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Reading Camera Lucida in Gaza: Ronit Matalon’s Photographic Travels

In 1988 Roland Barthes’s final book, Camera Lucida (La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie), appeared in Hebrew translation as Mahshavot ‘al ha-tsilum (Thoughts on Photography). Since only A Lover’s Discourse and two of Barthes’s essays had previously been published in Hebrew,1 the translation marked a new phase in the Israeli reception of Barthes and European photography theory more generally.2 But the 1988 translation also was significant because it appeared just as the first Palestinian Intifada was gaining momentum and receiving widespread media coverage in Israel and abroad. Ronit Matalon (1959–), an Israeli writer of Egyptian extraction, was working at the time as a journalist for the newspaper Ha’aretz, covering the Intifada and reporting on her visits to such locations as Gaza, Rafiah, and the Shati refugee camp, where, she notes, the “Intifada was taking place mainly in the territory of ‘the visible,’ in which the camera played a major role.”3 In her five-page story “Photograph” (“Tatslum”), signed “Gaza, 1990,” she brings Barthes’s thoughts on photography to bear on situations of death and mourning during the Intifada. In her 1995 novel The One Facing Us (Zeh ‘im ha-panim eleynu), Matalon continues her engagement with Camera Lucida, connecting it to the photographs discussed and/or visually reproduced in the novel. Its Israeli narrator travels to Cameroon, a setting that allowed Matalon to consider the implications of Barthes’s theory and methodology for neocolonial...
race, class, and gender inequalities and the struggles against them.4 Just as Matalon’s narrators travel to unfamiliar locations (Gaza, Cameroon), so her writings transport photography theory into political-social environments where it might be “reignited” rather than merely “adapted,” to quote Edward Said. Matalon’s use of Barthes thus enacts what Said calls the “profound restlessness” of theory, its striving “always to move beyond its confinements, to emigrate” (451–52).

*Camera Lucida* interweaves Barthes’s theoretical reflections with his analyses of specific photographs and his personal, memoir-like ruminations on his mother’s death. Despite, or perhaps because of, its generic indeterminacy and intriguing combination of the personal and the analytical, the book has been widely discussed in the Anglo-American world. While Barthes’s famous distinction between the *studium* and *punctum* of the photograph continues to excite debate among art historians, philosophers, and literary critics, scholars have also taken up other aspects of Barthes’s work—for example, the relationships between family rites, such as mourning, and photography (see Hirsch 5). The book has even been called “the most quoted book in the photographic canon” (Batchen 1).

In her use of *Camera Lucida*, Matalon is attuned both to the literary qualities of the text, often interpolating it—via unacknowledged quotations—into her fiction, and to its theoretical agendas. Her Barthes is twice removed from his French context—through translation and through incorporation into works of fiction—and Matalon takes full advantage of this linguistic estrangement by weaving the high register of the Hebrew translation into her own formulations. Doing so, she renders the central Israeli-Palestinian Gaza encounter in “Photograph,” as well as the Hebrew language used to describe it, all the more strange and artificial, lending everything “an exaggerated strangeness” (*zarut mugzemet*). On another level, Matalon undertakes, in both “Photograph” and *The One Facing Us*, her own *translatio* of Barthes, asking how, if at all, his ideas might emigrate to a Gaza under Israeli occupation, to the Egyptian diaspora, or to neocolonial Africa. She thereby examines critically the practices of visual, and particularly photographic, representation in these settings.5 Matalon focuses on three issues central to *Camera Lucida*: photography as a “return of the dead” and thus as an (impossible) invitation to mourn, the status of the author/photographer vis-à-vis that of the reader/viewer, and, lastly, the racial dimensions of the image as an “emanation of the referent,” a kind of “skin” shared by viewer and photographed subject.

While Matalon has by now become a central, even mainstream, Israeli writer, her early forays into the sphere of Hebrew letters were executed from the marginal position of a Mizrahi woman writer, and a prose writer at that.6 By taking on the voice and words of a prominent French theorist, Matalon both underscored her own local position (as Israeli, female, and non-European) and asserted the links between herself and Barthes, her position as a commentator on his work, and the

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1 I use the term “neocolonialism” to “emphasize a repetition with difference, a regeneration of colonialism through other means.” See Shohat and Stam (40).

5 Although Lili Ratok and Gabriel Zoran have discussed the importance of *Camera Lucida* for Matalon’s early writing, they have attended neither to the qualities of the Hebrew translation of Barthes nor to Matalon’s resistance to and rewriting of Barthes’s late theory in her politically self-conscious writings.

indeterminate, experimental status of her own theoretically inflected literature. If the first part of this essay concerns Matalon’s transposition in the story “Photograph” of Barthes’s Winter Garden plot to Gaza, in the second section I treat her practice of weaving unacknowledged quotations from the translation of Camera Lucida into that same text, employing Barthes’s exact formulations while evacuating his presence and radically rewriting some of Barthes’s key assumptions.

I then examine Matalon’s continued engagement with Camera Lucida in The One Facing Us. The appearance of African subjects in the family photographs around which the novel revolves allows Matalon to revisit the racial implications of Barthes’s notions of photographic contingency and light as a “skin” that joins the viewer and the photographed subject. If, as recent criticism has maintained, images of black subjects are indispensable to Barthes’s theorization of the punctum and even to the Winter Garden image itself, Matalon takes this insight one step further to show that the contingency or accident of photography is productive of racial inequality. Light, however, does not function for Matalon merely as a shared skin, a “carnal medium” that fixes the referent to the image and transfers it to the eyes of the beholder. It is also a means of disrupting photography’s contingency and, via the narrative, of manipulating its contents and insisting on its illusory power. For Matalon, the medium of photography both binds black and white subjects, citizens and noncitizens (in the Israeli-Palestinian case) and momentarily blinds the viewer to differences of color, class, and gender. Hence, in both her story and her novel, Matalon manipulates and reframes Barthes’s text, positioning La chambre claire/Maḥšavot al ha-tsilum as central to (her) writing about the social-political dynamics of vision and visibility in Gaza and Cameroon.

Gaza’s Winter Garden

Matalon’s first book-length publication, a volume of experimental short stories entitled Strangers at Home (Zarim ba-bayit), concludes with “Photograph” (“Tatślum”), a story concerning occupied Palestinians, the ultimate strangers in their own home. In a series of sketches composed while she was a journalist for Ha’aretz, in the late 1980s (later collected in the volume Read and Write, Kro u-khetov), Matalon depicts the minutiae of places, people, and conversations and also describes the mutual mistrust between herself and her Palestinian interlocutors. Many of her visits to Gaza during this period followed the death of Palestinian fighters or civilians, with Matalon both paying respects to the families and attempting to understand the circumstances surrounding the deaths themselves (see, for example, “Amal’s Birthday” and “Tiny Targets” in Kro u-khetov 89–96, 103–12). Matalon also reported on the mourning for individuals who had been transformed, often with the help of photography, into public figures and used for political purposes. In “Photograph,” a five-page story that reconfigures these experiences, Matalon describes the visits of an Israeli woman — ambiguously called “Nurit or Ronit,” the second name being Matalon’s own given name — to two Gaza families, one Palestinian and one American, whose close relatives have recently died. The first-person narrator presents Gaza in ambivalent, even hostile, terms; after kissing the hands of the deceased’s sisters, for example, she proclaims: “saneti et ha-adama she-hen dorkhot ‘aleya: ani ohevet et ‘aza yoter me-or sheni, kapara
la-taḥat shel ha-‘olam” (144; “I hated the ground they walked upon: I love Gaza more than a second skin, hell-hole offering of the world,” Weinstein 218; literally, “penance for the world’s ass”).

With the help of Haled, a young man accompanying her in Gaza, the Israeli narrator hopes to find out what has happened to her “missing friend” and his wife. When she arrives at the home of her friend—now referred to as her “dead friend”—she tells his sisters that she knows he has been “murdered” (“Photograph” 218/144). The scene that follows this revelation is a parodic retelling of Barthes’s “plot” in Camera Lucida—that is, of his search for an image of his mother through which he can relive her passing. Because, like Barthes, the narrator cannot come to terms with the fact of death, she searches for traces of the deceased. “I need pictures of him,” she desperately demands at the sisters’ home, “even one from his identity card, so that I won’t go on living my life with the image of a severed head, that’s all” (218/144). Her search for these pictures—part of her “marvelous job” as a journalist—becomes a means of avoiding “suffering” and escaping the burden of death. Matalon repeats the word “lucky” (mazal) to reinforce ironically this avoidance: “Lucky I had turned aside my head, just a little, when they hurled his death at me, lucky that we all searched for the photographs in the crannies [kukhim] that emerged out of the darkness in the room, lucky, lucky, lucky” (218/144).

In the second part of Camera Lucida, Barthes develops the notion that photography testifies to “the reality of that which has died or is going to die” (Allen 130). He comes to this insight when discussing a photo of his mother at age five in “what was called a Winter Garden in those days” (Camera Lucida 67). This image, Barthes claims, enables him to “rediscover” his mother in all her particularity; he detects there the “irreplaceable” quality of “who she was” (Camera Lucida 69, 75). This highly personal discovery—the reader is denied any glimpse of the Winter Garden photograph (an image that is, Diana Knight has claimed [266], Barthes’s own “invention”)—uncovers in turn the significance of photography at large. The “essence of photography” is the possibility of both retaining a physical trace of the referent’s being and reality and “shifting this reality to the past.” The Winter Garden image not only reawakens Barthes to the fact that the referent “had really existed,” but also to the fact that what has been lost cannot be recovered or replaced (Camera Lucida 73, 79, 77). The “catastrophe” of the subject’s death constitutes photography, insofar as every apprehension of a photograph, particularly an older one, entails the disquieting realization of an “anterior future,” of a death that was awaiting at the time the picture was taken and that oftentimes has already taken place when it is observed (Camera Lucida 96).

1 Unless otherwise noted, I quote, with minor modifications, from the published translations of “Photograph” and The One Facing Us by Marsha Weinstein. The English page numbers appear first, followed by the Hebrew page numbers of “Tatslum” and Zeh ‘im ha-panim ‘eleynu. The translations from Kro u-khetov are mine.

2 La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie, published in 1980 just prior to his death, is Barthes’s final “statement of faith in a photograph’s relation to its referent” (99). In “The Photographic Message,” published two decades earlier, Barthes emphasized, by contrast, the paradoxical process of transformation whereby “the uncultured of a ‘mechanical’ art,” or else the “photographic analogue,” becomes a coded, social text, or a “social institution” (31, 19). In Mythologies, moreover, Barthes pursued a critical semiotics of bourgeois (photographic) myths, demonstrating that “it is precisely in the strength of . . . an image’s denotative power that ideology does its naturalizing work” (Allen 120).
In “Photograph,” Matalon evokes Barthes’s Winter Garden narrative to interrogate the relationship between death, photography, and mourning in the Israeli-Palestinian context. By crossing the border and entering Gaza, her narrator seems to enter a photograph; at one point, a winter garden even materializes: ‘Haled and I stood at the entrance to the young wife’s parents’ house, next to a strange winter garden. ‘An exaggerated strangeness, like in dreams I do not like,’ Haled said’ (219/145; emphasis added). She too is searching for an image of the deceased, but whereas Barthes goes through a series of photographs in order to find the one image that would bring his mother back to him, Matalon’s narrator is willing to make do with any photograph. The aim of her search is to counter her gruesome mental image of the friend’s possible decapitation, rather than to rediscover the unique “truth” of that friend’s being. In the more immediate context of her visit to Gaza, the insistent search for a photograph taken from an “identity card”—a document issued by the Israeli government to control residency and regulate, among other things, the movement of Palestinians—reinforces the barrier between the narrator and her hosts, and so prevents any shared process of mourning.

The endeavor to find a photo of the deceased culminates in the unexpected appearance of barely intelligible facial close-ups on the walls of the Palestinian sisters’ dark crypt-like room. Centrally located in the story, this scene, together with the final “resurrection” scene, corresponds ironically to Barthes’s discovery of the Winter Garden photograph. As the narrator, Haled, and the sisters are about to abandon their search for a photograph of the dead man, they notice sporadically flickering spots of “brown and white” on the “rough walls” of the home (218, “havlahot shel hum ve-lavan ’al ha-kirot [ha-mehuspasim shel ha-heder ha-kukhi]” 145). These spots, neither photographic stills nor cinematic images, strike the narrator as “tsilumey takriv ‘anakiyim shel panav” (145; “giant photographic close-ups of his face”). In what may be a critique of the Palestinian custom of displaying oversized images of Shahids (martyrs), the man’s face is enlarged almost to the point of obscurity.9

On one level, this uncanny scene recreates Plato’s cave, with the shadowy “brown and white flickers” of color on the cave-like wall, faint, distorted traces of a life that the reader can never directly access. On another, it recalls Barthes’s failure to find the “truth” of his mother’s face by enlarging her photograph—“I believe that by enlarging the detail . . . I will finally reach my mother’s very being . . . . Alas, however hard I look, I discover nothing: . . . I see nothing but the grain of the paper” (Camera Lucida 99–100)—and suggests that the sisters’ home is also a structure made of photographic paper onto which enlarged and indecipherable images are projected. However, if this visual trace of memory does not allow the narrator to “reach [her friend’s] being,” it does convey something more than the texture of the (paper) walls: by looking very hard, she discovers something.

“Had everyone seen what I had seen?” the narrator continues, casting doubt on her own vision: “Ha-im yakholti litfos mashehu she-otet li zikaron shel mishehu

9 Cf. a passage from “Tiny Targets” (“Matarot ze’irot”) in which Matalon describes a room in the home of a Palestinian family whose son has died: “The room is small and sparse, the photograph large. After a while it appears as if this entire room, crowded and filled with thick cigarette smoke, is the photograph of the dead boy. His sister, Samiya, hurries and brings more horrifying photographs: the brother lies, on the eve of his death, wounded, bleeding, on the kitchen floor . . . . Death is the measuring stick, the most essential, most lively part—paradoxically—of life itself” (Kvo u-khetov 106).
"aher?" (145; “Had I perceived something that someone else’s memory had signaled to me?” Weinstein 219). Unlike Barthes’s reflections on photography, which derive from a solitary investigation of his responses to certain images, Matalon’s narrator indicates that one’s vision may be constituted from the outside, in the home of the other and through another’s memory. From this perspective, the close-ups counter the sovereign vision instantiated in the identity-card snapshot. For Barthes, furthermore, photography as the “exorbitant thing” is never “in essence a memory” and actually “blocks memory” (Camera Lucida 91). Matalon’s close-ups function, by contrast, as a form of ambiguous and ironic remembrance. They could, potentially, dismantle the barrier between the Israeli visitor and her Palestinian hosts, but the reader does not receive any assurance of such an outcome. The close-ups remain indeterminate, constituting either the narrator’s wishful projection or a surreal transference of “someone else’s memory.” They call into question Barthes’s attempt to secure, in Ariella Azoulay’s words, “the stability of the singular gaze and the homogeneity of the field of vision” (310).

By projecting the close-ups on a wall and prefacing this scene with the phrase “the wall silent, the stone crying out,” Matalon also evokes two biblical passages concerning injustice: “The very stones will cry out from the wall” (Havakuk 2:11) and “the writing on the wall” (Daniel 5:5). The image of the silent wall and shouting stone (the main “weapon” of the Intifada) suggests that the injustice done to the Palestinian friend cannot be heard through or read upon the private wall of the home. The biblical passage concerning the stones crying out from the wall ends with God lamenting, “Alas for you who build a town by bloodshed, and found a city on iniquity” (Havakuk 2:12). In “Photograph,” the injustice of “bloodshed” is made concrete when one of the sisters shows the narrator “a pair of men’s trousers, stiff as if someone were standing in them, stiff with congealed blood and mud.” These are the trousers of the deceased about whom “everyone was wrong, you too,” for “no one knew what he was thinking when he wasn’t with everyone else” (“Photograph” 219/145).

In contrast to the indeterminate status of the close-up, the pants become, with the help of blood and mud (not light), an imprint of the deceased’s body. They thus bring him back to life while proclaiming his murder. Nevertheless, this corporeal mock-death mask does not capture the “essence” of the beloved, about whom “everyone was wrong,” the narrator included. Here even the “friend”—surely a term that suggests a degree of intimacy—turns out to be someone who was misrecognized, whose thoughts will never be revealed and whose privacy and anonymity are thus maintained in both life and death. The private death cannot be translated into the public sphere and so assigned a predetermined political significance. As the narrator notes upon arriving at the house of the young wife’s parents, “the blueberry bushes, the neat bricks, and the lace curtains told us we could not breach this private realm” (219/145).

In his reading of Camera Lucida, Jacques Derrida points out that the punctum is Barthes’s expression for “the point of singularity . . . the ‘referent’ as the irreplaceable other, the one who was and will no longer be, who returns like that which will never come back.” Photography thereby “bespeaks the unique death, the death of the unique” (284–85). “Photograph” enacts both the personal inability of the Israeli woman and the structural incapacity of society at large to experience the “unique death” of the irreplaceable Palestinian other. In this respect, Matalon
intervenes in the vexed history of Hebrew literary representations of Palestinians as either knowable and assimilable (emphasizing their naiveté and lack of self-consciousness) or the subject of Israeli fantasies (see Oppenheimer). The sister of the dead man never fills the gap created by her statement that “everyone was wrong” with any accurate information, and the life and the death of the nameless brother remain opaque and, in a sense, interchangeable: he was, in the words of the story, “ha-met ha-yi be-moto u-met be-hayav” (144; “the dead man alive in his death and dead in his life,” Weinstein 218), since no one knew who he “really” was. His violent death, moreover, does not resolve this situation by allowing the meaning of his life to emerge or be reconstituted. The image of the deceased’s stiff pants, empty but still retaining the shape of a man standing in them, epitomizes this absence. The condition of the Palestinian as no-body is the injustice that Matalon’s story uncovers via the transposition of Barthes’s Winter Garden quest onto the scene of mourning in Gaza.

However, if in “Photograph” the “return” of the dead through the sporadic close-ups parodies Barthes’s view that a photograph is a literal “emanation of the referent” (Camera Lucida 80), it is not a ridiculing imitation but rather “a repetition with critical difference” that, in Linda Hutcheon’s words, “speak[s] to a discourse from within it, but without being totally recuperated by it” (26, 35). Barthes’s notion of return through the medium of photography assumes the fullness of a pre-photographic “reality,” even if this non-ghostly reality is nothing but a fantasy conjured up in retrospect. To borrow Louis Kaplan’s claim concerning the ontological approach to photography, Barthes is more interested in “the photograph’s being and its status as an indexical trace of the real” than in the notion of the image as a “withdrawal (or the step back) to that strange and disturbing space of ‘absence as presence’” (48). From Azoulay’s perspective, “Barthes fails to account for the fact that the referent of a photograph—and not only the photograph as signifier—is given for negotiation” (311). The close-ups in “Tatslum” attest, by contrast, not to the man’s ever having “been there” but rather to the “social relations” that could have made his photograph possible and that bind the Israeli woman to the Palestinian noncitizens ruled by her state (Azoulay 127, 131). For Matalon, any “return” can thus only be partial, incomprehensible, or mystical. The narrator’s journey marks in this way Matalon’s critical distance from Barthes even as her story is a “tissue of quotations” from Mahshavot ‘al ha-tsilum/ La chambre claire.

Resurrection in Quotation

A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.

—Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”

In On Photography, Susan Sontag contends that “the taste for quotations (and for the juxtaposition of incongruous quotations) is a Surrealist taste.” She also argues that photography and the collection of photographs is a surrealist activity in that photographs are generally “ubiquitous, cheap, unprepossessing objects” that render the world “really real, that is, surreal” (75, 79, 80). The story “Photograph” is
itself composed of clichés, quotations, partially or entirely nonsensical utterances, and surreal images. By structuring her story around incomplete and incongruous quotations from the Hebrew translation of *La chambre claire*, Matalon exhibits a “surrealist taste” in Sontag’s sense. She undermines the distinctiveness of the figures in the story and enhances the absurdity of the Israeli-Palestinian encounter in Gaza by inserting Hebrew translations of Barthes’s words into the speech of different characters. Likewise, the signature “Gaza 1990” adds to the text’s surreal mode of rendering the world “really real,” rather than merely grounding it in a historical-geographical context. Matalon thereby defamiliarizes what has become an all too familiar, almost mundane, conflict.

Prior to its 1992 publication in *Strangers at Home*, “Photograph” appeared in the socialist Israeli journal *The Written Word* (*Ha-milah ha-ketuva* 1990–1991), with the rather more explicit title “After ‘Thoughts on Photography,’ Roland Barthes” (“Be’ikvot mah˙shavot ‘al ha-tsilum, Roland Barthes”). Matalon’s decision to change the story’s title enacts “writing [as] the destruction of . . . every point of origin” (Barthes, “The Death of the Author” 142). Deploying a welter of extended, unacknowledged, and unmarked quotations from *Camera Lucida* in Hebrew, Matalon both draws from this text and obliterates her “source” in the process, practicing what Barthes preaches in “The Death of the Author” by irreverently erasing his name from the title and, ultimately, the entire collection. By dating the story, inserting her name into it, and reproducing, albeit in a distorted manner, her own journalistic experiences, Matalon also plays with her own authorial persona, asserting her presence while simultaneously undermining the very notion of authorial origins.

Aptly, the first utterance of the narrator is a quotation, not from Barthes but from the title of the Hebrew translation of Sontag’s *On Photography*, *Ha-tsilum ke-re'i ha-tekufa* (*Photography as the Mirror of the Times*). In response to H˙aled’s welcoming “ahalan,” the narrator says, “photography as the mirror of the times interests me,” and the two take out their “papers—[hers] yellow, his pink” (“Photograph” 217/143). The phrase is ambiguous because there are no quotation marks: either photography itself (as a mirror of the times) or the book, *Photography as the Mirror of the Times*, might be of interest to the narrator—or both. This seemingly nonsensical opening functions as a counterpoint to the extensive use of quotations from Barthes’s work, rather than from Sontag’s, throughout the story. The two authors are in a sense conflated since both remain unacknowledged, and Matalon uses Sontag’s title while erasing the title of *Camera Lucida* in order to criticize Barthes’s attempt late in his life to extract photography from “the times” and discover its ontological significance. Similarly, the interaction between the narrator and H˙aled is at once both grounded in the realities of their “times”—their names, the need to show “papers,” and the setting of Gaza—while also, via Matalon’s surreal quotational language, standing at some remove from the local and contemporary.

Consider another instance of unacknowledged quotation in the story:

. . . מילאנו ככלות הכל אחר מישאלתן של אחיות המת, ואמרנו שהחשיכה בלתי-טבעית, הקיר שותק, האבן צועקת, המת חי במותו וموتחי: חפצים, חפצים,—even-על-פי-כן, כשמדובר באדם ולא בחפץ יש לכוח העדות שבתצלום גורל שונה לחלוטין. בהסתכלותבקבוק, בגבעול של פרח האיריס, בתרנגולת או בארמון שצולמו—כרוכה רק הממשות, אבל גוף, פנים—ותרר מזה: ביותר קרובות הגוף והפנים

(“Tatslum” 145)

. . . we fulfilled after all the wishes of the dead man’s sisters, and said that the darkness was unnatural, the wall silent, the stone crying out, the dead man alive in his death and dead in his life:
objects, objects, and yet—when it’s of a person and not an object, the power of testimony in a photograph has an altogether different fate. Seeing a bottle, the stem of an iris, a chicken or a palace photographed—involves only reality, but a body, a face—and what is more: frequently, the body and face of a beloved person? (Weinstein 218; emphasis added)

The second half of this quote, here emphasized, is taken verbatim from the Hebrew translation of Camera Lucida. Its “original” context is Barthes’s attempt to distinguish between photographs of objects and photographs of people when it comes to the matter of “being.” If a photograph of an object involves “only reality,” in the case of “the face of a beloved person” one can “discover that being in the photograph completely, i.e., in its essence . . . beyond simple resemblance, whether legal or hereditary.” Thus, in the Winter Garden image Barthes finds the “air” of his mother, “a kind of intractable supplement of identity” that made her who she was (Camera Lucida 106, 109).

By interpolating this quotation into her story, Matalon asks in effect whether the photograph of the Palestinian can reveal anything more than the “mere reality” provided by, say, the image of an iris stem or a chicken. Could his photograph, if retrieved, allow the Israeli narrator to discover the man’s “air,” to grasp his unique “essence” in a manner transcending familial and political identifications? The interchangeability of life and death in the lines that precede the quotation from Barthes implies that “objects” and “people” are possibly interchangeable as well in the landscape of “Gaza, 1990.” The seamless transition from their (the narrator and Haled’s) words to Barthes’s is jarring, since their statement and that of the French theorist are not fully compatible.

Matalon recontextualizes another central passage from Barthes’s work when, towards the end of the story, the narrator visits the home of the American parents of her friend’s wife, where a “strange winter garden” materializes at the entrance to their house. The home’s interior is covered with “dozens of photographs . . . stuck to one another . . . on the wallpapered walls, in small labels on objects, framed on the heavy sideboard.” The mother claims that her deceased daughter is “in all of them,” but the narrator sees only the Madonna and Child, “madonna e bambino” (220/147). Subsequently, the mother utters the following words from Barthes:

In order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes. The Photograph must be silent: this is not a question of discretion, but of music. We achieve absolute subjectivity only in a state, an effort, of silence. To say nothing, to shut your eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness, the mother said. (Camera Lucida 55)

As with the “silence of the wall” in the sisters’ house, the photograph paradoxically “has to be silent” for it to speak, for Barthes’s punctum to emerge from it. Here, the punctum is the daughter herself, who appears to “rise of [her] own accord” within the most coded image of all, that of Madonna and Child. The story ends with the emergence of the dead woman “out of the virgin or the child,” as she literally walks out of the photograph into the room and towards the characters “by virtue of [the narrator’s] gaze alone” (220/147):
Carefully she gathered up the hem of her skirt, tucked a few strands of hair behind her ear, and walked out of the photograph toward us, into the large, foreign room. I could see her, with her pale, birdlike profile and secretive smile, she came out of the virgin or the child, I knew her well. I had to keep quiet about what I had seen; I had nothing but my gaze.” (Weinstein 219)

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes claims that when we look at a photograph directly, our intellectual-linguistic reactions can prevent us from apprehending the unnamable, uncoded detail that is the *punctum*. The *studium* of the image is, by contrast, “always coded”; it appeals to the viewer’s cultural “taste” and historical “interest,” forging a tacit agreement between creator and consumer that allows the viewer to “encounter the photographer’s intentions” (*Camera Lucida* 51, 27–28). In “Photograph,” however, Matalon stages the miraculous appearance of the nameless wife/daughter out of the coded detail—Madonna and Child—of the photographs on the wall, conflating thereby the *punctum* and the *studium* of the images. Although her narrator does not look away but gazes intently, her actions enable the woman to emerge in a gesture that nonetheless performs Barthes’s idea of the *punctum* as a (grotesque) resurrection (*Camera Lucida* 82). Like the uncertain status of the final image of the story—“forgive me, is this a photograph or a painting?”—the resurrected woman is not clearly identified with either Madonna or child. According to the mother, “she is in both”; according to the narrator, “she came out of the saint or the baby” (220/147). The interchangeability of Madonna and child is reminiscent of Barthes’s transformation of his own mother, both at the time of her death and, later, through photography, into a child for whom he must care. At the same time, it foregrounds once again the problem of origins, as the narrator both resurrects the wife, giving birth to her as it were, with the help of her animating gaze, and also scrutinizes and even attempts to sever the umbilical cord connecting mother and child, photographed object and observing subject.

Barthes has further claimed that the figures in a photograph “do not emerge, do not leave: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies. Yet once there is a *punctum*, a blind field is created (is divined).” The blind field animates both the photograph and the viewer, adding to the photograph a kind of “subtle beyond” (*Camera Lucida* 57–58). The resurrection of the wife/daughter in the story literalizes the animating effect of the *punctum*, for Matalon takes the mad and hallucinatory possibilities of Barthes’s theory, a potential madness that he himself discusses, one step further: in “Photograph” the gaze dismantles the boundaries between the photograph and its surroundings and so provides a macabre escape from mourning by bringing the dead back to life (*Camera Lucida* 115–17). Similarly, Matalon uses quotations in a manner that allows them to become unfastened from their original context and gain a new life of their own. Enhancing the discursiveness and illogical style of her writing, this practice ultimately produces a political critique of the scripted attitudes towards life and death in the Israeli-Palestinian context.

**The Racial Contingency of Photography**

In her first novel, *The One Facing Us*, Matalon conducts a more extended exploration of the transformative relations between viewer and captured image, erasing, as in her story, any explicit traces of her critical reliance on Barthes’s thought, while simultaneously adapting and reconfiguring his writing through the use of
When describing a photo apparently taken at a railway station in Cairo, 1946, Matalon also quotes (without acknowledging) Barthes: "The photograph addresses the future, supposedly, a parting that will take place in a few minutes, as if it were standing at the threshold, as if waiting for something, but no: this is a waiting for a catastrophe that already happened" (Zeh 'im ha-panim 'eleynu 60; my translation and emphasis). Although Matalon’s "catastrophe" involves parting, not death, this passage draws from Barthes’s meditation on the image of Lewis Payne awaiting his execution: "By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future .  . . I shudder .  . . over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe" (Camera Lucida 96; emphasis added).

According to Hirsch, "the conventional family album . . . stress[es] chronology, continuity, and repetition within and across generations" (214). Matalon undermines these social conventions by creating a non-chronological family album in which images are often missing or blurred.

11 Zuza even stresses the importance of “details” if one wants
to paint a “life-like picture of reality” and claims that “everything depends on the gaze of the viewer: you can turn a special thing into a dull and miserable thing and vice versa” (Zeh ‘im ha-panim ‘eleynu 290–91; my translation). Matalon similarly underscores the gaze of her viewer-narrator, who transforms the “dull” details of each photograph into evidence of something. She undoes the punctum-studium distinction throughout the novel by showing that the details of images, whether intentional or unintentional, coded or uncoded, need to be scrutinized and can lead to something beyond the photograph. Here, as elsewhere, Barthes’s own semi-blind spots, the internal paradoxes and tensions of his book, enable Matalon to use Camera Lucida for her own political-fictional ends. Another such tension concerns the implications of Barthes’s notion of the contingency of photography for race relations.

As in “Photograph,” which depicts Nurit/Ronit’s travel to Gaza, The One Facing Us turns on a geographical dislocation, commencing with the sixteen-year-old Esther’s voyage from Israel to the port town of Douala, Cameroon, in the late 1970s. She remains there for a period of “two hundred days” in a state of semi-imprisonment after her uncle, Jako Sicourelle, places her passport in a safe and refuses to relinquish it. However, the loss of her identifying document and, with it, her identity-photo, has positive, as well as negative, implications for the novel’s protagonist: Esther becomes a diarist and photographer, and, as such, she is not merely confined by her surroundings, but also molds them, experiments with them. Her position as outsider/insider allows Esther to experience, observe, and even criticize the social hierarchies of “liberated” Cameroon. She narrates the novel from this privileged position, primarily in the first-person voice that often relives the past in the present tense, as if, like a photograph, it had frozen in time. When the narrative focuses on Esther in Cameroon, a third-person narrator intermittently depicts her from the outside.

Gil Hochberg has discussed the status of Israel as a failed homeland in The One Facing Us, claiming that “while the novel emphasizes the desire for a home, shared by all characters, it also highlights the unsatisfying translation of this desire into the attachment to the new national space” (230–31). Beyond this, as Hochberg maintains, the novel also evokes and deconstructs the concept of Levantinism (once a derogatory term connoting cultural impurity) as an alternative to the segregation and political marginalization of the Jewish-Egyptian community, whether in the colonial Egypt of the 1930s and 1940s or in the Ashkenazi-dominated Israel of the 1950s and 1960s. The Jewish Egyptian intellectual Jacqueline Kahanoff’s revived vision of Levantinism thus becomes for Matalon “a lost historical opportunity” rather than a real cultural possibility (In Spite of Partition 46–47, 51–52). In Cameroon, the encounter between East and West is mapped onto one between black and white subjects. Moreover, this alternative to Egypt and Israel exposes and intensifies, rather than eases, familial-social tensions. Esther herself exchanges the “semicolonized” state of the Mizrahi immigrants in Israel (see Zeh ‘im ha-panim
The absence of certain images can be explained on the diegetic level: Esther’s mother and her sister Marcelle, for instance, steal images from each other every time they meet; these images are even referred to at one point as “the missing photographs.” The narrator also claims that many photographs have been lost or destroyed (Zeh ‘im ha-panim ‘eleynu 170, 121; The One Facing Us 151, 113). Ofra Amihay (146–49) compares the absence of Barthes’s Winter Garden photo with Matalon’s “missing photographs” in The One Facing Us, arguing that the reading of unreproduced images is a form of resistance that also underscores the photograph’s “portability and tangibility.”

Each chapter of the book opens with either a captioned image or an empty space labeled “missing photograph.” (Matalon states in an interview that she “intentionally chose vague pictures, not especially nice or of good quality, but ones that can be found in any family album” [Abramovitch 4]). Matalon’s narrator interprets the contents and material qualities (fading, inscriptions) of both present and absent photographs and interweaves these interpretations with recollected stories and present scenes that situate the photographed people and places in larger cultural-historical contexts. Among the many family photos reproduced in The One Facing Us are two images of uncle Sicourelle with his African workers, one of which is the first photo of the novel and shows the uncle with his back to us as he observes his Cameroonian workers at the Douala port. The opening image conflates familial and colonial photography so that Esther’s relationship to the uncle whom she is sent to visit is mediated through the prism of his (visual) status vis-à-vis his African workers.

The relationship between race and photography is of course also central to Barthes’s project. At crucial junctures in Camera Lucida, Barthes includes images of Africans—for example, when he develops the notion of the punctum on the basis of a 1926 James Van Der Zee portrait of an African American family. These photos have led Carol Mavor to suggest that the “punctum is a shadow of sorts. It is a dark place” (227). Furthermore, as both Mavor and Shawn Michelle Smith have shown, the Winter Garden image has as its implicit companions or parallels Richard Avedon’s portrait of A. Philip Randolph (the African American labor movement leader) and a magazine photo of a slave market that Barthes cut out and lost as a child. Barthes introduces this image just before he discusses the photograph as a literal “emanation of the referent”:

. . . a slave market: the slavemaster, in a hat, standing; the slaves, in loincloths, sitting. I repeat: a photograph, not a drawing or engraving . . . . From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here . . . . 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. (Camera Lucida 80–81)

Barthes turns the elusive “radiations” or “light” of the photographic process into a bodily matter, an “umbilical cord” and “skin.” Within the context of his previous description of the slave market image and his “horror and fascination . . .

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that there was a certainty that such a thing had existed,” Barthes now “shares a skin with the enslaved men and women” (Camera Lucida 80; see Smith 248).34

Barthes also uses images of Africans, however, as a foil to the Winter Garden image, describing, for instance, the portrait of William Casby as the pure mask of slavery. In Shawn Smith’s words, “the portrait of William Casby exemplifies the mask of photographic meaning whereby a unique individual is translated into a cultural sign, [whereas] the Winter Garden Photograph secures precisely the opposite; it removes the mask to reveal the unique individual” (249). In his earlier essay “Myth Today,” Barthes addresses the conditions of this process of translation, describing how an African-French soldier on the cover of Paris Match could become an “instrumental signifier” of French imperialism (Mythologies 125). In the case of that photograph, “what is got rid of . . . is the contingent [contingente], historical, in one word: fabricated, quality of colonialism” (Mythologies, trans. Lavers 143; Mythologies 217). However, in Camera Lucida, Barthes associates contingency with photography itself (not colonialism), claiming that “since every photograph is contingent [contingente] (and thereby outside of meaning), Photography cannot signify (aim at generality) except by assuming a mask” (Camera Lucida 34; La chambre claire 60). Although Barthes calls attention in both his early and later writings to the ways in which photographers pose and capture black subjects so as to turn them into signifying objects, in the case of the Paris Match photo, this process erases the qualities of colonialism or slavery that are “true only under existing conditions,” rendering these historical phenomena mythic and universal. In Camera Lucida Barthes counteracts through his own personal responses to particular photos the “masking” and myth-making that obscures the underlying essence of photography: contingency as “accident” or “risk” (Camera Lucida 34).

In The One Facing Us, Matalon considers light as a “carnal medium” that connects subjects on the bodily or epidermal level and that can affect race relations. She implicitly combines early and late Barthes, striving to unmask the myths of neocolonialism by focusing on her narrator’s personal response to particular images. When describing the opening photograph, the narrator asserts that the back of the uncle dressed in white “speaks” and signifies, presenting a mask of sorts despite being turned away from the viewer (see figure 1). The bodies of the Cameroonian workers are, by contrast, “purely” contingent and therefore stand outside of language; they are “mute”:

These people, these backs are captured in this way by accident. Chance could have easily shifted the arrangement of bodies, shuffled them in front of us: the one bending over could have been the one standing next to the basket, the one with the bare black chest could have been something else entirely, a shadow for example, he could have been a shadow if he had shifted slightly to the side, outside the

34 Several critics have noted the relevance of Frantz Fanon’s articulation of the “racial epidermal schema” (112) of Africans in colonial and postcolonial environments to Barthes’s understanding of photography. Mavor, for example, points out that “the fact of blackness is as stubborn as the photograph’s link to the referent” (214)—or else, in Tapia’s words, “the visual technologies of race are . . . photographic” (205).
frame, a shadow cast in front of him on the smooth paving stones. Chance has erased the faces of these people, melding them into one piece, into a plurality that has gathered all its disparate wishes into one will, one intent: an intent aimed at the authority observing them, the authority of my uncle who stands there with his arms crossed, an authority that has eyes, that has the idleness of happy observation, that has the ability to observe. (my translation)

The kind of photograph that Matalon uses is of a different order than Avedon’s portrait of Casby or the Paris Match cover photo. Here, the photographed subjects are a mass of interchangeable, nameless, and faceless bodies. “The one with the bare black chest” is noted, striding as he and the others do “toward the plastic tubs brimming with fish and the stench of fish” (The One Facing Us 3/9). These men are not mythologized and they do not address the spectator; rather, situated as the background of this photograph, they merely serve as proof of the uncle’s visual authority. At the same time, this authority may also be a matter of “chance,” for the uncle, we are reminded, is another body in the photograph; his is a “chance” authority that can be challenged.

This first photograph of the novel is thus an explicit meditation on the relationship between racial inequality and the contingency of photography. For Matalon, photography’s contingency is most palpable when the subjects are denied access to the apparatus of image-making and have no control over their transformation into photographic objects. This contingency becomes more radical when it affects those who supposedly lacked a “will” even before they were captured on film—that is, those whose “plural” will is subsumed under the gaze of colonial authority. Instead of Barthes’s notion of photography as “contingency, singularity, risk” (Camera Lucida 20), we have here a “flat” contingency: any other bodily arrangement could have replaced the actual one in the photo, to the point where a person could
The third-person position is characterized by “blindness,” since Esther has been apprehended and defined by the uncle’s gaze. In this, her “position” is not unlike that of the “mute” African workers in the photograph. Neve reads Esther’s voluntary blindness, as well as that of certain African characters, as an assertion of will-power over and against the external gaze of Western culture (332–33).

When, later in the novel, the uncle’s status has begun to decline, another photograph shows him standing in profile onboard a ship, alongside, rather than in front of, his workers. One of the men suddenly “whirls around, rending the slumber of the photograph . . . thrusting a knife wherever he can” (The One Facing Us 241/256). The stabbing of “Monsieur Sicourelle,” first described as though it were taking place only within the photograph, both enacts the violence of photography and leads to Esther’s “release” and return to Israel. Viewed in tandem, the opening photograph and this later image-text establish a correlation between the subject’s visual position — the uncle observing his workers in the first photo, on the one hand, and facing sideways and located among his workers, on the other — and the ability to wield the symbolic gaze of power, to fix others in place and hold sway over them. It is ultimately the gaze of the narrator that, as in the story “Photograph,” animates the image, here with violent results. In both cases, text and photograph work in tandem to disrupt the “pure contingency” of the image. The knife rends not merely the “slumber of the photograph” but also the inevitability of its “pure contingency.”

If an African worker inside the later image performs the action (stabbing her uncle) that leads to Esther’s return to Israel, in the opening photograph it is Esther who enters the image from the outside. This entrance takes place through the mediation of Barthes’s carnal medium, light, which hits the “stagnant, fetid water that spills from the plastic tubs, shimmering on the hard cement.” The reflection creates a smooth, glistening surface that, as the narrator contends, “lends all this — the nearby human event — an air of the unbelievable.” This is also the place where the photograph “opens” and announces its “possibilities” beyond its function as “evidence of reality” (The One Facing Us 4/10–11). By emphasizing the presence of light within the image itself, rather than as the medium that connects viewer and photographed subject, Matalon reconfigures also the power relations involved in the acts of photographing and viewing. It is through the flooded lit-up corner of the photo that the narrator can enter the image, and this move also contributes to her construction as both “his niece” and a “blind” third-person character.15 Planting herself in this past image is “the only way [she] can see,” the narrator paradoxically contends, and this type of vision goes against Barthes’s understanding of photography’s carnality and evidentiary power. Matalon enhances instead the “unbelievable” or “unreal” aura of the image, transferring the gazing observer into it, rather than vice versa. Whereas for Barthes, to “enter crazily into the spectacle, into the image” is to pass “beyond the unreality of the thing represented” (Camera Lucida 117), Matalon’s narrator uses the “mistakes” and “illusions” generated by the camera as the basis for entering the spectacle of the past.

Matalon transforms Barthes’s indexical umbilical cord into a bi-directional linkage that not only carries rays of light from the body photographed to the eyes of the spectator but also transports the body of the spectator — through the (blind) gaze — back into the photograph. These routes are given, moreover, a temporal

15 The third-person position is characterized by “blindness,” since Esther has been apprehended and defined by the uncle’s gaze. In this, her “position” is not unlike that of the “mute” African workers in the photograph. Neve reads Esther’s voluntary blindness, as well as that of certain African characters, as an assertion of will-power over and against the external gaze of Western culture (392–33).
dimension, as the past of the image reaches the present of its apprehension and then enables a return to the past through the retrospective gaze that transports Esther back to Cameroon. Furthermore, if light is a skin shared by Barthes and the black subjects of the photographs, the narrator fully unsettles her position as a white female observer by donning this skin and entering the image and standing where the African workers themselves could have stood. This mutuality displaces the dubious identity of the familial affiliation established through the “umbilical cord” of documentation in favor of gender and racial ones. It also reminds us, as Ruby Tapia has suggested, that “the photographic and maternal logics of transparency and immediacy . . . work very similarly to the logics that produce race as a self-evident (written clearly on the body) signifier of essence” (204).

More generally, the “missing photographs” in The One Facing Us force the reader to pay closer attention to the gaze itself and to the manner in which images are described. The narrator’s descriptions focus not merely on the figures in the images—their clothes and their expressions—but also on incidental “background” details. In doing so, they enact the notion that “the very capture of light on film [by the photographic technology] implies an ineradicable surfeit” (Pinney 6). This is the “stuff” of the image that would appear to others “dull” and “uninterpretable,” yet for a narrator who strives to fill in the gaps of the family history it proves immensely intriguing (Etkins 945). The result is a descriptive excess that undermines the distinction between foreground and background and that often culminates in misidentification—for example, when Esther identifies her uncle as her father in a family photo (28/36)—or a disclosure of deliberate misreading. Matalon’s interest in the hazy edges of the image, where photography resembles painting, also has political ramifications. This interest resists, like the punctum, the intention of the photographer as author as well as the action of the camera itself, which points to where the eye should be focused, as if saying “look here.” Instead, her narrator’s “eye goes of its own accord to what is not fully revealed, to the hazy detail that encapsulates life” (The One Facing Us 187/204).

Although the narrator’s description of the novel’s opening photograph includes background objects, colors, and textures, it omits the illuminated presence, at the top of the photograph, of a person walking toward the spectator. (It is precisely this portion of the photograph that is enlarged on the original Hebrew cover of the novel.) This figure is “facing us,” although his features are erased, and it simultaneously enacts and subverts Barthes’s and Sontag’s notion that “a photograph is literally an emanation of the referent” (Camera Lucida 80). If the radiant figure reminds the reader-spectator of the importance of light in the production of the image, by not fully materializing into an identifiable person, it also points to the “dubious identity” of the referent, to the illusions promoted by the camera and eye. In this manner, Matalon uses the lit-up corner of the image to counteract the tendency of “photographic media . . . [to] assume, privilege, and construct whiteness” (Dyer 89).

Throughout the novel, Matalon develops the motif of the human figure as a projection of light and shadow whose identifying features are erased. Toward its

16 In “The Place of the Wound” (“Ha-makom shel ha-petsa”), Matalon’s description of a photograph of a severely wounded or dead Palestinian on a truck surrounded by men holding his head and pointing at the wound in his chest emphasizes “the upper edge of the photograph where a certain haziness takes over . . . and creates the sensation that soon the image will be erased or blurred . . . that it has an imaginary, painterly quality and not a photographic one” (Kso u-khetov 68).
conclusion she inserts the same painting by the Israeli artist Yitzhak Livne at the head of two separate chapters and with two different captions: “Missing Photograph: The One Facing Us” and “Missing Photograph: Landscape of a Pool, Douala, Cameroon.” This image calls into question the painting/photography distinction—sharply upheld by André Bazin and Sontag (154), among others—by situating the painting as the specter of an absent photograph. Matalon describes this image, moreover, as both painting and photograph, a product of brush strokes and a projection. Livne’s art suits her purpose here because of its close affinities to photography: influenced by Gerhard Richter, Livne often uses photographic sources for his paintings, and although his works are not photo- or hyper-realistic, they consistently appear to be copies of something because of their flatness, monochromatic colors, blurriness, and light effects. Matalon reproduces Livne’s art, however, not only to challenge the photography/painting distinction, but also to indicate that in “the territory of ‘the [photographic] visible,’” subjects can also become more obscure rather than more defined and identifiable.

Like the man in the corner of the first photograph, the man in the painting is “casting his shadow, trying, it seems, to emerge,” to push himself into “an existing scene” (The One Facing Us 229/245). In both cases, moreover, water becomes the slippery medium that reflects light and enables these figures—as well as the narrator herself—to appear. “Suspended between extreme light and extreme dark,” both male figures materialize as indeterminate absent/present silhouettes rather than fully fleshed-out people (not unlike the reappearance of the Palestinian dead in “Photograph”); they function as “locations,” not “identities” (The One Facing Us 229–230/245–246). The unreal, theatrical quality of the painting is enhanced by the fact that the light illuminating the man from the front separates his shadow from him: “It breaks and moves away from him, the shadow, independent, cast on the fence behind him, severing the familiar continuity of a shadow that emerges from a figure [demut]” (Zeh ‘im ha-panim eleynu 246; my translation). The man facing the viewer here is faceless, although, like the novel’s title, he is “the one facing us.” Likewise, his shadow does not belong to him and does not enhance his presence as a figure. This “independent” shadow is further reminiscent of the shadowy present/absent Cameroonian worker caught in the opening photograph, someone who “could have been a shadow if he had shifted slightly to the side.” The black and white painting/photo disrupts the flat contingency of the Cameroonian racial “continuity,” revealing that the black shadow is independent of its white figure and that both lack a fixed “identity.”

Both Gaza and Cameroon, despite their historical-political differences, enable Matalon to revisit Camera Lucida and consider its implications for Israeli forms of racial violence and the politics of their representation. Hence, while Matalon, like Barthes, projects her narratives onto images of “others” and onto foreign locations, The One Facing Us as a whole is critical of the narrator Esther’s past treatment of the Cameroonian as “a marginalized class open to assimilation” (Olin 114). Matalon thereby also underscores the tenuousness of the Israeli category of Mizrahi identity, a marker of black/white difference (in relation to the European Ashkenazi population) that is largely reversed in the African context.

17 Thus, when Julian, her uncle’s African servant and the object of Esther’s erotic fascination, returns her gaze with “white-white eyes, devoid of pupils,” this “empty” and “hating” gaze of contempt deeply unsettles Esther, who is used to wielding the gaze herself (Matalon, The One Facing Us 200/215).
Photography is but one of many devices (including the incorporation of excerpts from Jacqueline Kahanoff’s essays) that Matalon enlists in *The One Facing Us* to heighten the novel’s realism and sense of historical factuality. Yet unlike Barthes, she does not reaffirm the evidentiary power of the image, but insists on its “magical character” and evocation of “absence as presence.” The places where the photograph “opens,” coming to life and enacting a back-and-forth between the interior and exterior of the photo, are politically charged in both story and novel. In these scenes, physical and mental checkpoints are momentarily lifted, and memory allows a visual exchange to take place between occupier and occupier, colonizer and colonized. Matalon does not depict, however, any possible “redemption” via photography. Rather, she composes a series of mock resurrections and ends both texts on a highly pessimistic note.

The artificial environment of Barthes’s Winter Garden becomes in Matalon’s writing a site of experimentation with the social-political import of surreal and realist conventions. Her reading of *Camera Lucida* in Gaza and Cameroon, including her unacknowledged interpolations, breathes new life into Barthes's text and shows that its translation into Hebrew was crucial to the development of Israeli theories and narratives concerning the visual apprehension and representation of (racialized) violence. Matalon writes from “the dark place” of the punctum, insisting that the gender, class, and racial dimensions of this dark place be etched in light.

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