The Missing Hour Allison Morton

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington 2017

Committee

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Program authorized to offer degree

Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, Bothell

Creative Writing and Poetics

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Abstract

The Missing Hour

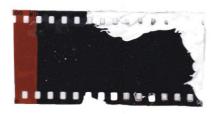
Allison Morton

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An exploration of trauma and memory through poetry, painting, collage, erasure, and collection of texts on unexplained supernatural phenomena. A *she* which both is and isn't the author collects evidence of something she can't be sure happened to her or not.





001.3 there is a hole in the backyard somewhere in the yard there is a hole

full of empty

and the hole is fenced to keep the kids and the dogs out but still in the yard the fenced yard on the cliff which holds the yard where a hole sits and sits and sits and waits

for a great machine to spill light inward into the hole

what do you remember?

do you wish you had a photo of this memory?

004.2
lights run over the house
in spirals
in circles
lights run over the house

in v formation they migrate

they spiral and stream into the bedroom window under the covers through the hills

lights run through the house

opening cabinets rearranging picture frames breaking glass they spill out over the house





007.5 there was a waiting there waiting there for her was a waiting in the air

floated-above-floated-below in the corner of the closet

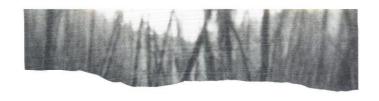
waiting and whispering

asked for directions

home

how many copies of this memory do you keep?







is this memory attached to you?

she looks into a well
she feels the space
running down
into the core of the planet
where it spins and stops and
she remembers photographs in boxes on shelves in the back room
musty carpet and broken windows taped over
puncture holes in her vision
she sees where he sleeps, placid,
dead not dead not anywhere notalive
either but still
so she opens boxes on shelves in the back room where he slept
the well where he hides things
is full
of space



when she was young there was an understanding of empty rooms and hallways that lead to planes full of people

the people are asleep in their chairs with their trays down

a flight crew is notified of

trays covered in paper covered in scratches in a foreign language dreaming they were birds trapped

a sealed-unmarked-rectangular-wooden crate

couldn't breathe remember being the trees that were home to birds rather than cages is a photo useful?



if a shadow slept across her eyelids, would she know?

is it just the sun setting behind the hill in the yard

the hill wasn't there yesterday it was always there

the hill with the house

it was always there

that's the closet

house

she grew up in



is anything sharp?

011.2 listening leads to letters to listening to letters which listen at night and listen for letters to be sent in the night

on the train in the back of the train

where the train treads heavylike lead and treads the ground around the tracks like a gravity field



006.2 there was gravel in her throat gravel in her palms in the heel of her hand in her throat

gravel in the air

mixes to dust to wind to dust mixes with wind with dust



006.3 the house on the cliff in the yard it wasn't there where it was

before it moved before it breathed before it floated

away towards something else



whistle, watching in the worn trees roundabout round about the house and into the road that ran around the roots of the oak tree in the middle of the map and waited in the warm trees where she heard a whistle and watched for lights



it's raining down the road the weeds grow faster when the back tires spin into the ground

growing tomatoes in a kiddie pool filled with dirt

she salts slices on white bread

and watches

is there enough light?

through a cracked window into the house

where the walls drip black

what are you looking at?

006.4 someone told somebody this

somewhere

where someone was there

writing-reading reports of bodies

reports of bodies

reports of bodies underground bodies drowning underground

under water-under-ground



plastic lawn toys stuck in the mud in the rut in the road to town bleeding down the concrete drain threat of thunder in the yard smell of matches burns your hair stepping over shards of grass splintered stairs go through your skin a spark inside the window's glare somewhere between you and him a broken lock still works hurts to open doors that squeal

have you ever given a photo away?



get my face under water
that's all I can remember
everything was white with halos
the closet
glowing
on Michigan Street
a scar left by a bone
same scar
vivid dreams, a scar,
or a break



can anything return from an iris?









017.5 the door wavered in light wilted and willed her towards the door

tilted on hinges, crooked with creases in the wood which wavered in the light the light wavered, waited, wilted for her

she waited

the knob rusted

she waited

the yard still still in the moonlight over the door the wrinkles wilted across the door a sheet draped over the door sheer and shimmered

light-moonlight-what-light through the window



is the noise overwhelming?

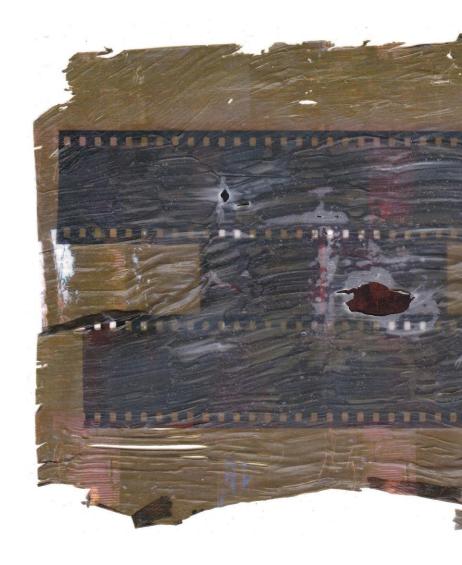
014 would it move somewhere else in the moonlight in the light

somewhere wide and open wide and open to stay alive

where are you?

between-trees-between-leaves shafts of light on her eyes

her window wooden crosses make shadows on the carpet





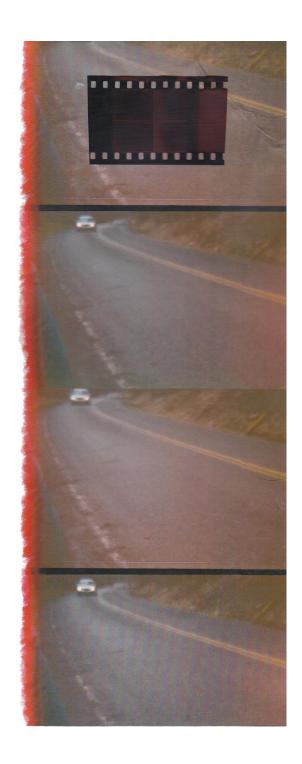
002 anywhere she couldn't be safe where she's safe in the undercarriage away from the roar of the plane

no the sky

the scream in the sky in the plane,

under the plane, under the seats, under the plane

in the cloud there's a face which used to be a different face but now it glows



o16 she wondered, watching, waiting for a word for a shadow to form and fill the hole for the truck in the drive to scatter gravel rock embedded rocks embedded in the dug into the ground behind the house he watched on the hill that floated away anchored into a pit she couldn't see



013 a dark room a bright door

she heard someone be somewhere else away from the door, is the yard still there or is it somewhere else

away from the door she doesn't want to open she doesn't want to open the door the door

is bright

where do you hold the negatives?

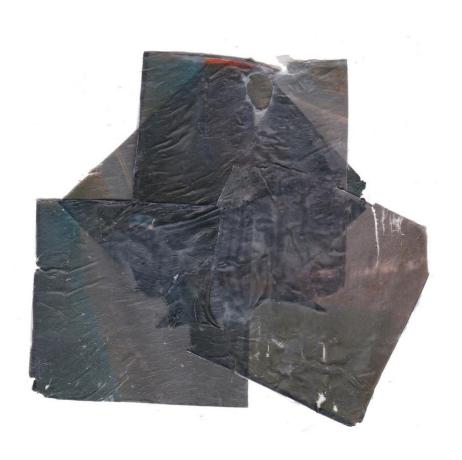


if she could remember winter maybe summer would coat the yard in grass if she could get her face under winter maybe memory

would thaw

into a grassy
summer
into a glossy
photo
where the yard would live
live and lively
a life
lived in summer
lived in house
lived in jeans
lived
lived
her face under water
under winter

if she could remember water in winter



sources of material, language, and inspiration -

Crop Circles, Signs, Wonders and Mysteries, Steven and Karen Alexander, 2006

Intruders: the Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods, Budd Hopkins, 1987

Children of the Matrix, David Icke, 2002

UFOs, The Public Deceived, Philip J. Klass, 1983

The Roswell Report: Case Closed, The Official U.S. Government Report, Headquarters United States Airforce, Captain James McAndrew, 1997

UFO Crash at Roswell II, The Chronological Pictorial, Donald R. Schmitt, 2001

The Keepers, An Alien Message for the Human Race, Jim Sparks, 2006

Hitler's Flying Saucers, Henry Stevens, 2012

Communion, A True Story, Whitley Strieber, 1987

55

- the missing hour's interrogation turned back onto the author -

---- What do you remember?

Roland Barthes, in a book about photography actually about his mother actually about the memory of his mother

"... that most terrible thing which is in every photograph: the return of the dead."

Memory is a ritual of rebirth.

In the remembering, dead things come back to me.

a quiet backyard where dogs chase, a balcony before a hurricane, wet driveway, waiting for the bus, strange dreams at night hot days

My memory speaks a dozen languages: visual, textual, textual. These are languages I only understand in bits and pieces. So I attempt to translate them into a book. A book not in my native tongue of full sentences and clear photographs, but in the blurry patterns in which my memory speaks.

These translations of my memory compete with each other, and so the documentation fails me again. I don't know which is real – my sensory memory, the photo, the painting, or the stories passed down from someone else. If none of them are true, as in fact, then they all have space to be real. I hope for this work to also encourage the reader to remember. What truths do they hold as fact? And how can they be sure?

The *I* in the book is not me, but certainly she holds pieces of me, the same way my memories hold pieces of me that are not quite me anymore. Those memories used to be me, but I'm different now. Many of the photographs in the book are taken in places significant to me or my family, somewhere we stayed once for Christmas, a hike in the woods taken with a friend.

I was there, I took that photograph for this book, but now the image holds my memories, passed on into the book for someone else to think about.

I know now that a photograph is never about photography, but instead about the dead things

(memories)

which linger inside the photograph, and these things also linger inside the memory, taking a different shape. That memory is dead now, the people we were at that moment are also dead, and the people we are now will be also be gone eventually. They are already are.

But this haunting is not only present in the photograph, it is present in every way I attempt to translate. I linger in the photograph, the painting, the poem.

So *the missing hour* is a harvesting of those attempts at translation.

----Where are you?

This work actually started out as a collecting and erasure project of a certain kind of material I was drawn to. I started collecting books which at first seem absurd – *Hitler's UFOs, The Roswell Report, The Crop Circle Enigma*, but more and more I became interested in the people writing these books and why – not just the surface interest in the supernatural, but something personal. Initially, I just wanted to see what kind of language I could pull out that would surprise someone when they learned it was from books on subjects largely considered ridiculous. I was interested in the way the language could be manipulated from a 'strange' source into something resembling poetry.

Soon though, I was writing my own words inspired by the collages I was making, and they all became jumbled together. My own personal experience was being molded by reading the language of these works, so I started taking photographs and writing and collaging all of these things together. My memory and their memories were blending and I found myself questioning the truth of both. The work became an attempt at working through the difficult relationship we all have with memory. I wasn't just investigating the truths of strangers, but the truth of my own memories. The process of the work became a way to figure out how the work works, how does photography work in my life and how does that relate to memory? Why do we need photographic evidence? Lack of photographic evidence is the pillar of most arguments against these people's outlandish stories of alien abduction, crop circles, monsters and spirits. And it's a fair argument. We shouldn't believe everything anyone says, right? But, at the same time, is it worth outright dismissing any person because of this lack? So I started to create a photograph which will not give us evidence, but instead work against itself as evidence, to illustrate how little of the human experience we can actually trust. The everyday memories most of us hold on to are no more rooted in fact than an abductee's tale of otherworld-y contact. What can we know? Not much.

----Do you wish you had a photograph of this memory?

The photograph, in its scientific process of swallowing light//documenting shadow, is evidence of my memory//my dead things.

My photography is an act of memory.

What am I afraid of forgetting? What needs to be verified? Light//shadow? Or something else?

I have plenty already.

Why look at a photo of the invisible? I keep trying anyway. So then I decide to take photos of ugly and empty things, to highlight the invisible; instead these images make me uncomfortable, they haunt.

The photograph is not the memory, but the goal of the memory. My memory hopes to stay perfect forever. I hope to remember every detail of a good day, but they slip away like grains of sand and they're lost to me, and soon the memory is a grainy photograph. I can see shapes of bodies and hear the timbers of voices, but I cannot experience the fine details of being alive in the moment. So I take a grainy photograph and put it in a book, I rearrange and tear it into a collage and take control of the hard to decipher image. This act of framing the poor vision makes the poor vision acceptable. It's okay if this is all I can see now, it's still enough. The poor memory still stirs something in me. The incomplete memory still carries an emotion within it.

"[...] what is not represented by the image lies outside it, that which is not the image [...] which cannot be seen or said."

-- Virginie Lalucq, Fortino Samano (the overflowing of the poem),

What we really see in a photograph is not what we see, but what we remember. We look at the photograph not to see the thing, but to remember it, and as we remember it, we don't really see it, we feel it. So I tried to pull the seeing which became feeling back into vision and language. It's all an attempt at translating what we cannot see into what we can see. I wanted to pull the thing outside the image back into the image.

----How many copies of this memory do you keep?

A photocopy photocopies language overwhelms and repeats photocopy overwhelms never changes

I give the copies away...

I give them away in hopes that someone else's memory might hold on longer than mine, or come to them in sharper detail. I pass out reminders, so all the versions of the memory might stick around a little longer.

Everyone's got a slightly different version of what happened that day, and those versions change every time

they're passed on, just a little, details slip away or are invented. I want to encourage these versions as they grow exponentially, so I share them with others and let the memories live their own lives in other people's homes. So the factual becomes lost in the passing on? I'm not convinced the facts ever last beyond the moment, or if they do, they certainly don't live in the memory.

Any borrowed language in the book or the paintings actually comes from first-hand accounts of witnesses of supposed alien or supernatural activity. These accounts are just a textual version of giving away photos. These people are sharing things that happened to them in order to find some kind of relief or verification by telling their stories. They pass on the copies.

I make a point, though, not to directly tell you which language is borrowed. I wouldn't want the power of their words to be sullied by the stereotypes on which their reputation hangs. They aren't any different from the reader. All memory is supernatural. All memory is unreal.

The original can never be passed on. The original memory stays with me, though it may have only lasted a second before another detail slips away and it's now version 002.

And the book does this too, the book is just a micromanaged version of giving away photographs. Whatever the book revives for the reader is just another version of the memories in the work, passing on, growing, and changing. And if they ever come back to look at it again, new memories will arise – even if they're just different versions of the earlier memories, they're still new.

"[...] remembering is repetition, remembering is also confusion."

- Gertrude Stein

This confusion is vital to my work in this book, because even as I commit all this remembering, I cannot truly remember, I cannot know my memory in perfect detail. The more you repeat, the more confused you become, and somehow, in this confusion, I gained a kind of clarity in knowing that I could not know. It's comforting to realize that this standard of memory I was trying to reach is actually a bar that doesn't exist at all.

I focused on repetition in my work in multiple ways – with the image copied exactly, and with nearly identical

photos taken in quick succession. I also play with the expectation of movement, of freezing time. These all add to the confusion that Stein speaks to - how the reader of my work can never be quite sure of anything.

In the same essay, Stein also explains repetition as insistence. Well, actually she declares that repetition doesn't exist because in the repetition, there is an unavoidable insistence which inherently changes each instance, so you can never repeat the exact same thing, but only insist. I agree and disagree with this. In my writing, the repetition is a kind of insistence, as in it is a way in which I wish to emphasize or draw attention to something, but it is also a kind of working-through the thing. As I repeat, I insist, and as I insist the meaning changes and I am able to explore the different ways and meaning inside the poem or image.

I don't necessarily agree that repetition cannot exist and is only insistence, though, because I do believe repetition does exist and is in my work, as in, the same exact image or word over again. I need repetition to exist, because I need real repetition in order to create the confusion against the implied repetition.

----Is this memory attached to you?

Yes, but...

it still passes through the vision of others. The memory floats over and away from the photograph, changes hands, endures under

loss//invention of detail,

The memory is me.

A memory
is never quite the same.
I can duplicate the copy,
but I can't take the same photograph twice
and I tried
the light moves
the wind carries,
my hand trembles

I can possess the photo but I cannot possess the moment as I move past it, forward into time.

Sontag reminds me I am a tourist of my own memories: "As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure."

She also explains that we use the act of photographing as a placeholder for work, the guilt we feel for simply experiencing something, so we must translate it into something tangible, an object of proof. Again the photograph

comes back to us as truth, but this is just not right... The thing changes as it passes through memory and it is not the same as it was when it was photographed. The photograph is not proof of the memory, because the memory is ever changing. The photograph as a creation of evidence helps me to possess something, but it's nothing more than the photograph. I can't possess the memory.

So then I ask:

----Is the photograph useful?

Something is useful if it can produce something, make a task easier, or keep us alive. So no, the photograph is not really useful in the practical sense. It won't keep up alive. I have a hope that the photograph can make the remembering easier. That's the whole reason we take them, to remember. But I know it doesn't actually make the remembering easier because the photograph is not accurate to the memory. If the memory speaks a dozen languages, and the photograph only speaks visually, how can the photograph be accurate? The photograph is not the memory. But as a society, we've convinced ourselves that the photographic is inherently evidentiary.

Some certain facts live in the photograph. Something I thought was blue was actually red. And the photograph has tarnished my trust in my memory because what I thought to be true is actually not. But maybe I remembered blue for a reason. Maybe red reminds me of scarier things and I'd like to think that the scene was blue. Maybe the changing of details is an act of self-preservation, or an attempt at optimism.

The witness accounts and other reading materials are written by people writing about trauma. But there's no way to know that these stories actually happened. Why make up a scary story? If a horror story is an attempt at optimism, of our brains rewiring themselves to keep us going, then there must be an even more frightening trauma happening underneath these outlandish stories.

I don't doubt that these people absolutely believe what they are saying. I just know that memory can lie to us. Perhaps sometimes we need it to.

Rebirth ruins the dead, value lost –

No.

losing touch of trust of memory and therefore reality

memory is as unreliable as the photograph as transparent as a ghost

---- Is there enough light? if the camera can't see it, can I?

The camera 'sees' in only the most technical sense. It takes in light and duplicates it for me. I can certainly see things that the camera can't. I can see the moods of the people around me, I can notice beautiful things. The camera sees everything but makes no editorial choice. The camera is only a mechanical tool to make images, I'm the one laying all these feelings and memories onto the image, the photographer is the one who decided what was important enough to be photographed.

"to photograph is to confer importance"

- Susan Sontag, On Photography

And since the photo only captures the importance of what can be seen, I deal with the unseen by writing about it, by shifting between the languages of memory. Repetition in the language works like an over-exposed photograph, the words as light lingering in the poem for too long and illuminating the image.

The over//under exposed photographs move the work from evidence to interpretation

Before and during the making of this work, one of my strongest writing inspirations was Kate Greenstreet. I read *Young Tambling* and I was drawn to both the writing and the visual work. At first, I was charmed by the language, which was not overly complicated or full of words which I needed to stop and look up. She was a poet who grounded in a world that I recognized. It didn't seem to me that she was using poetry to elevate or escape something, but instead to speak about it both poetically and colloquially.

As I got further on into making *The Missing Hour*, I realized it was speaking around a story of trauma in the same way that *Young Tambling* did. Greenstreet did not tell the whole story. In both her writing and her visual work,

there was a balance of light and dark, a balance of what we can see and what we can't, strategically used to address moments without necessarily addressing the trauma. This reminds me of photography, you need both light and shadow to create an image. Too much of either and your photo is no good. This is why you don't shoot at night or on an overly sunny day. In fact, the magic hour of twilight is the best time to take photos, as the light escapes, you can catch the best images. You can see most clearly right before you lost your sight.

I went back through *Young Tambling*, looking for places I marked. One stands out to me, on a page facing a series of square images, which to me feel like abstracted nature but could be anything at all –

"But what about fog?"

- Kate Greenstreet

Greenstreet is addressing the unknown, the filter through which we see everything. What does fog do to your sight? It's the real-life manifestation of grain in a photograph, you lose the details. But it's not like blur, where the subject itself loses detail, fog, instead, lays over everything. Grain lays on the paper, underneath everything. Either way, it's a layer which obscures.

Sometimes there is too much. In too much light I see hardly anything at all.

the photograph illegible, leaves a predictable motion frozen in repetition, stops time and reveals to us what the eye sees but we don't know it sees:

"Photography makes aware for the first time the optical unconscious."

- Walter Benjamin, A Short History of Photography

Benjamin is talking about the small things our eyes can't catch but the camera can. Think of Muybridge's photographs of horses galloping, the first evidence that we couldn't see everything. Nearly a century and a half later, in a culture inundated with photographs, we need to spin our perspectives around and suggest that perhaps we see things which the camera cannot. What exactly is the camera capturing? Is it what you really need to see?

----Is anything sharp?

The sharpness of the photograph reinforces our experience of the photograph as evidence. The clearer a photo, the more we can recall. Or do we really recall it? Looking at the photo and seeing the evidence of a person or moment is actually more like *pretending* to remember the moment. We say to ourselves, oh yeah, that's right... Did the photo actually kick start a memory or do we just simply believe the photo?

For something to be sharp, though, it must also be painful. A clear photo creates a clear memory, cutting through the warm ambiguity of remembering... The remembering of the other senses is pushed back when all of our focus is on the visual.

The sharpness of a good photograph doesn't leave much room for things to be forgotten, and sometimes we want to forget parts of our memories, only want to remember the nice ones. Naturally, then, we usually only photograph the things we want to remember.

Writing the poems was a way to address the sharp things that linger around photographs because language works so well in ambiguity, leaves room for interpretation while still communicating in a specific direction. The writing is certainly haunting, but the spirit responsible for the haunting comes from the reader.

There's a sharpness from above...

There is certainly a male character running through the poetry of the book, which came from my writing as a woman and my societally normalized fear of living under a male authority. This theme of male authority was also running through a lot of my source material, especially the books on Roswell, full of military presence continually undermining the ideas of others.

As a woman living in an era where large numbers of people in power are attempting to roll back women's rights, I was naturally concerned with and worried by the looming, male, government pseudo father figure who spends a lot of time and effort covering up lies with lies.

the line between

photo//memory blurs

in bad photographs of figures, hills, houses and roads

The taking of an illegible photograph becomes a tool for illustrating how little we actually see.

all empty but not always empty or maybe never empty.

So the empty photograph illustrates the emptiness which the photograph has always been, the reminder of death, of nothingness –

"The photograph is a farewell. It belongs to the afterlife of the photographed."

- Eduardo Cadava

The afterlife only lives on in the memory of the living, the memory of the viewer. So while the photograph is always about the dead, the dead can only live on in one way – in the memory of the living.

a rocking chair in a empty foyer, dirt from boots on the laminate, door left open in a rush

sometimes the ghost will show itself in fragments

--- What do you see? Shapes waver, covered over, under paint, ink, memory *I see things that I cannot see*.

The photograph is gone but never right in the first place and now it's hard to remember

--- Is the noise overwhelming?

grain, texture like sand, details are lost in a sea of each other

Yes, but in a comforting way, like a reminder of the particles we are all made of.

What's in the photograph?

---- Can anything return from an iris?

I layer paint, words and images, forgetting what came first, I dig through to find the words I lost, but now they change. I write them again and again and every time they change, passed down to myself from myself,

which one is real?

Nothing comes back the same.

which overflows the photograph which overflows the moment...

The words come from the image, the image from a tool – a camera, or a brush, acrylic, or from a book that already was. I write like myself, not like I want to be someone else, so I write simply and I let time and memory and feeling stutter and repeat in the words as images come through the words from images from me.

So my self works as translator for my memory, my photographs, into words. The words overflow from the collage

"And the shadow became Fortino and I was/the shadow following his shadow following/my shadow become Fortino."

-- Virginie Lalucq, Fortino Samano (the overflowing of the poem)

This book, *Fortino Samano*, built on a concept that must have been floating around in my head and then burrowed its way into the process of my work – the overflow. This book is the translation of a witnessing of a photograph, the photograph being a witness to the execution of a person – Samano. I realize now that my photography in this work is also a witness, as all photography is in some way, and that I am not finding this witness to be a trustworthy one, and then I become stuck in a circular cycle of trying to find a witness worth listening to.

Photography? Language? Memory? Myself? I'm starting to come to the conclusion that no witness can be a credible one. However, my work (read: investigation) has brought me closer to being comfortable with what I cannot know.

Fortino Samano Virginie Lalucq

On Photography Susan Sontag

Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History Eduardo Cadava

Camera Lucida Roland Barthes

Young Tambling Kate Greenstreet

Portraits and Repetition Gertrude Stein

A Short History of Photography Walter Benjamin