foretell an answer of the real in the form of Morris returning Rossetti’s love. The sublime, and scandalous, future foretold by the Parsons photographs is Rossetti’s miracle.⁸

After their affair had cooled to a friendship, Rossetti wrote to Morris,

You are the noblest and dearest thing that world has had to show me; and if no lesser loss than the loss of you could have brought me to so much bitterness, I would still rather have had this to endure than have missed the fullness of wonder and worship which nothing else could have made known to me.⁹

These emotions, even if as yet unacknowledged, but with their potential weighing heavily in the still air of Rossetti’s garden on that day in 1865, are captured in the Parsons images of Morris. The photographs catch and hold Morris, as Rossetti must have been doing in his heart and mind, as the most precious thing there ever was in the world, that he had ever seen or would ever see. Morris was a real woman, but also the preeminent icon of nineteenth-century medievalism. Although Rossetti’s paintings cemented her status in the public eye, these photographs are pivotal in Morris’s transformation into an icon of beauty; they capture

⁶ Benjamin, *ibid.*, 454.

⁷ See Chapter 1.

⁸ Žižek describes this occurrence as scandalous in “Courtly Love,” 106.

⁹ Friday [4 February 1870] 34 [#16], in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence*, ed. with an introd. by John Bryson, in association with Janet Camp Troxell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

and freeze the moments during which he began to visualize her as an icon, and provide inspiration for a number of later works.¹⁰

Read against the backdrop of his paintings and poetry, as well as independently as a group of images, the photographs demonstrate the ways in which her beauty, her silence, her unavailability, her alleged aloofness, and her identity as an object of devotion, Rossetti's and others', canonize her as an important embodiment of the courtly lady in the nineteenth century. Widely celebrated yet largely unseen because Rossetti rarely showed his work, Morris fits some of the parameters of the courtly lady quite neatly. The medieval courtly lady behaves in a condescending and even cruel manner; Morris was unavailable, with a reputation for being remote, cold, and silent. However, although historical opinion about her behavior toward Rossetti and its possible destructiveness has varied over time, in current scholarship she appears to have been neither arbitrary nor disdainful of Rossetti at any time during their relationship. While medieval courtly ladies are idealized in ways that make them seem to be all the same, Morris did not look like anyone else, and moreover, as is evident in this group of photographs, she looks very different from photograph to photograph. In that way the images relate to how the appearance of the courtly lady is slippery and elusive, despite the fact that the lady's admirers describe her so similarly, as do Morris's.

Most importantly, the typical courtly lady is perpetually unavailable; however, Morris for a time returned Rossetti's love. Having her love did not lessen his desire; Rossetti could

¹⁰ Although his "discovery" of Morris took place in 1857, he did not begin to seriously paint her until after these photographs were taken. Rossetti's paintings featuring Morris as model are among his best known, and many can be directly related to the Parsons photographs. Rossetti appears to have used the Parsons images as inspiration for works such as *La Pia de' Tolomei*, 1868-80; *Pandora*, 1869; and *Reverie*, 1886, although Morris also sat for him in person for these works. For example, compare Rossetti's *The Roseleaf*, 1870 (Fig. 21) and a photograph of Morris in a similar pose (Fig. 22). Ford points out that "A study of the paintings by Rossetti that are closest to these photographs appears to indicate that none was painted solely or directly from them, and that they were intended as reference material. Had they been intended as portraits in their own right, Parsons the professional photographer would have ensured that they did not show the edge of a screen, or the guy ropes of the marquee, or other background details which give them an unfinished look," (Ford, 313).

not get enough. Furthermore, traditionally the troubadour is of lower status than the Lady; despite her higher social status, the medieval woman had less social power than a man, so the fact that Morris was from a working class background is not completely at odds with this aspect of courtly love. Rossetti certainly subjected himself to her, at the same time that he mastered her, by appropriating her appearance for his art. He idealized her, painted her, wrote poems about her, but simultaneously, as a jealous courtly lover, kept her out of sight.

When the photographs were taken, Jane and William Morris were the parents of two daughters, and she was a collaborator in his design work, but emotionally they were somewhat estranged for reasons that remain unclear.¹¹ That she was socially unavailable at the time of this sitting, although not in love with her husband, is significant. Lacan points out that simple prohibition is not enough to arouse desire, but it doesn't hurt: as Barthes notes in *A Lover's Discourse*, "In order to show you where your desire is, it is enough to forbid it to you a little (if it is true that there is no desire without prohibition.)"¹² Pre-Raphaelite scholar Jan Marsh suggests that Morris's married status added to her desirability for Rossetti; he

seems partly to have been playing a troubadour role, as a courtly lover worshipping an unattainable *donna Giovanna*. . . . One possibility is that he allowed himself to adore Jane romantically precisely because she was married, like Beatrice.¹³

Morris's unavailability made her subsequent (temporary) availability all the more delicious.

¹¹ Jan Marsh, *Jane and May Morris: a Biographical Story, 1839-1938* (London: New York: Pandora Press, 1986), 89.

¹² Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 137.

¹³ Marsh, *Rossetti*, 342.

Later in life, after Rossetti's death, Morris allegedly claimed that she had never actually "given herself" to him.¹⁴ The possibility that their love was unconsummated corresponds with the idea that courtly love should remain distanced; otherwise, as in the case of King Arthur, Lancelot, and Guenevere, the result could be "the disastrous consequences of the ideal courtly love's being 'sullied' by physical consummation."¹⁵ Morris's observation that her relationship with Rossetti "was very warm while it lasted," certainly an understatement about a potentially scandalous passion, reinforces the conception of her courtly emotional distance.¹⁶

By the time Rossetti's first paintings featuring Morris were completed, beginning with *Mrs. Morris in a Blue Dress*, 1868, the two had evidently acknowledged their love for each other.¹⁷ In 1871 William Morris tacitly acquiesced to their relationship, co-renting a

¹⁴ This information comes from the notebooks of her lover later in life, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, who had asked her about her relationship with Rossetti. WSB notebook, 18.10.1892, quoted in Peter Faulkner, ed., *Jane Morris to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt: the letters of Jane Morris to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt: together with extracts from Blunt's diaries* (Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter, 1986), 27.

¹⁵ Sutherland Lyall, in collaboration with Mike Darton, *The Lady and the Unicorn* (London: Parkstone Press, 2000), 97.

¹⁶ Debra N. Mancoff, *Jane Morris: the Pre-Raphaelite Model of Beauty* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2000), 67.

¹⁷ Extramarital involvements, such as that between Edward Burne-Jones and Marie Zambaco, were not unknown in the unconventional social circles in which Jane and William Morris and Rossetti moved. William Morris's early poem "Guenevere," written before he married Jane Burden, ironically champions the adulterous queen's fidelity to her passion for her lover over her fidelity to her husband. (Morris posed for Guenevere in Oxford during her first contact with the Pre-Raphaelites.) In William Morris's sole completed painting from 1857, which featured his future wife as either Guenevere or Iseult, he portrays her as an overtly sexualized adulteress. The unrepentant figure stands in front of an unmade bed, her sleeve falling loose, fastening a chain about her waist; the presence of a bottle of wine adds to the implication that she is dressing after lovemaking [see J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 81]. William Morris's utopian novel *News from Nowhere* advocates greater freedom in love relationships than those available to the Victorians, but was published many years after he was confronted personally with the situation [William Morris, *News from Nowhere or an Epoch of Rest, Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1891), 62ff]. There would have been no guarantee that the notoriously hot-tempered William Morris would be as tolerant as he was. Rossetti's involvement in any such breakup would have created a public scandal which could have damaged both Morris's and Rossetti's careers, since many of their respective clients were also part of their social circle (Marsh, *Rossetti*, 342).

country house, Kelmscott Manor, with Rossetti, so that Jane Morris and Rossetti could spend time together without arousing scandal.¹⁸ Those satisfactions were in the unknowable future in Rossetti's garden in 1965.

The Courtly Lady in the Bower

Photography historian Colin Ford observes that insatiable desire is part of what Rossetti paints.¹⁹ The working photographs which in part inspired Rossetti's paintings are suffused with restrained longing; it is easy to imagine Rossetti's fingers on Morris's reportedly pale-as-ivory flesh, gently and carefully arranging her before Parsons's lens.

Some of the Parsons photographs capture Morris's compelling presence in a garden of love, exquisitely focused in front of a blurred wall of greenery that in its haziness becomes an impenetrable thicket (Fig. 1). The foliage is a soft background against which she is pinned, a butterfly under glass. She pops out in sharp crystal focus against the cloud of verdure, almost a cut-out figure from a stereoscopic image. Where Rossetti's paintings tend toward the typical Pre-Raphaelite all-over focus, the photographs are ironically more traditionally painterly, with the background losing focus.

Part of the reason for the garden setting involves matters of light adequate for the process as well as the privacy afforded by Rossetti's own garden. The convenience of proximity to his home/studio also provided easy access to props like the tent, chair, garments and jewelry which he kept on hand for his models. Yet certainly Rossetti, with his extensive knowledge of medieval and Renaissance love poetry, would have been aware of the

¹⁸ Treuherz, et. al., 200; they rented Kelmscott between 1871 and 1874. See also Marsh, *Rossetti*, 416ff.

¹⁹ Ford, 308. That Ford refers to Rossetti's passion as hopeless is of note, for Jane Morris certainly returned his feelings, at least for a time.

connection between gardens and love. Five years earlier he depicted a scene of lovers tenderly kissing in front of a patterned background and espaliered roses entitled *The Rose Garden* (1860-61) (Fig. 2), a prototype for a frontispiece to his translation volume, *Early Italian Poets, from Cuillo d'Alcalmo to Dante Alighieri*.²⁰ The pose of the woman leaning forward to kiss her kneeling lover is almost a mirror image of the way Morris leans forward, eyelids lowered, over the back of a chair in one of the Parsons photographs (Fig. 3). Her arms wrap tightly around the chair back, lace spilling from sleeves, fingers tightly intertwined as if in longing for the absent lover.

One of the best-known examples of the association of gardens with love is Guillaume de Loris's *Roman de la Rose* of the mid-thirteenth century, "which clearly defined the enclosed garden as the arena for amorous pursuits."²¹ In that walled garden, nature has been perfected, with anything that is not beautiful excluded. In an article discussing the Musée Cluny's late-fifteenth-century *Dame à la licorne* tapestries, which may represent an allegory of courtly love,²² medievalist Kristina Gourlay writes,

the *Garden of Love* was one of the most frequently represented secular settings in art during the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries . . . there is little question that during the Middle Ages . . . there was a direct connection in both art and literature between gardens and the pursuit of love, romance, and pleasure . . . [a] flourishing garden . . . leads the viewer to anticipate romance.²³

²⁰ Ultimately he decided not to use this image; however proofs and preparatory studies for the image exist. See <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/nd497.r8.m33.rad.html#107>.

²¹ Kristina E. Gourlay, "La Dame à la licorne: A Reinterpretation," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 134 (September 1997): 55.

²² See Sutherland Lyall, *The Lady and the Unicorn*, in collaboration with Mike Darton (London: Parkstone Press, 2000), and Michelle Monsour, "The Lady with the Unicorn," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 134 (December 1999), for the tapestry's relationship to courtly love.

²³ Gourlay, 55-56. Her note 32: "Orchard gardens first became visible in medieval literature as the setting for love in early Provençal love poetry, and this theme was used again and again in medieval Romances such as *Tristan and Isolt*. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, gardens continued to be associated with love, and authors such as Giovanni Boccaccio, in the *Decameron* and *Teseida delle Nozze d'Emilia*, and Geoffrey

If, as the Song of Solomon tells us, “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed,”²⁴ the garden is a place where nature is tamed and domesticated. Art historian Lise Gotfredsen argues that desire is barred by taming.²⁵ The garden of the tapestries is meticulously arranged and inhabited by tamed wild animals, like rabbits, monkeys, a lion, and of course a unicorn. Rossetti’s garden, in contrast, was deliberately quite wild and overgrown,²⁶ and its notoriously unruly menagerie could scarcely be referred to as tame.²⁷ Morris, if one accepts the Pygmalion aspect of her relationship to Rossetti, is in a way a creature Rossetti picked up in Oxford and brought home, but she is not tamed in

Chaucer, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Parliament of Fowles*, and *The Merchant’s and Knight’s Tales*, made extensive use of the “Garden of Love” as a setting for their amorous stories. These literary gardens often share with the unicorn tapestries the fact that they are inhabited by many small animals . . . rabbits, fawns, and other tamed animals. Many of these animals, such as the rabbits, represent characteristics appropriate to a story of romance and courtship. Rabbits were known in the Middle Ages for their fertility. . . . In the Middle Ages, the dog was the most popular symbol for fidelity. . . . These are only two of the most frequently depicted animals in the tapestries.”

²⁴ Song of Solomon 4.12.

²⁵ Lise Gotfredsen, *The Unicorn*, trans. Anne Brown (London: Harvill, 1999), 92.

²⁶ Marsh, *Rossetti*, 310.

²⁷ While the photographs taken in Rossetti’s garden lack the menagerie present in the Cluny tapestries, those very grounds were in fact so renowned for their exotic menagerie that they are said to have inspired Lewis Carroll’s Mad Hatter’s Tea Party (Mancoff, 47). According to Rossetti’s contemporary and biographer Henry Currie Marillier, “In this garden were kept most of the animals for which Rossetti had such a curious and indiscriminate affection. How many of them there may have been at any one time does not seem to be stated; but as one died or disappeared, another would be got to replace it, or Rossetti would see some particularly outlandish specimen at Jamrach’s and bear it home in triumph to add to the collection. Wire cages were erected for their accommodation, but these were not always proof against escape, especially in the case of the burrowing animals, which had an annoying way of appearing in the neighbours’ gardens. Mr. W. M. Rossetti has given from memory a tolerably long list of creatures which at one time or another figured in the menagerie at Cheyne Walk. They included a Pomeranian puppy, an Irish deerhound, a barn-owl named Jessie, another owl named Bobby, rabbits, dormice, hedgehogs, two successive wombats, a Canadian marmot or woodchuck, an ordinary marmot, kangaroos and wallabies, a deer, two or more armadillos, a white mouse with her brood, a raccoon, squirrels, a mole, peacocks, wood-owls, Virginian owls, horned owls, a jackdaw, a raven, parakeets, a talking parrot, chameleons, grey lizards, Japanese salamanders, and a laughing jackass. Besides these there was a certain famous bull, a zebu, which cost Rossetti £20 (he borrowed it from his brother), and which manifested such animosity in confinement that it had to be disposed of at once. The strident voices of the peacocks were so little appreciated in the neighbourhood that Lord Cadogan caused a paragraph to be inserted in all his leases thereafter forbidding these birds to be kept.” H. C. Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, An Illustrated Memorial of His Art and Life* (George Bell and Sons, 1899), 208-09.

these images. Instead they seem to free her from William Morris's bourgeois re-education. Like *la Dame*, whose appearance changes from tapestry to tapestry, Morris's appearance changes radically from photograph to photograph. It is quite possible that anyone looking at these images as a group would think they were of at least two different people. Features that in one image appear heavy almost to the point of coarseness (Fig. 4), in images from the same day, with just a slight turn of the head, show a visage of unutterable delicacy and fineness (Fig. 3). She sometimes appears quite masculine (Fig. 5), at other times feminine (Fig. 3). In some she appears so awkward and uncomfortable that comparison to photographs of institutionalized patients with mental illness by nineteenth-century neurologist Hugh Diamond come to mind. In this way the photographs fail to uniformly idealize Morris. Certainly these changes are in part due to shifts in lighting, and to Parsons's moving the camera so that the light hits her from different angles; yet the differences are nonetheless striking.²⁸

In one of the tapestries, the Lady stands before a tent (Fig. 6), which has also been read as a symbol of love, a sort of bower of love, implying romance and marriage, and thus perhaps the fulfillment of desire.²⁹ The tent she stand before bears an inscription, either "[A] Mon Seul Desire [D/V/R/P]" or "A Mon Seul Desire [D/V/R/P]," in the second of which the

²⁸ I am indebted to Professor Williams for his discussion of the technical aspects of the lighting of these photographs.

²⁹ Gourlay, 66: "The pavilion in front of which they stand calls to mind a fifteenth-century tapestry in the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, which depicts a noble couple in a garden framed by a similar pavilion held open by angels instead of a lion and unicorn. The setting, the flowers at the lady's side, and the dog with which the gentleman plays, all would suggest that this tapestry is somehow associated with love. Thus, it is possible that open pavilions too are symbolically associated with love, romance and the entrance into matrimony, and in both these cases, the pavilions could represent either a bower of love, the family estate, or both."

“A” would be read as “À.”³⁰ The inscription has been interpreted to mean the renunciation of earthly desire, the renunciation of the pleasures of the senses illustrated in favor of designating free will the guardian of the senses.³¹ In this interpretation, then, “‘A mon seul desir’ is a moral enjoinder or anecdote of the virtuous wife who places love above everything else.”³² In Fig. 7 and Fig. 8, Morris, once again looking completely different in each image, leans against a central tent pole, hands twisting her dress into a knot at her waist. Just in front of, before, or barely inside the tent, Morris is a nineteenth-century *Dame à la licorne* who is ready to risk everything for love, although not wifely love; she, like Guenevere, will follow true love.

Rossetti’s Idealized Courtly Lady

Ford rhapsodizes about these pictures, describing them as “one of the most compelling sets of Pre-Raphaelite images known to us. For this writer, at least, the results are more haunting and beautiful than many of Rossetti’s paintings and drawings of the same sitter.”³³ Rossetti’s contemporaries recorded similar reactions to Morris herself, falling under her spell following Rossetti’s hiring her to model in Oxford. Such testimonials demonstrate the uncanny power of Morris’s appearance, a power the Parsons photographs later helped to crystallize. At the time of William Morris’s engagement to Jane Burden, long before Rossetti had done much more than sketch her, the poet Algernon Swinburne said, “The idea of

³⁰ The letters at the end of the inscription have been interpreted in various ways. See Anna Nilsen, “The Lady with the Unicorn: On Earthly Desire and Spiritual Purity,” *Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia* 16 (1995): 213-235.

³¹ Monsour, 248-9.

³² Monsour, 253. The meaning of this inscription has been the subject of debate and remains unresolved.

³³ Ford, 308.

marrying her is insane. To kiss her feet is the utmost men should dream of doing.”³⁴

Georgiana Macdonald, then the fiancée of Rossetti’s fellow Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones, was so struck by Morris’s appearance that she wrote, “I shall never forget it—literally I dreamed of her again in the night.”³⁵ The collectivization of Morris’s idealization was underway.

Later, so beautiful did Rossetti’s painted images of Morris appear that she aroused a profound curiosity among his limited audience to catch a glimpse of the real woman who inspired the work. In person, Morris did not disappoint and was if anything more astonishing than the paintings.³⁶ In a letter to his sister, Henry James wrote,

Oh *ma chère*, what a wife! *Je n’en reviens pas*—she haunts me still. A figure cut out of a missal—out of one of Rossetti’s or Hunt’s pictures—to say this gives but a faint idea of her, because when such an image puts on flesh and blood, it is an apparition of fearful and wonderful intensity.³⁷

Artist W. Graham Robertson, meeting Jane Morris later in her life when her hair was graying, nevertheless commented that “Mrs. Morris required to be seen to be believed . . . and even then she seemed dreamlike.”³⁸

Burne-Jones envisioned a painting as an image that surpassed reality, “a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be—in light better than any light that

³⁴ Marsh, *Jane and May Morris*, 26, citing Swinburne to Edwin Hatch, 17.2.1858, quoted in C.Y. Lang, *The Swinburne Letters*, 6 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1959), I, 18.

³⁵ Mancoff, 28.

³⁶ Although obviously many found Morris to be the pinnacle of beauty, she and other Pre-Raphaelite models, with their unconventional looks, were not universally embraced. See Bullen, Chapter 1, “The Ugliness of Early Pre-Raphaelitism,” 6-48.

³⁷ Spear cites Leon Edel, *Henry James Letters*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 94.

³⁸ Ford, 318, citing W. Graham Robertson, *Time Was* (London: 1931), 93-94.

ever shone—in a land no-one can define, or remember, only desire...”³⁹ Rossetti and Morris’s contemporaries asserted that Rossetti had not in any way idealized Morris’s appearance in his paintings.⁴⁰ Rossetti’s dream, his fantasy of beauty, was real, even surpassed, by the actual Jane Morris. Rossetti’s brother William recalled of her beauty:

It seemed a face to fire his imagination, and to quicken his powers—a face of arcane and inexhaustible meaning. . . . For idealizing there was but one process—to realize. I will not conceal my opinion that my brother succeeded where few painters would have done other than fail; he did some genuine justice to this astonishing countenance.⁴¹

Ford agrees, commenting, “These extraordinary photographs demonstrate that the statuesque Jane Morris was truly a ‘stunner’ in the flesh, and not just through Rossetti’s transformative imagination.”⁴²

The medieval troubadour’s attachment to the Lady is based on her ability to keep his desire in play by never satisfying it, by the impossibility of her satisfying it. Artistically, Rossetti claimed that Morris thwarted his satisfaction by being difficult to paint: he felt he never satisfactorily captured her essence. He wrote to her, “How nice it would be if I could feel sure I had painted you once for also as to let the world know what you were.”⁴³ Morris’s unusual looks resist transcription, even though she is identifiable in Rossetti’s paintings.

³⁹ Martin A. Danahay, “Mirrors of Masculine Desire: Narcissus and Pygmalion in Victorian Representation,” *Victorian Poetry* 32 (1994): 47, citing Christopher Wood, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (New York: 1981), 119.

⁴⁰ David Sonstroem, *Rossetti and the Fair Lady* (Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1970), 125: “James, William Rossetti, Watts-Dunton, and Graham Robertson all give independent testimony that Gabriel’s many portrayals of her were accurate and not exaggerated or idealized.” James wrote, “On the wall there was a large and nearly full-length portrait of her by Rossetti [*The Blue Silk Dress*], so strange and unreal that if you hadn’t seen her in person you would pronounce it a distempered vision, but it is in fact an extremely good likeness,” Edel, 1, 94.

⁴¹ Mancoff, 51-52.

⁴² Ford, 317.

⁴³ *DGR and JM Correspondence*, Sunday [30 January 1870].

Despite the fact that Rossetti and Morris enjoyed a mutually acknowledged romantic relationship that lasted from approximately 1868 to 1876,⁴⁴ and that he did possess her in a way through his paintings, Rossetti ultimately lost Morris, pining after her for the rest of his life. The end of the romance evidently related to two factors: Rossetti's symptoms of mental illness were more and more troubling and he dealt with them with an increasingly excessive use of chloral; and the Morrises's brilliant and ambitious elder daughter Jenny was diagnosed with epilepsy, at that time a tragic, progressively deteriorating condition. Morris withdrew, and although they maintained a friendship, Rossetti's letters to her are full of yearning; he never got over his love for her. When his mental and physical health weakened and their relationship shifted to one of devoted friendship, he nonetheless considered her the most important person in his world.

The letters written by Morris and Rossetti during their affair were destroyed by Morris's instruction. But Rossetti's surviving letters to Morris testify to his unflagging longing for her. After the end of their affair he wrote, "I never cease to long to be near you and doing whatever might be to distract and amuse you. To be with you and wait on you and read to you is absolutely the only happiness I can find or conceive in this world, dearest Janey."⁴⁵ The beginning of this unending desire unfurls delicately in the photographs of 1865. Later, he writes of "my deep regard for you; —a feeling far deeper (though I know you never believed me) than I have entertained towards any other living creature at any time of

⁴⁴ Marsh, *Rossetti*, 493.

⁴⁵ *DGR and JM Correspondence*, [18(?) [sic] February 1870] 35 [#17].

my life.”⁴⁶ For Rossetti, Morris never stopped being the idealized and unavailable courtly lady that she appeared to be in the Parsons photographs.

Love and Blindness

Lovers entertain both hope and fear. Simultaneously they feel both great heat and excessive cold. They want and reject in equal measure, constantly grasping at things but retaining nothing in their grip. They can see without eyes. They have no ears but can hear. They shout without a tongue. They fly without moving. They are alive while dying.

Tullia d’Aragona ⁴⁷

Love, you make me tremble so violently with the joy that I feel I can neither see nor hear nor do I know what I say or do.

Bernart de Ventadorn⁴⁸

One of the earliest indicators of Rossetti’s later health issues was an episode of blindness he suffered shortly after Morris acknowledged that she reciprocated his feelings. His doctors were unable to find a physical cause for the symptom.⁴⁹ Whatever the cause of Rossetti’s blindness (and as Marsh points out, hereditary conditions may well have been involved⁵⁰), the timing of Rossetti’s experience of blindness in terms of his relationship with Morris raises the issue of the relationship between, love, desire, sight, and blindness. One of

⁴⁶ Ibid., Friday (31 May 1878) #32, 68-9.

⁴⁷ Tullia d’Aragona, “Dialogue on the Infinity of Love,” 1547, in Susan Griffin, *The Book of the Courtesans: A Catalogue of Their Virtues* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 100.

⁴⁸ Cited in Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*, 47.

⁴⁹ Marsh, *Rossetti*, 341-2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 341. His father suffered hypertension and diabetes, either of which may have contributed to the blindness.

the paradoxes of the Parsons photographs is that Morris looks so different from image to image, making her hard to see.

The Lacanian gaze is distinguished from looking or seeing. The gaze is not on the side of the subject but on the side of the Other. As Lacan demonstrates in his story of the tin can, the object is already gazing at the subject, yet “You never look at me from the place at which I see you.”⁵¹ The subject of language is always tied to the body produced by language, and therefore seeing is always only from one perspective: “I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides,” Lacan writes.⁵² Thus the tin can, which Lacan had not seen until the fisherman captaining his boat pointed it out, was representative of that gaze of the Other that is outside the body. The subject is de-centered, the same de-centering that takes place in the comprehension of the anamorphic skull in Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*. Like language, the gaze is there before the subject, and also like language demonstrates that the desire of the other is constitutive of the subject. The split that separates the eye from the gaze is the visual equivalent of the split of entry into the symbolic.⁵³ In that way, the gaze also castrates the subject. The body of the gaze is therefore not the idealized body the ego sees, but the body as castrated.⁵⁴ The gap between the gaze and the eye is the lure, which distracts the subject from the impossibility of seeing oneself; the lure inflames

⁵¹ Lacan, *XI*, 103.

⁵² Iverson, 456, citing Lacan, *XI*, 72.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 456.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 458.

desire.⁵⁵ In the case of the photograph, Iverson argues that the *studium* is the object of the look, while the *punctum* is the object of the gaze.⁵⁶

Lacan addresses the role of the gaze in the foundation of the subject of the symbolic as follows:

What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which—if you will allow me to use the word, as I often do, in a fragmented form—I am photo-graphed.⁵⁷

Lacan has little to say about photography, but this fragmented allusion to photography resonates with Barthes's idea of the photograph as that which creates and mortifies: The Lacanian gaze creates the subject and mortifies it by encasing it within the orthopedic structure of the imaginary body identified in the mirror stage. For Lacan, seeing is an impossibility.

The issue of what can be seen and what cannot, and the blindness associated with the impossibility of seeing are reflected in the work of Barthes as well as Rossetti. Rossetti's 1861 translation of Fazio degli Umberti's "His Portrait of his Lady, Angiola of Verona," attests to Rossetti's interest in the link between the seen and the unseen. As the speaker in the poem admires his lady's visible attributes—neck, chin, shoulders—his aroused desire leads him to dream of the parts of her he cannot see:

The eyelids of thy mind
Open thou: if such loveliness can be given
To sight here,—what of that which she doth hide?
Only the wondrous ride

⁵⁵ Phelan, 34.

⁵⁶ Iverson, 457.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 459, citing Lacan, *XI*, 106.

Of sun and planets through the visible heaven
Tells us that there beyond is Paradise.
Thus, if thou fix thine eyes, Of a truth certainly thou must infer
That every earthly joy abides in her.⁵⁸

These lines, in which the poet fantasizes about his beloved's sexual anatomy, perfectly capture for Rossetti how the visual inflames desire: "Never was beauty better described," Rossetti asserted.⁵⁹

The eyelids of the mind see what the physical eyes cannot. In this way Fazio and Rossetti are in accord with Barthes, who believed that "in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes."⁶⁰ To close one's eyes to a photograph is to discard its connotation, its art, its function, and thus to "allow the detail [the *punctum*] to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness."⁶¹ The latent *punctum*, which reveals itself to Barthes when he has looked away from the photograph, is a sort of afterimage of the real, when what Barthes would call the "culture" of the image has fallen away. Like Fazio and Rossetti, Barthes advocates the opening of the mind's eyes.

What would one see in closing the eyes after looking at one of the Parsons photographs?⁶² Overt visual suggestions of sexuality are not evident, and Morris's body is largely lost in voluminous garments. Yet she appears to be wearing neither corset nor crinoline hoops, both signs of bourgeois propriety. Ford argues that these absences may be

⁵⁸ (ii. 382). Published in 1861 in *The Early Italian Poets* (London: Swift, Elder and Co., 1861).

⁵⁹ Bullen, 129.

⁶⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 53.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶² Morris is remote, private, and covered, compared to some of Rossetti's paintings of her, such as *Astarte Syriaca* (1877) and *Pandora* (1878). Rossetti's paintings featuring other models, such as *Venus Verticordia* (1863-8) and *Lady Lilith*, 1868, both based on Alexa Wilding, are substantially more revealing.

read progressively, as an “example of a woman modifying conventional mid-century dress according to aesthetic concepts . . . one of the earliest to be seen in photographs.”⁶³ However, in a photograph staged by the notorious Rossetti, these absences may also be read provocatively.⁶⁴ Although Morris was already wearing such garments on an everyday basis,⁶⁵ she dresses in a more conventionally Victorian style, with a corset and crinoline, in one family photograph (Fig. 9).

To close one’s eyes is by no means to not see. While Bernart de Ventadorn attests to love’s impairment of vision, Tullia d’Aragona insists that the lover does not need eyes to see. For Barthes, love is not blind:

The lover is the natural semiologist in the pure state! He spends his time reading signs—he does nothing else: signs of happiness, signs of unhappiness. On the face of the other, in his behavior. He is truly a prey to signs. . . . Love is not blind. On the contrary, it has an unbelievable power to decipher things.⁶⁶

Yet the lover’s obsessive search for meaning has a contradictory way of occluding the lover’s powers of perception:

He sees clearly—but the result is often the same as if he were blind. . . because he doesn’t know where or how to make signs stop. He deciphers perfectly, but he’s unable to arrive at a definite interpretation, and he’s swept away by a perpetual circus, where he’ll never find peace.⁶⁷

⁶³ Ford, 311.

⁶⁴ Bullen, 142; Ford, 311.

⁶⁵ Mancoff, 34; Morris was wearing loose medieval-style garments at Red House, where they lived from 1860 to 1865.

⁶⁶ Barthes, “Greatest Cryptographer,” 303.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Love's impaired vision comes from the lover's over-receptiveness to signs. The lover cannot help but look too hard, especially, perhaps, when the lover is an artist and the beloved a muse and model.

Andreas Capellanus reported that the blind could not experience love; this assertion testifies to the medieval belief in the mutuality of sight and desire.⁶⁸ Medieval optics theorized visual contact between eye and object in a way similar to Barthes's poetic description of perpetually separated bodies touching with rays of light. The eye was, Camille writes, "an active lantern;" it could take in rays of light from the object, but in addition was thought to send out rays toward the object, maintaining the Platonic theory of vision.⁶⁹ Love was an arrow which reached the heart through the eye in the *Roman de la Rose*: "when love saw me he did not threaten me, but shot me with the arrow that was made of neither iron, nor steel, so that the point entered my heart through my eye."⁷⁰ The danger of the visual in relation to courtly love is indicated by the lover's dislike of sharing his lady, even visually, with others; the wounding capacity of vision is indicated by the fact that "his happiness depends on *not* seeing her . . . 'when I do not see her, I am pleased.'"⁷¹

In terms of Lacanian courtly love, Morris's return of Rossetti's love could be seen thematically, not diagnostically, in the light of the lover's (Rossetti's) too-close approach to the courtly lady in the space of *das Ding*, resulting in an unbearable *jouissance* in the form of blindness. Like the anamorphosis, *das Ding* must only be approached indirectly. Blind eyes,

⁶⁸ Camille, 27; Lacan cites Andreas in *VII*, 146.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁰ *Roman de la Rose* cited in Camille, 39.

⁷¹ Cholakian, 22. He is citing Guillaume d'Aquitaine, *Les chansons de Guillaume IX, duc d'Aquitaine (1071-1127)*, ed. Alfred Jeanroy (Paris: E. Champion, 1927), poem IV.

not seeing, are eyes that are being looked at by the gaze.⁷² One of the innovative and powerful aspects of Rossetti's paintings of women after 1859 was the penetrative quality of their gazes, reversing the typical relation between viewer and work of art. Rossetti's translation of Fazio reads, "I look into her eyes which unaware/Through mine own eyes to my heart penetrate."⁷³ Literature and visual arts scholar J. B. Bullen refers to this active gaze as "an empowered gaze, active and penetrating in Fazio, powerfully indifferent in Rossetti."⁷⁴ The gaze of the Rossettian woman defies reciprocation.

Although Rossetti felt he had not successfully painted Morris, his poetry suggests that painting provides a form of consummation other than sexual, a sort of possession.⁷⁵ Rossetti closes his 1869 sonnet "The Portrait (Sonnet IX)" as follows:

Let all men note
That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this!)
They that would look on her must come to me.⁷⁶

As feminist art historian Griselda Pollock points out, "The painted image of the loved one is that which can be utterly and timelessly possessed."⁷⁷

⁷² Lynne Cazabon, "Paul Outerbridge, Jr.: The Representation of Feminine Sexuality," *History of Photography* 18 (spring 1994): 31.

⁷³ Cited in Bullen, 130.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Mancoff, 55.

⁷⁶ Rossetti Archive, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1870.1stedn.rad.html#p197>.

⁷⁷ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 135. The exact dating of this poem is unclear, and it has been associated with not only Morris but also with Elizabeth Siddal and Alexa Wilding. However, the fact that he inscribed a chalk drawing of Jane Morris, dating from 1869, with lines 4 and 8 of the sonnet, identifies it strongly with her. See the Rossetti Archive commentary on this sonnet, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1868.s212.raw.html>. Furthermore, Ford Madox Brown claimed that Rossetti wrote the sonnet as an accompaniment to the painting *Mrs. Morris in a Blue Dress*. See <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1868.s212.raw.html>, citing Newman and Watkinson, *Ford Madox Brown*, 155.

Rossetti also “possessed” Morris through his paintings in the sense that his work was not widely seen until after his death; those who would see painted images of Morris had to literally go to him or to his patrons in order to see the paintings. Rossetti disliked opening himself to criticism, and instead of showing his work publicly, sold his work to a small group of collectors until the late 1870s, when he began to publish reproductions.⁷⁸ Following Rossetti’s death, there were three memorial showings of his work in 1883, and they were the first opportunities for the public to see his paintings outside reproductions; even at the end of the nineteenth century his actual paintings were still quite difficult to see because the majority were in private collections.⁷⁹ No comprehensive exhibition of his work was shown until 1973.⁸⁰ The absence of contemporary knowledge about Rossetti and Morris’s affair is added to by the tantalizing absence of the work itself at the time. Furthermore, the Parsons photographs themselves were private; May Morris kept them her whole life, and when she left them to the Victoria and Albert, she stipulated that they were not to be reproduced.⁸¹

Sublimation, Idealization, and Identification

Morris’s canonization as a legendary beauty is in large part a result of Rossetti’s personal idealization of her. Morris was Rossetti’s courtly lady, a human being he idealized, revered, desired, and in the Lacanian sense, sublimated. Her appearance was a sort of

⁷⁸ Ford, 316.

⁷⁹ Edwin Becker, “Sensual Eroticism or Empty Tranquility: Rossetti’s Reputation around 1900,” in Treuherz et. al., 112.

⁸⁰ Dr. David Fleming and John Leighton, “Preface,” in Treuherz et. al., 7.

⁸¹ Martin Bailey, “...And Jane Morris, styled by Rossetti in her best dress,” *The Art Newspaper* 59 (May 1996): 11. The album was given to the V&A after May Morris’s death in 1938. May Morris had written that she did not want the photographs to be reproduced, but it was not a formal condition and the photographs were later published.

punctum in a crowd, a face that no one else had particularly noticed, waiting for Rossetti, whose recognition of and response to her would change both their fortunes. Describing the experience of the *punctum*, Barthes writes, “it is not I who seek it out . . . it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.”⁸² This is exactly what Morris did to Rossetti. She animated him, and he animated her.

Not only unusual, her looks were opposite from the early Victorian ideal of beauty, which required

a soft round or oval face, pink cheeks and rosebud lips, soft dark eyes and delicate arched brows. Long straight hair was looped over the ears in demure fashion and fastened at the nape of the neck. The ideal figure was petite and soft, with small hands and feet, a slender waist and the overall appearance of a china doll.⁸³

Morris, in contrast, was quite tall, with angular features, dramatic eyebrows and dark crinkly hair, skin pale instead of pink. Later, when she was married to William Morris and they traveled abroad, her looks generated taunts and laughter.⁸⁴ However, Morris’s exceptional and arresting features eventually came to be seen as ideal, and her style was widely imitated.⁸⁵

Morris’s iconization is a collective fantasy, an ongoing one, since her beauty is still revered. Rossetti assimilated Morris’s beauty, changeable and malleable as it is, into his own and the culture’s hungry and devouring image-repertoire. But his sublimation of Morris was

⁸² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26.

⁸³ Marsh, *Jane and May Morris*, 15-16.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 136-7: “‘When she traveled in France,’ Robertson wrote, ‘our light-hearted and often beauty-blind neighbors found her appearance frankly amusing and would giggle audibly when she passed by, to the astonishment and rage of Morris, who was with difficulty restrained from throwing down his gage in the cause of his lady,’ [W.G. Robertson, *Time Was*, 1931, 95]. A similar occurrence was recorded by May in England, when once the family arrived in the Oxfordshire market town of Burford when it was crowded with local farmers. Wherever they went, her parents were striking figures, she explained, Jane being so tall and dark and Morris so squat and roughcast.”

⁸⁵ Mancoff, 3.

not an acquiescence to the cultural screen; he idealized a lower-class woman with very unconventional looks, upsetting the aesthetic and social status quo. Yet Morris, or Rossetti's iconicization of her, resists cultural screen's capacity to devour. The Parsons photographs demonstrate that despite Rossetti's sublimation of Morris, her appearance is still remarkable, unusual and both recognizable and not. It is perhaps this elusiveness, even from the cultural image repertoire, that posits her most strongly as the courtly lady.

Photographing the Courtly Lady

In *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes writes, "here then, at last, is the definition of the image: that from which I am excluded,"⁸⁶ referring to the beguiling image of the beloved which is imaginary. Rossetti is not in the Parsons photographs, but he is just outside them, in the off-frame that for Metz is an additional loss to that of the lost moment framed in the photograph.⁸⁷ Morris was there, and Rossetti was there (and of course Parsons); the light that touches her also touched him. Watching Morris, discussing poses, adjusting her body a bit here or there before the click of the shutter, Rossetti is an unseen but felt presence. Offstage, Rossetti seems to drive her aloofness; she is not alone, but resisting interaction, perhaps at his direction. At the same time she appears quite conscious of being observed. Her remoteness is a reaction to the presence of another; her very aloofness marks her sensitivity to Rossetti's presence. It is a withholding that acknowledges an erotic tension. For a time, Rossetti will find a place in the Barthesian image of love.

Each moment a photograph memorializes has been snatched from nonexistence,

⁸⁶ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 132.

⁸⁷ Metz, 86-7.

privileged over an overwhelming infinitude of others. Like the poetry of courtly love, the photograph distances, idealizes and sublimates. Barthes alludes to the sublimating capacity of the photograph when he writes, describing the *punctum*, “I feel that its mere presence changes my reading, that I am looking at a new photograph, marked in my eyes with a higher value.”⁸⁸ These moments, then, become hallowed, sacred, sovereign representatives of the past, history, loss and absence. The photograph elevates the referent to the status of *das Ding*. Photographs, with their glimpses of immortality, hide the abyss of death, while they simultaneously point to the inexorable passage of time and the viewer’s drift toward his or her own oblivion.

The Parsons images attest to the reality of their referent, the particular face to which Rossetti sought assiduously to do justice. They also attest to Morris’s absence, as all photographs mark the absence of their referents. Other than the paintings, we have only these few artistic photographs to show that aspect of the woman who so captivated Rossetti and others, since in family portraits she is barely recognizable as the passionate woman of Rossetti’s paintings. In an 1874 portrait of the Burne-Jones and Morris families, Morris slumps forward, her eyes deeply shadowed, her expression almost grim (Fig. 9). She is somewhat recognizable as the Jane Morris of the paintings, if the viewer knows what to look for. Although one must consider the fact that these photographs were taken almost ten years later than the Parsons images, they nonetheless demonstrate the very different quality the Parsons photographs possess.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 42.

⁸⁹ By 1874 Rossetti was in poor condition and the Morris’s daughter Jenny had been diagnosed with epilepsy.

One cannot help but look, in the photographs, for the woman familiar from Rossetti's paintings, as did Morris's contemporaries who desired to see her in the flesh. Photography historian Michael Bartram, who does not agree with William Rossetti's assessment of Morris's perfections, acerbically calls the paintings "exercises in the prettification of photographs:" "One elongates a neck already remarkable for its length, removes an anxious angularity from the wrists . . . the other lifts the hair to make room for a perfect make-up-artist's eyebrow. Sullen lips are re-shaped."⁹⁰ But he is accurate in suggesting that Rossetti aestheticizes the woman seen in the photographs. The photographs show the truth not just in terms of their indexicality, but also the truth behind the paintings.

Rossetti positions himself as a troubadour with a camera, albeit one manned by someone else. He is photographing the courtly lady. These photographs are indexical to Morris, but what the contemporary viewer, one with any familiarity with the Pre-Raphaelites, sees is the referent seen through Rossetti's paintings, the visibility and familiarity of which are a result of the sublimation that is taking place in the photographs. The Morris we know is the one Rossetti painted; her dramatically pronounced and curling lips, dark rippling hair, and huge dreamy eyes are quite familiar. They have an ancestral relation to the paintings, although none of the paintings reproduce the photographed poses exactly. Rossetti's paintings have a kind of ownership or inventor's claim to what we recognize in her as referent. What we see when we look at these images is not Morris the historical figure, the flesh and blood woman of the past, but the threshold of her translation into Morris the courtly lady, elevated to that position by Rossetti's paintings and poetry. These two Morris'es don't match, and their differences are tied up in the parameters of a courtly relationship. Looking at the photographs, seeing both the photographs and the paintings, the viewer is thrust into a

⁹⁰ Bartram, 136.

temporal cyclone of love and desire in the off-frame. They are photographs of the impossibility of the sexual relationship.

That Morris's appearance changes from image to image adds to this quality. When we see a photograph of someone we know, we say, "'Look, this is my brother;' 'this is me as a child,' etc.'" ⁹¹ Manoni's "I know very well, but..." applies here: the viewer can say "I know that's Jane Morris," but there is a pause: "but..." because she looks different in every picture. If one closes one's eyes after looking at the Parsons photographs, it is perhaps the painted Morris one sees. Rossetti's painted Morris is an anamorphosis casting shadows on Rossetti's photographed Morris. This shifting appearance forces the question of photography's indexicality; can these all really be of the same woman? ⁹² The woman who in the photographs is elusive and changing is recognizably the same woman Rossetti paints.

The photographed Morris is subliminally, invisibly doubled by the fictive painted Morris. Rossetti's idealizing looks at Morris through Parsons's camera cannot ultimately idealize Morris as a narcissistic identification because with her chameleon appearance she resists totalization. Rossetti's photographic idealization of her thus ironically recognizes her individuality. This is a situation of photography *en abyme*—not with mirrors, as in Craig Owens's influential article, but in an interplay between life, history, photography, and painting. In the slippage between the various painted Morris and startlingly different-

⁹¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 5.

⁹² That changeability, in part, may make her face so suited to representing a variety of women: art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn asks, "How could a face that is so idiosyncratic that it is instantly recognizable, in the work of other artists as well as that of Rossetti, convincingly impersonate so diverse a range of literary, legendary and allegorical figures?" Prettejohn, "'Beautiful Women with Floral Adjuncts,'" in Treuherz et. al., 92.

looking photographed Morrises, the viewer falls into a *mise en abyme*, or “abyss—the indefinite play of substitution, repetition, the splitting of the self.”⁹³

If the photograph hides the vase or shell of art around *das Ding*, what does it mean to take a picture of that very shell, in its human guise? Moreover, what if that indexically represented object of sublimation can also only be seen in light of the art that depicts her? These photographs, unlike typical ones, show the way the symbolic covers the real; they reveal the artifice. Rossetti’s obsessive need to paint Morris created a vase around the vase, an anamorphosis of an anamorphosis, a redoubled distancing from *das Ding*. In photographing Morris in the process of sublimation, Rossetti has unchained indexicality, at least partly: we see the woman to be idealized, and the vase/art/decoration at the same time. We see the vase being created around the disenfranchised object (the actual woman) who is elevated to the status of the lady in the paintings in the process of the creation of that decoration.

Looking very closely at the Parsons photographs as a group, identifying their similarities and differences, provides a surprising experience of recognition. The photographs in which Morris looks the least like Rossetti’s paintings (even if he created a painting based on that photograph) provide an inroad with which to abandon the Rossettian image-repertoire. For example, a close comparison of Fig. 10 to Fig. 11, both profiles, reveals that although Morris is posed quite similarly, the line of her jaw appears quite different in each. In Fig. 10 that jaw is strong and angular, and that angle is replicated by the smaller angles of her earlobe and where it connects to her jaw. In Fig. 11, however, the jaw is soft and curving, no doubt due to the way she has bent her head forward. That softness is replicated by the softer

⁹³ Craig Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” *October* 5 (summer 1978): 77.

curve of her earlobe and its angle of attachment.⁹⁴ To try to mentally imagine these divergent images as one individual is difficult; it might be easier to image them as sisters. Too many details from photograph to photograph don't quite add up. However, this slippage from image to image can provide a glimpse of her actual appearance.

In this aspect of the photographs, Morris's changing appearance doesn't undo indexicality, rather, it confirms it in its precision. It breaks down Rossetti's iconicization of Morris. If courtly love implies the lover's sense of the way the beloved perfectly fits the lover's needs, courtly love's own indexicality, what happens if the woman's appearance shifts so much? It demonstrates that the lover's feeling is imaginary.

Lacan uses the term "lure" to describe ways that subjects adopt masks from the image-repertoire. Describing Caillois's discussion of mimicry in animals, Lacan says, "the being gives of itself, or it receives from the other, something which is mask, double, envelope, detached skin, detached to cover the frame of a shield."⁹⁵ Morris's chameleon changes are not mimicry, and her persistently unusual appearance precludes those changes from being masks appropriated from the cultural image-repertoire. Perhaps it was exactly these characteristics that so compelled Rossetti to sublimate her.

Celebrating Morris in his poem *Heart's Compass*, the earliest draft of which dates to 1871, Rossetti designated her "the meaning of all things that are."⁹⁶ His description thus

⁹⁴ Obviously this raises the question of whether or not one of these images was reproduced backwards, and thus if the two images actually show two different sides of her face. In another photograph (Ovenden, Fig. 7), which shows her from the left side, there is a tiny trail of curls growing down her neck which is not visible in photographs which show her from the right. This indicates that these photographs most likely were not reversed and are of the same side of her face. Graham Ovenden, *Pre-Raphaelite Photography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1872).

⁹⁵ Lacan, *XI*, 98.

⁹⁶ "Heart's Compass," HL XXVII, cited in Sonstroem, 121. The date of the draft comes from the online Rossetti Archive, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/12-1871.raw.html>.

aligns her with the idea of the courtly lady as the signifier of signification. At the same time, these photographs represent the hint of Morris's future return of Rossetti's love, the courtly answer of the real.

Rossetti keeps the image of the aloof courtly lady of the Parsons photographs for himself. In his paintings, he undoes her aloofness, by making her expression more accessible, unbending her tightly curled wrists, and re-creating her as more obviously open to desire. He transforms Morris, the middle class—albeit aesthetic—wife and mother of two into a totemic, sexualized, desirous woman, even if, as his contemporaries attested, he represents her truthfully in terms of recognizability. If reading the loved body for the cause of desire is not unlike looking at a photograph and finding the *punctum*,⁹⁷ the detail which creates desire, we have to imagine Rossetti reading the photos and then exaggerating those details to draw attention to their desirousness and shift Morris toward availability. The photos let him read her body for desire in a way he could not in person: they create a distance that paradoxically allows him to possess her.

Antigone's Beauty

The obvious historical insistence on Morris's compelling beauty raises the issue of the beautiful in terms of the courtly. In the *Ethics*, Lacan privileges beauty over the good, because beauty, he argues, doesn't take us in. The belief in the good, of capitulating to the desires of one's neighbor, is what causes subjects to give ground relative to their desire. (This is one way of looking at William Morris's acceptance of Rossetti's love affair with his wife.) At the limit of the good, the subject is confronted with the incomprehensibility of his or her

⁹⁷ See Chapter 2.

own desire. The good, Lacan argues, is what we must get past in order to approach desire. Beauty is what lies beyond the good.

According to Lacan, the subject believes in the existence of an other who has the object which will fulfill the subject's desire; this object is the lure. This situation represents the fantasm, the mystery of the subject's desire. We need psychoanalysis to help us to traverse this fantasm and not to cede ground in relation to our desire; until that happens, we are all taken in by the good and cannot see that there is no object. Lacan privileges beauty over the good because of beauty's ability to disarm desire, which is the goal of analysis. In the shifted perspective of the space of the beautiful, Lacan argues, there is no longer an object.⁹⁸

In his poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats writes,

Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.⁹⁹

Yet truth, Lacan notes, "is not pretty to look on."¹⁰⁰ Beauty hides the ugliness of truth.

Beauty, unbearable to human eyes, can only be seen from the space Antigone occupies between the two deaths, from that anamorphic perspective. Antigone's radical adherence to her desire, her refusal to give in to the good, situates her in the field of the beautiful.

Morris's canonization as the epitome of beauty is not exactly the kind of beauty Lacan attributes to Antigone. Antigone's beauty is inhuman, precisely because she is exiled from the symbolic and anticipating her physical death. However, the fact that Lacanian beauty is a space in which there is no longer any object does pertain to these photographs.

⁹⁸ Lacan, *VII*, 238.

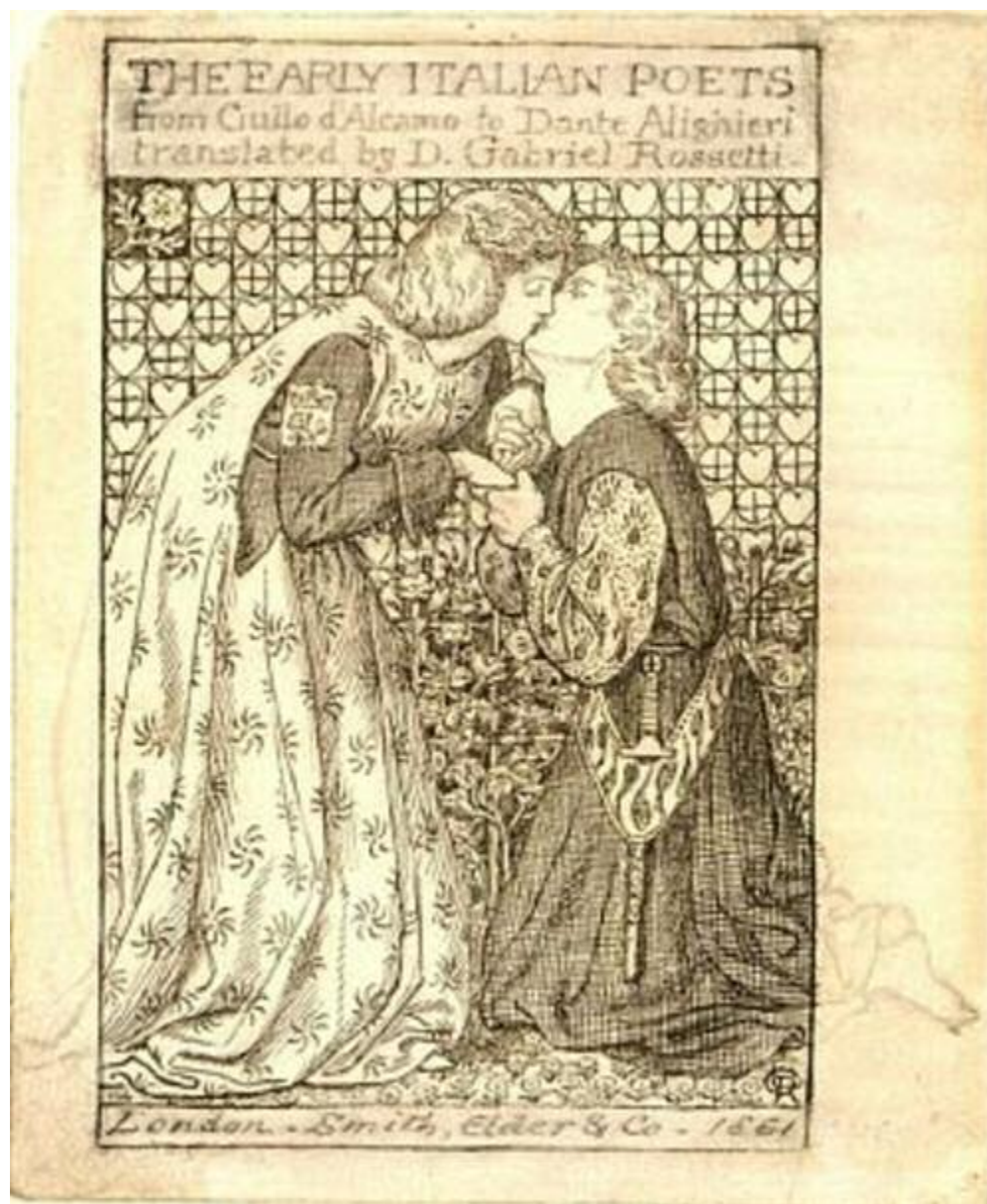
⁹⁹ Keats, line 49-50.

¹⁰⁰ Lacan, *VII*, 217.

Rossetti's longing for Morris as his object of desire was never satisfied. His sublimation of her places her in the space of *das Ding*. Sublimation, when narcissistic, radically ignores the subjectivity of the object thus elevated. Yet Rossetti's failure to paint Morris in a way that he found successful indicates a slippage of narcissistic sublimation. His attempts to idealize her on canvas and to encase her in glittering Stendhalian crystals failed. Her individuality escaped him, and he knew it. Despite his best efforts, Rossetti's deep love for Morris, although inspired by her beauty and deeply obsessive, was based on her individuality, as was Barthes's for his mother. His love for her functioned in terms of the active gift of love, in spite of his best efforts. Morris's astonishingly mutable beauty, which escaped language, paint, and photography, demonstrates the imaginary nature of the desired object.



Chapter 4, Fig. 1: Parsons and Rossetti,
Jane Morris, 1865



Chapter 4, Fig. 2: Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
"The Rose Garden," 1860-61



Chapter 4, Fig. 3



Chapter 4, Fig. 4



Chapter 4, Fig. 5



Chapter 4, Fig. 6:
"La Dame à la Licorne," 1480 - 1490



Chapter 4, Fig. 7



Chapter 4, Fig. 8



*The Burne Jones and Morris families
Photographed at the Grange in 1874
by Frederick Hollyer*

Chapter 4, Fig. 9 :



Chapter 4, Fig. 10



Chapter 4, Fig. 11

Chapter 5: Bringing Out the Past: Courtly Love and Nineteenth-Century American Men's Passionate Friendship Portraits

"However hard I look, I discover nothing."¹

"The Photograph . . . is a prophecy in reverse."²

Roland Barthes

From the time that daguerreotypes began to be used for portraiture, through various technological evolutions in photography, and into the first quarter of the twentieth century, men commemorated their loving friendships with photographic portraits.³ These men manifest their love in a variety of ways: gazing adoringly at each other, overlapping hands on a thigh, interweaving fingers, linking arms at the elbow, leaning in so their cheeks touch, and throwing an arm warmly around another's broad shoulder. There is no denying that what is

¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 99-100.

² Ibid., 87.

³ This project is based on published photographs in American collections; however, men's loving friendships and photographs commemorating them were not exclusive to America. Some collections include images of European origin. In addition, images of men of color are uncommon, although examples of African-American and Asian friends exist; interracial photographs are even rarer. See John Ibson, *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 45. Also, Ibson, 154: "My frequent perusal of [eBay's] photo wares has greatly enhanced my sense of how representative my collection is and how distinctive the images of men together have been, in contrast to images of women together or of men and woman together. . . . I have consulted several archives of vernacular photographs . . . one encounters comparatively few images of men of color, either for sale or in archives," x.

expressed is love, but is it the love of friends or lovers? Do the affectionate touches and the fond looks these men exchange reflect desire, and if so of what type?⁴

Even if what a single photograph shows cannot be ascertained, the photographs as a vast body of images still provide evidence of a time that was free from homophobia as we know it today. This genre of portraiture dates from a time in which sex between men was a crime. Yet the men who sat for these warm photographic testaments to their relationships are, as art historian David Deitcher compassionately comments, “innocent of the suspicion that such behavior would later arouse.”⁵ The genre represents what Barthes might call a “prophecy in reverse.”⁶ Courtly love provides a method with which to analyze these photographs, the desires they inspire, and what they withhold.

Several books collect images from this genre of portraiture, and there are a number of identifiable subgenres.⁷ In photographs of two men, one often sees variations on the following: one man sitting on another man’s lap, two men side by side holding hands, one

⁴ This chapter will center around relations between men; the phenomenon of the collectibility of such portraits has been focused on images of men. Furthermore, as artist and critic Deborah Bright argues, “Eroticized male-male relations from photography’s beginnings to gay liberation have been lovingly excavated, published, and written about . . . Lesbian or ‘sapphic’ photographs were almost exclusively produced by men as a staple fantasy of straight porn. As ‘normal women’ were not believed (permitted) to be interested in sex outside of marriage and reproduction, no self-identified erotic image commerces by and for women developed until the 1970s, within the context of feminism. The same holds true for non-white men and women whose desires and bodily image heritages are also marked and shaped by historical subordination.” Bright, *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire* (London: New York: Routledge, 1998), 11. Not only is there an absence of women’s commercial erotic photography, but despite written evidence of women’s passionate friendships, evidently little photographic evidence has come to light. According to GLTBQ, an online encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, transsexual, bisexual, and queer culture, “The vast majority of photographic images made by lesbians remain hidden in private photo albums and never reach public display,” see “Photography: Lesbian, Pre-Stonewall,” http://www.glbtq.com/arts/photography_lesbian_pre_stonewall.html. One photographer whose work documents late-nineteenth-century lesbian culture is Alice Austen.

⁵ David Deitcher, *Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together, 1840-1918* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 50.

⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 87.

⁷ In addition to the books by Deitcher and Ibson, see also Russell Bush, *Affectionate Men: A Photographic History of a Century of Male Couples (1850s to 1950s)* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998).

man sitting in a chair while a man stands beside him wrapping his arms around his seated friend, men pointing guns at each other with their arms wrapped around each other, and men with their legs intertwined.

An anonymous daguerreotype of two unidentified young men from 1845-50 provides a striking example of the latter (Fig. 1). In a delicate gold frame, the well-preserved image rests as if protected (from us?) by an oblong octagonal mat, also gold. The daguerreotype is in excellent condition; the nubby texture of the light-colored trousers of the figure on the left is clearly visible. What is remarkable about the image is the men's physical intimacy. The image is cropped so that the figures' lower legs are lost, the tight focus giving the viewer a sense of closeness to the sitters, and compressing their bodies closer together. They are seated side by side, a wooden chair visible beneath the man on the right. Their bodies are on the same level, their heads at the same height; their heads, shoulders, and torsos face the camera directly, identically. Both men are dressed similarly in frock coats with short, knotted cravats; they even have identical beards, low and cupping their chins.

The man on the right has handsome, expressive features, an elegantly and carefully shaped light mustache, collar-length wavy hair, and perhaps a touch of wistfulness in eyes that nevertheless look with a certain boldness into the viewer's. His right shoulder is just in front of his friend's left, and he leans back into his companion. His legs are spread apart, and his right leg is crossed over his companion's left leg, the contrast between his dark trousers and his companion's light-colored ones drawing attention to their interlocked legs. The man on the left has a more reserved expression, eyes facing outward but not engaging the viewer's directly, and shorter, more strictly combed-back hair. His legs are also spread but not so far apart, and he plants his right hand firmly, even possessively, on his friend's thigh where it

crosses his own. A prominent ring on his pinky finger calls attention to the solid weight of his palm on his friend's leg, and the joints of his knuckles are visible in exquisite detail where his long fingers bend to wrap around and lightly grip his friend's thigh, keeping it securely in place. His other arm is wrapped around the shoulder of the man on the right, keeping an equally attentive hold there, fingertips almost caressing the velvety lapel, with his index finger intriguingly raised ever so slightly.

But where are the hands of the man on the right? Neither is visible. His left hand is buried in his trouser pocket, so that not even a sliver of wrist is visible, although the presence of that hand is visible beneath the fabric of the pants, pointing toward—touching?—his groin. His right hand disappears behind his knee in the vicinity of the friend's upper—very upper—thigh; his own thigh is fairly distant from his friend's knee, closer to the friend's body. There can't be much room for that hand, between the darkly clad thigh and the lightly clad hips. In fact, that right hand could almost be in his friend's pocket. Or, it is conceivable, in his pants.

Their faces are serious, not sad, but solemn in a way that seems somewhat at odds with the casualness of the widespread legs and crossed thighs. They would have had to sit still for several minutes (perhaps that's why they are solemn) during the exposure time of the daguerreotype. During those minutes perhaps they reflected on this portrait of their closeness while it was being taken, thinking about the satisfaction of possessing it, this series of moments precipitated on a polished silver plate. They hold onto each other as they sit still. It is a serious occasion, one for fine garments and pinky rings and carefully combed hair, but also one for spread legs and crossed thighs and an affectionate arm around a shoulder. And

then there are those hidden hands, which might be able to tell a little more if only they were more visible.

Deitcher asks, “How was it that such men were so comfortable posing so closely together?”⁸ Yet this was a widespread convention of the portrayal of men together, one men and photographers embraced and repeated for decades until the early twentieth century, when their popularity began to wane. There are multiple reasons that the fashion for of such images dwindled, but their disappearance correlates with the pathologization of homosexuality and the concurrent rise of homophobia, especially from the late 1940s until the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion heralded the gay rights movement.⁹

In 2001, Deitcher curated *Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together, 1840-1818*, an exhibition at the International Center for Photography in New York, of mainly nineteenth-century photographs apparently taken to commemorate male friendships. The show drew attention to and revealed the importance of this genre of portraits both historically and politically. Deitcher refers to these relationships as “passionate friendships,” referring to the study of the ambiguous love displayed in same-sex relationships that began with Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s 1975 article, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America.”¹⁰ Deitcher previously published an article about

⁸ Deitcher, *Dear Friends*, 14.

⁹ Allen Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images From Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 115, discussing suppressed eroticism of Minor White’s nudes. See also: Bright, “a cultural backlash spawned by the Depression produced stringent new laws aimed at suppressing public visibility of homosexuality in entertainment, employment, and social life. The postwar Red Scare with its publicized purges, witchhunts, and linking of homosexuality to pathology and communism constructed the deep closets where most men hid their queer lives from 1945 to 1970,” 10.

¹⁰ Smith-Rosenbrg, *Signs* 1 (1975): 1-29.

this genre in 1998.¹¹ The subsequent publication of several additional books collecting photographs of this genre testifies to their present and past popularity and importance. In his catalogue of the show, Deitcher investigates the undecidability of desire in this genre from the point of view of his own experience as a gay man and in terms of “the desire they elicit among individuals who know of their existence and care about their fate.”¹²

The loving friendship photographs present what appears to be a satisfiable and thus idealized desire. The apparent unity of the couples pictured in these portraits is the reciprocal love for which the courtly lover longs. In these photographs, it is not so much the sitters who are idealized, although one of the appeals of the genre is that many of the men are attractive and undoubtedly quite desirable to many viewers. The difficulty of identifying what type of desire is expressed and in what ways it may or may not have been acted on arouses the viewer’s desire to know more about the subjects and the times in which they lived and loved each other, a desire that is ultimately unsatisfiable and, therefore, unending.¹³

Instead of depicting an ideal but distant woman, the loving friendship portraits appear to represent an ideal but distant, lost world in which, it seems, men can love each other freely and desires can be satisfied. Courtliness is displaced from a desire for a specific idealized other to a desire for a potentially utopic ideal past. In the words of Thomas Waugh, an

¹¹ “Looking at Photographs, Looking for the Past,” in Bright, 23-36.

¹² See <http://www.daviddelitcher.com/aboutthebook.html>. Deitcher’s website states that “Enthusiastic collectors—most of them gay—have rescued these enigmatic objects from oblivion.”

¹³ In fact, as Deitcher points out, the absence of information about the subjects is part of what arouses his desire: “their elusiveness, their resistance to naming and categorization.” Deitcher, *Dear Friends*, 150.

historian of gay visual culture, these images may offer “a visual manifesto of the right to love.”¹⁴

Cruising and Dispersed Desire

For Barthes, desirous love does not have to be directed to a specific object. Barthes describes Stendhal’s being in love with Italy in a way that is appropriate for this situation. “It is like love,” Stendhal says, “and yet I am not in love with anyone.” Stendhal’s love is not a generalized love for Italy, but like a Barthesian lover he has fallen for particular aspects of Italy: “for the cornstalks of the ‘luxuriant’ Milanese campagna, for the sound of the Duomo’s eight bells, ‘perfectly *intonate*,’ or for the pan-fried cutlets that reminded him of Milan.”¹⁵ Stendhal’s passion for Italy was love at first sight; it took the form of “a soprano singing in Cimarosa’s *Matrimonio segreto* at Ivrea; the singer had a broken front tooth, but love at first sight is never affected by such things.”¹⁶ Stendhal fell in love, not with the soprano, but with Italy.

Barthes describes this type of love as plural, dispersed:

What is loved and indeed what is enjoyed are collections, concomitances . . . a polyphony of pleasures. . . . This amorous plural, analogous to that enjoyed today by someone “cruising,” is evidently a Stendhalian principle: it involves an implicit theory of *irregular discontinuity* which can be said to be simultaneously aesthetic, psychological, and metaphysical; plural passion, as a matter of fact—once its excellence has been acknowledged—necessitates leaping from one object to another, as chance presents them, without

¹⁴ Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 102. He is referring specifically to the homoerotic work of the Pictorialists.

¹⁵ Barthes, “One Always Fails to Speak of What One Loves,” 297.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 296.

experiencing the slightest sentiment of guilt with regard to the disorder such a procedure involves.¹⁷

Stendhalian dispersed love requires a touristic innocence or naïveté that is free from day-to-day trivialities, or a willful ignorance “justified” by being a visitor, a tourist seeking pleasure. This is problematic; Barthes’s *Empire of Signs* is an example of the problem of this kind of love. The Japan he falls in love with is *his* Japan, a Japan whose culture he samples randomly and only as it pleases him. Yet it is also an idealizing desire.

Barthes posits Stendhal’s pluralized love in terms of cruising. Barthes’s fondness for Parisian hustlers, beautiful Moroccan boys and the gay corners of Tokyo, as well as his metaphorical use of the idea of cruising for a practice of reading, attest to his pleasurable and at times blissful partiality to cruising. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes advocates a cruising practice of reading, one in which the cruising reader awaits a flirtatious wink from the text.¹⁸ As a writer, Barthes relinquishes his control over the reader’s pleasure:

I must seek out this reader (must “cruise” him) without knowing where he is. A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader’s “person” that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an unpredictability of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game.¹⁹

This unpredictable dialectic of desire is operative in the ambiguity and anonymity of the loving friendship portraits.

To cruise photographs is to be open to the experience of the *punctum*, to have an eye out for it but not seek it out actively. Art historian Kris Cohen argues that the “prick” of the *punctum* may be read in relation to gay sexuality. First of all, the *punctum* enters the body as

¹⁷ Ibid., 298.

¹⁸ Lawrence D. Kritzman, “The Discourse of Desire and the Question of Gender,” *Signs in Culture: Roland Barthes Today*, eds. Steven Ungar and Betty R. McGraw (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 101.

¹⁹ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 4.

a surprise, as if, Cohen writes, it surprised Barthes from behind. The *punctum* represents a “penetrative reciprocity, the capacity for each of two bodies reciprocally and sequentially to penetrate one another, [which] is one of the practices of gay sex most disruptive to heterosexuality.”²⁰ This sexualized *punctum* adds another layer to the practice of cruising photographs.

Barthes describes cruising as

the voyage of desire. . . . The body is in a state of alert, on the lookout for its own desire. And then cruising implies a temporality that accentuates the meeting, the “first time.” As if the first meeting possessed an unheard-of privilege: that of being withdrawn from all repetition. Repetition is a baleful thing for me—stereotype, the same old thing, naturalness as repetition. Cruising is anti-natural, anti-repetition. Cruising is an act that repeats itself, but its catch is absolutely fresh.²¹

Cruising implies an “I’ll know it when I see it—and when it sees me” attitude, a sort of mutual recognition, whether in reading or in an erotic cruise. Ideally it resists stereotype and is open to a variety of desires. Cruising is an opportunity for the answer of the real.

Barthes’s theorization of cruising provides a way to think about the rediscovery of the genre of loving friendship portraits. What a lovely surprise it must have been to flip through shoeboxes filled with vintage wedding portraits, photographs of children in long skirts and knee breeches, or formally suited men engaging the camera solitarily, and then to come across a photograph of two men with their arms wrapped around each other, gazing welcomingly at the viewer, opening a veil onto a lost male community. And then to find another, and then others, mingling, closeted, among random assortments of vintage photographs, and to realize that an entire genre was waiting to be re-found.

²⁰ Cohen, 10.

²¹ Barthes, “Twenty Key Words,” 231.

The Barthesian cruiser shares some qualities with the Barthesian lover who awaits an answer of the real from the beloved. Barthes draws attention to the similarity of the cruiser and lover by saying, “the cruiser and the lover are both equally distant from married people. . . . Both excluded.”²² Yet differently from the cruiser, the lover’s deepest conscious hope is to become part of a united couple. All the same, the lover exists in a position in which such a relationship is permanently impossible. Barthes distinguishes the cruiser and the lover in another way: “the practices of the cruiser don’t coincide at all with the ascetic practices of the lover, who doesn’t scatter himself through the world, remaining instead imprisoned with his image.”²³ And while the cruiser may attain momentary satisfaction, it is theoretically never adequate, thus leading the cruiser to try to repeat the “first time.”²⁴ Both seek for and decipher signs of desire from the other(s). Here, perhaps, is where the arbitrariness of the descriptions of the courtly lady, her evident substitutability, link lover and cruiser together, even though their immediate goals—timeless unity with the beloved versus the excitement of the brief encounter—are so different. In both cases, desire flourishes.

Deitcher acknowledges this element of cruising when he comments that his relationship to loving friendship portraits is

akin to flirtation. It parallels the sense of limitless possibility that depends on not knowing very much more about a man than is suggested by his presence. . . . As in flirtation, the collector's desire to sustain a relationship with these photographs and to the men they record embraces uncertainty.²⁵

²² Barthes, “Greatest Cryptographer,” 300.

²³ Ibid., 298-99.

²⁴ Barthes, “Twenty Key Words,” 231.

²⁵ Deitcher, *Dear Friends*, 16.

Deitcher's comments on flirtation, while not using the word "cruising," nevertheless address the possibilities afforded by anonymity and how that anonymity sustains desire in a way that is quite appropriate to these images.

Cruising offers certain freedoms and pleasures; nevertheless, art critic Allen Ellenzweig asks "whether stand-up quick sex in down-and-out corners is a truly free choice in the gay ghetto, or a learned behavior by some who are suffused with guilt, shamed, and a determined need to be degraded in degrading circumstances."²⁶ The passionate friendship photographs insist that the viewer imagine a world where there is no necessity of a gay ghetto. But they keep in play the pleasurable experience of the possibilities of cruising anonymous men.

To fall into desirous love anonymously in this manner is a way to avoid what Freud abhors, the love of one's neighbor. It allows for the possibility to lose sight of the "fundamental evil" in the self and the neighbor, and opens the potential to not give ground relative to one's desire. The recuperation of anonymous and ambiguous photographs of loving male couples, is a practice which also permits the viewer to forget the "wickedness" of others; it is idealization from an ethical distance.

The cruiser's desire for the anonymous and Stendhal's touristic desire for the unfamiliar can have a recuperative aspect. Stendhal wrote, "When I am with the Milanese and speak their dialect, I forgot that men are wicked, and the whole wicked aspect of my own soul instantly falls asleep."²⁷ The erotic cruiser desires to maintain anonymity, not passing judgment on the other much beyond attractiveness and willingness. A dispersed love, instead

²⁶ Ellenzweig, 146.

²⁷ Barthes, "One Always Fails to Speak of What One Loves," 300.

of idealizing the beloved object and seeing it as the ultimate perfection, allows the lover to forget what Lacan terms the “evil” of an individual or group. Forgetting one’s own evil and the evilness of others has the potential to defeat the dangers of the love of one’s neighbor.

The intentionality of the eroticism in these portraits cannot be ascertained; nor can the intentions of the sitter’s desires. To long to know what the other desires, and if the other desires the subject (or someone with whom the subject can identify) is courtly. Deitcher writes eloquently about the unknowability of the sitters:

Part of me would like to know if one, or the other, or both were survived by wives and children. But another part of me would rather never know. . . . The naturalized identification of marriage and parenting with heterosexuality has so often been used to deny the queer past—and so often gay men and lesbians have been coerced into acquiescing to this conspiracy of self-denial . . . same-sexers have been coerced into living as straight people and had little choice but to assist in expunging their deviant desires from the historical record.²⁸

Knowing who the subjects are, and even knowing that they married and had children, does not necessarily mean that they did not also having loving and/or sexual relationships with men. This is the particular power of these images: they disrupt the assumptions typically made about heterosexuality. In the case of a particular photograph in which two affectionate male subjects are not only identified but are revealed to be unscrupulous Texas cattle barons, Deitcher finds that that information does little to diminish his feelings about the image.²⁹ His desire prevails.

The tension around the puzzle of what the loving friendship portraits represent is demonstrated by a (straight?) collector’s assertion that “the same-sex affection such

²⁸ Deitcher, in Bright, 31.

²⁹ Deitcher, *Dear Friends*, 26.

photographs record was, of course, ‘legitimate.’”³⁰ Equating legitimacy with heterosexuality without even having to spell it out, this comment associates homosexuality with the illegitimate, and with immorality and guilt. Such a statement is evidence of what Deitcher calls “the compulsion to makes sense of these nineteenth-century facts in terms of twentieth-century dichotomies;”³¹ to judge the images in terms of heterosexuality versus homosexuality, licit versus illicit, is to efface the more complex continuum of desires, from friendly to erotic to sexual, that characterized relationships between men in the nineteenth century.

The questions about men’s relationships raised by the loving friendship portraits are part of a greater ambiguity about how to understand relations between nineteenth-century men, and women, in general. Prior to the coining of the term “homosexuality” in 1869 by Káároly Mária Kertbeny, a Hungarian writer and translator,³² and its subsequent pathologization in the 1880s, sexualities were much more fluid. The potential freedom afforded to men prior to the stigmatization of homosexuality is tragically undergirded by the fact that sodomy was illegal and punishable; such laws were enforced to varying degrees, but were nonetheless a constant threat hanging over the lives of men who loved men. But it was the acts that were punishable; individuals were not necessarily stigmatized for their desires or identifications alone. Ironically, it was the naming and stigmatization that led to the consolidation of homosexuality as an identity. Foucault describes this transformation:

³⁰ Ibid., 35.

³¹ Deitcher, in Bright, note 9; he is criticizing Anthony Rotundo’s article “Romantic Friendship: Male Intimacy and Middle-Class Youth in the Northern United States, 1800-1900,” *Journal of Social History* 23 (autumn 1989): 1-25.

³² Ellenzweig, 15, cites Manfred Herzer, “Kertbeny and the Nameless Love,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 12 (autumn 1985): 1-26.

An entire sub-race was born, different—despite certain kinship ties—from the libertines of the past . . . the . . . category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized . . . less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy into a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul.³³

Gay identity and community thus emerged in part in response to homophobia, and are, for the present moment, difficult to separate.

To dream of a time without homophobia, when all men could show physical affection with pleasure and without fear is not necessarily to imagine a world without gay identity, but instead to dream of a future in which politics no longer necessitate a community that needs to defend itself. It is a willing openness to love all men who show affection for other men, and to be able to forget, momentarily, as Deitcher forgave the unscrupulous cattle barons, the evil that might have made them bad neighbors. It is to privilege love over Good, and to persist in one's desire.

Photography and Gay Culture

The interest of contemporary gay men as described by Deitcher in the loving friendship portraits is part of a history of appropriating mainstream, socially sanctioned imagery to acknowledge desires that mainstream culture condemns.³⁴ There may be nostalgia involved in the collection of these photographs, but such collection also has a capacity for disruption. “Being drawn this way to enigmatic artifacts provides evidence of longing,”

³³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 43.

³⁴ As Halpern observes, the act of anal sex can be seen as an appropriation of a bodily orifice “by a certain discourse other than the orifice itself,” 94.

Deitcher writes, “longing for the self-validation that results from having a history to refer to; longing for a comforting sense of connection to others—past as well as present—whose experience mirrors one’s own.”³⁵ They are an important part of recovering a lost past, of beginning to fill in what Deitcher calls “the absence of history where history should be.”³⁶ In that absence, Deitcher argues, “the importance of this modest salvage operation [should not] be denied on the basis of its more speculative (and therefore depreciated) historical method.”³⁷ Deitcher situates the recovery of gay history as an act of defiance:

Resistance compels the queer historian to unearth precious traces of that past, and to disseminate them in the form of previously untold stories of men and women, some of whom succeeded as others failed to live with and act on their forbidden love. Through such acts of recuperation, the queer historian helps to ensure the continued availability of that past as a source of validation and connection for more or less isolated individuals in the future.³⁸

Photographer and writer Deborah Bright observes that “photographs depicting or hinting at lived men’s and women’s transgressive desires in the years before Stonewall have become precious relics, treasured and woven into the narratives queers have constructed about their suppressed histories.”³⁹ They have struck a deep chord with people oppressed because their desires have been designated shameful, sinful or criminal. Not only that, the recuperation of these images demonstrates, as Deitcher says, “the potential for personal desires to lead to the disclosure of public truths.”⁴⁰

³⁵ Deitcher, *Dear Friends*, 14.

³⁶ Deitcher, in Bright, 32.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Bright, 10.

⁴⁰ Deitcher, in Bright, 34.

Barthes excels in the theoretical use of personal desires. Suffering greatly following the death of his mother, Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida* that her death left him in a place where he could only anticipate his own death, and that this is what he discovered in the Winter Garden Photograph. “Every photograph is this catastrophe,” he writes: every photograph declares that photography’s *noeme*, “this-has-been,” is inseparable from its universal *punctum*, that the subject/referent will die, and, as another living being, so will the viewer. The photograph he chooses to demonstrate this concept is Alexander Gardner’s portrait of Lewis Payne, 1865 (Fig. 2). Payne was a conspirator in the attempt to assassinate Secretary of State W. H. Seward as part of a larger conspiracy against the federal government orchestrated by John Wilkes Booth. Payne is in his cell awaiting his execution by hanging. Barthes writes,

The 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. . . . 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 that has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.⁴¹

Barthes’s choice of the Gardner image makes sense in terms of the fact that Payne is anticipating his own death, as the viewer of any photograph must do, according to Barthes. Yet it seems odd that Barthes uses the image of an assassination conspirator to illustrate the way he feels in front of the photograph of his lost beloved mother.

A clue to his choice lies in his offhand comment that “The photograph is handsome, as is the boy;” Payne is more than handsome. In this photograph, he has seductively heavy-lidded almond eyes, beautifully shaped voluptuous lips, a strong chin with a slight cleft, thick

⁴¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

dark hair, and elegantly arched expressive eyebrows. Gardner's lighting caresses Payne's clear skin, strong neck, and broad shoulders beneath their prison shirt. Payne's visible thigh is heavily muscled, his torso flat and firm. Yet his manacled hands have a delicate poise as he leans back against the rough-surfaced cell wall, his face heroically but gently stoic and accepting of his fate. It is hard to imagine him as a murderer.⁴² Barthes's sympathies (and desires) lie with the handsome boy, not the Secretary of State.

This is not the only photograph Gardner took of the imprisoned Payne. Of two other photographs, one (Fig. 3) shows him as almost unpleasant looking, standing in a long coat; the other, with Payne posed much as he is in the *Camera Lucida* image, shows him less sympathetically and attractively (Fig. 4). Given Barthes's avowed fondness for boys, a desirous reading of this photograph illuminates his discussion of the photographic catastrophe. Barthes uses the unseen Winter Garden Photograph to discuss his anguish over the loss of his mother and the catastrophic quality of photography that he learned from it. Barthes's use of the Gardner image bemoans a different kind of loss which Barthes describes in *Incidents*, a posthumously published collection of journal fragments. *Incidents* closes with Barthes's heartbreak over realizing that that at the age of sixty-five, it is unlikely that he will again experience the love of "one boy."⁴³ That realization is another catastrophe.⁴⁴

The kinds of recovered histories that Deitcher celebrates echo a discovery made by literary theorist D.A. Miller about Barthes. In *Bringing Out Roland Barthes*, Miller describes

⁴² Christian Boltanski's *Detective* (1987) emphasizes the photograph's inability to represent criminal tendencies. He appropriates photographs of criminals and victims from true crime magazines and collages them in an installation without captions, so that with each image the viewer is confronted by the impossibility of discerning the difference.

⁴³ Barthes, *Incidents*, 73.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 2. Barthes also uses the word catastrophe to describe rejection by the lover as related to abandonment by the mother. Here he feels rejected not by a lover but by all potential "boy" lovers.

an event in which he discovered evidence of Barthes's experience that surprisingly mirrored his own. Preparing for a trip to Japan, Miller perused a guide to Tokyo's gay sex districts. He was startled to recognize that a hand-drawn map Barthes reproduced in *Empire of Signs*, his book on Japan, was identical to a map in Miller's guidebook.⁴⁵ Miller had previously understood Barthes's travels in Japan as sexually impoverished, thinking that Barthes "in fact had no sexuality, in any sense that counted had no sex."⁴⁶ He instead found a savvy traveler whose sexual adventures he shared.⁴⁷

Empire of Signs is about Barthes's deliberately naïve immersion in Japanese culture (with some exceptions, such as his maps) in order to explore the emptiness of signs. He is particularly insistent about the unreadability of the Japanese body and face. In Japan, he finds "the nothingness or the excess of the exotic code," in which individuals fail to assimilate into types because he cannot read which signs might comprise a type. The individuality of a Japanese person "cannot be understood in a Western sense . . . individuality is not closure, theater, outstripping, victory; it is simply difference, refracted, without privilege, from body to body."⁴⁸ Barthes describes Japanese eyes as slits created by a perfect brushstroke, miraculously flat, and kept in intriguing reserve behind the upper lid. Whereas for Barthes the Western eye "is subject to a whole mythology of the soul, central and secret, whose fire, sheltered in the orbital cavity, radiates toward a fleshy, sensuous, passionate exterior," the

⁴⁵ D. A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Barthes, *Empire*, 97-98.

Japanese eye in its flatness holds no hierarchical position in the face, making the face “entirely alive.”⁴⁹ This nonhierarchical face adds to the unreadability of the Japanese body.

Miller’s revelation of Barthes’s erotic tourism adds significance to two photographs in *Empire of Signs*, both head shots of Japanese actor Kazuo Funaki. He is the perfect picture of the exotically handsome Japanese movie star, in costume as a warrior with fletches of arrows in a quiver visible over one shoulder. One photograph opens the book (Fig. 5); in that image, the actor looks seriously at the viewer, jaws lightly clenched, curved lips pressed together with a slight shadow under his lower lip. His darkly luminous eyes are stern yet warm, his skin flawless, his cheekbones strong, as are his jaw and chin. The other photograph (Fig. 6), an almost identically framed head shot, closes the book, with the actor in the same costume. Yet in this photograph, which Barthes has captioned “Close to smiling,” the actor’s lips are slightly open and barely curved up at the edges. His jaw has relaxed, which gives his entire face a softer expression, and the stern compassion in his eyes has lightened to a quiet pleasure. His smile is one of appraisal, perhaps the smile of someone cruising who has sighted an attractive target. The two photographs, framing Barthes’s text, progress from an impossibly perfect and unavailable movie star to a man who is still impossibly perfect but open, at least acknowledging that the viewer’s presence might be pleasurable. The photographs of Kazuo contradict Barthes’s claims about the unreadability of the Japanese body and face, and delineate a desirous, longed-for courtly progression in which the idealized object returns the interest of the lover.

Like Miller’s connection with Barthes via *Empire of Signs*, the passionate friendship photographs also forge connections between men. Before gay culture developed and became increasingly visible, isolated men who desired other men endured what literary theorist

⁴⁹ Ibid., 102.

Vincent Bertolini refers to as “the painful internal conflict resulting from acknowledging a structure of desires that cannot be satisfied through socially validated forms of practical life.”⁵⁰ Barthes describes the sense of exclusion he felt when he happened on the end of a wedding while visiting the Church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris:

He [speaking of himself in the third person] had received in a single gust all the divisions of which he is the object, as if, suddenly, it was the very being of exclusion with which he had been bludgeoned; dense and hard. For to the simple exclusions which this episode represented for him was added a final alienation: that of his language: he could not assume his distress in the very code of distress, i.e., *express it*: he felt more than excluded: *detached*: forever assigned the place of the *witness*.⁵¹

A man who came of age in West Virginia in the 1930s told art critic and author John Loughery, “I would have killed for one glimpse of a gay couple or even one single individual I could identify with as a gay adult.”⁵² As late as 1969, librarian and author William Benemann says of his experience at Berkeley, “I had never met another person who I knew was gay, never seen a gay character in a movie or on TV, never read a book with a gay character, never read anything that treated it as anything but an aberration. . . . There was a total embargo on information.”⁵³ This absence of access to a community and history is deeply oppressive.⁵⁴

Photography played a role in creating communities of shared desires. Historian Daniel Boorstin comments, “The story of the rise and perfection and simplification of

⁵⁰ Vincent Bertolini, “Fireside Chastity: The Erotics of Sentimental Bachelorhood in the 1850s,” *American Literature* 68 (December 1996): 719.

⁵¹ Barthes, *Barthes*, 85-6.

⁵² Ibson, 201.

⁵³ Cathy Cockrell, “Gay Bears! Campus archivist is preserving history of sexual minorities at Berkeley and beyond,” *The Berkleyan Online*, 6/7/200 <http://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2000/06/07/gaybears.html>

⁵⁴ Tee A. Corinne, introduction to “Lesbian Photography on the U.S. West Coast 1972-1997,” <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/WAAW/Corinne/index.html>.

photography has often been told, but photography as a transformer of experience has not been given its due.”⁵⁵ Like the poetry of courtly love, photography is both a product of and shaper of cultural practices. Queer theorist Thomas Waugh notes, “A multiply-produced photograph acknowledges both the preexistent desire of the individual spectator and the presence of another or others as well, a whole class.”⁵⁶ Photography’s indexicality provides evidence that there are and were other men who love men.

In photography’s earliest years, men and women were rarely photographed together, with the exception of wedding pictures and family portraits. Professor of American Studies John Ibson’s thorough (yet still anecdotal considering the innumerable photographs not available to examination) exploration of nineteenth-century genres of photographic portraiture indicates that images of men together are different in terms of affection and intimacy expressed than those of women together, or of men and women together. As Smith-Rosenberg points out, in the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, sexual spheres were quite separate.⁵⁷ In the relative absence of images of nineteenth-century heterosexual intimacy and affection (other than intentionally erotic or pornographic photographs), photographs of intimate men present an alternative past, one in which, instead of the gay man being left out, male-male affection is visually predominant.

Admiration of the male body is not solely the prerogative of men who sexually desire other men.⁵⁸ The classical or classically inspired male nude is a staple of artistic

⁵⁵ Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 371, cited in Ibson, 11.

⁵⁶ Waugh, 27.

⁵⁷ Smith-Rosenberg, 53.

⁵⁸ Ellenzweig, 14: “Phallic adoration is not the exclusive province of homosexual men . . . ”

representation; photography quickly became another way to represent such figures; images of nude men (and women) taken for artistic purposes have flourished from photography's earliest days. The photographs that painter Eugène Delacroix commissioned from photographer Eugène Durieu in 1853, a series of muscular male nudes in classically inspired poses (Fig. 7), are well-known examples.

Academic nudes, without being specifically targeted to a gay audience, nonetheless were but one instance of what Waugh refers to as gay men's "history of appropriated eroticisms."⁵⁹ The original intent of a photograph, Waugh comments, "is of little concern for the creative consumer, and in any case ecclesiastical paintings had been subtextual treasure hoards themselves long before the camera was ever invented."⁶⁰ Gradually the producers of artistic images realized an audience beyond artists existed for nude photographs, and they responded with photographs for a wider market. Such images remained cloaked in the alibi of art and of classicism; the term "alibi" describes legitimization of images, what Waugh calls "a disingenuous system of furtive sexual commodification and subtextual gratification that is all too familiar to gay constituencies of this century, and even to heterosexual erotic consumers (though in a more peripheral way)."⁶¹ For men who took pleasure at looking at pictures of men, that pleasure has long been bounded by "the codes of subterfuge, sublimation, and shame with which we have had to mask and divert that pleasure from the beginning."⁶² In the case of the development of gay subjectivity, the appropriation and sharing of these images, and the market's response to such appropriations, were formative.

⁵⁹ Waugh, 62.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 26-7.

Contemporary collectors, in seeking out images of male-male affection of the past, are continuing an activity that has been an important part of the development of gay subjectivity.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the salability of homoerotic imagery gradually led to the marketing of gay pornographic photography, a genre that abandons the refuge of alibis.⁶³ The earliest known extant explicitly homosexual photographs date from the 1880s, but written evidence attests to the presence of such images in London in the 1870s.⁶⁴ Gay pornography also allowed men to identify and affirm their desires, and it indicated the presence of a community and pleasures that were possible beyond the weight of social oppression.⁶⁵

Side by side with the growing market for homoerotic and pornographic photography was the genre of loving friendship portraits, which required no alibis to be not only acceptable but ubiquitous. The fact that gay pornography co-existed with the “innocent” portraits attests to a growing gay sensibility to which at least some of the sitters were attuned. Many of the pictures in this genre postdate Kertbeny’s 1868 coining of the term

⁶³ Ibid., 295. At the same time of course, heterosexual pornographic photography was proliferating and becoming increasingly commercialized. “By the end of the nineteenth century, worldwide underground networks existed for the distribution of illicit photos explicitly depicting sexual activities. . . . The new production concentrated, not surprisingly, in France, with Budapest and Vienna being important competitors around the turn of the century,” 286.

⁶⁴ Waugh, 288. However, an 1874 source to which Waugh attributes homophobia describes Algernon Swinburne and a friend sharing homoerotic photographs with Guy de Maupassant. “[Maupassant]: After lunch [Swinburne and his friend Powell] took out of gigantic portfolios some obscene photographs, life size, made in Germany—and there were nothing but pictures of men. Among others I recall one of an English soldier masturbating against a windowpane.” See Edmund Goncourt, *Paris and the Arts, 1851-1896: From the Goncourt Journal*, ed. and trans. by George Becker and Edith Phillips (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 145-57. Waugh acknowledges that “the reliability of this hearsay data is suspect of course, given the startling revelation of large-scale photo formats available in the 1870s, and the prurient context of the anecdote.”

⁶⁵ Todd Smith, “Gay Male Pornography and the East: Re-Orienting the Orient,” *History of Photography* 18 (spring 1994): 18. This statement was made in the context of the Kinsey archive’s pornography collection.

“homosexuality,” and are thus testimony to the overlapping of men’s loving friendships and the developing definition and stigmatization of homosexuality.

The earliest loving friendship portraits were made in commercial photo studios. Each is a self-portrait of a relationship, a deliberate and desired commemoration of friendship that purposefully draws attention to the fact that the friendship is full of love and physical closeness. The commercial photographers who took these studio portraits may certainly have had desires that are reflected in their work. But the sitters’ desires transcend those of the photographer.⁶⁶ They imply relations off-stage which are not necessarily part of the appeal of commercial pornographic or erotic images, in which the photographer’s desires and the commercial appeal of the image take precedence over the desires of the sitters.

Nineteenth-century portrait photography was a popular and profitable business.⁶⁷ Taking only daguerreotypes into account, an estimated 30 million photographs were produced during the 1840s and 50s.⁶⁸ Ibson has identified serial photographs of the same male sitters taken at a single session which demonstrate the sequence of some such sittings. The photographer would take three or more images of various intimate poses, the last image often being one man sitting on another’s lap, or, in the 1920s, kissing.⁶⁹ The existence of thousands of such images makes it clear that they were perfectly acceptable.

⁶⁶ “That some poses might originally have been the idea of the photographer rather than the subjects is immaterial. Subjects accepted the convention, and their comfort with it is clear,” Ibson, 83.

⁶⁷ Ibson, 13, citing John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 43.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 36, 145.

Barthes comments that “the photograph clearly only signifies because of the existence of a store of stereotyped attitudes which form ready-made elements of signification.”⁷⁰ The men who posed for the passionate friendship photographs did have a stock grammar which included, with some variation, one’s good clothes, often a frontal pose, and physical signs of affection. There was no necessity to smile, to appear carefree or spontaneous, to express a particular affect. Perhaps the photographer’s guidance in creating those poses allowed the sitters to relax into them. Yet ironically that stock grammar is what makes these photographs so arresting to contemporary eyes, in part because we cannot read it. What we can read is love. Barthes asserts, “it is not indifference which erases the weight of the image—the Photomat always turns you into a criminal type, wanted by the police—but love, extreme love.”⁷¹ That is the other factor evident in the comfort of so many of the sitters.

Orphans

The potential for a photograph to be appropriated increases when its original function has been lost. When photographs are separated from their context and from information which might situate them historically, they are called “orphans.” Legally, this term designates a photograph whose ownership cannot be identified for copyright and reproduction purposes.⁷² Beyond copyright issues, the orphaned photo acquires a forlorn or fugitive status. Photography historian Doug Nickel describes such photos as having become

“anonymous”—when the family history ends and the album surfaces at a flea market, photographic fair, or historical society—and the image is severed

⁷⁰ Barthes, “Photographic Message,” 22.

⁷¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 12.

⁷² See K. Scott, “Copy Cats,” *The British Journal of Photography* 153 (April 2006): 13-14.

from its original, private function—it also becomes open, available to a range of readings wider than those associated with its conception.⁷³

Similarly, Susan Sontag comments that a photograph separated from its context is “only a fragment, and with the passage of time the moorings become unstuck,” permitting the image to “[drift] away into a soft abstract pastness, open to any kind of reading.”⁷⁴ The orphaned aspect of the passionate friendship portraits is underscored by the fact that they are part of an entire orphaned genre.

The tension between the extreme specificity of the clearly focused portrait photograph and the absolute anonymity of the sitters makes the term orphan even more appropriate, since surely there are other pictures of their friends or family but those connections have been severed by time and the absence of language and cannot be remade. This makes the meaning of the passionate friendship portraits all the more alluringly undecidable: the sitters are anonymous, and the genre is one for which we are trying to decipher the grammar.

When Deitcher wrote his 1998 article, he referred to such images as

castoff[s] that [lie] unnoticed at the weekend flea market amid the indignity of unsorted elastic-bound stacks of other tintypes, cartes-de-visite, and postcards. . . . I identify with the weathered object. In its scuff marks and dents, I see the signs of age and more. I see the stigmata of their abandonment and mistreatment as so much discarded junk.⁷⁵

In the few years since his article was published, however, such photographs have become expensive collector’s items. Searching on eBay under “gay photographs” will reveal a

⁷³ Nickel is referring to snapshots, but the same could be said of earlier technologies. Nickel, “The Snapshot: Some Notes,” in *Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life: 1888 to the Present* (San Francisco: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 13, cited in Ibson, 199. Ibson quotes him in reference to romantic friendship photos.

⁷⁴ Sontag, *On Photography*, 71, cited in Ibson, 199. Ibson is using these two quotes to criticize what he perceives as ahistorical readings of such images; his emphasis is on placing them accurately in history.

⁷⁵ Deitcher, in Bright, 33.

number of such photographs, often high priced, some of which don't even show men together. As in the past, the reception and interpretation of the images by a public creates a commodifying mechanism.

If the photographs are orphans, contemporary gay men seeking evidence of a gay past may be thought of as historical orphans, seeking a deep history with which they can identify and through which they can trace cultural roots. The adult orphaned Barthes seeks a photographic image of his mother after her death, and finds her pure representation in a photograph taken when she was a child, long before he was born, his beloved mother that, he argues, only he can recognize. In these photographs, there is a vision of a gay ancestry that gay collectors first saw, one that others might not recognize. Historically, it has been of vital importance for gay men to be able to recognize each other without asking about sexual preference. At a forum titled "Is There a Gay Sensibility and Does It Have an Impact on Our Culture," journalist Jeff Weinstein said "No, there is no such thing as a sexual sensibility and yes, it has an enormous impact on our culture."⁷⁶ Ellenzweig points out that "complex signals and secret practices . . . [and] social behavior across class strata, can best be decoded and appreciated by the already initiated—that is, by others who share, or have come to share, the same sensibility."⁷⁷

In his memoirs, Félix Tournachon, known as Nadar, one of the most famous portrait photographers of the nineteenth century, demonstrates the romantic sensibility associated with men's loving friendships. Coming home at the end of the day, he writes:

⁷⁶ Weinstein, cited in Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality and the Movies*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 326. The source of my citation is Ellenzweig, 66, fn5.

⁷⁷ Ellenzweig, 66.

If your luck is to be perfect that day, that one with whom you can speak most intimately, who is never far from your thoughts and who thinks always of you, a kindred spirit who has passed time with you, is suddenly announced into the room. So it was my good fortune one evening to greet the soul, the brightest mind, the most quoted person in all of Paris, my dear friend Hérald de Pages.⁷⁸

Nadar's words bring to mind loving friends having their picture taken together, men like those of Fig. 8. Fig. 1 is of men in early adulthood; this image is of men closer to middle age. One wears glasses and holds a cigar between his fingers, and the other, with thinning hair, smokes a pipe. The man with glasses sits on his friend's lap, his right leg reaching across the picture and ending in a foot, intriguingly clad in a striped sock, that is cut off by the edge of the picture. The location of his left leg is a mystery. He has a small neat mustache, more abundant than the one sported by the man on the right in Fig. 1. He looks somberly off-frame over his friend's head. That somberness is belied by the warmth with which his left arm wraps around his friend's shoulder. He grips tightly so that the flexing of his fingers, and in particular his index finger, wrinkle the fabric of his friend's jacket as he pulls him close. The man with the pipe, head slightly inclined forward, angles his eyes up towards his friend's face. His left hand disappears between his thigh and his friend's. The hand of the first man, holding the cigar, is resting on an ashtray to keep it balanced on his thigh. To have your picture taken while holding an ashtray is to indicate that you're not going anywhere soon. These men are settled in intimately and comfortably.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes writes about and reproduces a photograph of a man and two boys in which smoking and hidden hands also play a role, Nadar's *Savorgnan de Brazza* (1882, Fig. 9). De Brazza was an Italian explorer who adopted French citizenship and traveled in Algeria, Gabon, and the Congo. In this studio photograph, de Brazza sits on a

⁷⁸ Nadar, "My Life as a Photographer," *October* 5 (summer 1978): 13.

rock in front of a painted backdrop of the sea with a cloudy sky, with sand and pebbles at his feet. He is accompanied by two young-adolescent black boys. Both boys wear dark pants, berets, and striped sailor shirts under wide-collared sailor overshirts. De Brazza has a lean face, almost gaunt, with high cheekbones, a prominent elegant nose, dark eyes shadowed beneath a strong brow, a beard and mustache, and close-cropped hair with a cowlick at the crown of his head. His angular face contrasts with the boys' round faces. His right hand holds a cigarette between two fingers and rests on his right thigh, and his left foot is propped on a large rock. The hand of the boy on the right rests on de Brazza's slightly elevated thigh. The boy's fingers bend as if gripping the thigh, but his palm is raised and does not touch the pinstriped fabric of de Brazza's trousers. The boy's dark overshirt blends in with de Brazza's dark jacket so that they seem to merge. This boy's face seems very youthful. He has a widow's peak that shows below the edge of his beret, wide-set eyes, and a slight, sweet smile; his expression is one of faint puzzlement. The boy on the left is taller, his face more angular and his expression more reserved, with lips set firmly together. He stands behind and to the viewer's left of de Brazza. His dark overshirt merges with de Brazza's right shoulder, but his legs are distinctly separate, and his left foot is perched jauntily on a small rock, his left knee bent forward. His arms are crossed over his chest, shoulders hunched forward protectively, as if he is cold or guarded, but not as if he is afraid.

The "incongruous gesture" of the other boy's hand on de Brazza's thigh, Barthes notes, "is bound to arrest my gaze, to constitute a *punctum*. Yet it is not one, for I immediately code the posture, whether I want to or not, as 'aberrant' (for me, the *punctum* is the other boy's crossed arms.)"⁷⁹ Barthes dismisses the boy's hand on de Brazza's leg as *studium*. It may be "aberrant," but it is coded. What is the code that Barthes reads in the *studium* of this

⁷⁹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.

photograph? A famous explorer is in the studio of a famous portrait photographer, framed by an artificial beach and two black boys dressed as sailors, one of whom has his hand awkwardly perched on the explorer's leg. The crossed arms and hidden hands of the boy on the left prompt the question of the location of de Brazza's right hand and arm, and the other boy's left hand and arm; the boy's right arm is invisible. De Brazza's left arm is either lost in the dark area where coat and overshirt overlap, or, more likely, is wrapped around the boy's waist, which would explain the awkward way his left shoulder twists back, as if tucked under the boy's invisible arm. If his left arm is around the boy, where is his left hand? The hand may simply be hidden behind the boy's back. However, there is an oddly blurred area to the right of the boy's side where de Brazza's hand might be were it to emerge from behind the boy's back. This blurred area looks as if one of the painted clouds has dropped right down behind the sitters, with an edge peeking out, obscuring the hand.

De Brazza had another portrait made at Nadar's studio around the same time, in the same faux beach setting with painted backdrop and rocks, perhaps even the same day (Fig. 10). In this portrait he is alone, dressed in Islamic garb with a classical Arabian *shora* (a turban-like headdress), sash, loose shirt and trousers, as if prepared for a desert trek. His feet are bare and he holds a long walking stick. Various medallions hang from his garments. De Brazza stands in an unnatural pose, an off-balance contrapposto, his weight resting on his right leg with his left leg in front, and he leans back slightly. One hand is partially tucked into his sash, the other held elegantly along the walking stick.

In this photograph, all the clouds are in the sky where they should be, and there is no blurry area visible where it is in the other photograph. Is that cloud, then, a retouch that hides de Brazza's hand encircling the boy's waist? And if so, why? Would the visibility of that

hand be an inappropriate sign of closeness? Why would his hand be erased while the boy's hand on his thigh is left visible? This portrait and its carefully posed relationship between white man and black boys demonstrates the complexities of touch in nineteenth-century portraiture, and highlights the more obviously pleasurable and natural touching in the portraits of loving friends.

Nadar's fervently devoted words about his intimate friend Hérald de Pages are a nineteenth-century convention of articulating affection between men. Those conventions make the expression of erotic desire very difficult to distinguish from the expression of devoted friendship. The larger question is whether or not they can or need to be distinguished. The acceptability of fervent passion between friends, queer theorist Jonathan Katz argues, "made possible the unself-conscious, unembarrassed expression of same-sex attraction, clearly including a sexual component."⁸⁰ The loving friendship photographs, some of them, as well as the sheer quantity of them, suggest along with other evidence that the nineteenth century, far from being sexually impoverished for men who desired other men sexually, was actually rich with transgressive desires and acts, and that, moreover, such desires and acts may not have been quite as transgressive as traditional history indicated. Michel Foucault reasons that "as long as friendship was something important, was socially accepted, nobody realized men had sex together."⁸¹ Deitcher explains:

Unable to be certain of which among these photographs actually constitutes the discarded traces of historic queer love, they all become symbolic of the mutability of same-sex affection, of masculinity, male sexuality, and the limits

⁸⁰ Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians And Gay Men in the U.S.A.: A Documentary History* (New York: Meridian, 1992), 449.

⁸¹ Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," 1982 interview reprinted in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 1: 171.

of same-sex intimacy as homosocial relations between men transmuted into homophobic ones.⁸²

The most accurate thing to be said is that some of the men in these photographs loved other men exclusively, many of them had sexual experiences with other men, and all of them felt a freedom to express love for other men that has largely been lost to homophobia.

Deitcher argues that the close romantic friendship that is most likely what is represented in the photographs is a casualty of the rigidification of classification of sexuality that resulted in the category of homosexuality. A clear example of this rigidification and its accompanying homophobia can be seen in changes in sports team photographs between 1900 and around 1920. Present-day sports fans smile indulgently on the casual spanking of backsides and jubilant embraces of athletes, but perhaps only because sports is a field in which open homosexuality has not been tolerated; professional athletes are rigidly represented as 100% heterosexual, an oppression that is just beginning to relent.⁸³ In team photographs, however, players are lined up in rows, keeping their hands to themselves. Before 1920, sports team photographs represented the same camaraderie and physical contact to which we are accustomed to seeing on the field, and which is evident in the loving friendship portraits. In Fig. 11, from 1909, the members of a fifteen-man football team face the camera with mostly delighted expressions from various levels of what is basically a heap of young men, as if all the team players tackled each other and then looked up to smile. The teammates' comfort with each other and their pleasure in commemorating their team is evident.

⁸² Deitcher, in Bright, 34.

⁸³ Ibson, 113.

After the mid 1920s, team portraits become ubiquitous formally posed rows of men whose identical postures often prevent physical contact.⁸⁴ In a team portrait of a seven-man basketball team and their coach from 1920 (Fig. 12), three men and their coach sit upright on a bench, the three men sitting with arms and ankles crossed, hands tucked behind their arms. The suited coach sits awkwardly with his hands crumpled between his legs, arms stiff, particularly his right arm where it touches the arm of the player next to him. The front-row players display strong muscular arms, and their arms touch lightly where they sit close together. Behind them, the other four players stand with arms mostly invisible, except for the man on the right whose arms are tucked behind his back, as perhaps are those of the other players. Unlike the earlier football players, these men look at the camera seriously. They represent a team as a machine. Their vanished hands have none of the suggestiveness of the daguerreotype shown in Fig. 1. The closeness of men's passionate friendships has been sacrificed, Sedgwick argues, because

the homosocial bonds of male domination are constituted, in part, by the repudiation of erotic bonds among men. It was precisely the ability to project that eroticism on to others—women, blacks, and homosexual men—that guaranteed the masculine identity and superior status of (ostensibly heterosexual) white men.⁸⁵

Sports team photographs provide a legible timeline of this repudiation.⁸⁶

In *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, the author reproduces an image of himself with his students from his 1974 Seminar at the École des Hautes Études (Fig. 13). Like post-1920 athletes, Barthes and his students are posed in two rows. Barthes and seven of his students sit

⁸⁴ Ibid., 105, 111.

⁸⁵ Bright, 11, referring to the work of Sedgwick, 11.

⁸⁶ See D. Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 95-96.

on a bench, with seven others standing behind them. Barthes's face wears an expression that indicates his self-consciousness at being photographed, his lips pressed together in a small, artificial smile, and his hands are tightly interwoven between his knees. The students' expressions range from smiling and pleasant to neutral, distracted, and bored. The seated figures are close enough that their shoulders and arms touch, and all of them hold their hands in front of them. Despite these divergent expressions and limited contact, there is a sense of camaraderie among the sitters.

On the far right of the first row, a young man beams at the camera, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees, his hands held together comfortably. Earlier in the book, Barthes reproduces a photograph which he lists simply as "Paris, 1974," and whose caption reads, "...among friends," (Fig. 14). He is with three young men, all of whom are recognizable from the group photograph. Most prominent is the man who smiled broadly into the camera on the far right in the group photograph. He is the only one looking into the camera. While the other figures do not appear to have posed, this man faces the camera with his hands held together in front of him, fingers twisting together less naturally than in the group photograph. Barthes stands just behind him and to the viewer's right, his head tilted down and his face shadowed, but he appears much more natural in this photograph, and his mouth is open in a pleasant expression as if he is speaking. Barthes's left hand holds what may be a large envelope or newspapers, but his right hand and arm are invisible. Where his right hand would be if it encircled the young man looking into the camera, a glimpse of another man's white sweater peeks from beneath his jacket. The white of the sweater is a blank space where Barthes's hand would perfectly fit. Whatever Barthes's relationship with this young man was, the photograph permits them to be read as a couple. But the young

man's transformation from relaxed student in a group photograph to tense friend in a casual photograph reads like Barthes's description of the beloved who "impregnate[s] his body with discretion and a kind of indifference, delaying his recognition of me, etc.: in short, trying to keep himself out of the picture."⁸⁷ This awkwardness prophesies Barthes's sadness in *Incidents* that the possibility of his being loved by "one boy" has ended.

Sedgwick uncompromisingly argues that "an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition."⁸⁸ The risk of ascribing sexual intent to expressions of male physical affection must be balanced with the risk of continuing to hide a history that has been neglected and deliberately hidden, by the persecutors as well as, tragically, by those who feared persecution. Queer theorist Michael Warner states forcefully, "The dawning realization that themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture means that we are only beginning to have an idea of how widespread those institutions and accounts are."⁸⁹ The indefinite sexuality of the loving friendship portraits, taken at a time when sexuality retained to some degree its own indefiniteness, must be neither occluded nor carelessly overinterpreted. Like the referent of a photograph, evidence in these referents is both present and absent.

⁸⁷ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 192.

⁸⁸ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), cited in Restuccia, 145.

⁸⁹ Warner, "Introduction," in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), xiii, cited in Restuccia, 145.

The Closet with a Curtain

After centuries of ambiguous tolerance and outright persecution of male-male sexuality, the loving friendship portraits represent the possibility of something that has been thought of as forbidden, at least as impossible as any love between a troubadour and his noble lady.⁹⁰ They enigmatically show the completely open expression of desires whose past has been purposefully concealed and which are stigmatized in the present. Deitcher beautifully articulates the possibilities afforded by this situation:

I am inclined to imagine, for a variety of reasons, that these men took full advantage of the special dispensation granted in their day to romantic friendship. In such moments of possible anti-historical reverie, I see them as lovers who enjoyed then-unmentionable sexual acts, and who, whenever necessary, dissimulated skillfully as “romantic friends” to avoid exposure and punishment as the sodomites I (want to) believe they were.⁹¹

Deitcher dreams of a past in which the closet had not a door but a curtain, a continuum with the world of convention.

Sexological insistence on the dichotomy of straight and gay fabricated the closet and closed the door. What would life have been like with the closet veiled rather than closed? In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the veil arouses desire. Lacan uses Pliny the Elder’s story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios to delineate the function of the veil.⁹² In a competition to see who was most skilled as a painter, each artist tried to paint something as realistically as possible. Zeuxis painted grapes, whose realism was so effective that a bird tried to eat them. But Parrhasios painted a veil so authentic in appearance that Zeuxis asked him to pull it aside so he could see the painting behind it. The fruit arouses the appetite of the bird; the veil arouses

⁹⁰ Courtly love has aspects that can be called homosocial because of the way women were used as forms of exchange to structure relations between men. See Burns, “Courtly Love,” 40.

⁹¹ Deitcher, in Bright, 29.

⁹² Lacan, *XI*, 103, 111-112.

the desire of the subject.⁹³ The difference between the two paintings, argues literary theorist Charles Shepherdson, is

the difference between the level of the imaginary and the level of desire. The function of art is to incite its viewer to ask what is *beyond*. Art . . . leads us not ‘to see,’ as Lacan would put it, but ‘to look.’ For [unlike Zeuxis’s bird] the human animal is blind in this respect, that it *cannot simply see*, but is *compelled to look* behind the veil, *driven*, Freud would say, beyond the pleasure of seeing.⁹⁴

The passionate friendship photographs function like Parrhasios’s veil: they arouse the desire of the viewer—or of some viewers—to know what is beyond them. But what do they veil?

For Lacan, as for Zeuxis, the veil implies that there is something behind it. It permits the subject’s continued belief in the existence of the object.⁹⁵ The Lacanian veil hides an emptiness; in the case of these images, that emptiness has a particular significance. The Lacanian veil allows the subject to persist in believing that there is an object that can satisfy the subject’s desire. Parrhasios’s veil was a painting, and for Lacan, all art decorates the emptiness of *das Ding*. In its perfect realism, Parrhasios’s veil has a photographic quality. But it is not a real veil; it is a work of art, like any other art, that covers and points to *das Ding*. Moreover, like Parrhasios’s painting, the Lacanian veil is opaque and cannot be opened. The veil over the nineteenth-century gay closet, however, appears to have been more permeable.

Like Parrhasios’s painting, these photographs are not veils themselves but images of veils. They picture the veil that protected men’s desires for other men. They entice particular subjects to pull the veil aside; not every viewer feels compelled to look behind the veil. Like

⁹³ Iverson, 462.

⁹⁴ Charles Shepherdson, “History and the Real: Foucault with Lacan,” *Postmodern Culture* 5 (January, 1995): unpaginated online resource.

⁹⁵ Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*, 201, citing Lacan, *Livre IV: La Relation d’objet, 1956-7* (Paris, Seuil: 1994), 156.

an anamorphosis, the image of the veil must be seen from a particular angle in order to be seen in its perspective, i.e., the stereotypically heterosexual viewer may not be able to so easily see in these images what is enticing to the gay viewer.

Then what is the emptiness behind the veil of these photographs? Parrhasios's painted veil was the exemplification of the art of *trompe-l'oeil*. The indexical photograph is not a form of *trompe-l'oeil*; it cannot imitate or copy.⁹⁶ These photographs simply show what was. To assert that they depict no evidence of male-male desire is to insist that there is something behind the curtain. To assert that they show incontrovertible proof of male-male desire is to do the same. But to leave their meaning open as a body means to simultaneously validate the individuality of the sitters, and to keep open all possible relationships between the men.⁹⁷ To accept that they show male-male affection of a type that is uncategorizable, that due to sheer numbers must include some men who desired men, some men who desired women, some who desired both, some who weren't sure, and some who didn't desire anybody, is to accept the veil for what it is. The full effects of the veil, Iverson argues, are felt fully when the subject realizes that there is nothing behind the veil.⁹⁸ Nineteenth-century loving friendship veiled relationships that, in Deitcher's opinion, "could be romantic in ways that we would identify as sexual but that Victorians, in their state of pre-Freudian innocence, would not." As a result, "A considerable range of same-sex relationships between men was acknowledged and sanctioned, effectively shielding forms of physical contact that gradually

⁹⁶ Baudrillard argues the opposite in "Photography, or the Writing of Light," trans. Francois Debrix, Ctheory, 2000, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/ baudrillard/ baudrillard-photography-or-the-writing-of-light.html>. "The technique of photography takes us beyond the replica into the domain of the *trompe l'oeil*."

⁹⁷ Deitcher, *Dear Friends*, 150: "The anonymous portraits of comrades and romantic friends that fill the pages of this book cannot ultimately be enlisted as incontrovertible evidence of a gay past; but neither, by the same token, can they be taken as proof that such a past did not exist."

⁹⁸ Iverson, 462.

would be identified and stigmatized as perverse, if not criminal.”⁹⁹ The function of this veil is not that there is nothing behind it, but rather that there is nothing to hide.

Courtly Love, Greek Love

Another way to consider these photographs in relation to courtliness is to re-examine Lacan’s model of the courtly lady as a shield for *das Ding*. Richard Halpern establishes the sodomitical orientation of *das Ding* with a close reading of Lacan’s writing on the Arnaut Daniel poem and on Lacan’s discussion of the vase. Halpern points out that while Lacan draws on Heidegger’s Thing and his idea of the vessel, there is a shift between the two theories. Heidegger uses the term “*der Krug*” to mean not vase but “jug.” For Heidegger the jug is a “holding vessel,” meant to contain or to pour out. He also uses the term “*das Gefäß*,” “vessel.” The French translation in Gallimard (which Halpern believes Lacan to have used) for Heidegger’s *der Krug* is “*la cruche*,” which is also slang for prostitute, and “*la vase*” for vessel. Lacan uses *la vase*, which can mean vessel or vase, not *la cruche*, thereby transforming Heidegger’s humble and bountiful jug into an aesthetic object which has not only a holding function but an empty function as a decoration. Heidegger’s jug is meant to contain; Lacan’s vase creates nothingness.¹⁰⁰

Halpern also notes that Lacan states his agreement with an article that “establishes a relationship between the act of making a vase and ‘the female sexual organ,’” a reference Silverman refers to as regrettable.¹⁰¹ But Lacan does not make a pun with *la cruche*. So,

⁹⁹ See www.daviddeitcher.com.

¹⁰⁰ Halpern, 92-93.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 93, referring to Lacan, *VII*, 168, and an article by philologist Hans Sperber, “On the Influence of Sexual Factors on the Origin and Development of Language,” 1912. Lacan’s interest in the article lies in its discussion of sublimation.

Halpern argues, Lacan drops *la cruche* altogether in favor of *la vase*, which as it turns out, is slang for either the posterior or the anus.

Therefore Lacan's vase as anus becomes a non-procreative vessel. In medieval French, in terms of sodomy discourse, Halpern comments,

the anus [is] the "improper" vessel, to distinguish it from the vagina as the "proper" vessel for receiving the male seed . . . while it *surrounds* the seed left inside, it cannot *hold* it as the uterus can . . . no matter how much is deposited within it, it remains in some sense "empty." For the discourse of sodomy, the anus is the paradigmatically empty space, the vessel as absolute void.¹⁰²

"Through an accretion of small choices," Halpern argues, "Lacan privileges the anus as his paradigm for the emptiness of the Thing, and [therefore] his concept of sublimation . . . takes on a vaguely 'sodomitical' cast."¹⁰³ This sodomitical cast then makes Lacan's choice of Daniel's poem resonate in a different way.

In addition, the courtliness of the loving friendship photographs is related to Žižek's discussion of an answer of the real in terms of love. He refers to Lacan's writing on desire from *Seminar VIII: Transference*:

We witness the sublime moment when *eremenos* (the loved one) changes into *erastes* (the loving one) by stretching his hand back and "returning love." This moment designates the "miracle" of love, the moment when "the real answers."¹⁰⁴

On the next page, Žižek describes the courtly lady's giving her troubadour "simply a sign of love" as another example of the answer of the real, likening the courtly lady to the *eremenos*. In *Seminar VIII* Lacan states that Greek love is "not the same thing" as courtly love, "but it occupies an analogous function. I mean that it is quite obviously of the order and of the

¹⁰² Halpern, 91.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰⁴ Žižek, "Courtly Love," 105.

function of sublimation” as he discussed it in the *Ethics*.¹⁰⁵ Greek love, Lacan states, was the love of beautiful boys.¹⁰⁶ Indicating his perception of the pleasures of cruising, Lacan laments the difference between Greek love and contemporary homosexuality:

God knows, I believe that one can scarcely find it elsewhere than in the quality of objects. Here, schoolboys are acneed and cretinised by the education they receive and these conditions are not really favourable for them to become the object of our homage; it seems that one has to go searching for objects in out of the way places, the gutter, that is the whole difference. But there is no difference in the structure itself.¹⁰⁷

Lacan’s humorous if cruel dig at awkward schoolboys simultaneously accepts gay desires and recognizes their marginalization. At the same time, he is asserting that courtly love and Greek love share the sublimation of the beloved object.

While the relationship between the ancient Greek *erastes* and *eremenos* is, like the courtly love relationship, one of lover and beloved, it is structured differently. The beloved lady in courtly love is of higher social status, and ostensibly has power over the troubadour. In Greek love, the *erastes*, the lover, is the wealthy and powerful figure, not the beloved *eremenos*, although the *eremenos* still has erotic power over the *erastes*. The *erastes* idealizes the *eremenos* and longs for his love to be returned, but he is characterized as being the active sexual partner as well as a mentor who will educate and train the *eremenos* so that he too may one day be an *erastes*. Ideally the relationship results in a lifelong bond in which, after the *eremenos* has become *erastes* and taken on his own *eremenos*, they are equals.

What appeals to Lacan in the Greek love relationship is that there is a balance between the two lovers, a neutrality. This balance takes the form of the fact that the *Erastes*

¹⁰⁵ Lacan, *Seminar VIII: Transference, 1960-1961*, trans. Cormac Gallagher from unedited French manuscripts, n.p., n.d., 23.11.60 II, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 12.

does not know what he is lacking, while the *eremenos* does not know what he has, “the hidden thing he has, what gives him his attraction.”¹⁰⁸ But what the lover lacks is not what the beloved has hidden in himself:

And this is the whole problem of love. Whether one knows this or not is of no importance. One encounters at every step in the phenomenon, its splitting apart, its discordance and a person has no need for all that to dialogue, to engage in dialectics . . . about love, it is enough for him to be involved, to love, in order to be caught up in this gap, in this discord.”¹⁰⁹

Therefore, Lacan argues, “We can propose . . . that . . . love as signification (because for us it is one and it is only that), is a metaphor, in the measure that we have learned to articulate metaphor as substitution.”¹¹⁰ This statement leads to the point that Žižek has made: when the *eremenos* stretches his hand back and returns love, when the *erastes* becomes the beloved and vice versa, “there is produced the signification of love.”¹¹¹

The way these photographs relate to both courtly love and Greek love is similar. If the contemporary viewers are the troubadours, they are also the *erastes*. While the photographs themselves are literally older than the contemporary viewer, their youthfulness lies in the innocence and freedom they represent. Like Lacan’s *eremenos*, they do not know what they have. The gift of love occurs in the finding of the photographs: finding that recognition, that sense of the real waving back. The photographs don’t have a concrete answer or concrete proofs; what they have is love.

The Mapplethorpe scandal made headlines out of the imagined threat of the explicitly “gay” photograph. Yet the less explicit loving friendship portraits have a radical disruptive

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 30.11.60 III, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 5.

potential. The claiming of these images by the gay community is both an affirmation of the transhistorical evidence of homosexuality as well as a positive, radical and socially destabilizing political act. As Todd Smith comments, “To know that one is not alone is a kind of power.”¹¹² Deitcher observes that “the fact that these photographs can only perpetuate uncertainty regarding precisely what they picture in no way detracts from the significance of their recovery.”¹¹³ Instead, that uncertainty adds to their subversiveness.

Finding evidence of male-male sexuality in earlier times demonstrates that gay subjectivity is part of a culture with deep roots and a heretofore unacknowledged prevalence. The ambiguity of the individual images is mitigated by their sheer numbers and varieties. These photographs suggest that possibly, despite legal sanctions against sodomy, not only were there men with desires for other men in the nineteenth century, there were a lot of them; the display of their love for each other was acceptable, and perhaps most transgressively, they could not and cannot be visually distinguished from men who desired women. They attest to an almost utopic freedom for men to take pleasure in other men’s bodies and emotions before the advent of homophobia and before AIDS. The photographs function like Lacan’s *homosexuelle*, according to Ragland: they can open the eyes of our heterosexist culture to the impossibility of the sexual relation, and thus raise questions about heteronormative desires. In so doing, they disrupt “the underpinnings of culture, based as it is on a sexual lie.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² Smith, 18.

¹¹³ Deitcher, in Bright, 34. He uses the restoration of the Sistine Chapel ceiling as an example of a more elaborately legitimated attempt at historical reclamation.

¹¹⁴ Ragland, “Lacan and the *Homosexuelle*: ‘A Love Letter,’” in Tim Dean and Christopher Lane, eds., *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 117. Ragland describes Lacan’s *homosexuelle* as a man whose “unconscious fantasy rejects the possibility that certain women lack anything . . . the structure of perversion is one response to the Oedipal drama. The only way for the *homosexuelle* to

The Barthesian *punctum* can operate in terms of sublimation by bestowing a unique relevance on a photograph. But while “over and over again, *Camera Lucida* succeeds in irradiating otherwise insignificant—or even culturally devalued—details in photographs,” Silverman feels that Barthes fails to adequately explore the ethical possibilities this increase in value makes possible, that he does not explore the potential to shift the relationship between self and other, to devalorize the ego. Margaret Olin supports Silverman’s concerns when she points out that “marginalized figures take up a large share of the illustrations in *Camera Lucida*,”¹¹⁵ including a former slave, a blind gypsy, children with developmental disabilities, slum children in Little Italy, and four African-Americans. But, she argues, “in order to make the sitters part of his family, he emptied their identity of everything but their status as representatives of a marginalized class open to assimilation by the narrator.”¹¹⁶ For Silverman and Olin, Barthes’s writing about photography fails in terms of ethical sublimation.

The embrace of the genre of men’s passionate friendship portraits is a sublimation that welcomes difference even as it is a form of identification. As Sedgwick scathingly and accurately comments in “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay,”

There are many people in the worlds we inhabit . . . who have a strong interest in the dignified treatment of any gay people who may happen to exist. But the number of persons or institutions by whom the existence of gay people is treated as a precious desideratum, a needed condition of life, is small. . . . On the other hand, the scope of institutions whose programmatic undertaking is to prevent the development of gay people is unimaginably large.¹¹⁷

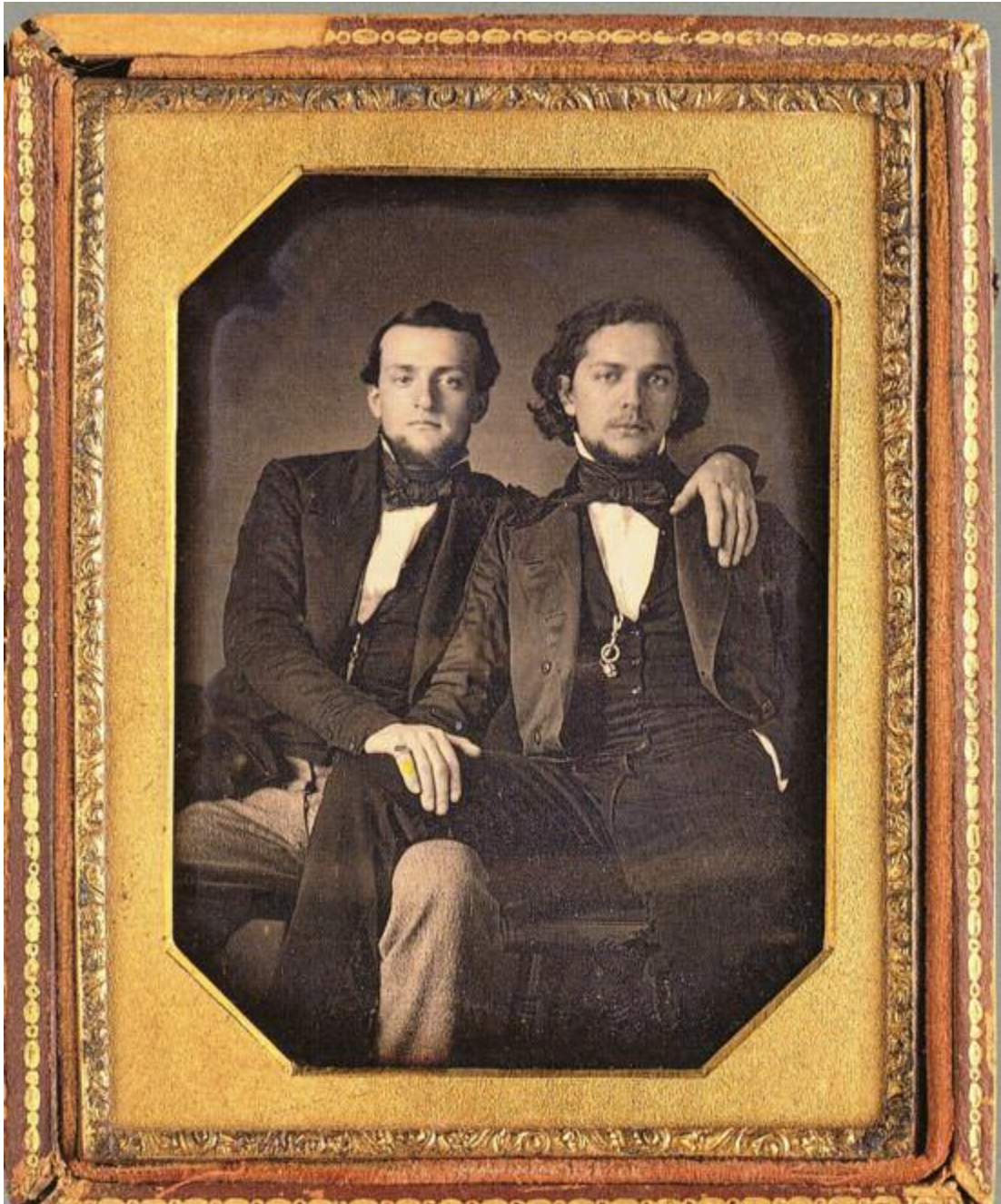
keep Woman pure, free of ‘sin’—that is, virginal—is not to have sexual congress with substitute versions of her. Since desiring a woman turns her into Eve, a seductress and betrayer, the *homosexuelle* avoids confronting this side of Woman,” 115.

¹¹⁵ Olin, 114.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Sedgwick, “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay,” *Social Text* 29 (1991): 23.

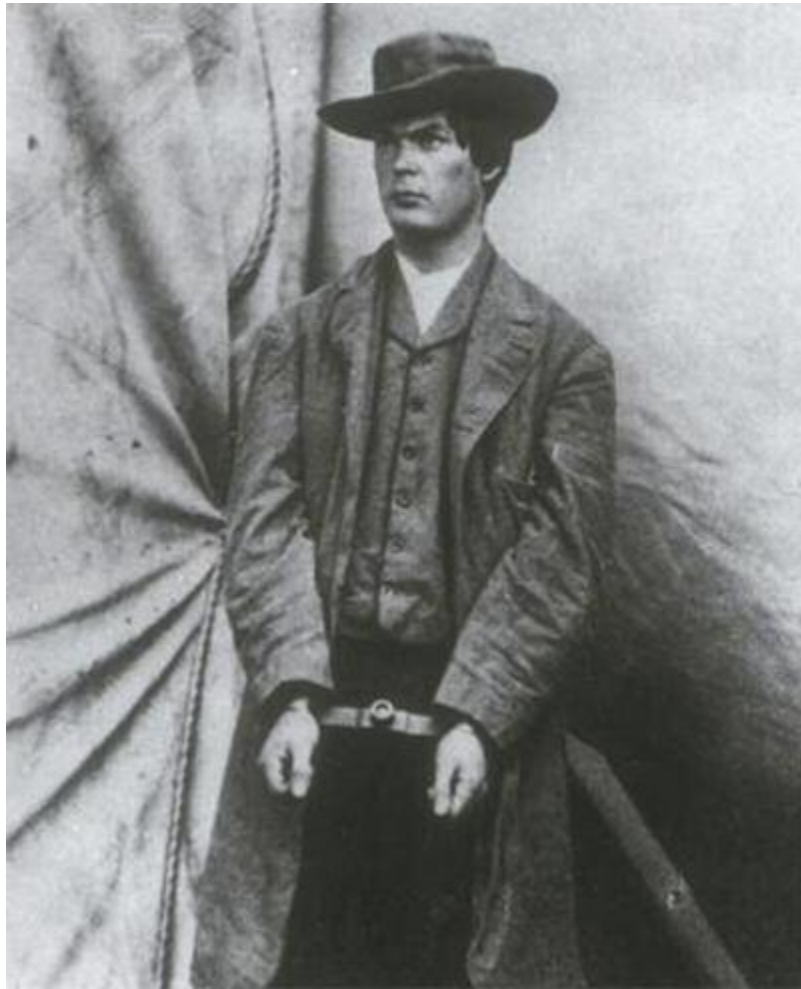
The recuperation by the gay community of these photographs, and their subsequent visibility and popularity in the wider art community is the beginning of a process that disregards heterosexual assumptions, that desires gay people and idealizes freedom of sexual preference. It is a courtly, ethical sublimation.



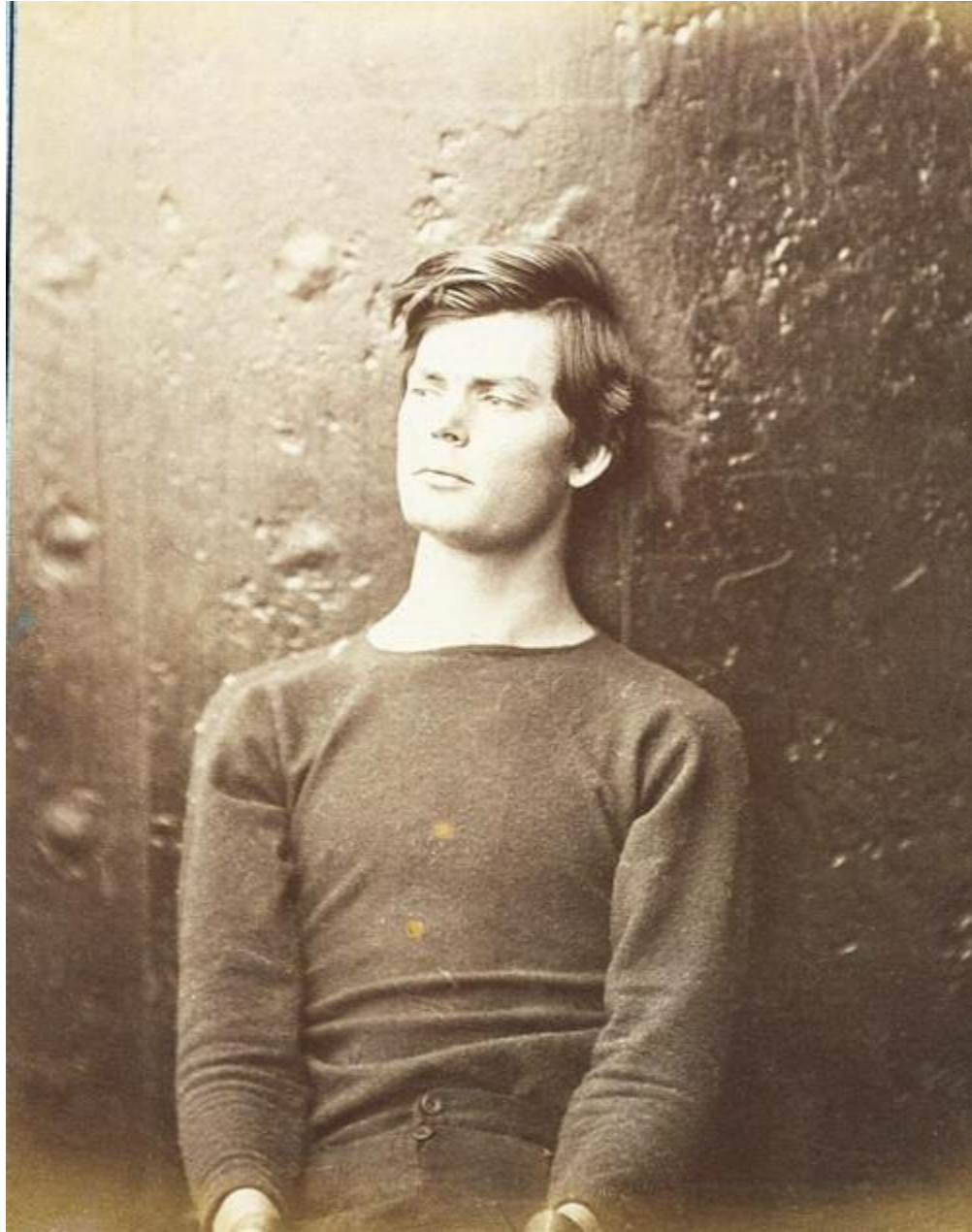
Chapter 5, Fig. 1:
Photographer Unknown, Subjects Unknown, 1845-50



Chapter 5, Fig. 2: Alexander Gardner,
"Portrait of Lewis Payne," 1865



Chapter 5, Fig. 3: Alexander Gardner
"Lewis Payne," 1865



Chapter 5, Fig. 4: Alexander Gardner,
"Lewis Payne," 1865



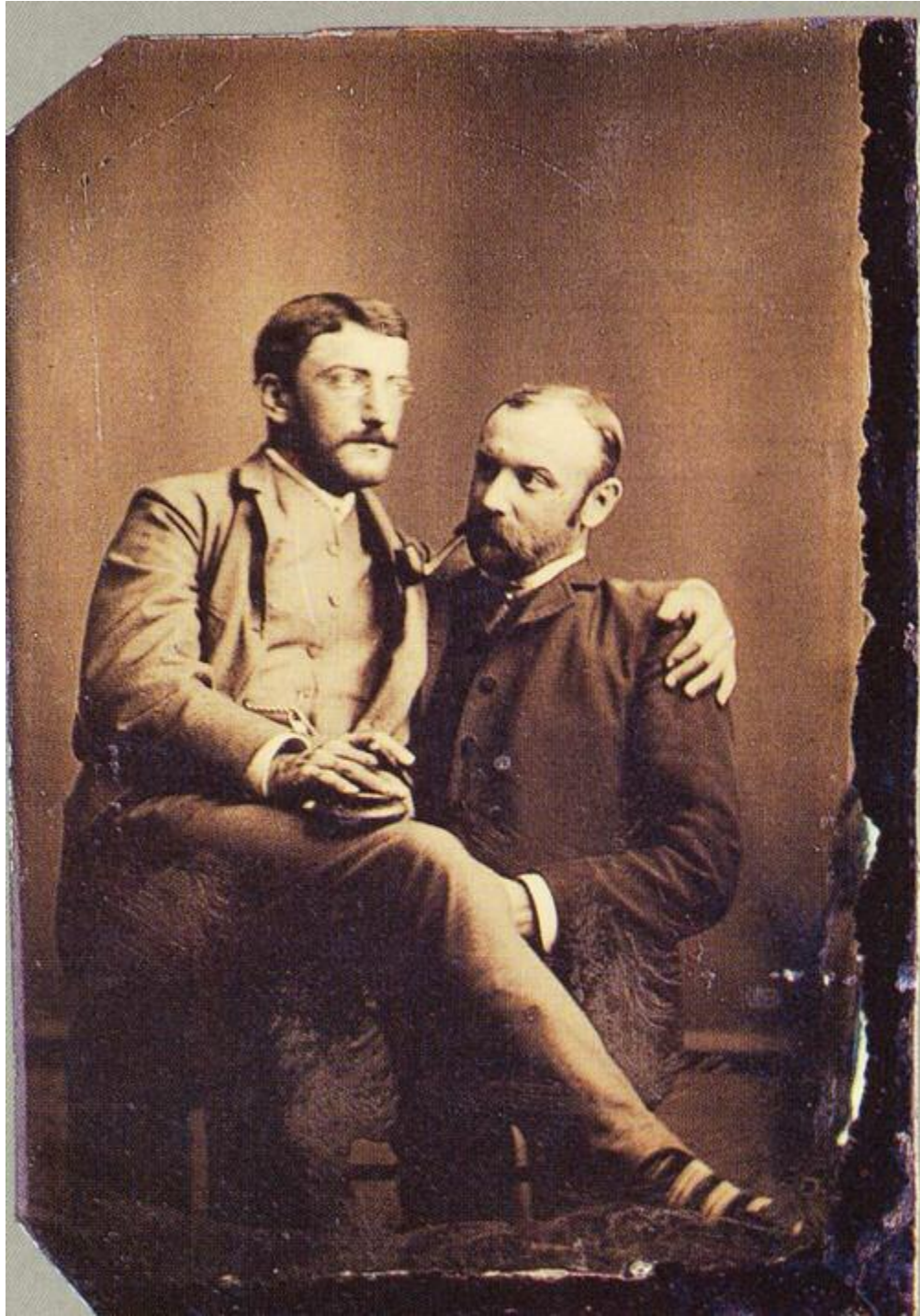
Chapter 5, Fig. 5
Kazuo Funaki



Chapter 5, Fig. 6



Chapter 5, Fig. 7: Eugène Durieu,
Academic Nude for Eugène Delacroix, 1853



Chapter 5, Fig. 8:
Photographer Unknown, Subjects Unknown, 1890



Chapter 5, Fig. 9: Nadar,
“Savorgnan de Brazza,” 1882



Chapter 5, Fig. 10: Nadar,
Savorgnan de Brazza, n.d.



Chapter 5, Fig. 11:
Real Photo Postcard, Fifteen-Man Football Team, 1909



Chapter 5, Fig. 12
Studio Portrait, Seven-Man Basketball Team and Coach, 1920



Chapter5, Fig. 13:
Roland Barthes with students from his
1974 Seminar at the École des Hautes Études



Chapter 5, Fig. 14:
Barthes "...among friends," Paris, 1974

Conclusion: Photography as Prophecy in Reverse

Silverman argues that today photography is one of the most significant contributors to our cultural screen.¹ Her important theorization of the problematics of photographic identification insists on the development of an ethics of photography, not just of taking or disseminating photographs but of looking at them. Lacan demonstrates that courtly love provides a model for ethical identification. Lacan's mirror stage, which Silverman posits as the subject's first sublimation, is the identificatory practice to which all others will adhere.

Yet as Gallop has pointed out, Lacan's theory of the mirror stage exists in a temporal paradox. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I*" is, Gallop argues, also formative of "an identity we call Lacan." Lacan writes that what is formed in the mirror stage is "*la souche*," which Gallop translates as "rootstock," which founds later identifications. Yet the text of the essay itself has no rootstock, because the article of which it is allegedly a revised version does not exist.² In the mirror stage, as a turning point in the development of the subject, the infant looking in the mirror and seeing a totalized image of itself retroactively perceives its body as having been a *corps morcelée*, a body in pieces. That concept of the self is an anterior understanding of the anguish of the *corps morcelée*. The mirror stage must occur for the subject to attain this anterior understanding. According to Gallop,

Not only does the self issue from it, but so does "the body in bits and pieces."
This moment is the source not only for what follows but also for what
precedes. It produces the future through anticipation and the past through

¹ Silverman, 81, along with television and cinema.

² Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 76-77.

retroaction. And yet it is itself a moment of self-delusion, of captivation by an illusory image. Both future and past are thus rooted in an illusion.³

But the future which propels subjectivity, the dream of the totalized body, will never be reached. Like the identification in the mirror stage that propels the infant forward as a subject, the jubilant identification of the beloved and verbalization of the courtly lady's attributes could propel the social status of the troubadour, not by marriage to the aristocratic lady, but by demonstrating his verbal prowess.

Gallop draws attention to Lacan's use of "*la souche*," a term that Barthes also uses in *Camera Lucida*. Barthes subtitles a photograph of two children with an elderly man "*La Souche*" ("The Stock," Fig. 1), and states that it is from the author's collection. Barthes never says exactly who is pictured in "*La Souche*," although he mentions a photograph of his father as a child and says that while his child father has "nothing to do with pictures of him as a man," he nonetheless sees his own face in his father's childish one.⁴ Yet photography critics including Diana Knight and Margaret Olin have argued that the photograph could be of Barthes's mother with her brother, and that it is possibly what Barthes refers to as the Winter Garden Photograph. His theory of photography is framed around presence, absence, and loss, but the photograph of his lost mother which he claims is absent from *Camera Lucida* may actually be present. In the Winter Garden Photograph Barthes fully and deeply identifies his mother as he never saw her. In "*La Souche*," he says he identifies himself in the youthful face of the father he barely knew. Barthes identifies the true essence of his mother only in a photograph of her as child, a version of her he could not know, when he did not yet exist. Furthermore, Barthes identifies with his aunt Alice, who like him was single her entire

³ Ibid., 81-2.

⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 105.

life, who would be the girl in “*La Souche*” if it is not the Winter Garden Photograph.

Barthes’s familial photographic rootstock is a fragmentary confusion which does not add up to totalized subjectivity.

In the *Ethics*, there is another temporal paradox. Lacan grounds his seminar on courtly love on Andreas Capellanus’s *De arte honeste amande*. Lacan claims that a scholar named Rénouart discovered a fourteenth-century version of the manuscript, but it turns out to be a “phantom,” like Lacan’s originary mirror stage article, and no scholar named Rénouart has been identified:

The seminar soon comes around to a concrete archival discovery that helped produce a massive twentieth-century interest in the forms and expressions of medieval courtly love. . . . Renouart’s archival discovery of a fourteenth-century text of Andreas [in 1917], Lacan suggests, opened a modern window onto a fascinating period in the history of love. But there was no such “discovery.”. . . [*De arte honeste amande*] has had a continuous history of transmission since the twelfth century; there is nothing to suggest that the text was ever “discovered” at the [Bibliothèque Nationale], least of all in 1917.⁵

Holsinger writes that Lacan invests

the psychic machinations of “courtly love”. . . with a formative role in the history of subjectivity and desire. Yet the historical commitments of the seventh seminar are undermined by the strangely empiricist authority Lacan vests in medievalism, an authority embodied in the phantom manuscript that paradoxically grounds the archaeological project of the *Ethics*.⁶

Holsinger hypothesizes that Lacan’s story of the 1917 discovery of the manuscript was “in part to lend the seminar a sheen of historical erudition, and in this respect the ponderous

⁵ Holsinger, 79.

⁶ Ibid., 23. Lacan is not alone in his lacunae-ridden borrowing: Holsinger criticizes Foucault (53) and Barthes (73) as well.

invocation of Renouart's codicological feat in the dusty BN manuscript room . . . was a stroke of archaeological brilliance."⁷

Lacan has been criticized for non-scholarly appropriations of medievalism, and his probably inadvertent mistake about the Andreas manuscript provides more fodder for such criticisms. His choice of Arnaut Daniel's text to illustrate the genre of courtly love poetry is particularly non-canonical. Lacan's overall use of courtly love as a way to theorize an ethics of psychoanalysis is itself a totalization of what was a very diverse genre, a genre that was so formulated not by Paris, who coined the phrase but meant it to apply specifically to Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*, but by a collective jubilant response to something that appeared to identify a totalized field of literature.

Lacan points out that the ideals of courtly love "are to be found in subsequent periods down to our own. The influence of these ideals is a highly concrete one in the organization of contemporary man's sentimental attachments, and it continues its forward march."⁸ These observations imply an historical continuity between a practice of love from the eleventh and twelfth centuries and present-day relations between men and women.⁹ While such continuities may indeed exist, and certainly the contemporary reader of poetry categorized as belonging to the courtly love genre may find much with which to identify, Lacan fails to realize that courtly love itself is a modern construct describing a medieval phenomenon, and as such is inscribed with contemporary concerns. The hardened genre of courtly love is like the falsely unified body the child sees in the mirror, the orthopedic body which allows the

⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁸ Lacan, *VII*, 148.

⁹ See Labbie's criticism of this overdetermination of the identification of modern love with courtly love in Žižek as well, 28.

child to enter subjectivity. Lacan looks at the contemporary version of courtly love as a mirror and sees a solid trajectory into the past with which to theorize a future for psychoanalytic practice. Paris's formulation retroactively posits a practice of courtly love which influenced his followers; the present relations between men and women are seen to be based on a past which was theorized in the 1880s. Lacan's work on courtly love implies an origin that is illusory.¹⁰ Lacan even finds courtly love's influence in the work of Freud; Kay notes that "He points out, for instance, how tangible is the continuing influence of courtly love poetry on the writings of Freud (even though Freud himself doesn't mention it)."¹¹ Lacan, himself jubilant with desire for courtly love as a linchpin for his theory of desire, finds it in his master text, the work of Freud.

Žižek's discussions of the answer of the real provide a way to think about the compelling coincidences that momentarily break through the symbolic. His examples are fortune-telling, the courtly lady's recognition of the lover, and the *eremenos* turning back to love the *erastes*. I have argued that the photographic *punctum* is also an answer of the real. Lacan's finding the embodiment of his theory of desire in courtly love is an example of courtly love as Lacan's answer of the real.

Lacan found his theory of desire in courtly love, and sublimated courtly love itself with his theory of an ethics of sublimation. This could arguably be seen as a narcissistic identification with the theory, since he finds it and uses it for his purposes, except for the fact that by demonstrating his theory with the non-canonical Arnaut Daniel poem he nonetheless recognizes courtly love's heterogeneity. Lacan uses an erroneously totalized theory of courtly

¹⁰ Lacan does cite German scholarship which formulated the characteristics of courtly love in the early nineteenth century, but does not name his sources; *VII*, 146.

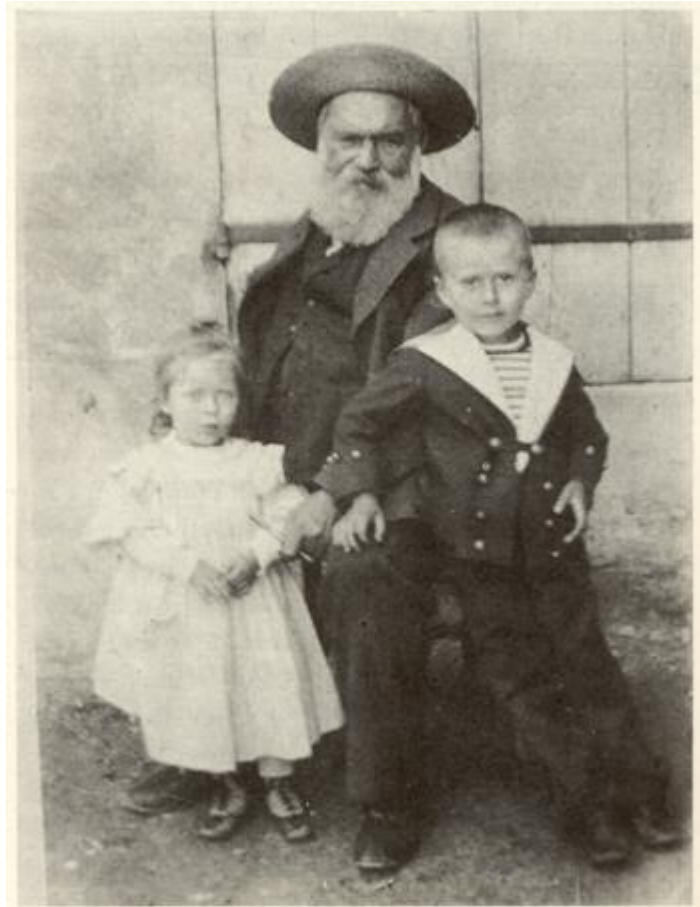
¹¹ Kay, "Contradictions," 28.

love to propel himself forward in his theory of ethics. But in doing so he bypasses the ways in which theories of courtly love are inflected by the late nineteenth century, the time during which Freud was just beginning to work on neurology, from which he would develop his theory of psychoanalysis. Lacan identifies with a totalized courtly love, failing to see that it actually was a genre *morcelée* prior to Paris's theorization.

Another temporal paradox occurs with the Parsons photographs of Jane Morris, which antedate Rossetti's famous paintings of her but which we look at because of those paintings and see in light of those paintings. Those photographs represent the past but predict Rossetti and Morris's futures. The passionate friendship portraits function as a "prophecy in reverse" that holds out hope for a non-homophobic future.

The loving friendship photographs offer a new way to look at Barthes's *La souche*. Barthes's father/uncle, a miniaturized, white version of de Brazza's companions, wears a striped sailor shirt under a wide-collared sailor jacket. His arm rests on the grandfather's arm, the boy's hand trailing down to rest lightly on the older man's knee. The grandfather's arm passes below the boy's to gently hold the tiny elbow of the aunt/mother. Her hands are clasped docilely in front of her, and she stands, in her starched and ruffled white dress, safely between the grandfather's knees. These relays of touch emphasize Barthes's concerns with photography, light, and tactility. The confusions of identity remind the courtly reader of the arbitrariness of the descriptions of the courtly lady. The undecidability of the loving friendship portraits cushions the confusion surrounding the Winter Garden Photograph and "*La Souche*." No matter which family members it shows, it still represents, for Barthes, identification and love.

Lacan's temporal confusion in the mirror stage is actually a metaphor for his theory of courtly love. Ultimately both courtly love and photography keep desire alive in transhistorical ways that underlie the impact of both on the reader/viewer of the present. Courtly love poetry works to articulate desires felt almost a thousand years ago. The continued life of those poems demonstrates that desire outlives the subject, providing a kind of immortality. Every photograph, in addition to presenting presence and absence which arouse the desires of the viewer, is also a representation of the desire to hold on to a particular moment; that desire outlives both the moment and can outlive the photographer and subjects. Photography's *noeme* may be the catastrophe of nihilation, but it also promises that desire lives forever.



Conclusion, Fig. 1:
“La souche”

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