



from the imprinting mode light from objects imprints on a light sensitive surface, each portion of the imprint traceable to some element of the thing the camera was aimed at (excepting artifacts introduced by photo materials like infrared film or high contrast paper or multiple printing techniques) to a constructed or fabricated image, more like painting and drawing. The digital photographer taps on a keypad, the painter touches brush to canvas. In both cases, the model might be purely in the mind.



First Macintosh, 1984



In 1980, the semiologist Roland Barthes published *Camera Lucida*, a groundbreaking discourse on the meaning of photography. He asked, what is photography essentially? He concluded that photography is fundamentally a medium which depicts reality, the once-has-been, and, further, ultimately, photography is about death, or at least impermanence. He wrote in a pre-digital period; as far as I am aware, no one has produced a similar investigation of the meaning of photography that embeds itself in the digital ethos.

Indeed, this is the shift: photos as simulacrum of once real experiences (the American Civil War, Dwight D Eisenhower, Yosemite, New York City tenements) to photos as constructions. Photography joins other so-called fine arts thru the magic and wonder of a set of electrical impulses, some on, some off, mathematically altered.



Early Photoshop, 1988

May 2004
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[The true total photograph] accomplishes the unheard-of identification of reality ("that-has-been") with truth ("there-she-is!"); it becomes at once evidential and exclamative; it bears the effigy to that crazy point where affect (love, compassion, grief, enthusiasm, desire) is a guarantee of Being...

...The image, says phenomenology, is an object-as-nothing. Now, in the Photograph, what I posit is not only the absence of the object; it is also, by one and the same movement, on equal terms, the fact that this object has indeed existed and that it has been there where I see it. Here is where the madness is, for until this day no representation could assure me of the past of a thing except by intermediaries; but with the Photograph, my certainty is immediate: no one in the world can undecieve me. The Photograph then becomes a bizarre medium, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, shared hallucination (on the one hand, "it is not there," on the other "but it has indeed been"): a mad image, chafed by reality.

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*