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A New Interiority: Yielding Intimacy in an Age of New Media
“I want to utter interiority without yielding intimacy.” (Barthes, 98)

French theorist Roland Barthes wrote his seminal reflection on photography, *Camera Lucida*, shortly after his mother’s death. In it he describes his discovery of a photograph of his mother, at five years of age, standing with her brother under palm trees in a glass conservatory. For Barthes, who came to call this image the Winter Garden Photograph, the picture wounds: its *punctum* accords with both the nature of his mother’s being and his grief at her death. But Barthes will not show the photograph to us, as he writes:

I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the “ordinary”; ...at most, it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound. (73)

Barthes is unwilling to give up the intimacy of his wound to the public -- to a public who would lack the capacity to feel such a wound. Rather, Barthes keeps this photograph private. The *punctum* of a photograph is intimate; it is deeply personal; it is guarded.

Barthes holds the Winter Garden Photograph closely as a memory, and indeed, photography promises to remember. This is the promise of new media: retention, endless memory, storage, and the ability to preserve our experiences, perhaps in ways only those intimate to us could do. Yet such media, I argue, are eroding the differences between what is inside and what is outside, what is private and what is public, what is intimate and what is not, flattening these divisions to a single, abyssal surface. With this collapse to the surface we see a new transparency, a new visibility, in new media. What is at stake in this collapse is precisely the boundaries of the intimate. For when what is most closely personal comes to the surface, it cannot be redacted.

Had Barthes shown us the Winter Garden Photograph, he could have never taken it back. This collapse to an abyssal surface results in a new ease in accessing the intimate, in accessing that which was once guarded. This ease can also be painful: a pain resulting from the devaluation of the intimate, a betrayal of the intimate, a transformation of one's intimate *punctum* into a public, ordinary, indifferent *studium*. But perhaps this ease can also be political.

The surface is the place where the where insides collide with outsides, where interiors meet exteriors. Surfaces are points of contact. On the body, the surface is the skin; in psychoanalysis, the ego, the psyche; in cinema and new media, the screen, and the graphical user interface; in hard computing, the casing of the hard drive. These surfaces are boundaries: they are the picket fences around yards, separating the public from the domestic; they are the intima, the innermost membranes of our organs; they are the divisions between what is intimate and what is not.

Over and over again, we see instances where advances in technology erode the divisions between interiors and exteriors, allowing insides to meet outsides at the boundaries, the surfaces. In *Atomic Light*, Lippit focuses on the skin of the body as the frontier between the body's interiority and exteriority, as something that is both "oriented towards the outside and inside" and that is "felt (touched) from within and without" (78). With the invention of the X-ray, the skin no longer maintains this separation. The interiority and exteriority of the body radically collapse onto the surface, and the depth of the body compresses. The new surface of the body becomes a deep surface -- an "abyssal surface" -- because it contains and flattens this depth (Lippit 29). The X-ray erodes the skin's dividing power between inside and out. The body is penetrated. X-rays also look inside: they see the broken bones, or the concealed weapon. Without even touching the skin, X-rays transform the avisuality of the interiority of the body

into the visible, the penetrated, the seen. X-rays can see through one's undergarments -- one's *intimates* -- to what lies beneath.

Where the X-ray might have begun the quest for total visibility of the body, the Visible Human Project completed it. The X-ray depicts the living body as a skeleton, as death. However the Visible Human Project shows the human body in cross-section, literally slicing the body into essentially flat sections, effacing the Cartesian definition of a body as a "thing which takes up stable space, which is itself place" (Waldby 35). The bodies of the Visible Man and Visible Woman are obliterated by the process of documentation, and they lack depth at all: rather, they became a set of millimeter-thick slices, as if pieces of deli-meat. Total visibility -- as a solution to "the problem of bodily opacity" (24) -- occurs only through the penetration of the skin, and the collapse of the interiority of the body onto the superficial surface of the cross-section.

New technologies flatten us. The telephone dislocated our voices from our bodies, sending this intimate part of us -- the sounds that come from our insides -- out into the realm of the other's receiver. On Skype, our three-dimensional bodies are flattened to the 2-dimensional screen, and live inside it next to word processors and editors which were solely meant to handle two-dimensional objects. The boundaries between what is public and what is private have eroded through listservs and blogs, where the private life of one is broadcast to a wide and public audience through the self-publishing mechanisms that only the Internet allows. On YouTube we see the living rooms of others, sitting silently behind them as they vlog, dance, or show us their dog's newest trick, thrusting the private domain of their homes out into the public, and then back into our own privacies of our *personal* computers. On Facebook the interiority of a person is revealed to the world, giving access to personal data in a way impossible previously. It is apt, I think, that at this moment of writing, Facebook has just gone public as a company with a \$16

billion dollar initial public offering (Rusli and Eavis).

I do not mean to dramatize this collapse of interiority and exteriority, as there has been much writing and much catastrophization on this matter. Rather, I mean simply to highlight that the difference between insides and outsides is eroding through media. We see this erosion occurring quite physically through prosthetics. If all media are extensions of the self, as McLuhan and Kittler would argue, then all media are prosthetics. All media are artificial body parts worn to augment the human senses. Spectacles become an extension of the eye, the hearing aid an extension of the ear, the calculator an extension of the mental faculties. When such media objects become an extension of the self, the 'self' must expand to include these objects within its boundaries, thus stretching and eroding the divisions between what is self and what is other. Kittler would be unlikely to agree with this characterization, claiming that there is no self without media to begin with. Yet I find it instructive to see how objects of technology become adjoined to the 'natural' body, for this reveals how the interior and the exterior elide into one self which includes the prosthetic. Just think: how many times have you seen a friend who always wears glasses suddenly turn up in contact lenses, only to explain to them "Wow, you don't look like yourself!" -- the self, then, being the prosthetically-enhanced face?

The spectacles, the hearing aid: technologies let us see more clearly, let us hear more clearly, and bring us closer to as they conflate the self with the other. As technologies of seeing inside, both the X-ray and the Visible Human Project show the desire to get closer, and to penetrate boundaries of the flesh, as do all technologies that "transluminate" the body, as Waldby puts it (25). This drive towards closeness is precisely the drive of intimacy. The intimate is the "inmost, most inward, most deep seated", from the Latin *intimāt-us*, past participle of *intimāre*, meaning the inmost, deepest, profound, or close in friendship (Oxford English Dictionary). Walter

Benjamin also cites this drive towards closeness in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, claiming that the decay of artwork's aura is intrinsically linked to the "desire of the present-day masses to get closer to things spatially and humanly" (255). When works of art are brought closer via reproduction -- when a poster of the Mona Lisa lives in doctor's offices across America -- what is lost is the *here and now* of the art work, its "unique existence in a particular place" (Benjamin 253).

Within his photographs, British photographer Eadweard Muybridge was trying hard to bring us closer and closer to motion: to fill in the gaps of our sensory-perceptive knowledge by taking photographs at closer and closer time intervals. In his later work, he shoots people in motion in front of elaborate and scientific mesh grids, disarming them from the *here and now* of their environments in an effort to get closer. We can also see the drive to get closer in Antonioni's 1966 film "Blow Up", in which the main character, a photographer named Thomas, enlarges his park photographs to reveal a murder he had not witnessed, yet discovered in the process of developing and enlarging. In both cases -- for both Muybridge and *Blow Up's* Thomas -- the photographs allow the discovery some truth that was previously unknown. For Muybridge, this was the truth about animal motion, and for Thomas, the truth of the murder's occurrence. Getting closer allows for the discovery of the intimate in the scientific use of the word: "the innermost nature or fundamental characteristic of a thing" (Oxford English Dictionary).

What is inmost is tied to what is most essentially the self. Psychoanalysis aims to reveal the inmost: it holds a promise of looking into the interior of the psyche -- into the unconscious -- and of revealing its innermost thoughts and desires. For Freud, consciousness is almost like a skin, serving as the location where the interior forces of the unconscious and the exterior forces of sensation come together. Freud himself highlighted surfaces: "the ego is ultimately derived

from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the *surface of the body*. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the *surface of the body*" (Lippit 78). The ego is, according to Freud, "not merely a surface entity, but is itself a projection of a surface (Lippit 78). The ego is that surface that is projected onto, that separates -- and also attempts to integrate -- the exterior forces of perception and the interior forces of the unconscious. Lippit notes that "psychoanalysis can be said to be a science of surfaces and cracks" -- the surface, again, being a kind of skin, and the cracks being the small avenues through which we may discover the disarming secrets of the unconscious (78). Just as X-rays transformed the avisibility of the interior of the body into the visible, so too does psychoanalysis cast light onto the obscure, shadowed interiority of the unconscious, and expose it to the realm of consciousness.

It is interesting to turn from here to Freud's notion of the uncanny -- the *unheimlich*. For Freud, the uncanny is that terrifying thing which proceeds from "something familiar which has been repressed" (15). Etymologically, the uncanny is the opposite of the intimate. *Unheimlich* is the opposite of *heimlich*, meaning "belonging to the house, ...familiar, tame, *intimate*, comfortable, homely" (2, emphasis added). Yet *heimlich*, meaning "intimate", also has the alternate definition of "concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it" (3). Here we see clearly how what is intimate collides with what is private, held secret, kept inside in the realm of the interior. Freud quotes Schelling's definition of *unheimlich* as "everything that ought to have remained...hidden and secret and has become visible" (4). By looking inside, psychoanalysis reveals the hidden and secret repressed thoughts, just as the X-ray reveals the hidden bones or the concealed weapons and the Visible Human Project reveals the hidden insides of the body.

In *Programmed Visions*, Chun examines how computer interfaces -- specifically graphical user interfaces -- act as the mediators between what's visible and what's invisible in computing (8).

After all, Chun notes that there is a “...growing belief that computers enable total transparency” - a belief that is at odds with how opaque the computer really is to its users (Chun 16). Yet this belief in transparency impacts user interface design. Certainly within Silicon Valley, there is a big push towards towards what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG) interfaces, where editing happens in-line, changes are reflected immediately, and the interface is at its most ‘transparent’. Software is the surface *in media res*, in the middle of things (Chun 175). Yet it, too, is both visible and invisible at the same time, spanning visibility with a strange half-transparency like that of celluloid film itself. The graphical user interface is the most visible part of software, but its status is that of the frame of a painting in a gallery, which is neither interior to nor exterior from the work but rather lives in the liminal boundary between the inside and the outside.

New media do seem to promise a new transparency. But computers do not yield quite so easily to visuality.. Chun notes:

When the computer does let us “see” what we cannot normally see, or even when it acts like a transparent medium through video chat, it does not simply relay what is on the other side: it computes. (17)

In this way, computers are a striking metaphor for false consciousness: we don’t actually see what’s happening inside computers, but it feels like we see everything. Computers are about voltage differences, not about Snow Leopard.

Bits are invisible. We cannot see them, hear them, touch them, or smell them, as David Levy notes (Kirschenbaum 30). Our information lives within a system of opacity, within the black box of the hard drive which is sealed inside our computers in an encasing needed to keep out contaminants like dust and hair that would sever its functionality (Kirschenbaum 75). The casing of the hard drive protects its interiority. Only through software can the interiority of the hard drive be accessed. The *softness* of software belongs in the realm of the intimate, of the inside.

What is on the inside anyway? What is it we're looking for when we get closer? On the inside, I posit, lays *identity*. Nowhere is this more clear than in the hard drive, the innermost part of the computer and its data receptacle. Kirschenbaum notes, "You are the sum total of your data. No man escapes that" (104). Whereas once *les yeux étaient le miroir de l'âme*, now the hard drive is, as Italian media artist Carlo Zanni makes evident with his work "You Are Your C:", which portrays each visitor as their own hard disk. Zanni writes that the work is a "modern soul mirror, it doesn't make you young again and it doesn't show you better than you are. It shows only what you are: your hard disk". Or perhaps the eyes are the avenues to our identities, as retinal scanning would have us believe. Or, rather, the blood, which has been reintensified as a "psychic base for identification" (Berlant and Warner 318). A true identification is what Barthes finds in the Winter Garden photograph. In it, he finally saw his mother, exclaiming "There she is! She's really there! At last, there she is!" (99). The photograph achieved for Barthes the "impossible science" of his mother's "unique being" (71). The insides, that is, are so preciously intimate because they hold our truths, our unique identities.

For Barthes, the Winter Garden Photograph grounds his desire to re-encounter his mother's truth. This grounding is justified because photography's essence -- its noeme -- is *that-has-been* (Barthes 100). In other words, identity is intricately connected to memory. If identity can persist, it can do so only through memory. To identify something -- to recognize it -- is to "coat with presence the otherness of that which is over and gone" (Ricoeur 39). To identify something is to remember it.

Crucially, such a memory is an active one rather than a passive one. Up until recently it was believed that retaining, coupled with rewriting, formed a "persistence of vision". This

persistence was once the most popular idea of how we understand motion, where it was thought that images were retained on our retinas and that our brains compared these retained images to new images coming in, using this comparison to see motion. Now we know that the relation between retaining and rewriting is more complex than this. And more and more, digital media, like the screen and like the retina, operate more heavily in the realm of erasure and rewriting over the retention of traces. Chun notes that “memory must be held in order to keep it from fading” (137). Media, especially new media, promise to hold our memories for us. The Winter Garden Photograph holds Barthes’ memory of his mother, just as my digital pictures hold my memories of a recent trip to the beach and my iPhone holds the memory of the phone numbers of close friends. The paradox of digital media is that its memory “operates by annihilating memory” (Chun 137). Digital memory is constantly refreshed. What looks static to us is constantly renewed (Chun, *Enduring Ephemeral*, 197). Indeed the Internet itself has no memory -- an issue that the Internet Wayback Machine aims to resolve by saving the histories of web pages dating back to 1996 (Chun 171) . But because websites link to rather than embed images, and because links constantly change, break, and go offline, the Wayback Machine preserves a “skeleton” of a page, devoid of its original images. It’s as if the Wayback Machine has taken an X-ray of the Internet.

Whereas permanence has a calmness to it, erasure contains a violence: the violence of effacement. This violence is the violence of the collapse of interiors and exteriors to the surface. For the X-ray -- that light which collapses the depth of the body onto its surface -- the violence is that of penetration. Whereas light once bounced off the skin, thus creating the photograph, now light penetrates through the skin with the violence of radiation. The X-ray “makes the body visible by burning it. The extravisuality of the X-ray is an effect of its inflammatory force.... It sees by burning and destroying” (Lippit 50). The X-ray has a lethal force, one that foreshadows

and echoes the catastrophic capacity of atomic light to “penetrate the body and erase the distinction between inside and out” (Lippit 84). The violence of the X-ray harms literally -- through radiation -- and metaphorically, by collapsing all interiority and exteriority to a single curve: the surface.

There is a violence in psychoanalysis as well: the violence of cracking the surface of the consciousness to reveal the unknowns that reside within the unconscious. Psychoanalysis, like the X-ray, is a method of looking inside. Often the psyche is not prepared to look inside, and therefore it displaces memories, as we saw with Freud’s Screen Memories. But the surface of the psyche provides cracks as clues for psychoanalysis, often appearing in the form of dreams, which are then interpreted. Dreams straddle the realm of the visual and the avisual, and crack the surface of the ego, collapsing the divide between the unconscious and the conscious, folding the unconscious into the fabric of the consciousness. Likewise, memories straddle the visual and the avisual, and crack the surface of *time*, collapsing the past into the present, and bringing memories -- which are always of the past, always of the posterior -- into the present moment.

This collapse of time is precisely what is at stake for Barthes in his examination of photography in *Camera Lucida*. The Barthesian photograph has a double violence: first the violence of the *punctum* -- that which that which pricks, wounds, bruises. Barthes writes, “A photograph’s *punctum* is the accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27), that which “I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*” (55). The *punctum* is not a neutral entity; it is damaging one. The *punctum* damages by means of the skin: it pricks, it bruises. Barthes’ use of words here is certainly metaphorical, but his words are words of

the skin nonetheless, and the skin provides an important conceptual framework for understanding the *punctum*. Like wounds to the body, the *punctum* leaves its trace in time, as a skin-memory. Just as bruises appear on the skin as latent artifacts of damage -- we are black and blue after the impact, not during -- so too can the *punctum* "accommodate a certain latency" that is discovered after the fact, where the *punctum* is revealed when the viewer thinks back on a photograph that is no longer in front of him (Barthes 53). The *punctum* is a violent wound that the photograph casts upon the viewer as a skin-metaphor.

If the Barthesian photograph is doubly violent, and the first violence is that of the *punctum*, the second one is the violence of the photograph itself as an object of gaze, "not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (Barthes 91). This violence is a temporal one: it is a violence about removing the object, which adheres to its referent in the photograph, from its original temporal context. The photograph mummifies of the singular moment, almost making it into a specter (Barthes 89). This mummification happens because of persistence of the second *punctum*, which is Time itself: "the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* ("*that-has-been*"), its pure representation" (Barthes 96).

The violence within the photograph lies in its flattening of time -- of the past with the present -- and in no instance is this clearer than in the case of the photograph of Lewis Payne in his cell on death row. In this photograph, Barthes "observe[s] with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake": Payne is dead and he is going to die. In front of the photograph of his mother as a child, Barthes tells himself, "she is going to die," and he shudders "over a catastrophe which has already occurred" (96). The horror of anterior future death haunts the main character of Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (*The Pier*), who, as a child, witnesses his own death

on the pier of the Orly airport. It also haunts James Cole, the main character in Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys*, who likewise witnesses the anterior future of his own death at the Philadelphia airport. Indeed, for Barthes, "whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe" (96). Borges' *Infinite Library* contains this catastrophe as well: inside this infinite library is every story, including the true story of your death, "a death that has already happened, will have (already) happened when it finally arrives" (Lippit 6). Hollis Frampton's *Nostalgia* also contains this catastrophe: we are told about an image before we even see it, we are made aware of what will burn, what will already be lost, before we can even cast our gazes upon it. What this secondary *punctum* is wounding for Barthes is the ability to move continuously through time. Instead there is a punctuation in time. On the surface of the photograph, time collapses.

If this collapse is violent, then it is only a precursor to the violence that can come about through the betrayal of the intimate. This violence is suited to the intimate by its very definition. *To intimate*, as a verb, archaically meant to formally declare war (Oxford English dictionary). Once time has collapsed onto the surface of the Winter Garden Photograph, once Barthes has been pricked by the *punctum* of truly "seeing" his mother within the photograph, he will not betray this intimacy. He holds it close, safeguarding his *punctum* from becoming our mere *studium*. Yet this collapse of interiors and exteriors to the surface makes intimacy much easier to access. When what was once deeply personal is brought to the surface, the difficulty of reaching it is lessened. When we so readily document ourselves on the surfaces of our Facebook walls, our intimate traces -- our photos, our friendships, our personal preferences and 'likes' -- can be so much more readily accessed. Never before has it been so easy to betray intimacy as now, when what is inside has already been collapsed in space and time to what is outside through media.

Therefore, we guard our collapsed surfaces. We place screen protectors on our iPhones and silicone keyboard covers on our laptops. We try to protect our psyches by screening out memories we cannot handle. We wear bulky X-ray guard-vests when our dentists must X-ray our teeth now. We wear condoms (for let us not forget the other connotations of what it means to know someone intimately, to remove someone's intimates, to look inside intimately, to penetrate as if with an X-ray, to generate the X-rated). We update our privacy settings on our Facebook accounts, we block people, we unfriend. Or sometimes we do nothing, because a new kind of privacy in new media is a blending in. Encrypted emails, after all, are more likely to be flagged for search. Whatever it is we do, we take measures to guard what is intimate. We chastise those who do not, those who "overshare" online and who leave lewd Facebook photographs tagged. Increasingly this chastisement operates at a generational divide, with the older guarding their *punctums* more heavily than the younger who, by ignorance or by the belief they will blend in, let them go more freely.

Privacy and intimacy certainly intersect, and are conflated in online social networks. But they do not overlap wholeheartedly. Privacy is about control. Privacy contains socio-legal implications that intimacy lacks: there is a *right to privacy*; there is *private property*; and a *private sector*. Intimacy is about something else. It is about proximity, connection, and closeness. It is about the body and sexuality (and, in an collision of the two terms, intimacy is about our "private parts"). It is about what is inside, what is most inward, most intrinsic, most essential. It is about our innermost thoughts and feelings. Intimacy is about the *punctum* that shoots us like a deeply personal arrow, an arrow that can wound no one but that for whom it was intended.

Yet the private and the intimate do overlap -- to political effect. The intimate, the *heimlich*, is the realm of the home, a space of domestic privacy that can feel like a controllable space

in the face of the uncontrollability of the public realm. Berlant notes that intimacy engages with a “prevalent U.S. discourse on the proper relation between public and private, spaces traditionally associated with the gendered divisions of labor” (3). Berlant argues that such categories have created institutions of intimacy that have normalized heterosexual culture and made it hegemonic, creating a culture that “links intimacy *only* to the institutions of personal life, making them the privileged institutions of social reproduction, the accumulation and transfer of wealth, and self-development” (Berlant and Warner 317). Queer culture, on the other hand, has necessitated a break between intimacy and the domestic space, between intimacy and the couple, and between intimacy and property. Intimacy, when institutionalized, is highly political.

When insides and outsides are flattened, and collapse to the abyssal surface as I have shown they do, we find a new ease in penetrating through this surface into the realm of the intimate. This penetration can be violent, and painful. It can punch us as if through a hole in an early programming punch card; it can sting, bruise, and wound like the Barthesian *punctum*. Therefore, we do not yield to it readily, we guard against it. Once we have yielded, we cannot redact the intimacy that we have laid out on the table. But perhaps this ease in accessing what is intimate can erode upon the dominion of the political: carving away at the institutions of intimacy that give recourse to the straight over the queer, the couple over the community. For while the intimate is deeply private, the private can also be political.

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