

1.

Therefore, according to Balzac, every body in nature is composed of a series of specters, in infinitely superimposed layers, foliated into infinitesimal pellicules, in all directions in which the optic perceives this body. Since man is unable to create—that is, to constitute from an apparition, from the impalpable, a solid thing, or to make a *thing* out of *nothing*—every Daguerreian operation would catch, detach, and retain, by applying onto itself one of the layers of the photographed body. It follows that for that body, and with every repeated operation, there was an evident loss of one of its specters, which is to say, of a portion of its constitutive essence.

-Nadar, *When I Was a Photographer* (1900)

2.

In these deplorable times, a new industry has developed, which has helped in no small way to confirm fools in their faith, and to ruin what vestige of the divine might still have remained in the French mind. Naturally, this idolatrous multitude was calling for an ideal worthy of itself and in keeping with its own nature. In the domain of painting and statuary, the present-day credo of the worldly wise, especially in France (and I do not believe that anyone would dare to maintain the contrary), is this: "I believe in nature, and I believe only in nature." (There are good reasons for that.) "I believe that art is, and can only be, the exact reproduction of nature." .... "Thus if an industrial process could give us a result identical to nature, that would be absolute art." A vengeful God has hearkened to the voice of this multitude; Daguerre became his Messiah.

-Baudelaire, "Salon of 1859"

3.

The whole difficulty of the problem that occupies us comes from the fact that we imagine perception to be a kind of photographic view of things, taken from a fixed point by that special apparatus which is called an organ of perception--a photography which would then be developed in the brain-matter by some unknown chemical and psychical process of elaboration. But is it not obvious that the photograph, if photograph there be, is already taken, already developed in the very heart of things and at all the points of space? No metaphysics, no physics even, can escape this conclusion.

-Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896)

4.

In order to form a picture of this vicissitude, let us assume that every mental process...exists to begin with in an unconscious stage or phase and that it is only from there that the process passes over into the conscious phase, just as a photographic picture begins as a negative and only becomes a picture after being formed into a positive. Not every negative, however, necessarily becomes a positive; nor is it necessary that every unconscious mental process should turn into a conscious one. This may be advantageously expressed by saying that an individual process belongs to begin with to

the system of the unconscious and can then, in certain circumstances, pass over into the system of the conscious.

-Freud, *General Theory of the Neuroses* (1920)

5.

True life, life finally laid bare and illuminated, the only life consequently really lived, is literature; that life which, in a sense, inhabits at every moment all men as well as the artist. But they do not see it, because they do not seek to illuminate it. And therefore their past is like a photographic dark room encumbered with innumerable negatives that remain useless because the intellect has not "developed" them.

-Proust, *Time Recaptured* (1920)

6.

During her illness, I nursed her, held the bowl of tea she liked because it was easier to drink from than from a cup; she had become my little girl, uniting for me with that essential child she was in her first photograph. . . . Ultimately I experienced her, strong as she had been, my inner law, as my feminine child. Which was my way of resolving Death . . . if after having been reproduced as other than him- self, the individual dies, having thereby denied and transcended himself, I who had not procreated, I had, in her very illness, engendered my mother....Photography, whose etymology means "light writing," alchemically transforms light into flesh. In this transformation, photography becomes a maternal medium that magically reconnects the body of the viewing subject to the body of the referent by an umbilical cord. This umbilical cord, in turn, creates a new corpus that envelops both the viewing subject and the photographed object under a common skin. In the act of transforming light into skin, photography transubstantiates the body of the referent and transports it through time and space.

-Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980)

7.

Alas, it was this phantom that I saw when, entering the drawing-room before my grandmother had been told of my return, I found her there, reading. I was in the room, or rather I was not yet in the room since she was not aware of my presence, and, like a woman whom one surprises at a piece of work which she will hide if anyone comes in, she was absorbed in thoughts which she had never displayed before me. Of myself-- thanks to that privilege which does not last but which gives one, during the brief moment of return, the faculty of being suddenly the spectator of one's own absence--there was present only the witness, the observer, in travelling coat and hat, the stranger who does not belong to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again. What, mechanically, occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph. We never see the people who are dear to us save in the animated system, the perpetual motion of our incessant love for them, which before allowing the images that their faces present to reach us seizes them in its vortex, flings them back upon the idea that we have always had of them, makes them adhere to it, coincide with it. How, since into the forehead and the cheeks of my grandmother I had been accustomed to read all the most delicate, the most permanent qualities of her mind; how, since every habitual glance is an act of necromancy, each face

that we love a mirror of the past, how could I have failed to overlook what had become dulled and changed in her, seeing that in the most trivial spectacles of our daily life, our eye, charged with thought, neglects, as would a classical tragedy, every image that does not contribute to the action of the play and retains only those that may help to make its purpose intelligible. But if, in place of our eye, it should be a purely material object [*objectif*], a photographic plate, that has watched the action, then what we see, in the courtyard of the Institute, for example, will be, instead of the dignified emergence of an Academician who is trying to hail a cab, his staggering gait, his precautions to avoid falling on his back, the parabola of his fall, as though he were drunk or the ground covered in ice. So it is when some cruel trick of chance prevents our intelligent and pious affection from coming forward in time to hide from our eyes what they ought never to behold, when it is forestalled by our eyes, and they, arriving first in the field and having it to themselves, set to work mechanically, like films, and show us, in placed of the beloved person who has long ago ceased to exist but whose death our affection has always hitherto kept concealed from us, the new person whom a hundred times daily it has clothed with a loving and mendacious likeness...I, for whom my grandmother was still myself, I who had never seen her save in my own soul, always in the same place in the past, through the transparency of contiguous and overlapping memories, suddenly, in our drawing-room which formed part of a new world, that of Time, that which is inhabited by the strangers of whom we say "He's begun to age a good deal," for the first time and for a moment only, since she vanished very quickly, I saw, sitting on the sofa, beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and vulgar, sick, day-dreaming, letting her slightly crazed eyes wander over a book, an overburdened old woman whom I did not know.

-Proust, *The Guermantes Way* (1920)

8.

What best reminds us of a person is precisely what we had forgotten...That is why the better part of our memories exists outside us...Outside us? Within us, rather, but hidden from our eyes in an oblivion alone that we can from time to time recover the person that we were, place ourselves in relation to things as he was placed, suffer anew because we are no longer ourselves but he, and because he loved what now leaves us indifferent. In the broad daylight of our habitual memory the images of the past turn gradually pale and fade out of sight, nothing remains of them, we shall never recapture it.

-Proust, *Within a Budding Grove* (1919)

9.

A photograph acquires something of the dignity that it ordinarily lacks when it ceases to be a reproduction of reality and shows us things that no longer exist.

-Proust, *Within a Budding Grove* (1919)

10.

We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes.

-Kafka, "Letter to Janouch"

11.

The image wanders ghostlike through the present. Ghostly apparitions occur only in places where a terrible deed has been committed. The photograph becomes a ghost because the costume doll lived....This ghostlike reality is *unredeemed*....A shudder goes through the viewer of old photographs for they do not illustrate the recognition of the original but rather the spatial configuration of a moment; it is not the person who appears in his photograph, but the sum of what is to be deducted from him. It annihilates the person by portraying him, and were he to converge with it, he would not exist.

-Kracauer, "Photography" (1927)

12.

I sit here, at the window, I watch the passers-by / and see myself through their eyes. I feel as if I am / a silent photograph, in its old-fashioned frame, / hanging outside the house, on the west wall, I and my window. / Now and then I myself look at / this photograph with its amorous, tired eyes— / a shadow hides the mouth; the flat gleam from the glass in the frame, / at certain moments, when facing the sinking sun, or moonlight, / covers the whole face, and I am hidden / behind a square light, pallid or silver or rose, / and I can look freely at the world / without anyone seeing me. Freely—what can one say? / I can't move; at my back / the damp or burning wall; in my chest / the cold windowpane; the small veins of my eyes / reticulate in the glass. And pressed this way / between wall and windowpane, I dare not move my hand / to lift my palm to my brow when the sun blazes / like inexorable glory; and I'm forced / to see, to want, yet not to move. If I tried / to touch something, my elbow / could shatter the glass, / leaving a hole in my side, exposed to rain and to observation. // Then again, if I start to talk, the breath from my voice / clouds the windowpane (as now) and I no longer / can see the thing I wanted to talk about. // Silence and immobility, then... When evening falls / and the chairs outside the cafes are still warm / and everyone (and I, too, perhaps) tries to take refuge in someone else, / they come silently down from their frames as though coming down / a humble wooden staircase, go into the kitchen, / light the lamp, set the table (one can hear / the friendly sound of a fork hitting against a plate), / arrange my few books and even my thoughts / with comparisons and images (old and new), with respectable / arguments / and sometimes with ancient, unassailable, lived-through proofs.”

-Yannis Ritsos, "The Window" (1959)

13.

Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resembles them in a photographic sense....But the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory. The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits....In the illustrated magazines people see the very world that the illustrated magazines prevent them from perceiving. The spatial continuum from the camera's perspective predominates the spatial appearance of the perceived object; the likeness that the image bears to it effaces the contours of the object's "history." Never before has a period known so little about itself. In the hands of the ruling society, the invention of illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding...the blizzard of photographs betrays an indifference toward what the things mean. It would not have to be this way; but, in any case, the American illustrated magazines--which the

publications of other countries emulate to a large degree--equate the world with the quintessence of the photographs. This equation is not made without good reason. For the world itself has taken on a "photographic face"; it can be photographed because it strives to be completely reducible to the spatial continuum that yields to snapshots.... What the photographs by their sheer accumulation attempt to banish is the recollection of death, which is part and parcel of every memory-image. In the illustrated magazines the world has become a photographable present, and the photographed present has been entirely eternalized. Seemingly ripped from the clutch of death, in reality it has succumbed to it all the more.

-Kracauer, "Photography" (1927)

14.

Today any event worthy of notice is surrounded by a circle of lenses and microphones and lit up by the flaming explosions of flashbulbs. In many cases, the event itself is completely subordinated to its transmission; to a great degree, it has been turned into an object. Thus we have already experienced political trials, parliamentary meetings, and contests whose whole purpose is to be the object of a planetary broadcast. The event is bound neither to its particular space nor to its particular time, since it can be mirrored anywhere and repeated any number of times. These are signs that point to a great detachment.

-Jünger, "On Pain" (1934)

15.

All of the possibilities of this portrait art arise because the contact between actuality and photography has not yet occurred. Many of Hill's portraits originated in the Edinburgh Greyfriar's cemetery--nothing is more characteristic of this early period, except maybe the way the models were at home there. And indeed this cemetery, according to one of Hill's pictures, is itself like an interior, a separate closed-off space where the gravestones propped against the gable walls rise from the grass, hollowed out like a chimney, with inscriptions inside instead of tongues of flames.

-Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography" (1931)

16.

Concerning the *mémoire involontaire*: its images do not only come without being called up; rather, they are images which we have never seen before we remember them. This is most clearly the case in those images in which--like in some dreams--we ourselves can be seen. We stand in front of ourselves, the way we might have stood somewhere in a prehistoric past, but never before our gaze. And it is in fact the most important images, those developed in the darkroom of the lived moment, that we get to see. One might say that our most profound moments have been furnished, like some cigarette packages, with a little image, a photograph of ourselves. And that "whole life" which, as we often hear, passes before the dying or people in danger of dying, is composed precisely of those tiny images.

-Benjamin, "Speech on Proust" (1932)

17.

Anyone can see that the duration for which we are exposed to impressions has no bearing on their fate in memory. Nothing prevents our keeping rooms where we spent twenty-four hours more or less clearly in our memory, and forgetting entirely where we passed months. It is not, therefore, owing to an all too short exposure time if no image appears on the plate of remembrance. More frequent, perhaps, are the cases when the halfhearted habit denies the plate the necessary light for years, until one day from alien sources it flashes as if from burning, magnesium powder, and now a snapshot transfixes the room's image on the plate. But in the center of these rare images, we always stand ourselves. And this is not so enigmatic, since such moments of sudden illumination are at the same time moments when we are beside ourselves, and while our waking, habitual, everyday self is involved actively or passively in what happens, our deeper self rests in another place and is touched by the shock, as is the little heap of magnesium powder by the flame of the match. It is to this sacrifice of our deepest self in shock that our memory owes its most indelible images.

-Benjamin, *A Berlin Chronicle*  
(1932)

18. The illiteracy of the future will be ignorance not of reading or writing, but of photography.

-Moholy-Nagy, "Photography in Advertising" (1932)