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Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*

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Roland Barthes's 1980 book Camera Lucida is perhaps the most influential book ever published on photography. The terms studium and punctum, coined by Barthes for two different ways of responding to photographs, are part of the standard lexicon for discussions of photography; Barthes's understanding of photographic time and the relationship he forges between photography and death have been invoked countless times in photographic discourse; and the current interest in vernacular photographs and the ubiquity of subjective, even novelistic, ways of writing about photography both owe something to Barthes. Photography Degree Zero, the first anthology of writings on Camera Lucida, goes beyond the usual critical orthodoxies to offer a range of perspectives on Barthes's important book. Photography Degree Zero (the title links Barthes's first book, Writing Degree Zero, to his last, Camera Lucida) includes essays written soon after Barthes's book appeared as well as more recent rereadings of it, some previously unpublished. The contributors' approaches range from psychoanalytical (in an essay drawing on the work of Lacan) to Buddhist (in an essay that compares the photographic flash to the mystic's light of revelation); they include a history of Barthes's writings on photography and an account of Camera Lucida and its reception; two views of the book through the lens of race; and a provocative essay by Michael Fried and two responses to it. The variety of perspectives included in Photography Degree Zero, and the focus on Camera Lucida in the context of photography rather than literature or philosophy, serve to reopen a vital conversation on Barthes's influential work.

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