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Family photos : an exploration of significant exposures

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**FAMILY PHOTOS:
AN EXPLORATION OF SIGNIFICANT EXPOSURES**

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B. Ed., University of Calgary, 1983

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Education
of the University of Lethbridge
in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree**

MASTER OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

To into this inquiry is a personal journey and I appreciate my family's support for and interest in my work. I hope to honour the oeuvre of my family's snapshots and the people who made the photographs, on both sides of the camera.

- to Terrance, Anastasia and Mary, for believing in me

- to Mom and Dad, for trusting me

- to Nicholas Osachoff and Mary Murphy, for being family photographers

ABSTRACT

This hermeneutic inquiry into the significance of family photographs in our personal and public lives explores the relationship between the subject, the photographer and the viewer. The discussion uses the photographic oeuvres of the author's paternal grandfather and maternal grandmother as the basis of the exploration. Themes which appear include the following: the represented and projected images of a family within family photos; the significance of gender in the making of snapshots; and, the influence of history and religion upon families. The discussion also includes the relationship between art and photography, art photography and the snapshot genre, the role of women within photography and snapshot photography as a method of visual narrative. The author delves into hermeneutics as an interpretative framework when viewing family photos. Semiotics, and Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1981) inform the discussion in addition to Jung's matriarchal consciousness as two alternative frameworks for interpreting family photographs. The study indicates that family photographs are visual artifacts which document and authenticate the lived experiences of the photographer and that they serve as a visual form of life writing. Data from the photographic industry indicates the heavy involvement of women in family photographs which the study links to the marginalised role of the genre. To interpret the significance of the ubiquitous family snapshot involves the hermeneutic circle as the "text" of the photograph involves the inter-textuality of other previously encountered texts.

PREFACE

My involvement with photography began when I was a child, first as a subject, then as a viewer. In my teenage years, I began making my own photographs and my relationship with the medium has continued to expand as the years have passed. In this way, the inception for this thesis has been a series of moments strung together rather than a flash of inspiration or an idea sparked during a singular conversation.

My purpose, other than to fulfill academic requirements, is to explore the significance of family photographs. I have explored what they mean to me and perhaps to others. Although the primary audience for my writing has been my committee members, because of the narrative and interpretative style of this exploration, a general audience may find merit in my work. I have observed that in brief conversations with various people, from fellow graduate students, to colleagues, to friends and to casual acquaintances, that they have all expressed a genuine interest in the topic and have appeared curious about my work. This perhaps speak of the role snapshots play in our lives and their significance as an artifact of our existence.

My thesis has two pivotal themes. The first is the fact that family photographs (a term that I elucidate in the first chapter) are an integral part of modern life throughout the world. The second rests upon the distinctive nature of family photographs which contrast with all other photographic genres. Unlike professionally created photographs, family snapshot are the privy of the amateur and this makes them personal, common and marginalised; I explore this marginalization and the distinctiveness of snapshots throughout my text.

My method of inquiry has been primarily hermeneutic although semiotics, narrative inquiry and phenomenology have each played a role. In the first chapter, after elaborating essential background information, I introduce the reader to the families involved in my interpretations through the first set of photographs. The following five chapters then follow a similar pattern. They each begin with a scanned black and white photograph from each of the families involved, the Osachoffs and the Murphys. The two images provide the point of departure which guides the chapter's exploration of a range of issues and topics.

I have explored the trinity of the subject, photographer and viewer individually by chapters (Chapter 2, 3, and 4 respectively). Chapter Five and Six overtly includes all three roles. This attention to the photographic trinity is somewhat unique to this thesis, as most academic writing, regardless of discipline, primarily focuses on the role of the viewer.

Due to the hermeneutic nature of my work, I did not choose all of the photographs in advance. As I wrote each chapter, I would select the image according to its attraction to me, its punctum (Barthes, 1981). The issues which I discuss had emerged by the time I began writing and they arrived as part of the cumulative effect of graduate courses and reading widely in a variety of areas including: art, aesthetics, the history of photography, film studies, semiotics, hermeneutics, psychology, gender relations and sociology.

As the broad range of background reading indicates, I have encountered and explored the relationship among family photographs and numerous disciplines. This has not been entirely by choice but instead demanded by the hermeneutics involved and the very nature of family photographs which encompass the messy array of content we call life. In fact, I have left some topics unexplored perhaps for future inquiries, either by

myself or by other scholars.

The first chapter begins with background information concerning my lifelong involvement with photography and an introduction to my paternal and maternal families whose photographic oeuvres I use for the basis of the explorations into the significance of family photographs. Beginning in this chapter and throughout my writing I examine issues that relate to the family including: the composition and disposition of a family; the represented and projected images of a family within family photos; the role of the subjects, photographer and viewers within a family; the significance of gender in the making of snapshots; the impact of history upon a family, especially immigrant families; and the influence of religion upon family members, especially the family photographer. These themes appear throughout all six chapters for they are central motifs within family photographs and therefore of this inquiry.

Following this initial introduction, the second chapter discusses the relationship between art and photography, art photography and the snapshot genre, and the role of women within photography and snapshot photography as a method of visual narrative. These issues cascade down upon each other and provide an important context for my exploration and interpretations, although this chapter with its numerous topics was difficult to write. In Chapter Three, I discuss hermeneutics and how this interpretative tool parallels the viewing process involved in examining family photographs. I also explore the notion of home, and how a conceptual landscape appears in photographic images and how viewers easily believe what they see in snapshots, a concept which I initially address in the preceding chapter.

Chapter Four uses semiotics to interpret photographs and I have included a discussion of the noted book, *Camera Lucida* (Barthes, 1981). In his book, Barthes sought out the essence of photography and highlighted the importance of desire and death. As part of desire, I examine fetish, in the traditional sense of the word, and I also examine the role of death in photography. In addition to the significance of death, I have included the significance of life because as a scholar, a photographer and a mother, I believe that life, too, has its influence upon family photographs.

My discussion of the significance of life continues in Chapter Five where I discuss Jungian psychology as a interpretative framework for photographs. I examine the matriarchal consciousness and the subconscious influences at work when one is a subject, photographer or a viewer. The Jungian interpretation of the cycle of life picks up themes from Chapter Two with the relationship between young and old and the significance of gender. In Chapter Six, I have attempted to weave together my interpretations and have included a third photograph to interpret, one in colour of my young family. This third photograph is a method to summarize and conclude the numerous issues that the inquiry has brought forth. The epilogue is my final address to the reader but an interpretative discussion never ends, it merely shifts form.

As I alluded to earlier, the weaving together of the various disciplines, topics and issues has been challenging. However, I felt that the exploration required at least an attempt to pull together these influences upon the interpretation of the significance of family photographs. In an effort to overcome unity problems, I have used two levels of metaphors to structure my discussion. At the chapter level, a carefully selected

photographic term supplies the metaphor for the discussion and enables the reader to link ideas within that chapter. I begin this technique in Chapter Two with the use of *depth of field* as a metaphor and employ *exposures* for Chapter Three. For the next two chapters, I use *compositions* and *transformations*, respectively. Chapter Six, like the initial chapter has no metaphor.

The second level of metaphor is for the entire document. Once I had a better flow to the vagaries of each chapter, the unity of the entire document needed further attention and after receiving comments from two different proofreaders it became very clear that my responsibilities as a writer required even more work. It was a problem. How could I connect this complex web of discussions so that a reader could make sense of my explorations? And then, the metaphor came to me. The reading of this document parallels the process that a viewer encounters when he or she thoughtfully examines a family photo album.

Some photo albums have a chronology to organize them, or a theme or a specific topic such as the development of a child. But some albums lack such neat categories. I hope that a reader will engage my exploration in the same manner as one would an unusual photo album. What a viewer knows and expects, changes as he or she turns the pages. And just as each page reveals new insights, so does each individual photograph. And just as one photo seems very different from the previous one and the ones following it, and even may have been taken in a different continent or century, the photos in the album collectively express a very complex and interconnected narrative, involving many topics that spirals the viewer further and further from the original starting point. It is also

impossible to know where the journey is going to lead because discoveries build upon each other and have a timeliness of their own nature.

A family photo album has for its precinct the lived experience of the photographer, the one who writes the visual diary. This precinct is consequently quite vast and far ranging in its scope and this unusually large ambit has been a scholarly challenge. So as one reads this inquiry into the significance of family photographs, I ask that a reader approach the document as one would a family photo album, one that has been recently discovered in a forgotten part of a back closet or under a grandmother's bed or in a attic box. As a reader, engaged in the hermeneutics of my text, I have supplied numerous discussions which seem to lead away from the heart of the matter, of the significance of the ubiquitous snapshot. But this leading away is not a tangent or a transgression, but part of the hermeneutic journey which I encountered as I "read" the text of family photograph. To help others understand my journey, my text explores a vast precinct out of necessity. For as in all hermeneutics:

What we are trying to establish is a certain reading of text or expressions, and what we appeal to as our grounds for this reading can only be other readings. The (hermeneutic) circle can also be put in terms of part-whole relations: we are trying to establish a reading for the whole text, and for this we appeal to readings of its partial expressions; and yet because we dealing with meaning, with making sense, where expressions only make sense or not in relation to others, the readings of partial expressions depend on those of others and ultimately of the whole.

...Ultimately, a good explanation is one which makes sense of the behaviour; but

then to appreciate a good explanation, one has to agree on what makes good sense; what makes good sense is a function of one's readings; and these in turn are based on the kind of sense one understands. (Taylor, 1977, p. 103, 109).

I hope that you, the reader, find value in my exploration of family photographs and that you will draw upon your own storehouse of readings of related texts, be they actual photographic albums or written words. I believe that how you look and interpret your own snapshots will change upon the reading of my explorations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Dedication.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
Preface.....	ix
Acknowledgments.....	xv
List of Figures.....	xvi
I. FAMILY PHOTOS.....	1
The Question and the Title.....	1
My Journey into the Topic.....	3
The Nature of the Inquiry.....	9
The Study.....	18
Prelude to the Study.....	21
The Photographs.....	24
An Exploration of Significance.....	27
Closing Thoughts.....	31
II. A GRANDFATHER WITH A GRANDCHILD.....	32
The Photographs.....	35
Emerging Horizons of Interpretation.....	36

Issues within Art and Photography.....	38
Snapshot Photography.....	43
Women and Photography.....	46
Women and Snapshot Photography.....	49
Life Writing and Visual Narrative.....	51
The Believability Quotient.....	53
Visual Narrative.....	56
A Grandfather with a Grandchild.....	58
The Grandfathers.....	60
The Role of the Grandchild.....	62
Closing Thoughts.....	66
III. LANDSCAPES OF HOME.....	69
The Photographs.....	71
Emerging Horizons of Interpretation.....	78
The Alchemy of Reversals.....	78
The Lexicon of Photography.....	81
The Hermeneutic Experience.....	88
Mediators of Messages.....	94
Nicholas Osachoff (1901-1938).....	97
Mary Murphy (1890-1978).....	98
The Obsession.....	99

IV. FACES IN THE MOON.....	102
The Photographs.....	104
Emerging Horizons of Interpretation.....	108
Semiotics and <i>Camera Lucida</i>.....	109
Death, Fetish and Photography.....	115
Barthes and Snapshot Photography.....	120
Photography and Life.....	122
Returning to the Faces in the Moon.....	127
V. ALCHEMY AMID THE FIELDS.....	130
The Photographs.....	132
Emerging Horizons of Interpretation.....	138
Jungian Psychology.....	139
Photography as Alchemy.....	146
Messages Mediated by Hermes.....	149
VI. CHILD TO MOTHER TO CHILD.....	153
The Photographs.....	156
Emerging Horizons of Interpretation.....	160
The Evolution of Colour Photographs.....	162
Encountering the Photographer's Persona.....	167
Revisiting Marginalizations within Photography.....	173

Death and Rebirth.....176

Truths and Lies.....177

Concluding Thoughts.....179

VII. EPILOGUE.....185

References.....188

Bibliography.....195

LIST OF FIGURES

	PAGE
<u>Figure 1.</u> The Osachoff Family.....	22
<u>Figure 2.</u> The Murphy Family.....	23
<u>Figure 3.</u> Grandfather Osachoff and Lawrence.....	33
<u>Figure 4.</u> Grandpa and Betty Jo.....	34
<u>Figure 5.</u> Me with My Boys.....	69
<u>Figure 6.</u> Some Snow.....	70
<u>Figure 7.</u> Hana Kannigan and Jack Louis.....	102
<u>Figure 8.</u> Eddie Murphy and Friends.....	103
<u>Figure 9.</u> Five Young Women.....	130
<u>Figure 10.</u> Great-grandmother Murphy.....	131
<u>Figure 11.</u> Mercedes Osachoff.....	152
<u>Figure 12.</u> August 1963.....	153
<u>Figure 13.</u> The Blomgren Family.....	154

CHAPTER ONE: FAMILY PHOTOS

The Question and the Title

Snapshots. Pictures. Photographs. These have always fascinated me. They have always been part of my life either as a viewer, a photographer or as a subject. But this is not a novelty in an affluent, modern country; instead, it is the norm. Most people have looked at family snapshots, or have taken the odd birthday photo and have likely posed for the annual Christmas documentation of the family all together. So my experiences are not abnormal, special or unique; in fact they are the opposite, quite normal, mundane and somewhat typical. But my fascination still thrives and propels me into my inquiry of the significance of family photographs in my life and in the lives of others. So I ask: What is the personal and general significance of creating and viewing family photographs?

From this question flows the title of the thesis, Family Photos: An Exploration of Significant Exposures, which incorporates several interpretations. The first and most literal relate to the significance of specific photographs within a family's collection of snapshots and formal portraits. These photos may mark important events or emphasize the enactment of a ritual, such as a wedding. Or, a significant exposure to a viewer may be a casual photograph that portrays a candid honesty which is akin to how the viewer sees that person in unmediated situations. Such a photograph is somehow more real than other photographs in the family's collection; the special photograph has an "aura of authenticity" (Price, 1994, p. 24) which the viewer perceives, although other family members may not appreciate the same photograph in the same manner.

A more obtuse rendering of the title concerns the various definitions of exposure

which includes the photographic sense of exposing film to light and having it affected by this process and also the meaning of unmasking an imposter. To further the understanding of exposure, the definitions for the verb expose include the following: leaving a person or object unprotected, especially from the elements; to subject to risk; to expose a subject to light; to exhibit or display; to disclose a secret or to reveal a villain; and historically, to leave a child out of doors to perish (Sykes, 1976, p. 366). With these various meanings of exposure and its verb form, the thesis title takes on a rich and substantial depth of possibility of the significance which family photographs hold for me and for others: this inquiry is an exposure of the significance of family photographs.

Like the physical elements that must come together to create a silver-based image of a subject caught in a second of time, exploring family photographs involves the trinity of the viewer, photographer and subject. A camera without film cannot produce an image even if the sun shone all day. Nor can a camera and film create an image without light, just as light and film cannot create an image without a camera. The three parts need each other and are mutually dependent; conversely, the three are also separate and one can study the essence of each. However, it is the combining, the synergistic energy that creates a fusion from the contributions of the three. So, too, it is with family photographs. The viewer needs the photographer and the subject, just as the subject requires both the photographer and viewer, just as the photographer needs both subject and viewer. This trinity among viewer, photographer and subject has dynamic and powerful qualities, yet it is seldom recognized nor fully understood. My fascination with this trinity, with this common occurrence, forms the basis of my qualitative inquiry into the significance of family

photographs in the quadrants of self, family, historical context and the incorporeal dimensions of life (Lesy, 1980).

My Journey into the Topic

My predilection for photographs developed when I began to examine my grandmother's photographs. As a child growing up on a farm in southwestern Alberta, my parents would often take my sisters and me to visit our paternal grandparents in Fort Macleod. We lived about an hour's drive away and so after mass on Sundays we would drive to Fort Macleod and spend the afternoon with my grandparents. Because we were the younger of the forty-five grandchildren, my grandparents were quite old and the visits took place in the living room where my grandfather had "his" chair and a long sofa stretched out to his left. My parents would visit with them and my sisters and I had to entertain ourselves. In the summer we would play in the large backyard and sometimes we would walk down to the corner store and buy candy with the money that our grandfather had given us. But on days with poor weather, we had to amuse ourselves quietly so that the adults could have their visit. I do not know when or who gave me one of my grandmother's photo albums to look at but I do know that it became one of the best activities on those Sunday afternoon visits, next to the candy and the wild rocking chair rides that Grandpa used to give the four of us.

The photographs entranced me. I would lie on my tummy in front of my grandfather and turn over page after page of family history. My grandmother, Mary Ellen Murphy nee Killoran, was an intrepid documentor of her life. She wrote in a diary every

day for most of her adult years and she wrote letters to her adult daughters most Sundays. But most remarkably, she made photographs of her life. By the time I was examining the albums, there were two ottomans stuffed with the black paper albums, and snapshots also stuffed in dining room drawers and other such places. I do not know why she documented her life but I do know that her efforts have left a visual history for me and for my other family members to explore.

I remember that as I looked over the snapshots, I would ask whoever was handy to identify the people in the image or where it was taken. Over time I came to recognize the faces and locations and I could sometimes answer my sisters' questions. There were photographs of my father as a baby, toddler, boy and eventually as a man. I especially liked to look at the oldest photographs from the second and third decades of the twentieth century when my grandparents were in the early years of their sixty-six years of marriage. No particular photographs really stand out in my mind; instead, it is the oeuvre, the totality of my grandmother's life work of photographs, that fascinated me then and fascinates me now. These photographs were openings to knowing my own self, my family, the historical time and place that each photograph portrays, and to knowing the flow of humanity with its grand questions and obscure answers. These photographs were speaking to my soul, in a manner that I did not really understand but in one that I do know exists. Some have called photographs doors to understanding, others claim that they are windows and yet others see them as mirrors. Like the trinities previously mentioned, photographs are more than conduits to facts or platforms for voyeurism or reflections of self. They are all of these independently and even more dependently: these portals to understanding are

dynamic, powerful and synergistic.

This predilection for photographs grew into a love affair when I was fourteen years old. I joined a photography club and for the next four years, I grew in my understanding of photography and in my skills as a photographer.

I remember a visit to my school's library when I was fifteen. The visit was not unusual but the discovery of a specific book was. On top of a motley collection of donated books awaiting processing was a book of photographs. I noticed it and picked it up: Edward Weston's pepper study had me mesmerized. I turned the pages with reverence and I instinctively knew that these were important photographs. What attracted me, known as the *punctum* (Barthes, 1981), was the use of light because it sculpted the green peppers into a new way of seeing these vegetables. They were no longer green peppers; the photographs had transformed them into works of art. The tones of grey and the deep blacks transfixed me. Reluctantly, after the class warning bell sounded, I put the book back where I had first noticed it but when it became available to take home, I did not check it out. The magic was over, but I had been touched by the alchemy of photography and its extensive genres.

In my final year of high school, I talked once, briefly, of my desire to be a professional photographer to the itinerant school counselor. Up until that day, I had never voiced this desire to anyone. The counselor said it was difficult to get steady work and suggested that I try something more dependable. Young, naive, and unsure, I decided to become a teacher. Although teaching was not my passion like photography, it has unfolded as my calling and it has given me a rich career.

However, I continued to think about a career in photography while attending university and preparing for teaching. But I lacked confidence in my abilities and in myself, so I seemed to sabotage every attempt at furthering a career in photography. Finally, I became serious about an honest attempt at photography after teaching for three years in a First Nations school in northern Alberta. The school division granted me a leave of absence and I left for Victoria and for photography school.

I enjoyed studying photography but the entire time I missed my own students. I missed their stories, their laughter and even their misbehavior. The pursuit of photography seemed hollow, selfish and self-absorbed. The egos of my fellow students disturbed me, and the competition to create the consummate "perfect" image was unfathomable. The instructors were protective of "trade" secrets and envious of any bright, new talents.

Despite these negative elements, I improved my technique and understanding of the art and craft of photography. Since that time, I have married one of my fellow classmates and a central feature of our relationship has been photography. At times it has been a source of tension and also of joy. For me, photography has always been seductive, calling me in, but never fully revealing its essence.

As a photographer, I have had my photographs published in national magazines and I have two closets full of slides, negatives and snapshots to cull through and process, one cold winter followed by a rainy summer. I have photographed weddings and dabbled in marketing my images through art cards. My favorite style, both as a photographer and as a viewer, is documentary photojournalism and one day I dream of studying under Mary Ellen Mark, who is famous for her work in this genre. I currently have three personal

projects which include photographing flowers in a style reminiscent of Georgia O'Keefe and Ernest Haas; documenting the wedding day as a display of mixed emotions; and photographing my own family life. As a mother, I love to photograph my daughter and a future child will also have many photographs to own.

Currently, I am a teacher of English to international university students and they have often made photographs of us together, perhaps as evidence of our teacher-student relationship. I have also used photographs as the basis of action research in a writing course that I instruct. I have found that within a classroom situation, personal photographs are a conduit to understanding my students and seeing the connections that bind all people together, such as the significance of family and friends. It is perhaps this bridging of the private and public worlds which compels me to explore in photography what has always attracted but constantly eluded me until now.

What I am attempting relates to establishing the truth or the authorship of family photos within a family for all families. I am trying to discern what is genuine, which when I examine its etymology, (Skeat, 1963) refers to the father's placing a newborn baby on his knees to acknowledge the infant, to authenticate the source in the original stock, its reputed source, or its author. I am trying to give back to the family photographers, the newborn, the original stock that they have created.

What I am attempting is to take back a little ground, make connections, expose some truths and shed light on dark corners and ignored spaces of our lives. I am participating in the responsibility Madeleine Grumet discusses in *Bitter Milk* (1988) where female teachers need to end their compliant partnership in the transfer of children from the

home to the patriarchy of the world; in addition, female teachers must bring to their teaching those elements of the private world which privately sustain but which are abnegated in the public sphere. I am one who wishes to reclaim the importance of the private world in the public world. I am drawing attention to the technology and the process that all people, but most often families, use to authenticate their private lives. Family photos authenticate families: their subjects, photographers and eventual viewers.

Being a teacher, a pedagogue, it is interesting to note Grumet's (1986) exploration of pedagogy. The root of this word comes from the Greek *paidogogos*. In ancient Greece, an older slave, a *paidogogos*, would accompany a child from the home to the school. Although this function appears more custodial than instructional, according to Grumet, our sense of pedagogy has its origins in this passage from home to school; a passage from private and public worlds mediated for the child by an adult who had no legitimate agency nor authority in either place.

In such a manner, my exploration of the relationship of authenticity and authoring within photography has brought me to the word genuine. This is an interesting connection, and it relates to the private world bridging into the public, for as the etymology suggests, a father recognized the child as his, not for his wife, but for the world, for the public world.

I want to expose and bring to light a genuine, illuminated space for family photos. This illumination would attempt a deserved recognition for an undervalued genre and would encourage an appreciation for the private world of photographs and their significance in our public sphere. Family photographs do bridge these two worlds. An examination of the offices of most professionals would reveal an assemblage of families on

display who look upon us as we sign the mortgage, the insurance papers or the will.

Like an original paidagogos, I have no legitimate agency nor authority in either world, but through my writing I hope to bring my responsibility from one place to another, from the home to the school, literally, from my families' homes where photographic albums lay to the "big school" as my husband jokingly refers to the university. As part of the slave's responsibility, family photos mediate between private and public worlds; they bridge the two but belong to neither.

The Nature of the Inquiry

My qualitative inquiry is a personal archaeology, in a manner vaguely similar to Foucault's unearthing of the archaeology of knowledge. By examining different pairs of family photographs which have similar themes, I believe that I will uncover relationships in four quadrants of interpretation and in both personal and societal reckonings of these relationships. Upon this framework will be the synergistic energy of viewer-photographer-subject. The result is a labyrinth of multidimensional connections which may intuitively attract a viewer through the photograph's *punctum*. Barthes (1981) determines this quality as:

It is by *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally ... that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions. The second element will break (or punctuate) the *studium*. This time it is not I who seek it out...it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of

it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists to designate this wound: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many *points*. This second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, hole - and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me). (p. 26-27)

But from my research of the literature, these punctuated attractions are seldom examined or teased apart, especially in the context of family photographs.

In another fashion, this inquiry is similar to an icon study, a peeling away of assumptions and beliefs to reveal something new which may also be peeled back, until somehow a core or even perhaps nothing at all, reveals itself. I am always curious to examine why the photographers made the photographs and although this involves psychological speculation, it also involves the phenomenological act of intentionality. As photographers exploring their families through photographs, they were engaged in making meaning of their lives and of the lives of their family members, of their lived experience. I cannot know with certainty the intentionality driving the snapshots but various repeating themes and interpretations seem to appear and I have commented upon these. But always what remains open for interpretation are the photographs, and the examination of the significance of these photographs. What do they mean to me? To my family? To others?

On a personal level, my family history intrigues and easily commands my attention.

On a societal level, there is an oeuvre of family snapshots for all individuals and families to contemplate, but the significance of this collective body of work has little recognition and even less status in the photographic discourse. This marginalization of snapshot photography has primarily developed as a consequence of the efforts to canonize art photography (Solomon-Godeau, 1991). In less than one hundred and fifty years, photography has gone from being a new technological fad to a legitimized art form. Within this narrow perspective of photography, there is little room for the majority of photographic images produced, both past and present. Excluded, either partially or completely, are the genres of advertising, scientific, photojournalistic, editorial and amateur photography. Only art photographs are part of the canon because all other photographs lack the rigour and intentional aesthetic of art photographs. According to the photography critic Joel Eisinger (1995) snapshots are:

characterized by blur, unusual perspectives, imbalanced compositions, abrupt foreshortenings, and all the other mistakes of rank amateurs who have virtually no 'picture awareness', the snapshot form...provided a rich source of ideas about picture content and structure well worth the attention of artists. In allowing the snapshot to inform their work, consciously or not, the artists in Toward a Social Landscape benefited from the snapshot's directness and authenticity. [italics added] (p. 172)

Eisinger suggests that artists have found significant value in images made by rank amateurs and paradoxically, photographers such as Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus became famous and wealthy for the "snapshot aesthetic" inherent to their art

photographs. Eisinger asserts that these photographs had “distorted scale, artificial lighting, tilted horizons, blurred or out-of-focus images, information overload as a result of congested detail, random framing and unexplained fragments of arms and legs at the edges of pictures” (Thornton, 1978, p. 238 cited in Eisinger). Professional artists have copied the haphazard composition of banal subjects; professionals sought the authenticity which amateurs often captured.

This “snapshot aesthetic,” which was first heralded and strongly supported by John Szarkowski, the curator of New York’s Museum of Modern Art during the 70s and 80s, became an artistic style partly because of its legitimization by a powerful man heading a powerful art institution. In contrast, when amateurs create similar snapshot images the photographs are not taken seriously by anyone except family members, the odd historian and the occasional sociologist or anthropologist because of the amateur label. As a societal oeuvre, family photographs have been dismissed as interesting but somewhat irrelevant in significance.

But what do I mean by family photographs? For the purposes of this exploration, family photographs are the collection of photographs which a family accumulates over the lifespan of a family and -- by the acts of bequeathing and inheriting a collection -- generally passes on from one generation to the next. This collection often includes photographs made by both professional and amateur image makers, with the professionally made photographs likely representing a visual documentation of a specific milestone, such as membership on an athletic team, high school or university graduation, or a wedding. Professionals also visually document less decipherable life achievements such as a healthy

baby or toddler, initiation into adulthood, professional achievement, membership in a family unit, or even ownership of a valuable such as a car or land. These professionally made photographs share the common features of a very controlled mediation, both technically and psychologically, of the final image.

In contrast to such photographs, within a family's photographic oeuvre, are the photographs made by amateurs within the family. Such photographers have the choice between spontaneously "grabbing" a snapshot or posing the subjects. Either is essentially a snapshot because of the lack of the technical merit involved and because the genesis of the desire to make a photograph often arrives spontaneously. In a posed photograph made by an amateur photographer, picture awareness is often limited and heralds the visual influences of previously viewed images from a variety of sources, including other family albums, professionally made portraits, television and movies. Intentionally or not, the photographer may create a snapshot which visually echoes images within her perceptual storehouse.

Within the perceptual storehouse of the owners and viewers of family photographs possibly exist similar attributions of value to either subcategory of family photographs. Depending on the photograph, and on the values of the viewer, a professionally made photograph may have a stronger attraction than an amateur's snapshot, or the converse may be true. It is not one category versus the other but the collective importance which merits investigation for when tragedy strikes such as the blazing forest fires in August 1998 in the interior of British Columbia, people who were forced to evacuate their homes with little notice took "important papers, photograph albums and pictures off the walls"

(CBC Radio, 1998). These evacuees took their photographs made by both professionals and amateurs because such collections are truly irreplaceable.

To fully explore family photographs requires a careful scrutiny of the lexicon of photography. Family photographs are “snapshots” which most photography books condescendingly describe regardless of the yearly creation of 17 billion photographs taken by amateurs for personal reasons (Stroebel & Zakia, 1993, p. 726). Snapshot compositions are weak: obvious and controlled technique does not purposefully exist. My grandmother took snapshots, and referred to the photographs as snaps. However, few people now call the same kind of photographs snapshots and instead refer to them as pictures.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the photographic sense of snapshot entered into common vocabulary in 1860 whereby a magazine writer first coined the term snapshot with “the possibility of taking a photograph, as it were by a snap-shot - of securing a picture in a tenth of a second of time” (p. 837). However, the same entry also reveals that in 1808 snapshot made its first printed reference as “a quick or hurried shot taken without deliberate aim, especially one at a rising bird or quickly moving animal” (p. 837). So it is the sense of quickly or hurriedly releasing a trigger or a shutter while tracking the target or subject with the eye that binds these two definitions of what makes a snapshot. Photographers, both professional and amateur, have shortened the word snapshot and may refer to a shot and shooting. Unlike duck hunting, in photography, a shot captures a snippet of time caught in the mysteries of light and sensitized silver

reacting with each other: a snapshot is a brief interruption in the temporal flow of time.

The etymology of photograph (Sykes, 1976) which comes from the Greek *photo* meaning light (p. 830) and *graphie* (p. 467), meaning writing, literally translates as light writing, or writing with light. With this in mind, family snapshots constitute a visual diary and narrate the lives of family members, each particular family and families in general. The interstices of viewer, photographer and subject are a significant part of this visual diary and just as a written text can be analyzed, deconstructed and reconstructed, so too can the visual narrative inherent to the oeuvre of a family's photographs.

Snapshots democratized photography by making it simpler and more accessible to the masses as the years progressed. Taking pictures of friends, relatives, travel, and important events and rituals such as births, baptisms, bar mitzvahs, confirmations, graduations, and marriages provided a visual diary for families... The profound importance of snapshots has not yet been fully realized. Snapshots are not only an honest visual record of events historical and contemporary, but also a quiet movement that has influenced all forms of image making including painting, motion pictures and television. [italics added] (Stroebel & Zakia, 1993, p. 725-6)

There have been some exceptions to this relative lack of esteem for family photographs. As a sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu studied photography and its role in French society. His most noted research centred around the question of why is the practice of photography so widespread within French culture. This question shaped his study and drew him to the conclusion that photography ought to be defined within social functions: the family photograph as an index of family unity and simultaneously family photographs

as an instrument of the unity (as cited in Krauss, 1990). Although a common and accepted practice, creating family photographs are a theatrical production in a sense. They represent a projected image of the family and in so doing may actually be esteemed by the family members as a measure of the family's unity. The family photograph is a representation of unity in the same manner as the process of creating the family photograph engages and binds the family in a united, shared effort. The process and the product flow back upon each other.

Working from within a postmodernist framework, Krauss (1990) builds upon the use of photography as a medium of representation:

The camera is hauled out to document family reunions and vacations or trips. Its place is within the ritualized cult of domesticity, and it is trained on those moments that are sacred within that cult: weddings, christenings, anniversaries and so forth. The camera is a tool that is treated as though it were merely there passively to document, to record the objective fact of family integration. But it is of course, more than that. The photographic record is part of the point of these family gatherings; it is an agent in the collective fantasy of family cohesion, and in that sense the camera is a projective tool, part of the theatre that family constructs to convince itself that it is together and whole. (p. 19)

Later in Krauss' essay, she concurs with Bourdieu's belief that photographic objectivity does not exist when she quotes from Bourdieu's untranslated book, Un art moyen: Essai sur les usages sociaux de la Photographie (1969), "in stamping photography with the patent of realism, society does nothing but confirm itself in the

tautological certainty that an image of reality that conforms to its own representation of objectivity is truly objective” (p. 19).

Unlike Bourdieu, Roland Barthes attempts to reconcile the forces at work when viewing a photograph. In his book Camera Lucida, Barthes (1981) tackles the problematic quest of exploring photography “in itself.” In searching for the essence of photography he encounters instead the viewer’s reaction and the veil of realism which photography engenders. This temporal duality between the present viewing and the time when the shutter closed upon itself is part of the nature of photography. The object symbolized, the referent, always remains adhering to the image and that which the referent represents continues, often into the present time. This veil of realism sets photography apart from other visual arts and creates an unavoidable self-referencing whenever a viewer (spectator) studies a photograph. On some level, a viewer must encounter the question: why am I alive here and now? This is the *noeme*, the unique feature of photography, and for Barthes this makes photography’s power of authentication greater than its power of representation.

Although Bourdieu and Barthes develop two different interpretations of primitive or snapshot photography, they agree that it has a special and unique significance to society. This significance also has a poorly understood but intense power for most modern people who document family events and the passing of years with camera and film. Walter Benjamin (1931, 1972) speaks of a “reverent aura” that people attach to original works of art, but with developments in imaging technology the aura of the original has been substantially changed as infinite reproductions of any image are easily possible. However,

an image, especially those made with a camera, has in some manner retained an essence of the prototype which creates a unique attraction for the viewer. The prototype fuses with the image (Freedberg, 1989) and thus creates a compelling energy that mystifies as much as it enlightens. This energy, fusion, aura or *punctum* is an integral part of any photograph but its power is perhaps most potent when a viewer engages a photograph of family members. The multidimensional, multilayered self-referencing to a superficially simple reproduction of a moment caught in time kaleidoscopes into a personal reverie of intersecting and interconnecting posits of understanding.

This is the power of a family photograph and this is what drew me to my grandmother's extensive collection of photographs. Like a vortex it continues to envelope me because I reexamine familiar family photographs somewhat casually but always with a sensitivity to new observations of previously overlooked possibilities. Although I may know a photograph, I still feel engaged when I look at it. This is the power of the image which Bourdieu and Barthes and others have wrestled with but which eludes a perfect understanding, a precise containment.

The Study

A central feature of my inquiry is to encounter the multiple meanings of various family photographs. I have scanned two photographs, one from my maternal grandfather's oeuvre and the other from my paternal grandmother's, into the beginning of each chapter. A brief explanation of the people, place, time and event (or non-event) follows so that a reader may initially understand some aspects of each photograph. From this point of

mutual understanding, I endeavour to take a reader into a process of peeling back the layers related to a central theme which both photographs share either overtly or covertly and in this peeling back and teasing out, I reveal previously obfuscated layers of significance to a specific photograph.

The central themes which seem to underlie these family photographs include but are not limited to the following: the issues that snapshot photography generates within the photographic discourse; family rituals and celebrations; family life or “home” as a creative and artistic endeavour; the impulses at work in historical and personal documentation; the significance of visual diary as narrative; the tensions between being alive and the certainty of death; the meta-narratives of Christianity and capitalism; the nature of creating and viewing images within a Jungian framework; and, the influence of the hermeneutic tradition upon the interpretative nature of the inquiry. These themes and others dance behind the surface reading of a family photograph and each chapter of the inquiry deals with one to several related themes.

Because a thesis is a creative endeavour, this document has had a life of its own which I could not predict. I trusted the raw creative energies which emerged from examining the photographs and generated an authentic inquiry. I have felt a definite tension in writing this document between needing to substantiate and demonstrate my knowledge of various disciplines which creates the foundation for my interpretations, and my desire to write creative non-fiction. This blending of a public and a private voice has challenged me as a scholar and as a writer. To elucidate my interpretations first for myself and then for my reader has required using new interpretative tools and as a novice, I have

struggled. My horizon of interpretation has shifted and changed since I began this writing task and a smooth road it has not been. In my revisions, I have attempted to make effortless what was an effort and I hope that I have succeeded not in hiding but in enhancing an understanding of the flow of my spider web-like thoughts.

To guide a reader through the maze of possible themes and interpretations, I have framed the content of the inquiry much like a photographer must decide what to include and exclude within a photograph. To remain true to my creative desire, I did not preselect any photographs. Instead, I studied each oeuvre and selected the images with the prick of the *punctum* when I had a specific theme in mind as the creative organizing principle at work demanded the need for the theme first, image second. I examine the issues which snapshot photography generate as a marginalised topic within the photographic discourse and because this thesis is a qualitative, interpretive endeavour, an exploration of the art and craft of hermeneutics is essential: to examine the meaning within family photographs is an interpretative act, just as the writing of the examination is in itself another interpretive act. Hermeneutics provides a theoretical construct which articulates the interpretive disposition at work whenever I view or create a photograph. Consequently, I have integrated the hermeneutic discussion within the writing that conveys my explorations of the significance of the paired photographs.

In addition to hermeneutics, a foundational text throughout the inquiry was *Camera Lucida* (Barthes, 1981) which served to guide my discussion and provided yet another tool for examining the significance of family photographs. Explorations of the meaning of Barthes' work punctuate much of the current writing in the photographic

discourse and his influence cannot be ignored. In fact, there are parallels between what he sets out to explore in Camera Lucida and what this thesis attempts. In addition, Barthes' contribution to exploring the essence of photography is significant not only for scholars within the photographic discourse but for all pedagogues due to the current dominance of visual technologies and communication.

In another chapter, I apply a Jungian framework to my interpretations with the matriarchal consciousness as the primary focus. This discussion provides an unusual but relevant interpretation of the significance of family photographs. The conclusion connects my birth family's past to the present, and reinforces the repetition of themes from one generation to the next: I believe that the meaning of why I photograph my daughter and husband resounds with what I have found in studying my grandparent's photographs.

Prelude to the Study

Informal family portraits commonly occur and represent a logical starting point for the peeling back of the significance of family photographs. The following visual and textual introduction and analysis to the two families which form the basis for this inquiry is not exhaustive because some of the themes overlap and intersect and will re-enter later in my discussion. Of course, I am substantially changed from the little girl in Fort Macleod but in one manner, I am very much the same: entranced with the characters and stories which the photographs suggest but never completely reveal as authenticity and representation play out before my eyes.



Figure 1

Subjects: The Osachoff Family
Date & Place: Summer 1930 or 1931,
Slavenka near Blaine Lake, Saskatchewan
Photographer: Nicholas Osachoff



Figure 2

Subjects: The Murphy Family
Date & Place: Early 1939, The farm north of Cowley, Alberta
Photographer: William (Bud) Walls (son-in-law)

The Photographs

My paternal grandfather, Nicholas Osachoff made the first photograph (Figure 1) in 1930 or 1931. My mother, who is the very blonde girl in the second row, was unsure of the exact year. She also generally identified the time as summer, although she later speculated that it was likely June 29, St. Peter's Day which was a holiday for the Russian people in the Blaine Lake area of Saskatchewan, but her speculation only came after I pressed her for the reason for the formal clothes. The photograph includes my mother's direct family and some of the extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents) who lived within several miles of the site of the photograph. The house in the background is where my mother grew up and it was the centre to Slavenka, the name which the farm still bears. My mother told me that all the Independent Doukhobors lived on farms which bore the name of villages from southern Georgia, the area from where these Russians had emigrated. The family's patriarch and matriarch, Simyon and Nastya Osachoff, who were the parents of the photographer, are both sitting on chairs and dominate the portrait. The visual organization indicates that the photographer, my grandfather, likely orchestrated this semiformal portrait of the Osachoff family.

The counterpart to the Osachoff family portrait is the photograph of the Murphy family taken in 1939 (Figure 2). The photograph includes Mary Ellen and Thomas Murphy and their nine children, and the photographer was likely Bud Walls, who had married one of the Murphy daughters. Although my grandmother wrote on the photograph "Gillen Place," my father thinks this label is incorrect from the visual clues within the photograph. He commented that the Gillen house had no resemblance to the one in the photograph and

that the house near Cowley, where my father and mother still reside, is the house in the photograph. He furthered his defence by commenting on the height of the roof in the photograph and that no other house that the Murphys had lived in had such high ceilings as the one near Cowley. With respect to the time of year, my father could give no exact time, although he speculated that perhaps it was New Year's Day because a discarded Christmas tree appears in the left background. A Chinook wind could account for the lack of coats and snow. It is also possible that the photograph was taken at Easter as a religious holiday would account for the family being all together and for the formal clothing. It is interesting to note how my father identified the photographer, whose shadow appears in the right foreground. When I asked who had taken the photograph, he replied that the shadow looked like that which Bud Walls would cast. The visual organization appears casual but still retains a pleasing although unusual aesthetic.

Why do I enjoy looking at these photographs, thinking about them and looking at them again? What are these photographs telling me?

The family portrait of my Russian relatives suggests that the different generations were in different stages of becoming Canadian. My great-grandmother, Nastya, is wearing a traditional Douhkobour head scarf although it may have been likely newer and more expensive than the one that she would wear on a regular day. My great-grandfather dressed more like a Canadian farmer but his moustache with its pointed tip seems to indicate a European fashion and the sailor suits of the two younger boys are reminiscent of the clothes which Alexei, the only son of Czar Nicholas II, wore in a commonly published portrait of the czar and his family (Exhibit Tells, 1998).

The children, on either side, amid, and at the feet of the Osachoff grandparents seem to say to a viewer "here is the progeny, the future is assured." The adults in the back row appear to make a line of support which could defend an assault more than the young and old who are visually grouped together. It seems that young and old belong together, each drawing strength from that which they do not have. The adults tacitly seem to agree to their responsibilities and the photographer has created a representation of strength, unity and cohesion within this family. Was this the significance which the photographer, my grandfather had openly or more likely, inadvertently, sought?

To compare the Osachoff portrait with the Murphy family reveals superficial differences but also deep lying similarities. The Murphy family portrait indicates the fashions of the late 1930s although careful scrutiny reveals suits that are too small for the teenage boys. This suggest how growing children defy finances and few of the clothes were likely new to the individual wearing them. It was the end of the Depression and with such a large family, money was scarce. The visual organization of the individuals seems less controlled by the photographer than in its counterpart, although the three youngest family members stand on the same plane, ahead of their older family members as did the young in the Osachoff portrait. In a fashion also reminiscent to the Osachoff family, in the Murphy portrait the youngest and oldest are visually grouped together; in addition, the youngest member of the family is actually touching the eldest member. The wife, Mary Ellen, has linked her hand into the crook of her husband's elbow and he has his broad, thick hands shielding his youngest child's shoulders. These three could be in a portrait of their own.

The line of children which flows to the left of the parents has no major space separations. Some of the brother and sisters have placed their arms around their siblings' lower back and the chain of bodies with its inherent chain of closeness ends with the third youngest child. He stands a bit awkwardly, perhaps caught between the front row and the back row, for his emerging adolescence indicates that he will soon take on the adult responsibilities of the back row. His sister, the oldest sibling in the family, firmly grasps his side, anchoring him between what he is and what he will soon become.

When I look at the young boy-man in the centre, of the Murphy portrait, I see a glimpse of myself for this boy-man is my father. I feel empathy for him because as a middle child in a group of nine, he was neither here nor there, just in the middle. I am also a middle child and know how it is to have such a status within a family group.

When I looked closely at my mother when she was quite young, I was a bit surprised. Her partial scowl, which is likely the result of having to look into the sun for the sake of the photograph, is similar to the scowl that my young daughter makes. When I look at family photographs, the playing out of the genetic code becomes obvious; I think of family members who are not in the photograph but share facial and physical characteristics of those who are. Such similarities always absorb my attention and I know that I am not alone in this wonder of genetics.

An Exploration of Significance

What is the significance of these family portraits? On a surface level it seems that for both families, it is a document that proves all of the members were together on that

day. In the Russian portrait, because it includes some of the extended family, it is obvious that special occasions, drew everyone together and in their best clothing. For the Murphy family, to have the oldest children home all at the same time was an unusual event and worth the time and expense of making a photograph. On another level, the tremor of death's passing by but not stopping, may have touched the unconscious or conscious level of the photographer or the initiator of the portrait. In the Osachoff family, the grandparents are logically closer to death than anyone else in the photograph and this unspoken but understood possibility may have been part of the drive to create the portrait. But perhaps it was something more.

The lived experience of the patriarch and matriarch, Simyon and Nastya, mark a constant struggle of change in the hope of making a better life. Before they emigrated from Georgia to the time of this photograph, their lives involved constant physical toil and accomplishments achieved through sheer perseverance and effort. My mother has told me how her grandfather, Simyon, walked to Winnipeg from Blaine Lake in the hopes of finding a job for the winter, several years in a row. He and his brothers had no money for lodging and they would stay with homesteaders along the way, paying for their accommodation by doing light chores and singing traditional Russian songs acappella and in their rich baritones. Nastya walked eighty miles guiding a milk cow to their new homestead several months pregnant with her first child, Nicholas. Both Simyon and Nastya had different experiences but shared in common difficulties, of lives filled with work to ease the pressures of survival. So the Osachoff family portrait is not just a visual statement of "this is the family" but it possibly resounds with deeper narratives of

overcoming struggles, on various terraces including cultural and religious in addition to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. The photograph speaks of achievements gained through sacrifices and hard work, hard physical work. The photograph on some level seems to signify the success of the family and the anticipation of future successes. It is more than a posed snapshot of the Osachoff family.

The Murphy family portrait has some engaging qualities of significance. My grandmother Murphy was usually the photographer in the family but on this day she stands assuredly linked to her husband as a central subject instead of the usual photographer. Seven children were born in the Fort Macleod hospital but two of her nine children were born at home with the assistance of a midwife and family members believe that she never miscarried. What was my grandmother thinking on that Sunday in 1939? Was she the initiator of this photograph, having her son-in-law take the picture? By this time, she had grown too old to conceive and did she want or need some tangible proof of the children she had nurtured and raised? Other than a family portrait taken by the Gushel Studio in 1942, no other complete family photograph was made until a cousin's wedding in the 1970s. Someone, likely my grandmother, had the 1939 photograph enlarged to a five by seven and a torn hole marks the top centre edge where it appears that someone had tacked the photograph into a wall as a frequent visual reminder of "this is the family."

Was my grandmother only thinking of having a visual record for her own needs? Or was there an intuitive sense that the political unease in Europe would soon create the war which would attract young Canadian men and often leave them emotionally scarred, physically disabled or horribly dead, perhaps missing in action with an unknown resting

spot? She had lived through one world war and did she fear a second? Or did she have an intuitive recognition that the nine healthy, strong children were against the odds and that God might strike one down through illness or death and that now was the time to create the bit of evidence that might give her comfort and assurance in the later years of her life? Or maybe, it was just a recognition of the death of her own fertility, because by 1939 she was a grandmother several times over. The end of a woman's reproductive years weighs heavy with the knowledge that there is no turning back, that the life force has left and will never return. For someone like my grandmother, who was very successful in her childbearing, the end of fertility was the end of a personal era. This end also marked the transition into the autumn of her life with its inherent finality vaguely pending.

Was the photograph narcissistic? Selfish? Or a commonly shared artistic impulse to look upon what she had created? She did not leave out her husband; he is obviously integral to her perception of their family as she stands close and links her arm into his. She seems to experience pride, assurance and strength by intimately standing next to him. As in the book of Genesis, "A man shall leave his family, cleave and become one flesh."

As a strong Roman Catholic, the family was also proof of my grandmother's faith and adherence to the teachings of the Church. At her death in 1976, instead of the usual one, five priests officiated at her funeral mass. For Mary Ellen Murphy, this family portrait may have had a religious significance because it shows to any viewer her commitment to her faith and to the dictates of the Church. Tangible proof of faith seldom exists, but perhaps this family portrait made credible what was usually incredible.

I cannot know her thinking or her intentions. I can only view her images and

ponder their significance to me and to others. Her photographs, along with my grandfather's and now my own, augment my lived experiences and the unfolding of my life. This augmentation is not special or unique, due to the ubiquitous nature of snapshots in our modern era, but has only been partially examined due to its fecund and complex possibilities. I believe that my personal quest bears fruit for all, because we experience life individually but discuss its significance collectively.

Closing Thoughts

Exploring the significance of these photographs is a hermeneutic journey and the more I examine the photographs the more I can decipher my family's representation of family. One unfolds as controlled and orchestrated; the other more haphazard and spontaneous. Both reveal definite roles for the young, old and central authority figures. The authenticating power of the photographs whispers of the historical context of each image and of the reach of death. There are tensions between subjects and photographer, photographer and viewer, viewer and subjects, of the powers of representation and authentication. The two family portraits allude to multiple interconnections and interpretations as I peel back the subtle layers of significance. Such images are so much more than visual perceptions for any image is

a complexity of relationships, an inherence of tensions, juxtapositions, and interconnections. An image is neither pure meaning, nor pure relations, nor pure perceptions. An image is not even pure reflection, for one can never say with certainty that this is 'the thing' and a reflection of the thing. Nor can one say that

image is *this* literally and *that* metaphorically. These dualities - thing versus reflection, literal versus metaphorical - are not images but rather ways of structuring images.

The imaginal is never virginally pure but always ambiguous, shady and slightly disreputable, a mixture of shade and light, contour and shadow. With image, modalities intrude. Meanings interpenetrate. Fantasy and perception break into each other; idea and fact transgress each other's borders. ... *to resist the image is to be virginal in psyche, and to be a psychic virgin is to be closed to the image.* [italics in original] (Berry, 1982, pp. 97-98)

CHAPTER TWO: A GRANDFATHER WITH A GRANDCHILD



Figure 3

**Subjects: Semyon Osachoff with grandson, Lawrence Osachoff
Date & Place: Slavenka, Summer 1923
Photographer: Nicholas Osachoff**



GRAMPA + BETTY JO. OCT.

Figure 4

Subjects: Eddie Murphy with granddaughter, Betty Jo Murphy
Date & Place: October, 1955, The farm near Cowley
Photographer: Mary Ellen Murphy

The Photographs

A grandfather with a grandchild. A simple theme which produced simple photographs, in contrast to the posed family snapshots of the introduction. Or perhaps the peeling back of these images of young and old are more sophisticated, more complex than the punctum initially suggests.

The first photograph (Figure 3) simply taken in a true snapshot style records a pause in the regular flow of daily farm activities at Slavenka in 1923. My great-grandfather Semyon Osachoff comfortably lies on the farmhouse lawn, farmer style, with his two-year-old grandson, Lawrence standing nearby and so it plausible that the photographer, Nicholas Osachoff likely wanted to own this image of his father and son casually enjoying being together. True to his photographic style though, my grandfather does not look for the “decisive moment” when the geometric and narrative qualities reach their highest point of interest in the manner developed by the famous photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson. Instead, the photograph clearly reveals at work the snapshot aesthetic as Barnet (1993) describes in the following terms, “the images (usually of people) are taken at eye level in daylight, with the subject in the centre of the frame, and with some unplanned ‘marginalia’ that give the picture its spontaneity and complexity” (p. 60).

His snapshot reveals two definite technical flaws: the first is a camera shake, with its resulting fuzziness throughout the photograph; and the second is a random framing, which creates the clipped feeling of the foreground. Semyon’s feet are visually cut off, likely not intended by the photographer and created more by the amateur’s lack of knowledge of the optical difference between the camera’s viewfinder and the physics of

the lens. Despite these weaknesses, the snapshot has merit due to its spontaneous conception and its layers of significance for the trinity of subjects, photographer and viewer.

The second snapshot shares many similarities with the first (Figure 4). My grandmother also recorded a pause in the regular flow of daily farm activities with my grandfather, Eddie Murphy, sitting comfortably in his chair with the kitchen pantry to his left and the table and can of tobacco to his right. In his lap alertly sits my oldest sister, Betty Jo, four months old. In an attempt to capture the “decisive moment” my grandmother made the photograph of the tender tickle on the baby’s bare foot although she was likely reacting emotionally to what she saw rather than patiently waiting behind the camera for such a moment.

Like the first photograph (Figure 3), my grandmother took the image at eye level and the human subjects are at the centre of the frame with marginalia filling in the remaining visual space. Unlike my grandfather, my grandmother used a bulb flash on her Brownie camera which indicates her desire to have a successful image. This snapshot lacks camera shake but it does share random framing with a great deal of empty space above my grandfather’s head and with his feet cropped off by the bottom frame of the photograph. However, these flaws affirm its status as a snapshot with its spontaneity and complexity enhancing its significance.

Emerging Horizons of Interpretation

It is just these complexities that have attracted me as a scholar, researcher and

writer. Throughout my interpretive journey I have encountered numerous responses, reactions and interpretations of the general significance of photography to our modern world and these commentaries have provided a useful framework for my sharper focus on the significance of family photographs. And just as the poetics of a camera's aperture translates an image with varying depths of field, so does the remaining chapter discussion shift from a great depth of field with the encompassing terrain sharply defined to a shallow depth of field where the framed information varies in emphasis due to creative decisions. This movement from great to shallow depth of field manifests manipulated apertures resulting in fuzziness and clarity.

Although depth of field is a feature of adjustable lenses, it is an important technique when intentionally making a photograph rather than grabbing a snapshot. The primary reasons a photographer plays with varying depths of field derives from the photographer's attractions and planned interpretation of the subject. The optical manipulation which creates a shallow or great depth of field reflects the photographer's vision of the subject and what content within the frame deserves a blurred or clear rendition in the final print. By the choices made by the photographer, the subjects within the frame may be made less discernible or starkly clear. As a result, a viewer reacts to the subjects and how they fundamentally create a third of the alchemical trinity of snapshot photography.

In the following text, I commence with the depth of field necessary to distinguish issues between the landscape art and photography. As the discussion and the topic narrows -- from art photography to snapshot photography to the role of women in

snapshot photography, to the implied visual narratives of the two snapshots of a grandfather with a grandchild -- the depth of field progressively becomes shallower. By the end of the chapter, not only has the framing and focussing changed but so too has the depth of field, the emphasis of the content made visible (Barnet, 1993).

Included within the selective framing and finer focussing of this chapter is an integrated discussion of the prominent role of the subject, for the subjects of snapshot photography have been superficially treated and in some manner, marginalised in the photographic discourse. But this component of the trinity provides stability to the form, and significance to the photographic oeuvres of my families and of all families. The role of the subjects within a snapshot demands an exploration, a teasing out, an interpretation.

Issues within Art and Photography

With the announcement of the invention of photography in 1839, the world of images, both produced and consumed, was substantially changed and in a relatively short time. Photography, unlike painting or sculpture has had to fight to establish itself as an art because "inevitably the reality of photography was criticized for its lack of style. Artists who copied literally from photographs, repeating all the inelegant accidents of nature were severely treated by critics for their negation of the Ideal" (Scharf, 1968, p. 160). In addition to the issue of stylelessness, there are several dominant reasons why photography has aggressively had to prove that the process and the final product are equally valuable as painting or other visual art forms. Although this thesis cannot thoroughly explore all of these reasons, a brief overview of these impulses elucidates the development of art

photography and how snapshot photography has been a marginalised form within the family of photographic genres.

From the beginning, photography was attractive to many people ranging from inventors and scientists to painters. All of these people were fascinated and intrigued by the fixing of an image directly through physics and chemistry rather than by the skilled efforts of a human hand. Even with the crude processes of the daguerre type, followed by calotypes, wet-plates, dry-plates and finally paper-backed film in the 1880s, photography had an ambience of modernity which paralleled other scientific and technological advances in the nineteenth century. Photography eventually allowed many people, not just artists, to render an image which rivalled reality and for some, seemed to be more than reality. Taking a picture of a family member or friend was a relatively easy task to perform and the photographic companies and photographers pushed to accelerate photographic advances even further.

One of the first commercial uses for photography was portraiture and according to Rosenblum (1994), in the 1840s many portrait painters changed their craft from painting to the modern version of it. Photography also influenced the development of the French Impressionists which was a movement away from representation to the interpretation of the visual. Photography allowed Impressionists to see light and human movement differently which they then translated into their paintings in an unprecedented manner. If one looks closely, the ballet school series by Edgar Degas are essentially snapshot photographs of the ballet dancers although represented in paint upon canvas. Some art historians such as Scharf (1968) believe that photography allowed Degas to see the

dancers in a different way from previous work on this theme.

It was therefore as daring as it was imaginative for Edgar Degas to translate the strange images of the instantaneous photograph - as undoubtedly he did - into an entirely modern means for depicting an urban society. For it is highly probable that the many compositional innovations and peculiarly natural poses which appear in his work have their source, not in traditional art, nor solely in Japanese prints, nor purely in his imagination but largely in photography. ...Other evidence, some of it indisputable, records the fact that occasionally he employed them [photographs] directly. (p. 142)

Perhaps the long-lasting popularity of these paintings has to do with the photographic essence rendered not in the clarity inherent to photography but in a softer, dreamier fashion. Despite its unique character and obvious artistic applications, the art world was hesitant to embrace photography as a modern art form.

The weaknesses of photography in comparison to painting or sculpture flowed from photography's "uncompromising reality ... in its very lack of art, in its stylelessness, one of the most potent elements inherent in the mechanical image" (Scharf, 1968, p. 160). Scharf contends that the nonselective character of a camera lens gives some photographic images "an ascendancy over paintings which otherwise, because of the more palpable nature of paint and other characteristics beyond the scope of photography, they would not have" (p. 160). He also states that the distortions in form, the unnaturalness and the lack of visual order "provide photographs with a special power" (p. 160). Few artists, with an exception being Degas, realized these weaknesses as the inherent strength of this visual

form. Photography heightened the importance of the framed subject and previously banal subjects were now easily transformed into images. Artists were still caught in Classical vestiges of what was art, what was appropriate subject matter for art, and how to represent it and many did not understand the unique qualities of making a photograph or in perceiving the actual physical qualities of the fixated silver compounds upon thin metal sheets or later, paper. Degas instead, attempted to “combine the snapshot with the endless labour of the studio...the instantaneous given enduring quality by the patience of intense meditation” (Degas cited in Scharf, 1968, p. 161).

One of the people who changed the direction of the role of photography within art was Alfred Steiglitz (Time-Life, 1983). Born in America near the end of the nineteenth century, he travelled to Europe and attained extensive art training. He returned to New York and passionately applied what he knew about the traditional arts to photography. Steiglitz was not only a photographer but also an editor for various art magazines including the famous Camera Work. He was a key figure in bringing major European artists to New York and his Photo-Secession Gallery exhibited for the first time in America the work of Rodin, Matisse, Toulouse-Matrec, Picasso and others. Steiglitz championed experimental styles in art, both in painting and in photography, and the Photo-Secession also held numerous photography art exhibitions. His influence was substantial firstly because of his connections with the major artists of the early twentieth century and, secondly, because of his belief in photography as an art form coincided with economic and cultural changes of the first three decades of the twentieth century. Even with the influence of Steiglitz, many artists and critics believed that only painting and sculpture

were true art forms; photography was too mechanical with no ethos of the "original" and it was too accessible to people with an undeveloped aesthetic sensibility who often made snapshots of family members rather than appropriate subjects for art. Photography still had a long struggle ahead for status and stature.

Currently, many years later, the efforts of Steiglitz and his followers are obvious. Many people hold certificates and degrees in photography and they are the professional makers of photographic images. In the mid 1990s when the American photographic company Eastman Kodak wanted to penetrate the home market of its rival, the Japanese-based Fuji Photo Film, Eastman Kodak charged Japan with trade barriers and the discussions still continue as the issue involves millions of dollars in revenue. It is now a very big business, in addition to being accepted as an art form. There is also a photographic canon which academic institutions reinforce through discourse and criticism; photographs commonly hang in galleries and museums; and, the art marketplace has witnessed record price tags in the thousands of dollars for photographs by Eugene Atget, Edward Weston, Diane Arbus and others. The status and stature of photography have shifted dramatically in the twentieth century.

In the age of postmodernism, most everything is under scrutiny and this includes the photographic aesthetic in which Steiglitz played a pivotal role. In her meta-critique of the criticism of photography Solomon-Godeau (1991) examines the ideologies of the photographic discourse from its inception. She states the following:

the politics of aestheticism is the expression of an ideology of cultural production which is premised on an idealism that is at best naive and at worst mendacious.

This is an ideology that proclaims the autonomy of the aesthetic, the primacy of the individual artist, and the noncontingency of cultural production. This photographic aesthetic, jointly promoted by the museum, the academy and the marketplace, is principally derived from that version of Anglo-American formalism exemplified by Clement Greenberg's schematic model for the development of modernist painting and sculpture. In its photographic incarnation, however, the contraction of inquiry to the limited terrain of formalist aesthetics and a senescent and academic modernism obscures vast mystifications. In some instances these mystifications are specific to photography (for example, the perennial disavowal of photography as a mechanical image-making system by art photography lobbyists; the efforts to transform - conceptually as well as literally - a technology of multiples into one of "originals"). (pp. xxiv-xxv)

Within a relatively short time, photography has established a firm position within the art world, and thrives even further in the execution of science, mass media and commerce. Its position in these domains has grown dramatically within the last 160 years as has its overall status and stature in the art world. However, snapshot photography, the "pictures" of our everyday lives with their personal subjects and amateur style plays a limited role in formal exhibitions in museums or in formal study in the academy.

Snapshot Photography

Just as photography was once marginalised in the art world, and still has to maintain its stature, snapshot photography is the marginalised genre within the family of

photography. Although the snapshot appears to be a fundamental aspect of all photography -- whether it is the manner by which great photographers began, a style to be copied, or a concept of capturing the perfect moment -- historians, critics and technical writers are nearly silent on the subject of the snapshot. If they do write about it, it is usually in passing and as a bridge to the work of important photographers. The oeuvre of the snapshot that includes unknown photographers and the collective body of their work, is enormous. Yet in photographic circles, it is seldom researched and therefore seldom discussed.

However in economic terms, this genre generates the major source of revenue for multinational photographic companies such as Kodak or Fuji. Most people are familiar with the cost of developing and with over 17 billion snapshots produced each year, the revenues generated are enormous. The specialized films and chemicals of scientific and advertising photographers are expensive to produce in contrast to the simple films used by snapshot photographers and consequently the revenue produced by snapshot photography essentially subsidizes the research and development necessary for professional films. The uncritical users enable professionals to further demands for films and chemical processes that render truer, richer, and deeper colours or blacker blacks and whiter whites. Snapshooters lack the knowledge and expertise to critically assess their photographs; in contrast, professional photographers can be so sensitive to the subtle changes in colour renditions from film batches to film batches that they will purchase hundreds of rolls of film at a time to ensure consistent results.

From the position of a formal aesthetic, snapshot photography lacks the culturally

transmitted ideals of what constitutes a pleasing composition, or a striking image. People learn, to some degree, what looks artistic by the inundation of images made by professionals for the consumption of the average person. Viewing magazines, books and even professionally made portraits all leave a visual history upon a person's memory but they do not empower an amateur to truly imitate such images.

To a lesser or a greater degree, each person is visually literate because of the domination of sight from the moment of birth (Sinatra, 1986). Even before a baby learns to walk or talk, a baby uses visual information to organize and understand the world. Although in the womb hearing precedes sight, visual literacy is our first formal literacy and like any mother tongue, we know it first and we know it best. It is also a literacy that is unmediated: it lacks a memorized alphabet or symbol system from which sophisticated connections must emerge for even partially successful communication. Because audio and visual information have no mediation, if one has the physical ability to hear sounds or see the world, then the surrounding environment is available for interpretation. There is no barrier to the knowing; all can participate. Consequently, visual information is very democratic and in a sense this unhindered access actually lessens its importance. Like the oral word, visual information has lost the respect once paid it. Since the invention of the printing press, the role of the printed word has expanded at the expense of the oral tradition (Ong, 1982) and I would suggest also at the expense of visual literacy. In a similar vein to visual literacy, snapshot photography is highly democratic and allows any photographer to visually represent the world, even if he or she has no artistic training or intuitive sense of design. Remarkably, such photographers occasionally produce a "good"

image, a snapshot which by luck more than intention displays a traditional aesthetic rather than a snapshot aesthetic. Such luck seems less accessible in other art forms, and photography often suffers from a common belief that it is an easier art in comparison to painting or sculpture.

The very nature of photography produces further negative connotations because the camera and film work together to record all subjects equally. Unlike the careful executions of painting techniques that presents a canvas with obvious points of visual concentration, a photograph renders all objects, all subjects equally. Such equality distinguishes photography but it has also been a critique harboured against snapshot photographs, especially those which are spontaneously grabbed. In such photographs, the lack of a traditional aesthetic becomes heightened and sophisticated viewers may disregard the significance of the snapshot image because a viewer initially reads all aspects of the photograph as equally important. However, because of the personal subject matter of snapshots, most images retain some value to the subjects in the photograph, the photographer and eventual viewers.

Women and Photography

Having quickly covered the landscape of issues within art, photography and the snapshot genre, the depth of field shifts and moves to accentuate the significance of gender and photography. According to Rosenblum (1994) the initial developments within photography were primarily made by men but by the early 1850s, women were more commonly involved in the making of photographs due to the introduction of the easier

collodion or wet-plate process which involved adhering a sticky coating of collodion to a glass plate. While the plate was still wet, an exposure had to be made so that the silver salts would adhere and create a fragile negative from which a positive print was often made on albumen-coated paper. Previously, the daguerreotypes and the calotype were difficult processes for the sensitized silver had to adhere to copper plates and the camera lenses available at the time required long exposures. The cameras were large, cumbersome and heavy which had discouraged the involvement of women.

The improved and cheaper collodion process allowed more women to participate in the medium both professionally and as a hobby and since that time, the ratio of women to men who have participated in photography has been difficult to confirm but Rosenblum suggests an initial forty sixty split of women to men with the current ratios nearly even. Unfortunately, the photographic criticism and theory, written histories, literature and exhibitions clearly reveal the erasure of the documentation of female participation by the limited discussion and often omission of their work. In fact, Rosenblum's text is the first serious effort to highlight the contribution to photography by females and her text was published in the mid 1990s. Following her book came a significant travelling photographic exhibition throughout the United States displaying the work of various female photographers. This exhibition was an impetus for the magazine American Photo, which has a wide circulation among working professionals and serious amateurs, to dedicate a 1997 issue to women in photography, which was the first major publication to do so. This recognition of the participation by women in the industry came more than ten years after research indicated that "almost as many women as men were graduating from art and

professional schools with advanced degrees in photography and photography-industry statistics counted almost as many women camera users as men”(Rosenblum, 1994, p. 9). Rosenblum documents how women have been actively involved in photography in a variety of roles from making the photographs to retouching prints since the 1840s. However, the photographic art canon, as well as industrial and societal perceptions have strongly reinforced the contribution of men by the substantial neglect and omission of the accomplishments of women.

In 1888 with the introduction of the Kodak camera, photography became less demanding and easier: no more determining focussing or establishing an exposure time. Film processing now meant sending the exposed film off to Kodak for development rather than weighing and mixing chemicals and processing the sensitized silver in a darkroom. Gone was the fear of failure, the expense of a darkroom and the need for fine attention to the physics and chemistry of photography. The democratic nature of the medium had begun to blossom. It was now easy to make a record of one’s life, to attempt a visual diary and to even play with aesthetic principles and to obtain success. The notion of the ease of photography became firmly established.

The George Eastman company, which is known today as Kodak, was instrumental in advancing the notion of the ease of photography and this theme still appears in the advertising produced to lure the general consumer. This company, along with others, recognized the importance of selling their camera and film to women and directed advertising efforts to ease women’s fears of failure or looking odd right from the time of

the introduction of the first Kodak camera. With the political and economic changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many factors contributed to the popularity of photography for both men and women.

Women and Snapshot Photography

From the time of the introduction of the Kodak camera, snapshot photography has been a common activity within the private lives of individuals, especially those with families, and the definition of what makes a snapshot would definitely apply to most of the photographs made in the private life. But it is not just how a photographer makes a photograph but also the subject and the portrayal of that subject that furthers the perception of a specific image as a snapshot. A relationship exists between the esteem given and the activities and pursuits of the private life compared to those of the public world and following from this, the attached beliefs that society places upon the private and public worlds.

Many of the activities of the private world are the responsibility of women and just as the private world has less status than the public world, so too, do the responsibilities of women have less respect and stature than the efforts of men. Although women are part of the labour force in an unprecedented manner, they still hold a marginalised place within society. The mythology of the ideal woman still survives:

The lady's function in a capitalist society was to appropriate and preserve both the values and commodities which her competitive husband, father and son had little time to honour and enjoy. She was to provide an antidote and a purpose to their

labour. (Douglas cited in Grumet, 1988, p. 43)

I am postulating that the marginalization of snapshot photography is in part related to the fact it is a woman's craft. Market research by the photography industry (Canadian Photographic Marketing Association, 1998) indicates that currently, more women than men make the snapshots, have the films processed, and select specific images to upscale by enlargement and presentation within a frame for display within the home or as a gift for someone else to display. It is difficult to know why women have taken on this responsibility, but it may be connected to the significance of snapshot photography within their lives.

This postulation does not ignore the possibility that men could also fulfill the responsibilities that come with owning and using a camera for family life. In fact, male snapshotters are participating in the richness of the private world and are perhaps mediating between the public and private as a construction in understanding the true fabric of their lives.

Whoever becomes the family photographer, whether male or female, will likely seldom appear as a subject in the family's collection of snaps. This omission is a form of erasure. As a photographic subject, the photographer's lack of participation creates a void within the family's photographs; the title of this chapter and most of the photographs in this document allude to this erasure.

But perhaps the family photographer, who knows that his or her presence in the family photographs will be limited, acknowledges this fact and in stead accepts the responsibility of visually writing the family's life. The family photographer may recognize

either consciously or not, the significance of photography as a form of visual narrative and therefore, as a form of life writing.

Life Writing and Visual Narrative

If parallels are possible between literature and photography, within the literary canon famous poetry and great novels are the masterful works upon which the academe produces critiques, theory and research. Until recently scholars have ignored the genre of life writing which Kadar (1992) defines as:

texts that are written by an author who does not continuously write about someone else, and who does not pretend to be absent from the [black, brown, or white] text himself/herself. Life writing is a way of seeing, to use John Berger's famous phrase; it anticipates the reader's determination on the text, the reader's colour, class and gender, and pleasure in an imperfect and always evolving hermeneutic - classical, traditional, or postmodern. (p. 10)

Life writing recognizes the dialectic between author and reader, and as Kadar notes the author is usually cognizant of the eventual reader. This dialectic parallels the photographer-viewer relationship in snapshot photography and may encompass a photograph's subjects who are participating in the creation of a visual narrative. In so doing, the subjects may begin to blur the line between fact and fiction, between authentication and representation.

Kadar's broad definition includes the two traditional aspects of this genre, biography and autobiography, and once again a parallel appears between life writing and

snapshot photography. Personal photographs of a family are a visual biography of the family members, just as the oeuvre of the family photographer is an autobiographical statement of the photographer. Snapshots given as presents or mementos can serve in place of a letter or a thank you card and the visual narrative conveys messages as do letters and diaries. As both autobiographical and biographical texts include interpretations of perceived truth, so too do snapshots; and like a personal letter, a family photo has various subjective elements which influence the understanding and interpretation of the message. The impulse which motivates one to create biography, autobiography, letters or diaries or family snapshots flows from the same source.

A final significant parallel between life writing and snapshot photography relates to the practitioners of these activities. In both cases, they are untrained or partially trained practitioners, seldom professionals. They are usually not famous for their practice and often they are women. In this sense, the practitioners, their practice, their product and their audience have been marginalised within the academic canon.

My grandmother who had an extensive photographic oeuvre had an equally extensive oeuvre of diaries which ranged over the period beginning in 1912 and ending with her death in 1977. She was a woman who lived from before the turn of the century to the emergence of postmodernism. Her life ran parallel to the advances in imaging and, diary writing, her daily practice, is a novelty as the twenty-first century approaches. Her other common practice, taking pictures, still thrives and characterizes a popular form of documenting one's own life and the lives of others. Visual diary, snapshots, taking pictures, these embody the life writing commonly practised in the postmodernist era.

The Believability Quotient

Family photos can be a form of self-reflection and discovery for families, perhaps as diaries can be a form of self-reflection and self-discovery for individuals. Without conscious knowledge or effort the family photographer is documenting the family: showing aspects, contrived or authentic of the family's personality. Perhaps the photographer is looking for some understanding of his or her family. Perhaps they are trying to create an illusion of what that particular family is about. In a traditional sense of aesthetics, all forms of art are about placing a form over content (Langer, 1953); a snapshot is placing a frame over the messy content of personal life.

However, this framing is always an interpretation: the snippet of time represented in a photograph came and went like all others. Every attempt to conceptualize this moment -- in music, sculpture, painting, words or in photographs -- is a re-creation, an interpretation or a representation of that moment. However, due to the technology involved in photography, on a superficial, visual level the photograph seems to be reality. The photograph has a superior veneer of authenticity when compared to other forms of representation. Because a photograph looks like what we saw, we trust it. Bear in mind that a standard lens on most cameras from the time of the Kodak camera in 1884 (Eastman Kodak, 1998) until the early 1990s, was a lens that closely matched the focal length of the human eye; that is a 50-mm lens on a 35mm camera reproduces an image that is perceptually similar to that of the human eye. These equivalent physics were the basis to the Kodak Brownie camera and other common amateur cameras from the 1880s until the present day. Consequently, this use of lenses that mimic how the human eye

physically sees has produced an oeuvre of collective family photographs that closely approximates how an observing participant in the making of any of those photographs may have seen any of those events caught in time.

In contrast, a wide angle lens or even a short telephoto lens creates a photograph which looks different from how humans actually see. Only since the 1990s have 35-70 mm lenses (a lens that has a moveable focal length and can go from a moderate wide angle of view to a short telephoto lens which visually draws the subject nearer) have become popular with the snapshot photographer. When creating a family photograph, the standard 50 mm lens has helped to stamp authenticity invisibly across the resulting image. The standard lens has likely helped viewers of family photos to accept the projected, orchestrated, manipulated, constructed personality of each family that comes across in the family photographs. As a species that is highly reliant on the sense of sight, people tend to believe what they see. Consequently, the lens has assisted photography in rendering family photos with what Price (1994) refers to as an "aura of authenticity" (p. 24).

In addition, the dominance of the eye level perspective in snapshot photography reinforces a voyeuristic response by a viewer. The combination of the camera and the eye level perspective have substantially contributed to the believability of a snapshot. A further agent which increases the believability of snapshots is the viewer's familiarity with the context and the subjects of the image. Unlike most other types of photos such as those used in advertising, the backdrop or setting in family snapshots is likely familiar. For the viewer of family photos, the home environment is familiar and it is intimately part of the visual repertoire of the viewer; in fact, the viewing of the photos may occur later in the

same physical space as where the photographer pressed the shutter. This familiarity of setting reinforces the aura of authenticity because a viewer believes without question, or only with minor ones, that the constructed image of a family photo is possibly what he or she, the viewer, could have seen. To heighten the believability, most viewers of snapshots are family members who are very familiar with the human subjects of most snapshots and often have strong emotions attached to the faces in such photographs. Consequently the believability quotient of a family photo is substantially higher than most other photos because a viewer thinks (at some level, or somehow), *I could have been there at that moment of time and this is likely what I would have seen. The family snapshot is a near match to my physically being there at that moment in time, if I (i.e., the viewer) were the photographer.* The viewer believes what the family photographer documents because of its close match to the viewer's actual visual experiences, which are heightened by emotion, memory and imagination. The viewer has a fascination with not only the visually strange or novel but also with the familiar, and according to Price (1994) the familiar, reproduced in any photograph, professionally created or not, attracts a viewer. Price states that the recognition of the familiar is one of the chief pleasures of the photograph. When the known elements of an objective world are recognized and at the same time a new aspect of that world is presented, pleasure (as well as shock) can result. ... Art and illusion are not restricted to one form of image-making. Making and matching are ways of creating available to all makers. Photographs transcribe some reality, but the photographer has to determine what reality it will be. He makes the photograph by using the convention that is impossible for him to do anything

except transcribe conventional reality and make it possible to see in his transcription the new forms that he saw. What the viewer thinks he recognizes as reality is effectively, a new reality. (p. 84)

As a result, the photographer's construction of the family's image is seldom questioned or even noticed by most viewers who tend to be other family members and therefore, the constructed images of a perceived family personality are not critically examined or pulled apart. Few families really know the personality of their family and even fewer would discuss it collectively; although, I suspect in-laws may have a few discrete conversations and side comments to make. Like families themselves, family photos are a meshing of myths, hopes and fears, failures and successes, of flesh and of blood.

Visual Narrative

For me in viewing a family photograph, there may be an initial attraction and as a viewer, I am drawn into the photograph, into the void or gunyan as Barthes (1981) describes this experience. If I gaze long enough and without interruption, I enter into the time and space and place of this brief second caught on film. I begin to lose my viewer status and may enter into the situation as a participant. As a participating observer:

I may take up the role of spectator of my own past or future experiences, of other people's experiences, past or future, then I may also become a spectator of events that have never happened and could never happen. I do so, in fact, whenever I read - or hear or tell or write - a fairy story or its adult equivalent. The satisfaction I have in the story is the kind of satisfaction I derive, not from having an experience

but from looking back on one I *have had*: it is as though I were to go back over an experience I have *not* had! (Britton, 1970, p. 103)

Although Britton was describing the influences at work in language and in learning, the family photograph is a visual story. All of the elements of a narrative present themselves: a setting, characters, plot and hidden themes. In fact, the “decisive moment” of the famous street photography of Henri Cartier Bresson, which was the forerunner to the art world’s snapshot aesthetic, is when the visual elements within the photograph simultaneously work together to create the greatest artistic and narrative effect. The decisive moment of the photograph is the visual narrative’s climax. A good family photographer may work either intuitively or knowingly to document the highest point of action of the specific visual story he or she is photographing. The photograph taken in 1955, shows my grandfather tickling my sister’s foot and within the narrative of this photograph the tickling represents the high point of interest. In contrast, the snapshot taken in 1923, lacks the visual capturing of this narrative’s climax, but a viewer can easily entertain an imaginary conversation between the grandfather and the grandson. And it is not much of a stretch of a viewer’s imagination to hear the conversation between the grandfather and his son, the photographer. When imagination begins to fill the off-camera space or the time before or after the click of the shutter, the viewer has encountered the narrative of the portrayed subjects and has been a spectator of events that he or she never actually witnessed. The subjects have attracted the viewer in a manner similar to the perceptual attraction of a shallow depth of field where the marginalia of a snapshot creates the setting of the narrative but the clarity of definition of the subjects enhances the

importance of the subjects and any narrative that they may suggest. Although the narrative is a fiction, the believability quotient of the snapshot encourages most viewers to suspend disbelief and to experience the satisfaction of imaginary voyeurism.

A Grandfather with a Grandchild

In returning to the two snapshots which began this chapter, one can see how the landscapes of art and photography have been selectively focussed down to the implied visual narratives of the grandfathers with a grandchild. The narrow focus, the shallow depth of field, the purposeful degree of emphasis upon subjects who are significant to me but likely not to non-family members, creates singular clarity of the familiar faces and calls for exploration. These photographs offer me something of value and I must examine not just the surface reading of them but also the layered meanings constructed by the alchemical trinity of subject, photographer and viewer.

For some reason the photographers of the grandfathers decided to break the flow of work and to create a photograph. Both children look happy, and so do the grandfathers. The photographers perhaps noted this and felt or caught the impulse to document the moment. It is a private moment that reinforces the photographer's idea of what the family is. Perhaps the photographer wanted to explore, reveal or identify the "fundamentally relational nature of identity and the negations on which the assumption of a singular, fixed and essential self is based" (Martin & Mohanty, 1986, p. 196). Or, perhaps the photographs are not just negations, but also affirmations of what the photographer conceives of his or her family life. In one sense, it is easier to photograph

what you are, rather than what you are not.

However, when one examines the personal histories of the grandfathers, the two snapshots may be visual negations of what the two families were not. For both families, owning productive land was a sizeable feat and gave them a stature that their forefathers could likely never have obtained. In either Ireland or in southern Georgia, their countries of origin, land ownership brought a sense of control and power that labourers or peasants could not enjoy. Although not illiterate, the grandfathers had limited formal training in a trade from which to provide a stable and reasonable income for their families. The land, however, brought tactile security for they could always grow enough food and raise enough livestock to feed the family. The farm life brought challenges but there was a direct relationship between the labour expended and the bearing of crops. Unlike the work of Minnie Bruce Pratt as summarized by Martin and Mohanty (1986) where Pratt defines her childhood home by what it was not (i.e., not Black, not Catholic, not Jewish) the photographers seem to be visually stating their definitions of home: a safe environment, stable and healthy connections between the young and the old, a place and a space where love is almost palpable. Although this is a representation of the home life and therefore at some level must be a construction, for me as a viewer, there is an aura of authenticity to the photograph for the places and faces are familiar and their stories interwoven into mine.

The Grandfathers

But what were the stories, the life stories of these two grandfathers? Not just as

grandfathers but as men caught within the time and place and destiny of the context of their social, economic, political and religious histories?

The grandfather in the first photograph is Semyon (Sam) Osachoff (Figure 3). He was born in 1871 and grew up in southern Georgia, not far from Mount Ararat. At the age of 27, in 1898 he and his wife Nastya (nee Kannigan) boarded a freighter from the port of Batum on the Black Sea and travelled to St. John, New Brunswick. From here they travelled by train to Winnipeg and spent the winter. In the spring of 1899 they moved to Yorkton, Saskatchewan and later decided to settle in the Prince Albert area. Along with Semyon's mother, two brothers and a sister they established a small settlement called Ospennia near the Liard Ferry. This settlement was in keeping with the philosophies of Independent Doukhobors who believed in living close to each other, but not communally.

After living at Ospennia for two years, Semyon and his family, which now included his son Nicholas, moved down the North Saskatchewan River with a small group of Independent Doukhobors to establish the new settlement of Slavenka. This still remains Osachoff property today. Money to develop Slavenka was scarce and it was not until 1913 that the family permanently settled there. From 1901 until 1913 Semyon and Nastya lived and worked in Moose Jaw, returned to both Ospennia and Slavenka and had two more children, both daughters.

In 1916 and 1920 the family added more land to the Slavenka holdings. Semyon and Nastya farmed there with Nicholas and his young family until 1937 when they retired to Blaine Lake. Semyon died in 1951 and Nastya in 1957.

The second grandfather, Thomas Edward Murphy was born into a Catholic family in 1887 at Bitterroot Montana, which was a mining camp operated by his father. Eddie Murphy, as my grandfather was called, grew up along with his younger brother and sister at mining camps in Butte, Idaho and Moyie, British Columbia. Eventually the family settled on a farm near Spokane, Washington where Eddie attended the Gonzaga boarding school until the eighth grade.

In 1903 his father purchased the Lizzie Russel holdings, six sections of land, south of Fort Macleod, Alberta which is now the Eweleme Hutterite Colony. In 1906, Eddie's father died and at age 19 Eddie took on the responsibilities of running the ranch. He married Mary Ellen Killoran in January, 1912 and began his own family which eventually included four daughters and five sons. He ranched the Russel land with his mother, brother and sister until 1927 when they sold the property to the Hutterites.

From 1927 to 1939, Eddie consecutively rented two farms, first from one landowner and then from another. He did all the labouring himself and hired hands were no longer necessary. Then in 1939 he bought the Kemmis ranch north of Cowley where my parents still reside. Except for my father, Edward, Eddie and Mary's sons and daughters permanently left the farm for education and employment opportunities. In July, 1954 Edward married Mercedes Osachoff and until 1956, the senior Murphys lived and worked on the farm with Edward's young family. In 1956, Eddie and his wife, Mary retired to Fort Macleod. In 1976 Mary died, followed by Eddie in 1980.

These summaries describe, to some degree the lives of these two men although the

real stories, the stories of sacrifice, toil and perseverance, the stories that I have heard told over and over are not within these pages. But I know and recall parts of them whenever I view a reminder such as these snapshots. Despite their poverty in revealing the sacrifice and hardship which both grandfathers had experienced, the photographs are a catalyst to their stories. The snapshots enable a viewer to engage the life stories of those subjects permanently caught in a moment of their temporal time.

The Role of the Grandchild

Turning from the grandfathers to the grandchildren suggests the promise of easier times. And just as the two men are part of a specific historical time and place so too are the grandchildren. So who were the two grandchildren? And what significance did each child hold?

Lawrence Osachoff (Figure 3) was born in 1921 and he was the first grandchild for Semyon and Nastya. Lawrence's father Nicholas was the first born of Semyon, so the pattern of a first born male child was repeated within the two generations. Considering the historical and cultural context, the first grandchild's gender was likely important to both Semyon and Nicholas. And with the constant effort throughout his life to acquire and maintain a farm, Semyon perhaps saw an auspicious future for Lawrence now that Semyon's travails had produced his life long goal. Semyon had daily contact with his grandson due to the proximity of the families and so the grandfather-grandson relationship likely had an intimacy and intensity of considerable depth. Lawrence's birth likely had special significance to his grandfather as two years earlier Semyon had lost his two

brothers to the 1919 influenza epidemic. Lawrence's birth was promise of hope, a tremor of possibilities, the prelude to the circle of life.

In a similar manner, my sister's birth held a significance for the Murphy family (see Figure 4). She was born on June 29, 1955, exactly one month after the death of our uncle Donald, who solely predeceased his parents, Eddie and Mary. Donald's death came violently when he was working on an oil rig. The close-knit Murphy family truly experienced a deep loss, but when the new baby arrived, her needs and innocence helped to heal the grieving hearts. Even my sister's name, Elizabeth Josephine, has a relationship to Donald as he once mentioned to my pregnant mother that the new baby should have a royal name. Because of the time of her birth, there was a special relationship between my sister and our grandfather. As in the Osachoff family, the young and old had daily contact because my parents shared the same large farmhouse with my grandparents.

Both grandchildren, Lawrence and Betty Jo, had a special status within in each family, partly due to their gender, and the time and nature of their birth. But I suspect there may be other elements at work at the birth of nearly every child into a family. In the Judeo-Christian background of the two families, a child represents more than an infant to care for and a mouth to feed. In return for this physical care, a child in the Western tradition offers

a prophetic glimpse of a kind of knowledge... [that] emerges from a different subject-object relation, and therefore a different epistemological source. ... Both the child and the fool offer a paradoxical, counter traditional form of knowledge. They are symbolic of a unity of knowledge and being which in fact is the goal of

the wisdom tradition which they reverse. [italics added] (Kennedy, 1996, pp. 11-12)

In this Aristotelean tradition, wisdom stems from organizing rational forms of knowing which apprehends divine right and order from a rational hierarchy of knowledge (Kennedy, 1997). These rational forms of knowledge are clear and available to all people because the divine is the basis of rationality and consequently, there is no division or contradiction between the two branches of the divine and the natural. Wisdom enfolds the divine through Western rationalism rather than by mysticism or alignment with the ordering of the universe. However, both children and fools challenge this rational orientation.

The philosophical tradition established by Socrates, "breaks the positivism of the technocratic, the ethical, or the Ionic traditions of systematic knowledge, and strews the path to wisdom with paradoxes and aporias" (Kennedy, 1996, p. 14). Hence, the child or the fool is able to reflect a wisdom that adults can recognize but cannot really understand. From their marginalised location within society, children are either unnoticed or misunderstood. They have yet to be encultured into adulthood and have a closer connection to nature, the primal and the fecund world of play. Children generate a paradox, for from their innocence flows out words that adults fear to say but will often recognize as true. This dialectic indicates

a return, through the vicissitudes of the life cycle to a nature spiritualised - to the single, eye, to the 'utter transparency' of a human nature restored to Eden. ...The young child is the first statement of a higher integrity which must be earned

through development. (Kennedy, 1996, p. 18)

For the grandfathers in the two photographs, part of their relationship with each grandchild may have included this impulse of denying the rational pursuit of wisdom. Both grandfathers had limited education, close connections to the land and their lives had always ebbed and flowed with the cycles of the seasons. Their physical prosperity was intertwined with the vagaries of the climate as well as with their own efforts and this constant powerlessness over the final outcome of seeds sown in the earth had taught them a humbleness for their own efforts. As Grumet (1988) writes, and perhaps as these two grandfathers knew:

It is the old man, softer, wiser, not so upright, who knows like a woman. Women are three-legged creatures; neither babies nor men, women need a dialectical phenomenology that moves back and forth between the world as it appears to us and the world we refuse to see. We need a meditating method that stretches between lived phenomena and ideology of family life to help us diminish the distance between the private and public roles of our experience. For the world we feel, the world we remember, is also the world we make up. The place that is familiar can be the place where we are lost. [italics added] (p. 165)

And in the words of Schiller, "They [children] are what we were; they are what we are to become again" (cited in Kennedy, 1996, p. 19).

Both children, Lawrence and Betty Jo, are perhaps physical reminders of what the grandfathers are to become again, of what the course of their lives was moving toward. The photos disclose a special connection between the grandfathers and their grandchild - a

connection between age and youth, knowing and not knowing and yet knowing in a deeper way.

Closing Thoughts

In the Prologue, I asked a reader to approach my hermeneutic exploration, as one would when viewing a family photograph album. Like the eclectic mixture of snapshots within the pages of an album, this chapter has been an eclectic mix of topics beginning with the issues between art and photography and ending with a philosophical interpretation of the grandfather-grandchild relationship. My moving from one topic to another could be compared to viewing a series of snapshots within an album. As a viewer moves from picture to picture, new information reveals itself and the thread of continuity among the images morphs into different forms with each new image to consider. Nonetheless, as Taylor (1977) notes the partial readings fashions the whole, and a mutual understanding of the parts that create the whole is necessary as one makes sense of the messages involved.

Snapshot photography has an aura of simplicity attached to it, primarily due to its amateur status and its consequent marginalization. However, my explorations within this chapter have been anything but simple. The issues between art and photography have influenced the developments within art photography which in turn has influenced the snapshot genre. Then, within the history of photography it has been useful to examine the marginalization of women which in turn has had an impact upon the photographic oeuvres of families. From this topic, connections to life writing and visual narrative flow and one

can then begin to explore the significance of narrative as a method of interpreting the lived experiences of an individual. Most family photographs include a person as a dominant subject within the image and to strengthen the connections between the narrative function of snapshots, I sketched out the lives of the subjects of the chapter's two photographs. This led me to examine the philosophy of the child and how others have interpreted the relationship between young and old of which the chapter's two photographs seem to visually allude. Each topic allowed a brief exploration of a pertinent relationship to the significance of snapshot photography, and like moving from picture to picture in a family album, this chapter has covered an array of information.

In addition, I have attempted to determine the depth of field within the topics covered, to purposefully enhance the content. The initial discussion of art and photography required clarity on a broad topic, a great depth of field. As I changed the topics so did the depth of field required. My final topic of the young and the old required carefully selected clarity, and only a shallow depth of field.

This exploration has not been easy to assemble for to articulate the connections between one focus to another has required a careful scrutiny of why I need to include such a scope to interpret the significance of two simple snapshots. But like the veiled complexities of our private worlds, a simple snapshot discloses more than subjects forever caught in a time and space.

These subjects of snapshots, often such familiar faces, are visually represented in a new way, a novel way for future viewers to study. This familiar made novel is also part of the success of shallow depth of field in a photograph for the heightened clarity attracts a

viewer and contrasts to the ill-defined background. So it is not just the subjects but also their visual novelty which attracts a viewer and draws one into the multitude of stories, both true and concocted, that a snapshot suggests. The viewer, through the mediation of the photographer and camera, revisits familiar subjects in a new and novel manner. Together the trinity of the subject, photographer and viewer combines to transform the everyday into a matter of significance.

CHAPTER THREE: LANDSCAPES OF HOME



Figure 5

Subjects: (L to R) Lawrence, Emma and Walter Osachoff
Date & Place: early winter 1924, Slavenka, Saskatchewan
Photographer: Nicholas Osachoff

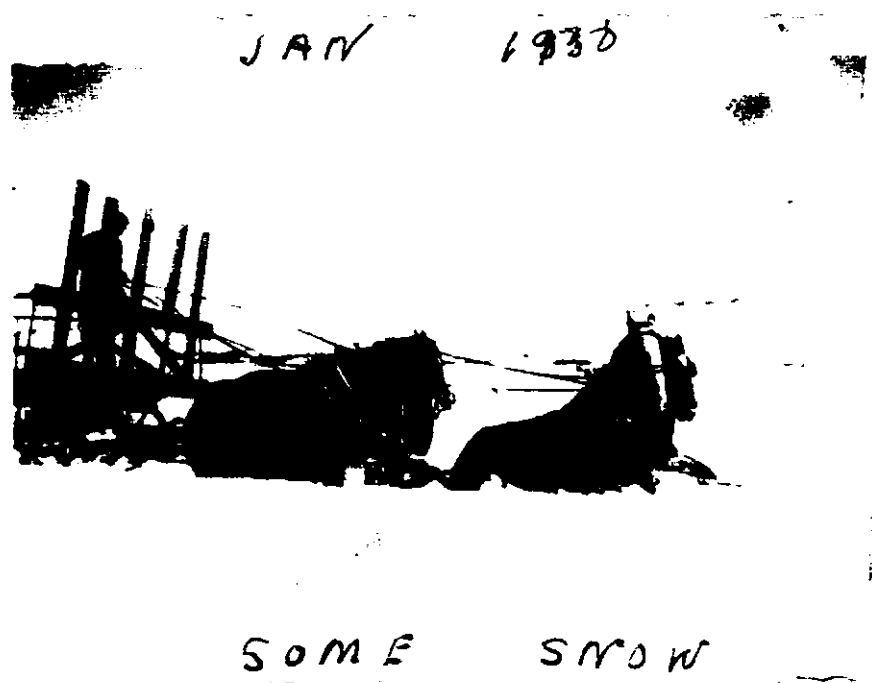


Figure 6

Subject: Donald Murphy

Date & Place: January, 1950, Murphy ranch north of Cowley, Alberta

Photographer: Mary Murphy

The Photographs

When I initially began to compose my thoughts concerning the photographs for this chapter, I found myself searching for my true response because as a viewer on the cusp of the twenty-first century, I cannot easily slip into the role of any of the subjects in these two snapshots. The activities documented are of the past and my personal experiences do not include riding in a cutter or hay wagon on runners. The novelty of the familiar does not exist for me in either snapshot.

The photograph from Slavenka (see Figure 5) had no initial punctum for me and I chose it partly out of necessity as a partner to the second (see Figure 6). For several days I mulled over the image in my mind's eye, and then finally I remembered a scrap of a story that my mother had told of a buffalo robe. Her family had used it in the winter when they had travelled by cutter but it had been poorly cared for by an in-law and now only stories of it remain. The robe appears to be along the back of my grandmother and her sons, which would indicate that the air temperature was not bitterly cold, a fact that the exposed faces of her young sons seems to confirm. As both Lowenthal (1979) and Lesy (1980) discuss, the photographic artifact is a route to the past, and for me this held true. Because I did not discuss the image with my mother or other family members, it was solely my grandfather's snapshot which triggered my recall of part of a story that I have heard only two or three times. The photograph facilitated my reconstructing of bits of separated information and merging it into my collective knowledge of my mother's side of the family.

"Me with my boys" is the caption that my grandmother gave to the photograph

which her husband, Nick Osachoff, had made on a winter's day in late 1924. Although she wrote the title on the back, there is no other information of date or place. Although the photographer was the father of the boys, the mother recorded the title, in a manner similar to the intimate back and forth sharing of daily life that occurred in such a family. Either the photographer did not want to title the snapshot or this responsibility belonged to his wife. If he was to entitle the photograph with a similar but third person rendering, it might have become "Emma and her sons" or "My wife with our boys" or something of this vein. His title would be different because of the different, unique viewpoint each individual has from another. But in some manner, in some vein of shared time and space, the perceptions would overlap and merge and create a shared perception of that ride in that horse drawn cutter.

Despite the absence of a date, with what I know of the dates of birth of the subjects along with the visual elements recorded by the camera, I can deduce pertinent information. In this manner the photograph, like many snapshots, provides clues to form deductions and sometimes accurate speculations about the past and past events. Because snapshots often reproduce the faces and places of our private lives, they are artifacts of our private lives, a visual document of our past time and spaces shared with others.

According to Lowenthal (1979) both memory and artifacts are routes to the past as

the recognition of familiar persons, places and objects enables us to reconstruct past events. A variety of aids - diaries, newspapers, books, the recollections of other people - supplement our own recall. Memory is fallible, however, and constantly altered by revision, conflation, and invention. (p.107)

While gathering research for his book, Time Frames, Lesy (1980) found that family photographs exposed the thoughts and feelings and explorations of the times recorded on film by the family members who were often the subjects in the images or the photographer. This catalyst to the various interpretations of the images seemed inaccessible in any other manner. He discovered that:

Most of the time, we'd sit in the kitchen and start looking at the pictures. They'd go through them quickly at first, one after the other or one page after the other. But then it always happened: we'd get to one picture or one page and they'd stop, and it was almost as if a little bone, a tiny little bone, somewhere inside, as thin as a wishbone, just cracked, and they'd sit up and rise back and start talking, looking right through me, and then they'd be gone. Back there. Gone. And then they'd come up again and say something, and then go back and start talking again; and I never said a goddamn word except "yes" because I was back there with them, riding the wave, holding the table, my eyes on theirs, my eyes in theirs, breathing till it passed and the next one came again. Wave after wave: recapitulation, conjunction, revelation. Again and again.

...But in every case, the people told me stories; they spoke parables; they made confessions. They told me tales; they recounted epics; they recited myths. They told me the way things really are. They sat, all of them, at the centre of the universe, looking out at the worlds of the lives of the people they had known, spinning around them. They sat alone at the centre, heroes and heroines to whom it all flowed, from which it all came. They passed judgment. They held the scales.

They told me the Truth. (pp. xiii-xiv)

So as a visual artifact, a snapshot does more than trigger the memories. It enables viewers who are perhaps the subjects in the photograph, to relive past moments, to explore forgotten sensations and emotions, to be involved in the fabric of their life and the lives documented by the photographer. This can be a powerful experience and its potency lies latent within the punctum, the prick of sensation and emotion.

But not every photograph has a punctum for each specific individual and this was true for "Me with my boys." Although it triggered a forgotten story for me, but this photograph had no punctum because the image appears staid and motionless despite the anticipated motion weighing heavily. The horse's ear is slightly back, neither so back as to indicate over stimulation nor cocked so far forward as to indicate attentive listening. The horse is waiting for the photographer to finish his image making and to climb into the cutter with the others, as in all likelihood my grandmother would not want to travel by herself in the winter with such young children. The horse is visually confined from moving forward as the frame of the photograph implies stoppage rather than motion. The people in the sleigh are nearly one with the horizon line and my grandmother with her children seem bounded to mother earth. The line of the horse's back ascends to the right and merges with the roof line of the Slavenka farmhouse and it seems to engulf the horse and bind him to the buildings as part of the possessions of the family. In the sleigh, the faces are not clear, so emotions are impossible to assess. The fuzziness of the picture indicates that the photographer shook slightly when he made the image, and the range of tonal values from white to black are fashioned in an amateur style, thus making a clear and

visually precise photograph impossible. However, these are the technical aspects which categorize the image as a snapshot.

In opposition to the expectation of equine motion, the second photograph (see Figure 6) of the horse-drawn hay wagon exhibits equine effort and motion. My grandmother, the photographer, entitled the snapshot "Some Snow" and labelled the date as January 1938 on the front of the picture. On the back she wrote "Donald with Elton's horses" and my father who has sorted through his mother's photographs has added "Don Murphy feeding Elton's cattle loose hay, January 1950. That January the countryside was covered with about three feet of snow. In January of that year the average temperature at the Cowley airport was -30 degrees Fahrenheit and never was above zero Fahrenheit once for the month of January."

As a researcher, I have observed for a second time, the contradictions between my grandmother's labelling of her photographs and the perceptions of my father. In this case my grandmother says 1938 and my father says 1950. Such contradictions are part of the reconstruction of any history, whether personal or public. Lowenthal suggests that the route to the past may be marked by fallible memories, fused interpretations and even inventions rooted in fact but also in imagination. The year really does not matter to me; instead, it is the image itself that had an initial punctum and which continues to draw me in.

"Some Snow" seems an underestimation of the reality of that snow for those horses. The photograph has captured the difficulty of moving, let alone pulling a wooden cart, a grown man, and eventually a load of hay. This was a difficult winter, whether it was

1938 or whether it was 1950; the essential elements of the photograph speak of challenges for beasts and humans. The cryptic title perhaps says it all.

An analysis of the visual elements reveals connections among the photographer, her subjects and the landscape. The photographer's shadow dominates the foreground and the horses have visual space to move on the right side of the image. Just above the lead horses a faded line of trees appears far in the distance. These trees would be growing in the Porcupine Hills as both my grandmother and my father did agreed on the photograph's location. This line of trees visually limits the horses to the earth and the motion of their labour pulls them down. Donald rises above the horizon line, above the heaviness of the equine labour. But his is not an unfettered freedom, for the vertical panels of the hay rack seem to imprison him. The reins of the team tie him literally and visually to the horses' labour and to their toil.

Both photographs speak of a relationship to the land in a manner that has substantially changed with modern technology. Transportation by horse is a novelty now, but in the past it was essential. Motion by mechanical means is vastly different from motion enabled by the pulling of a horse. For both families, the tie to the land as their livelihood presupposed a connection to animals. The elements of land and animals conflated into a perception of landscape which likely involved both practical and abstract understandings (Tuan, 1979):

Landscape is an ordering of reality from different angles. It is both a vertical view and a side view. The vertical view sees landscape as domain, a work unit, or a natural system necessary to human livelihood in particular and to organic life in

general; the side view sees landscape as space in which people act, or as scenery for people to contemplate. The vertical view is, as it were, objective and calculating....The side view, in contrast, is personal, moral and aesthetic. A person is in the landscape, working in the field, or he is looking out of a tenement window, from a particular spot and not from an abstract point in space. If the essential character of landscape is that it combines these two views (objective and subjective), it is clear that the combination can take place only in the mind's eye. Landscape appears to us through an effort of the imagination exercised over a highly selected array of sense data. It is an achievement of the mature mind. (p. 90)

The two photographers made snapshot exposures of people in the landscape. This is a subjective view and as Taun's quote indicates, a side view involving the personal, the moral and the aesthetic. The relationship to the land, for both families, influenced not only finances and lifestyle but the entire lived experience of the families as collective units and also the phenomenology of each individual family member. For my mother and father, this shared background of involvement with the land and the landscape has been the cement to their marriage and its bond has united them despite their very different religious and cultural backgrounds. The landscapes of home conveyed by the photographers are simultaneously different and similar as they both speak of

the beauty that we see in the vernacular landscape is the image of our common humanity: hard work, stubborn hope, and mutual forbearance striving to be love. I believe that a landscape which makes these qualities manifest is one that can be called beautiful. (Jackson, 1984, p. xii).

Emerging Horizons of Interpretations

Whether family albums include snapshots of the physical landscape or only the internal landscape of a house, all are exposures of the landscapes of home. And these exposures with their various attributes of exhibiting or displaying, disclosing secrets or revealing mistruths have been made through the mediation of the photographer, the one who writes with light. This mediating role carries significant weight in the trinity of subject, viewer and photographer as the snapshots assemble into an autobiographical oeuvre of the "light writer." So as the family photographer makes a snapshot, he or she exposes not only light to film, but subjects to viewer, and invariably his or her way of seeing for all to examine. These exposures occur simultaneously and declare the complexity of mediating visual messages, of representing narratives, of authenticating lived experiences.

In the following pages I expose the reversals involved in the physics and chemistry when making any photograph and continue the exposing process by examining the lexicon of photography. To further extend the depth of my exploration into family photographs as significant exposures, I explore the hermeneutic experience as an interpretative tool, and the discussion moves to the role of the mediator, the family photographer. By taking this path, I believe critical horizons of meaning meet and merge into a richer and more substantial interpretation of the significance of family photographs, of family exposures.

The Alchemy of Reversals

To explore what is a photographic exposure requires a tracing of a transformation

from tangibles to tangibles through a partly intangible process. This is because making a photograph from the initial human perception of an object to the final viewing of a print constitutes a constant interplay of reversals. Photography is an art, craft, an alchemy of reversals.

To begin with, the human eye has a lens, similar in fashion to a camera lens. As light rays enter into the eye they pass through the iris and reassemble in reverse and upside down on the retina. From the retina, the optic nerve transmits this image of the initial object to the brain. The optical cortex translates the image by 180 degrees and reverses it again to fully resemble the object. This intricate process of perception exists for all people with healthy vision. Consequently, when a photographer begins to make a photograph she has no direct awareness of visually receiving the world upside down and reversed within her eye. Because her brain functions properly with respect to vision, she can contemplate the making of her photograph without recognizing the constant and amazing task of visual translation. So she picks up her camera and makes her photograph.

But here again, the world of optics and chemistry work together to create a recognizable form. When the photographer clicks the shutter, once again light travels from the object and through the lens of the camera. It passes not through an iris but through an aperture and once again the image reverses itself (and may be reversed to resemble the original object through a series of lenses such as most modern cameras possess. However, the cameras used by the two photographers in this study did not have sophisticated lens systems within their respective cameras). The light rays reassemble, this time against the sensitized silver of the film. Unlike the constant act of seeing which most people

unconsciously engage in, the camera shutter and opens and closes upon itself. The “seeing” time is usually in fractions of a second which is in direct contrast to the constant stream of visual information received by our eyes.

Once the photographer has exposed the film, a continuation of this journey of reversal begins anew. In the darkroom, or within its equivalent of an automated film negative processor, the exposed film receives the chemical developer and for an average of seven minutes the sensitized silver changes chemically according to the degree of strength or absence of light which initially activated the silver halide. After the developer, the film receives a stop bath which as the name suggests “stops” the developing action of the first process and the chemical development ceases. After one or two minutes the unstable but forever changed silver receives the final major chemical treatment which “fixes” the image permanently. A final wash, a dip into anti-curling agent, and drying the film creates the negative as most people know it. But in a manner similar to the human retina, the film negative still needs further translation. The image is not upside down, but instead displays reversed tones of light to dark areas of the initial exposure. Once again a reorganization of the image through the negative, must occur.

The next translation process occurs with the help of an enlarger, a light source, photographic paper and further chemicals. Light from the enlarger passes through the negative, which is held flat by a negative carrier, even within an automated printing machine of a one-hour photo lab. The light passes onto the photographic paper which receives the light inherent to the tonal intensities of the negative. The reversed tones, light areas being dark and dark areas being light in the negative, now translate into a positive

image upon the photographic paper, a reproduction of the original scene. However, the image is latent and if it receives more light now the overexposure to light will ruin the photograph, becoming completely black. A properly exposed photographic paper then receives a chemical process similar to the developing of the original negatives of developer, stop bath and fix, followed by a thorough wash and complete drying. The peculiarities of the developer, fix, and even washing depends on the type of negative (black and white or colour), the type of paper (resin coated or fibre based) and numerous other variables such as the type of film, method of exposure and desired effect in the final print.

Eventually though, a final print emerges and the photograph exists due to this interplay of physics and chemistry. But once again, the photographic image requires translation. This final translation is once again in the viewer of the photograph, as part of the human physiology of perception.

This alchemy of translations, of reversals both upside down, right to left, and negative tones to positive are part of the empirical elements of human visual perception and of the commonly accepted photographic method introduced by Kodak. So a simple snapshot is not so simple from the point of view of the physics or chemistry involved in the creating, making and viewing of that exposed moment of time captured on film.

The Lexicon of Photography

Making exposures involves the alchemy of reversals and a lexicon of transformations for the photographer ultimately wants to fix or stop the power of the

image within the camera frame. Such a feat, although considered technical, is on some level magical and mysterious: the photographer's desire to make an exposure blends empirical processes with mystical impulses.

One of the key points of photography is the importance of the "fix" as in "to fix" an image, a part of the chemical process that stabilizes the image in either the negative or the print. According to the OED, the definition for fix is "to make firm or stable, to secure from change, vacillation or wandering, to give stability or constancy to the mind, thoughts, affections or purposes" (Vol. V, p. 981). In photography, without "fixing" neither the negatives nor the print would last longer than a few minutes. An astute photographer, underneath the safelights of a darkroom can actually see the changes occur in a print as the chemicals fix a black and white image. To my eyes, it is a process of cleansing the tones from dark to light and enhancing the clarity, the permanence of that captured moment. As the print goes from the stop bath and into the fix, the clarifying process commences without the fanfare of a definite beginning. But during the height of the fixing the blacks become cleaner and richer and deeper. The abyss of true darkness opens up and one can fall in.

In simple terms, to fix is to stop an image from changing. But within photography "stop" has several meanings, the most technical of which is to the "f stop," a photographic shorthand that refers to the aperture opening that exposed the film. On the lens of a 35mm camera the aperture usually has a f-stop range from f2.0 to f22 which is a standard scale of numbers to describe the opening of the aperture. Again, the alchemy of reversals applies, for f2.0 is the "fastest" aperture because it is the largest opening; as the f-stop numbers

increase, the amount of light that they allow to pass through decreases. Consequently, f16 requires a longer shutter speed than does f2.0. Each movement up the f-stop scale, from f2 to f2.8, or from f2.8 to f4 represents the light being cut in half. In older cameras without an adjustable lens, the f-stop existed but was fixed and unadjustable. Photographers will also refer to the differences in shutter speeds as a "stop" because they will also change the exposure exponentially (i.e. 1/60 is half the speed of 1/125, and one quarter the speed of 1/250). They will also talk of opening up a stop or shutting down by a stop or two, or even adjusting by one-third to one-half of a stop in a crucial lighting situation. To understand the f-stop is critical for any serious photographer because controlling the light is integral to the success of any exposure.

A less technical and deeper examination of stops resides in exploring what the photographer produces by using them. A stop can make the difference between a perfect exposure that accurately renders an amazing representation of what the photographer saw. However, most snapshotters have no real knowledge of the importance of f-stops when exposing a film and basically "snap and shoot" just like Kodak has advertised. The images come back from the lab and they may be over or under exposed. The bright sunlight may have fooled the camera's light meter or perhaps the photographer was able to understand the lighting situation and managed an acceptable print. Film manufacturers have recognized an amateur's lack of expertise and have created colour print film that has a five-stop latitude, of being under or over exposed and still render an acceptably exposed snapshot.

Regardless of the technical acceptability of the snapshots, the photographer is

trying to “stop” the action, to permanently concretize the second of the exposure. This is a stop in the temporal flow of time; an attempt to interrupt the march of time which different cultures view differently, often as linear or as circular. But prior to the invention of photography, there was no ability to actually stop time. It moved on, despite our desire to speed it up or slow it down or to “fix” it into something tangible. However, the photograph has the mystical ability to actually interrupt and concretize a frozen moment, to immortalize it forever. The photograph can stop time.

In this manner, a photographic image represents a captured piece of time and this genius has an unprecedented significance. In her book, Sontag (1977) refers to the concept of the simulacrum and Plato’s cave whereby people trust more in the photographic image than in the prototype. Sontag criticizes this as a misplaced trust and judges people as foolishly naive for holding onto the simulacrum rather than fully participating in the real event. But the ability to stop time, even the time of a common person’s life, even events that are mundane and pedantic and routine to everyone, is an unprecedented power over time and consequently, such photographic images have an immense attraction and inherent believability for most viewers.

As a viewer, there is a novelty in being able to see time frozen and Bayer (1977) explores some of this fascination with time and photography:

How does time fascinate the viewer? Partly it presents a reality in a way the mind doesn’t ordinarily perceive it. Accustomed as it is to coping unconsciously, with an endless flow of sensory perceptions, it stops to examine more closely something it feels it must have seen but never has, such as a motion frozen into a still image.

The classical illustration of this is that until Eadweard Muybridge photographed a galloping horse no one had “seen” whether all four of its hooves were airborne at the same time and, if so, in what position they were.... Steiglitz often called his photographs of this time, ‘snapshots’ and this photograph [The Terminal] is one of the earliest to catch the peak of an everyday, unposed action....The ability to capture a fleeting instant of ordinary everyday life has generically become known as the “decisive moment”....Time is often portrayed by deliberately using blurred movement....Suddenly the mind is given a picture rich with allusions, rich with nostalgia, sadness, a sense of time past and time lost....(p. 12-13)

To stop time marks no minor achievement, either outside of photography or within the medium, and each and every time a successful snapshot emerges, the photographer has created a small but significant document of that time. She has “snapped” the trigger of the instrument which can “shoot” down a piece of time. The snapshot has captured something out there and made it into a possession of the photographer. That time now belongs to the photographer but only if the camera, film development and final printed artifacts of time successfully fulfill their roles.

Although I had believed that my camera’s technical aspects were working, I have felt severely disappointed when films have been unexposed such as the time when I was photographing my young daughter with grandparents she rarely sees. I wanted the frozen pieces of time for them for now, and for her, in her future. But all I have is my memory of making these unsuccessful exposures, not my pieces of photographic paper of her with them. What I wanted was an image that would outlast her grandparents, myself and,

possibly, my daughter.

But what is an image? According to the OED the word image comes from the Latin word imago meaning “imitation, copy, likeness, statue, picture, phantom, conception, thought, idea, similitude, semblance, appearance, shadow” (Vol. VII, p. 665). Image derives from the same root as imitate. Did I want an imitation of my daughter with her grandparents or did I want an appearance of an imitation, a phantom that I could pull out and view or share with them of a photographic likeness of time spent together? Was I disappointed because the photographs did not turn out, or because I was afraid of losing my conception of what that day, of what that time meant to me and perhaps more to them, her paternal grandparents? Was I disillusioned because my hopes to authenticate my illusions of that moment in time did not materialize? Was the memento of the moment more than a simulacrum? Why did I feel that I had failed my in-laws and more intensely, my young daughter? Was it my motherly duty to document a time that she will likely not fully remember?

A further exploration into the meaning of image reveals “a mental representation of something (esp. a visible object), not by direct perception, but by memory or imagination; a mental picture or impression; an idea, conception” (OED, Vol VII, p. 666). This establishes that an image is not something tangible and that it operates in the realm of mental activities; an image is not an imitation that you can experience with all the senses but instead it is a belief in a mental representation of an original visible object. Images are not real; images are a simulacrum of what is real. Like the people in Plato’s cave, was I trusting the shadows more than what I had experienced with my own five senses? Did I

fall into believing more in the image, in the exposure, than in the people whom I had tried to photograph?

I wanted snapshots. I wanted to have “snaps” of this time shared together. But my exposure, my pictures were unsuccessful.

Many people refer to snapshots as pictures and often react to the word snapshot as an outdated or old-fashioned term. Because every picture tells a story, as the original 1927 advertising slogan for Doan’s Backache Kidney Pills heralded, and pictures are worth ten thousand words, according to the Chinese proverb, pictures are fun to take, to have and to share. A picture has a status that in the study of philosophical meaning, corresponds to a fact, “the relation of language and the world, or picture of fact and fact” (OED, Vol. XI, p. 785). Pictures are part of our modern world; they surround us and we surround them.

In my grandmother Murphy’s diary entry from September 24, 1913, she uses the term “picture” when she records the activities of that day:

Ed came up and did chores. Mae and I started to make my red dress. After dinner Mr. Williams and Brandon came. We took some pictures. They stayed for supper.

Jack came home about 7. Had some singing and music. They went home about 11.

Her phrase “took some pictures” is still commonly used today. This action, this verb “take” implies something of significance between the photographer and the act of exposing the film. For the verb to take is to grasp, grip, seize, lay hold of (OED, Vol XVII, p. 557). What was my grandmother grasping? What was I grasping? What were we gripping? seizing? laying hold of? Her life. My life. Her family’s life. My family’s life.

Their time together. Our time together. Time.

The Hermeneutic Experience

Making exposures involves the mediating role of the camera and the photographer who work together as participating observers, as Britton (1970) has suggested. This requires a watchful eye and a sensitivity to unravelling narratives that the photographer feels compelled, through duty or other provocations, to snap the shutter upon itself, to seal the envelope of the message contained within. All photographs are visual messages and part of the intrigue as a viewer flows from interpreting the overt and covert exposures within a snapshot. The process of interpreting a text, in this case a visual text claims a long history within the practice of hermeneutics and such activities have a history that date back to Aristotle and to ancient Alexandria where a school of interpretation existed (Smith, 1991). Since this time, interpretation has evolved and developed to include the concern of biblical exegesis, with the eighteenth century and the development of classical philology, to the present day where it is a prominent feature of modern intellectual thought. Hermeneutics is no longer the sole territory of theologians or legal theorists; instead, it represents a turning away from rationalism with its subject-object orientation to a turning toward a new orientation where the text brings meaning to the interpreter through a dialectic between text and interpreter. Hermeneutics demands a reconfiguration of the role and requirements of a researcher, an interpreter, of anyone who thoughtfully engages a text.

With the publication of Truth and Method, Gadamer (1960) made a significant

contribution to modern hermeneutics by focussing on the role of the question, linguisticity and historicity. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is a phenomenological and ontological approach to understanding which requires an open mind and full participation by the interpreter. Palmer (1969) succinctly describes Gadamer's conception of a hermeneutic inquiry with these words:

The method appropriate to the hermeneutical situation involving the interpreter and the text, then, is one that places him in an attitude of openness to be addressed by the tradition. The attitude is one of expectancy, of waiting for something to happen. He recognizes that he is not a knower seeking his object and taking possession of it - in this case, by coming to know "how it really was" or what the text "really meant" by trying to shake off his prejudices and see with a purely "open" mind. Rather, the methodical discipline is one designed to restrain his own will to master. *He is not so much a knower as an experiencer; the encounter is not a conceptual grasping of something but an event in which a world opens itself up to him. Insofar as each interpreter stands in a new horizon, the event that comes to language in the hermeneutical experience is something new that emerges, something that did not exist before. In this event, grounded in linguisticity and made possible by the dialectical encounter with the meaning of the transmitted text, the hermeneutical experience finds its fulfilment [italics added].* (p. 209)

So whenever a snapshot's punctum pricks me I begin to experience an encounter with that specific photograph. I begin a hermeneutic encounter.

The term hermeneutics originates in Greek mythology, where the god, Hermes

delivered messages from the gods to the mortals as well as among the gods. Hermes was the messenger of the Greek gods both among the gods and to the mortals. But, his role also included being “the leader of the souls to the Underworld, the guide of travellers, the god of speech, of thieves, of businessmen, the reputed inventor of the lyre, the syrinx, numbers and the alphabet, the giver of fertility, and the protector of athletes” (Mayerson, 1971, p. 210). When the Romans apprehended the Greek gods, Hermes became Mercurious, or Mercury, which emphasized his commercial aspect. Eventually in the Middle Ages with the increased activity in the ancient art of alchemy, Mercury became the mythological founder of this mystical science. He became meaningful again when Carl Jung began to explore the psychological aspects of alchemy in the early part of this century, and within archetypal psychology Mercury still executes his initial role as mediator.

Many of the multiple roles assigned to Hermes parallel the multiple facets of photography including: the relationship of photographs to death; photographs as arbitrators of meaning for travellers whether they be physically visiting a new destination or merely travelling through their lives; photographic images as a method to communicate stories and ideas in a visual rather than an oral language; illicit or pornographic photographs due to the criminal possibilities inherent to images; the images produced by the multi-billion photographic industry with its relationship to modern advertising and business; photographs as an art form with its own aesthetics which shares territory with any art, including music; and lastly, photographs as a giver of fertility, both in a creative sense and in the rebirth of the captured moment that a viewer may witness each and every

time one studies a photographic image. Just as Hermes fulfilled multiple roles so does photography and each photographer.

Hermes' primary responsibility was to mediate messages. In a similar manner, a photographer is a mediator between one world and another. A photographer, through the act of making a photograph, frames and captures time which carries a specific message. This message through the help of silver halides, chemicals and papers emerges as a visual statement of a specific moment frozen in film. A viewer may look upon this frozen moment at any time and is therefore receiving the message which the photographer had consciously or unconsciously apprehended. The photographer is between the time of the photograph's creation and the time of the photograph's viewing. The photographer, like Hermes, is between two worlds, of past-time and future viewing.

As a photographer, I have often experienced the role of mediator between the "now" of the photograph and a future viewing. This mediation sometimes has little pressure attached to it, but sometimes as a semi-professional documenting a stranger's wedding day or as a mother trying to juggle too many demands at a family event the pressure can be quite significant. I do not want to miss the message or be inattentive when the most important message spontaneously arrives, announces itself and leaves within seconds. The "decisive moment," the high point of action, the climax of a mini-narrative becomes ripe and explodes upon a family's landscape, and a re-enactment is exactly that, an acting of a moment that has passed and will not live again. A photographer wants to get the message right and even with professional training, numerous attempts, strong intuition and luck, the "decisive moment" often slips away.

But this is perhaps the effect of awareness of the mediating role and its responsibility of constant alertness. A real snaphooter truly snaps a few pictures and in innocence may encode messages with truer impact than the controlled perception of a professional photographer. Art photographers, such as Gary Winogrand, have copied the snapshot aesthetic, not because of the aesthetics involved, but due to the unconventional aesthetics in combination with the genuine, authentic message apparent within most snapshots. The aura of authenticity attracts such art photographers, but they refine the message and also attempt to improve it. Artists and snaphooters alike want to convey messages of significance, messages of importance. Snapshots, with their simple execution, may transmit more to a viewer than an aesthetically pleasing but personally meaningless art or advertising photograph.

In traditional aesthetics the form placed over the content comprises the method of creating a piece of art, and this approach has consistently been applied to analyze photography, especially art photography. However, as Gadamer notes (cited in Palmer, 1969) form and content work together rather than consecutively, and in this sense the traditional approach to understanding art and aesthetics does not apply within a hermeneutical experience. In contrast to the valuing of form over content, within hermeneutics, form and content follow simultaneously after an "understanding" of the work of art results. Understanding originates in the merging of two horizons, the viewer's and that which the piece of art proffers. Palmer (1969) rephrases Gadamer's thinking that it is precisely the experience of art which shows that the work of art is no mere object that stands over against a self-sufficient subject. The work of art has its

authentic being in the fact that, in becoming experience, it transforms the experiencer; the work of art works. The "subject" of the experience of art, the thing that endures through time, is not the subjectivity of the one who experiences the work; it is the work itself [emphasis added]. (p. 174)

In a similar fashion, for me as a viewer of family snapshots, many of the photographs "work." My horizon of being meets with the horizon of the snapshot and "the text is understood not because a relation between persons is involved but because of the participation in the subject matter that the text [photograph] communicates" (Palmer, 1969, p. 185).

Initially, as I study a family photograph I fall into the image. It is not a free fall accompanied by fear but rather an exciting experience of visual and narrative possibilities. My understanding of the significance of snapshots, of the exposures contained within, is still evolving because I am caught in the hermeneutic circle and I have many steps to take before I come back, if ever, to my point of entry. For this

hermeneutic circle has only the (logical, formal, derived) appearance of a vicious circle. It is not a question of escaping from it but on the contrary of engaging in it and going all round it....Engaging on the circular path appeals on the one hand to an artisanal, almost a manual, value of the thinker's trade, on the other hand to an experience of the feast [fete] as experience of the limit, of closure, of resistance, of humility. (Derrida, 1987, p. 32)

I also suspect that like any circle, tangents may offer another line of thinking but I must not be tempted by linear thoughts that carry me away from my inquiry and from my

experience of this process. A maze of layers and connections, continue to expose themselves as I peel back and tease out the interpretations of the significance of family exposures. I have just begun to discover and explore the dialectic between snapshots as a text and myself as an interpreter of this text.

The interpretative act which abandons the I-thou positioning of knowledge is integral to my discussion and to how I actually make discoveries of the nature of interpretation within art, photography and snapshots. A confluence of authoritative opinions initially stifled my response to my question, but as I examine the complexity of the exposures and embark upon the dialectic with this topic, true horizons of being will continue to emerge and fuse with mine. The circle awaits my fumbling and I await its guidance. Together, we will share in the discovery of understanding.

Mediators of Messages

The path of the hermeneutic circle includes the mediating role of photographers, who own one third of the dynamic in the process of creating any photograph. They mediate messages between the subject and the eventual viewer and in so doing photographers place their manner of perceiving the world in a visually accessible form. Photographers make autobiographical statements about themselves by what and how they photograph and this fact remains true for all photographers, even snapshot photographers. The motivations which drive a photographer are a blend of forces which influence many people in many ways at different times. Consequently, the reasons why a photographer documents the family events has both private and public roots although the manner in

which the photographers make the family pictures are very similar. In fact, the photographic industry has made market analyses which have deconstructed how family photographers take their pictures:

we stand eight or ten feet away from our subjects; we go outside on summer vacation but stay inside at Christmas; we hold the camera horizontally and at eye level, five to five-and-a-half feet above the ground. Little wonder, then, that your family snapshots more likely than not resemble mine. (Grundberg, 1992, p.13)

Despite these strong similarities in how most exposures are made, differences in why photographers make family photographs do exist.

As a teacher, artist, wife and mother I make snapshots for various reasons. The desire to document my life is quite strong and I have always sought photography as my medium of expression since exploring it as a teenager. I even made a self-portrait on the first day that I taught school, freshly graduated from university. Among my personal archives, the photograph still exists although feelings of aversion and pity spring forth when I recall or view the image. I wonder why I even took the time to make such a photograph and when I look at my innocence, I cringe at my ignorance of what laid ahead of me in that horrific first year of teaching in a northern and First Nations school administered in a colonial and patriarchal manner. But the photograph exists and I have kept it throughout these years. On that day I wanted a photograph and it still holds significance for me, despite my current murky understanding of why I keep a reminder of a time that I describe as "initiation by fire" into the teaching profession. Perhaps I recognize that life has a dark side and that photographs are like the pages that held the messages

which Hermes may have carried; the message is essential and the conduit to its understanding is a mere medium of communication. It is not the photograph itself that is the message but rather the interpretation of this visual information which holds the meaning.

Another reason why I photograph my life relates to my own family. I make photographs of my daughter as a visual record of her physical growth because the first years are a flood of changes which she will never be able to return to. I do not really trust my memory. I can easily romanticize how she was but a photograph helps me to be more grounded in my reminiscences.

I am also able to remember how I was feeling and what I was thinking when I made my family photographs. This aspect of immediate recall of intense emotions when making an image remains undiscussed in any of the literature that I have encountered, so I do not know if other photographers share this same capacity and if so, to what degree. I can view photographs of my daughter and know what I was thinking about composing the image and how I felt about her, me, and our relationship when I recorded that particular snippet of time. I know that I can recall anger at my husband about a marital issue when I examine various photographs and the anger still seems fresh although certainly not as intense. Some people have described photographs as windows and this metaphor holds true for my recall of thought and feeling of a very specific time and date and space.

I make family photographs to give away to my extended family and to friends. I make pictures of our lives to have as a memento of time shared with others or to commemorate special events or family holidays such as Christmas. On a holiday, I must

bring my camera and I have my share of images of me in front of a Buddha or among castle ruins. When I bought my first car, I had my mother make some photographs with me standing beside it. These motivations influence my photographs just as they likely did for my grandfather and my grandmother. The why of making photographs is always partly speculative but also rather obvious. The significance of those images is what intrigues me and that which I must continue to explore.

Neither my grandfather nor grandmother, despite the number of photographs which they made, left any clear answer as to why they made their family snapshots and I am not confident that knowing their surface motivations would reveal substantial understandings about the significance of the images to them. But because photographs do reveal aspects of the photographer's personality, the following biographies may illuminate elements at work when the images were made and perhaps enable current viewers, such as myself, to make further understandings concerning the significance of my grandfather's and grandmother's exposures.

Nicholas Osachoff (1901 - 1938)

My maternal grandfather, Nicholas, was the first born of Semyon and Nastya Osachoff and was born at Ospennia, Saskatchewan on November 22, 1901. He attended school in Ospennia and in Slavenka and in 1921 he married Emma Sookerokoff with whom he had two sons and a daughter (my mother). He farmed at Slavenka and was very active in the Douhkobour and surrounding community. My grandfather was a great supporter of education and he was among the first organizers of the Saskatchewan Wheel

Pool. Known as a great humanitarian, he spent many hours helping the less fortunate in the community and he worked diligently for the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF), now the New Democratic Party (NDP). He died on October 2, 1938 at the age of 37 after complications from an operation in Vancouver, leaving behind his wife and three children, the youngest of whom was my mother. His body was sent back to Saskatchewan by train and his family buried him at the Slavenka cemetery. My mother was fourteen when he died. She seldom speaks of him.

Mary Murphy (1890 - 1978)

My paternal grandmother was born in October, 1890 in Marmara, Ontario which is near Belleville and she was the fifth child of a family of ten children. She obtained her schooling in Marmara and in 1907 she moved with her family to claim a homestead south of Fort Macleod, Alberta. On January 10, 1912 Mary Killoran married Thomas Edward Murphy and they had nine children together, of which the second son eventually became my father. My grandmother's life was entwined with her husband's and until 1939 they lived in three different homes south of Fort Macleod. The move to the property at Cowley was a fruitful one and the large house easily accommodated the remaining family members, in addition to visits from those who had left for higher education or jobs elsewhere.

Throughout my grandmother's life came a constant flow of domestic duties performed for her large family and for outsiders such as the threshing crew and hired hands. Included in her daily routine was an entry in her journal that held descriptions of

the day's events and a record of when bulls were put with the cows and what field had been seeded or harvested. She noted the weather conditions and any important public event.

My grandmother was a devout Roman Catholic and taught this religion to her family. They said grace before each meal and the rosary each night. When my grandmother and grandfather retired to Fort Macleod in 1956, she attended daily mass. I remember visiting them many times because we lived relatively close and I have substantial memories of these visits. However, as I was just one of over forty-five grandchildren, our relationship had no twinge of being special or unique. It is only now, through the work of this thesis that I have established an exclusive relationship with her.

The Obsession

For these two photographers and now for myself, our autobiographical visual statements are more than a photographic exposure. They are exposures of meanings and interpretations layered one atop another very much as a photographer may purposefully create a photograph by multiple exposures. However a family snapshot does not literally have the multiple exposures for a viewer to physically perceive. But somewhere between the contributions of the trinity of subject, photographer and viewer, messages emerge and as aesthetic form and content work simultaneously, multiple interpretations, multiple exposures appear.

Photography is an empirical and mystical process which has obsessive possibilities, especially for the mediator, the light writer of visual biographies and autobiographies. It is

a compelling role and since the 1880s when the Eastman company introduced the Kodak camera, hundreds of amateur photographers have visually documented their private worlds with ease. The images of families from one hundred years ago contain similar messages as do the ones created today although the props such as horses, or cars, or computers change with the times. The photographs from this chapter could easily be "Me with my boys" with the subjects sitting inside a car, and in fact, my grandfather's oeuvre does hold two or three such images from the late 1920s. In the same vein, "Some Snow" could have snowmobiles or a four wheel drive truck as the means of transportation and still carry a similar message as the original image. The physical props depicted in a photograph merely create a historical context, the setting for the visual narrative. The themes, the exposures, the hidden messages mediated by the family photograph seem to repeat from generation to generation.

And despite the developments in the possibilities of documenting family life from video to web pages, the snapshot has endured and will likely continue on into the twentieth first century. Family photographs, despite their amateur status, have an enduring significance to us. Perhaps the messages which the photographers are mediating need restatement or reinforcement to every generation; Hermes did not question for how long would he be a messenger; he accepted his role and fulfilled its responsibilities. Perhaps this is also true for the photographer in each family, the mantle must be taken up and the messages conveyed.

Everything gets broken or gets lost. Worlds disappear. To photograph is to squeeze into little squares or rectangles movements salvaged from the clutter of

life or from the chaos of one's family. There is no sound and there is no smell. The green juice is gone; but like the dried leaf, it's still something. It's a sign; you and they have been somewhere together. (Plachy, 1992, p. 18)

CHAPTER FOUR: FACES IN THE MOON



Figure 7

Subjects: Hana Kannigan and Jack Louis
Date & Place: circa 1911, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan,
Photographer: William Swanson



Figure 8

**Subjects: (back L to R) T. E. Murphy and Fred Killoran
(front L to R) Vern Killoran and unidentified friend
Date & Place: 1911, unknown location
Photographer: unknown professional photographer**

The Photographs

When I first embarked on this inquiry, my mother and I were discussing the photographic oeuvres of the two respective families which I intended to examine. As we went through some old photographs, actually stored in a shoe box, we came across the portrait of my grandfather Murphy with his two brothers-in-law and a friend (see Figure 8). I commented on the moon prop and how I found it both funny and intriguing. She replied that there was a similar image from her side of her family but that she could not recall who were the subjects of the portrait. Further intrigued, I mailed a letter to my uncle requesting him to try and find the photograph so that I could use it as part of this document. He complied and here are the two portraits of "faces in the moon."

As the two photographs obviously and immediately reveal, a professional photographer made these two similar yet different images. On the back side of both photographs are the words "post card," "correspondence here" "name and address here" and "place stamp here" in the identical locations of a typical post card. These photographic post cards were never mailed although duplicates of the same image were likely available and perhaps these were mailed. The paper is a thicker, heavier weight than other photographs from this era, but the similarities are even more striking when one compares the actual photographs.

The most striking commonality is the prop, a crescent moon with a smiling masculine face. However, within this shared backdrop there also are differences. The image of the couple (Figure 7) has a waning crescent with the face dominating the right side of the image whereas the four men (Figure 8) have placed themselves on and behind a

waxing crescent moon that dominates the left side of the photograph. The first moon also seems friendlier with a jovial smile and an eye that purposefully engages the viewer of the image as the iris looks out from the corner of the eye. In this playful position, the eye as part of the photograph's secondary motif reinforces the primary motif of the couple, or whoever sits in the moon. The moon's eye in combination with the playful smile creates a visual dialogue with the viewer, in which the moon seems to say "Look at the primary subjects. Aren't they cute?" In contrast, the second moon prop engages the viewer in a different manner. The pupil's location in the centre of the moon eye does not direct a visual dialogue; instead, this eye denies dialogue. In addition, the exaggerated goatee beard and the thickly outlined lips with the unusual teeth all create a mouth that seems sarcastic or condescending. The curlicue at the nose and the overall higher placement of the face within the crescent suggests that the moon's face is visually equal with the faces of the four men. Consequently, this moon is nearly a subject in itself whereas the first functions solely as a prop to reinforce the significance of the couple.

Several other commonalities include the stars, the use of a drop cloth and the physical venue where the photographer made the portraits. To further enhance its playful theme, the first photograph has a more pleasing disbursement of stars rather than a concentrated grouping within the arc of the moon tips. The backgrounds are also similar although the second image shows the top edges of the drop cloth and even includes the hook that kept the moon in place which are further clues to where the photographs may have been made. It appears that not only were these photographs made during the same time era but that the venue was a temporary one, perhaps at a summer exhibition like the

Calgary Stampede or a similar festival. All of the subjects in the two photographs are wearing hats and in the second decade of the twentieth century, men generally took off their hats once inside a building, but a photographic opportunity as part of the various carnival activities would not dictate such standards of politeness. In addition, the woman wears her gloves and holds a purse which were part of public attire. At a summer fair, the post card concept would be a novelty to attract customers.

The back of the photograph of the couple (Figure 7) bears the stamp of William Swanson, Saskatoon. The young couple, Hana Kannigan, who was the niece of my great grandmother Nastya (Anastasia), and Jack Louis eventually married and with no date for this image, no one is sure if they were married when they had the photograph made. I think that perhaps they were courting for they seem intimate but her constrained smile seems to indicate that she did not want the camera to record her as completely compliant in the intimacy, or that it was too private a matter to have it obviously stated in film. Jack, however, seems very proud and secure and enwraps his girlfriend with both arms and hands. His body and his eyes seems to say, in a friendly but definite manner, "She is mine." He is sure of his feelings for her but she is not so sure. She is physically drawing away from him and this may have been for the pragmatics of her hat brim, but this does not account for her facial appearance. A viewer can read many possibilities into the relationship of the couple just from this encaptured moment.

The second photograph (Figure 8) has two men standing and my grandfather is closest to the moon face and his brother-in-law, Fred Killoran stands beside him. In the front, closest to my grandfather is Vern Killoran and the identity of the fourth man is

unknown. Although lacking a name, he appears the most relaxed due to the angles which his limbs make. The three known men seem stiff and somewhat mesmerized as they directly look "into the camera." They seem on guard and serious and certainly not playful as the prop might suggest, or as the couple were. Although the photograph is a novelty item, playfulness is not the aura which a viewer perceives from these four men.

The professional photographers of these two portraits did not likely have a thorough understanding of the personalities of the subjects. However, the moon prop and the post card concept attracted the subjects and for some reason they paid money to have such a portrait made. Within the constraints of the venue and limited time to make the photographs, the photographers were participating in the myth making which is the stock and trade of their profession. A notable portrait photographer, according to Barthes (1981), is a great mythologist and even a mediocre professional is part of the production of myth whether successful or not. In this respect, these two images are representations, compositions of myth.

For Barthes, myth was "a delusion to be exposed" (Culler, 1983, p. 33) and from this position everything within everyday life is the province of the mythologist.

The mythologist is concerned with the image of the wine - not its properties and effects but the second-order meanings attached to it by social convention.

Beginning with myth as delusion, Barthes soon comes to emphasize that myth is a form of communication, a 'language', a system of second order-meaning....In culture, one might say, everything exemplifies: a loaf of French bread signifies Frenchness. (Culler, 1983, p. 35)

These portrait photographs, these myths of faces in the moon have been mindfully composed in part by the subjects and directly by the photographer, for future viewers. These exposures are the formal compositions of the mythologist, of the light writer.

Emerging Horizons of Interpretations

Compositions, whether musical, lyrical or visual require an audience, a listener, a reader, a viewer. Without the balance of receiving the message, both it and the creator of this message lie unfulfilled, heavy with fruit but without a harvester. In the act of composing, the musician, or writer or photographer anticipates her audience, anticipates that someone will take the message and embrace its meaning through their senses, through cerebral, emotional and spiritual filters, through the various layers of interpretation.

The role of the viewer has been substantially discussed in the photographic discourse, especially within film studies and semiotics. The noted book Camera Lucida (Barthes, 1981) is an exploration into the essence of photography, primarily from the analysis of the viewer or spectator. To expose the significance of the viewer within the alchemical trinity of photography, the first half of this chapter examines semiotics and Barthes' contribution to exploring the significance of photography. From these two discussions of analysing photographs, I tease out further relationships, this time among photography, death and fetish. And to remain true to the literal definition of the word "compose," the final pages of "Faces in the Moon" examines the act of composing as putting distinct elements together to form a whole, to form an alchemical union between photography and life, the cycle of life and death, of the duality of our existence.

Semiotics and Camera Lucida

A composition, a formed whole, requires the arrangement of details in a specified or understood manner for a specific purpose. There is a mindfulness at work by the creator, by the photographer when composing a visual message and to analyze this message, the framework of semiotics has provided some useful tools. The famous semiotician Roland Barthes in his book Camera Lucida applied such interpretative tools and to recognize his contribution one needs further background into the history of optics and photography and to the original meaning of "camera lucida."

Most authorities mark 1839 as the year when Daguerre and Talbot, with two distinct but similar processes, introduced photography. Like many inventions, photography was the result of combining two well known scientific principles, in this case from chemistry and from physics. In 1727, Johann Schulze demonstrated that chemicals such as silver halide turned dark when exposed to light. The second and older principle was optical, and from as early as 1558 (Scharf, 1968), astronomers and painters used the camera obscura to create inverted images through an aperture in the wall of a darkened room which caused the light passing through to project an image on an opposite white surface. Eventually painters applied the concept of a camera obscura to a portable box with a mirror so that landscape sketches were easier to accomplish.

From this time until the invention of photography, many famous landscape artists used first the camera obscura and later the camera lucida to paint canvases with previously unattainable naturalism. Perspective was reproduced in the manner in which the human eye perceives it and this helped to produce unprecedented landscape paintings in the

seventeenth and eighteenth century. In fact, just as photography would encounter debates about its usefulness, accuracy and relationship to art, so too would paintings made with the aid of the camera obscura. Scharf (1968) notes that in some cases the images of the camera obscura were given a degree of authority equal almost to that bestowed later upon the photograph (pp. 1-2). It is also interesting to note that the inventors of photography, Louis-Jacques Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot were both artists, professional and amateur respectively, and were familiar with the camera obscura and camera lucida. In the eighteenth century, artists used the camera lucida which functioned similarly to a camera obscura except it had a prism for an eye piece which allowed the artist to accurately replicate directly onto paper the projected image outside of the chamber.

With this history in mind, Barthes' book title takes on a different meaning. Camera Lucida (1981) was initially published in France as La Chambre Claire (1980), but with the English title the translator has overlooked the existence of camera lucidas and attempts to have a reader engage the word "lucid" and its associations with clarity or clearness. Barthes makes a fleeting reference to camera lucida (1981, p. 106) but his text is a phenomenological exploration of the essence of photography rather than optical drawing devices. This discrepancy between the French and English titles is useful to note, especially in light of the fact that Barthes died in 1980 and the translation of La Chambre Claire was published posthumously. There is no commentary on this translation issue; perhaps it reinforces the alchemy of photography and the difficulty to precisely identify its essence.

Roland Barthes was born in 1915 and in 1916 his father died in a naval battle in the

North Sea. His mother raised him and most of his adult life he lived in Paris. As a child, money was scarce and later, tuberculosis interrupted his formal studies although the time spent in sanatoriums enabled him to read Sartre and Marx. His career as a teacher began in 1948 but it did progress smoothly until 1962 when he became the director of studies at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (social and economic sciences). During this same time span, Barthes published many of his writings but was a marginal although active figure on the French intellectual scene. Then in 1965, a professor at the Sorbonne condemned Barthes' writings as representative of everything that was radical and heretical and the French press reiterated this criticism. By the late 1960s, Barthes' fame equalled Claude Levi-Strauss, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan and the following decade confirmed his role as an intellectual and as a writer. He died suddenly in 1980, and some believe that his early death cut short his development in both arenas.

Various reference books describe Barthes as a structuralist and as one of the founding fathers of semiology, which is the study of the life of signs within society as in the work of Saussure (Ungar, 1989). His work is regarded highly although poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida, Victor Burgin and Umberto Eco do not embrace all that Roland Barthes represented. Regardless, his book Camera Lucida remains a significant part of his contribution to twentieth century thought.

La Chambre Claire was in part a tribute to Barthes' mother, who died in late 1977. Barthes has a personal melancholy, a grieving tone in this text through which he attempts to explore "at all costs what Photography was 'in itself' by what essential feature it was to be distinguished from the community of images" (Barthes, 1981, p. 3). As Ungar (1989)

notes, Barthes' inquiry was a departure from a structuralist approach and is a regression to phenomenology which Barthes used in his writing twenty years earlier. In the initial pages of the book, Barthes admits his disappointment with Classical phenomenology which "had never, so far as I could remember, spoken of desire or of mourning" (1981, p. 21).

Consequently, Barthes uses both semiology and an adapted phenomenology that incorporates the affect as the construct for exploring the essence of photography. For some critics, this combination was unacceptable; however, the weaving of emotions into his inquiry was characteristic of his later writing.

In a sense, Barthes has opened himself to the text of the image in a quasi-hermeneutical fashion. Due in part to the snapshot of his mother as a girl which sparked this exploration into the essence of photography, Barthes cannot simply encounter the I-thou position of rationalism in the guise of semiology. To be so objective, so depersonalized about the inquiry with his mother's gaze from the winter garden as his creative initiator, would be to deny her significance to his life. It would be to deny her in death the significance which she held in life. Barthes does not deny his emotions and allows their presence to shade his writing; he recognizes on some level the "emotional intertextuality" which snapshots often wield. As part of his mourning, Barthes recognizes that he cannot disassociate himself from his emotions and recognizes that "photography and music are not simply artistic languages to be analyzed as objects of a semiology" (Ungar, 1989, p. 72).

However, Barthes uses semiology to provide much of the framework for his inquiry and the text incorporates the lexicon and concepts of this multidisciplinary analysis of signs

and their cultural meaning. The subject or thing photographed is the referent, and the photograph is the sound-image, the signifier. The concept part of the sign, or what interpretations a viewer may make of a signifier, is the signified. Together and simultaneously, the signifier and the signified form the sign, which as Saussure originally conceived it, can be arbitrary and ambiguous. The photographer is the Operator and the viewer the Spectator.

In addition to these ideas, Barthes introduces the studium, the punctum and the noeme of photography and he chose Latin to define the studium as the “application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity” (Barthes, 1981, p. 26). For Barthes, the punctum disturbs the studium: “a photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (1981, p. 27). He furthers his exploration of the phenomena of the punctum and finally notes that “whether or not [the punctum] is triggered, it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there” (1981, p. 55). Barthes describes the noeme of photography as that which “authenticates the existence of a certain being” (p. 107). From a phenomenological viewpoint, photography exceeds the power of representation with its power of authentication. For Barthes, a photograph has an hallucinatory effect for it is “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” (p. 115).

The noeme generates a self-reflective questioning by the Spectator because the Spectator is the reference of every photograph viewed. This quality may motivate the

Spectator to ask “why is it that I am alive here and now?...Photography offers an immediate presence to the world - a co-presence; but this presence is not only of a political order...it is also of a metaphysical order” (p. 84). This self-reflective question leads the Spectator to surmise about the certainty of death, of either his own, or of his loved ones, or of anyone.

The poeme of photography along with the entire text contained in Camera Lucida: is the last in a series of illustrations that meaning [in an image] is inevitably grounded or located in a specific time and place and that unlimited semiosis is possible only in theatrical terms....Camera Lucida is also a narrative of mourning whose ties to death and sexuality lend themselves to the more primal insight afforded by psychoanalysis. (Ungar, 1989, p. 153)

In the last pages of his book, Barthes discusses the madness of photography, of how the poeme's hallucinatory quality links with madness, a madness that society desperately wants to tame or at best subvert or suppress. Barthes explores photography, madness and pangs of love, and about Nietzsche throwing himself upon a beaten horse; Nietzsche then wrote about going “mad for Pity's sake” (p. 117). Barthes examines how a photograph can take a Spectator from the unreality of the person represented and compel the Spectator to enter into the image and to embrace metaphysically what is dying or what is already dead. This is the madness of photography which is also the essence of photography. For Barthes, photography is both mad and tame. “The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakenings of intractable reality” (p. 119).

But what is “intractable reality?” What does it mean to compose messages, to make exposures of intractable reality?

Death, Fetish and Photography

Although many people who make and keep snapshots are consciously unaware of the intractable tension between photography and death, this connection has been noted by various authors. For example, Dubois has described photography as a thanatography which the OED translates from the Latin as the writing about “the phenomena accompanying and the practices related to death” (1976, p. 1198).

In the mid-nineteenth century, postmortem photography was popular among the middle class in Europe and America and its precedent derives from painted mourning portraiture from the sixteenth century (Meinwald, 1998). During the nineteenth century as the communal life of most Americans became increasingly restricted to the family, the focus of the funeral rite narrowed as well. Grief, sharpened by the magnitude of loss within so small a sphere, was given a more extreme form of expression. Funerals became increasingly elaborate during the course of the century. Every aspect of the burial process was embellished ... Photography was to become yet another accoutrement [of the funeral ritual]. (Meinwald, 1998, p. 4)

The postmortem portrait had a value to a family beyond that of a usual portrait because it represented the loss of an individual and as Meinwald (1998) claims, the transition to a smaller family system resulted in over identification and over dependence on individual family members and secondly a socialization whereby each person was

irreplaceable to the other family members. Photographs of children in their death beds, the infamous and famous dead such as President Lincoln, are all part of the history of photography. Even today, it is a common practice to have an enlarged photograph of the deceased on display during some aspect of the funeral, and families often scurry amid their grief to find a photograph which depicts the deceased as they perceived the individual: our practice of postmortem portraiture has undergone changes but I suggest that the underlying impulses are perhaps the same.

In addition to postmortem portraiture, snapshots have other relationships to death. A snapshot, as the word suggests, "shoots" the individual, for the person whom the camera records will never be exactly that same person. A snapshot is a visual record of the death each person experiences daily. And in another manner, a snapshot commandeers time. "With each photograph, a tiny piece of time brutally and forever escapes its ordinary fate, and is thus protected against its own loss" (Metz, 1990, p. 158). In addition, the stillness of a photograph, reinforces an aura of death in opposition to moving pictures, such as video or home movies, which represent life more as we temporally experience it.

This relationship between images and death dates at least to the late Middle Ages, when a memento mori was a form of painting that reminded the viewer that death is unavoidable and for which one must always prepare. The paintings represented death with a human skeleton, such as the Grim Reaper, or even decomposing human bodies: these paintings enabled one to "remember thy death." In a similar manner, the poeme of photography, especially within snapshot photographs, is a reminder, on some level, to "remember thy death." (It is interesting for me to note that my father would often say to

my sisters and I, “tempus fugit” but he could never remember the other half of this Latin phrase used by the Knights of Columbus. He knew that it had something to do with death, but he preferred to emphasize the first half as an encouragement to us to use our time wisely. The full phrase is tempus fugit: memento mori meaning “time flies: remember death.” He was giving us a partial and verbal, rather than visual, memento mori.)

Another dimension to the concept of a memento mori is an image that expresses an opposite desire, and that is the appearance of life. For Barthes, photography shares similarities to primitive theatre whereby the photographic image forms a mask to create the illusion of life in the face of death. As part of the ontology of photography, Bazin (1970) noted the mummy complex which is “to preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance ... to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, in the hold of life” (p. 9). The common practice of displaying photographs of deceased family members is a message which conveys that the family is remembering the death of one of their members. But on the other hand, the displayed portrait is also an artifact of the life of the deceased individual. The photograph may also affirm the viewer’s life rather than solely be a reminder of the family member’s death. The split feelings of those who outlive the deceased have been discussed by many, including Freud, and this emotional discordance is part of the grieving process: to not follow the loved person in death but to survive and to continue with life by progressively learning to love the person “as dead, instead of continuing to desire a living presence and ignoring the verdict of reality, hence prolonging the intensity of suffering” (Metz, 1990, p. 159). For the living, a photograph of the deceased mediates between both of these desires, of wanting to follow in death and wanting to go on with life.

The photograph simultaneously authenticates both life and death.

From another perspective, a photograph of a family member is a virtual presence in lieu of the physical presence of the individual. The photograph is a presence of an absence and in some manner operates as a fetish as defined in the traditional sense of the word: “an inanimate object worshipped by primitive peoples for its supposed inherent magical powers or as being inhabited by a spirit” (Sykes, 1976, p. 385). Photographs of loved ones may be found in many places: in wallets, purses, locket, within frames on a wall or upon a desk, within albums, adhered by magnets onto refrigerators, on the inside of lockers, as bookmarks, stuck to bulletin boards, as the primary decal on t-shirts or the motif in a tie, as the image on a puzzle or mousepad, the decorative focus of coffee mugs, and the centre of commemorative plates to name a few. These faces in strange places create a virtual presence, a periapt of presence, a quasi-denial of the signifier and an embracing of the referent.

People “know” that these are just photographs but yet they take on a dimension of fetish, and people regard the spirit emanating from the image with some degree of respect, depending on the actual relationship with the individual in the photograph. I know that I have talked to a photograph of my fiancé when I visited Ethiopia just weeks before our wedding. Each night I would take the photograph out and have a brief internal conversation with him, in lieu of a telephone call which was very expensive and nearly impossible to achieve due to the communication technology within that country. Although my fiancé was alive, he was far away and in so many ways remote from me. In death, the remoteness would even have a greater force, a greater emotional violence.

Some authors (Berger, 1987; Metz, 1990; Mulvey, 1989) also interpret the relationship between photography and fetish using Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, or various appropriations of his theory. Consequently, psychoanalytic concepts punctuate film theory as well as semiotics. This Freudian perspective helps to explain "the gaze," common poses in advertising and in pornography, and a male approach to film making. However, it does not explain many facets of being a female photographer, professional or amateur; or being a female viewer; visually literate or not. Weedon (1987) states that:

Freudian theory uses visible anatomical difference as its guarantee of psychic difference and women's inferiority. Yet it does not explain why social relations should take this form. It assumes that they are a manifestation of the nature of man....Feminist poststructuralism suggests that it is not good enough to assume that psychoanalysis accurately describes the structures of femininity and masculinity under patriarchy, since discourse constitutes rather than reflects meaning. To take psychoanalysis as descriptive is to assume basic patriarchal structures which exist prior to their discursive realization. (pp. 49/51)

In contrast to Freud, a Jungian psychology embraces all participants within the genre of snapshot photography and appears as a richer source of interpretation than Freud's. In the following chapter, I explore Jung's interpretation of images in greater detail and relate the significance of family photographs to this alternative interpretative framework.

But to return to the task at hand, it is useful to acknowledge that a composition can be a compound of artificial substances, especially made to serve the purposes of the natural

one, the original one. And so in this regard a photographic composition, a snapshot or a posed formal portrait taken by a professional, is an assemblage of elements made artificial through the application of physics and chemistry to create an image, a compound, that serves to replace the natural one, the original one, the intractable reality of the subjects and the meaning of their lives. For the viewer, a photograph is a representation, a simulacrum of reality, a composition in its most genuine sense.

Barthes and Snapshot Photography

Barthes, in his search to find the essence of photography, wrestled with the meaning of photographic compositions, of the images which pricked his attention through the punctum. But through his discussion he equally examines his reactions as a viewer to public and private photographs. He equates such reactions mutually, although the emotional connection to the snapshot of his mother influences the conception and bearing to birth his journey into the “essence” of photography. He equates photographs by Andre Kertesz, a famous photojournalist, and Robert Mapplethorpe, an art photographer, with a snapshot of his mother made by an unstated photographer. He mixes what the photographic discourse thoroughly discusses and that upon which it is silent: images by Kertesz and Mapplethorpe are significant parts of the photographic canon but snapshots are not. So in his examination of the essence of photography has Barthes opened his discussion to all of the depths of meaning? In two definitive ways, I think not.

The first is in his choice of images to reproduce in Camera Lucida. Only one, “The Stock” (p. 104) is a snapshot. The remaining twenty-four images are the work of

professional photographers; although the initial image that drew him to exploring the essence of photography was a snapshot of his mother when she was five. This photo is not reproduced or even substantively described. He examines primarily the photographs of “high culture” and does not effectively deal with photographs produced by members of the “non-high culture” group, of amateur snapshooters. Whether he intends to or not, his discussion is unbalanced and he prefers to explore photographs made by professionals often for professional or journalistic reasons. The reproduced photographs do not share the snapshot aesthetic of the photo of his mother and he has weighted his analysis with the strongly constructed image laden with controlled content rather than an amateurish construction laden with the personal content of the messiness of life.

A second omission is his unbalanced discussion concerning the relationship between death and life. He excludes the possibility of an attraction toward life as a reason for a making a photograph. His noeme of photography engenders the viewer’s self reflection of “I am the reference of every photograph, and this is what generates my astonishment in addressing myself to the fundamental question: why is it that I am alive [*italics added*] here and now?” (p. 84). His question incorporates the concept of life as the initial experience which leads to the second experience of death. As in Buddhism where life and death are regarded as the two sides of a piece of paper, impossible to separate and integral to the other, death presupposes life. Life comes first, always. But Barthes does not address how life is part, a distinct part, of the noeme of photography, especially that produced for personal rather than public reasons.

Although numerous writers refer to Camera Lucida as a seminal text, it is not

complete or entirely balanced. Barthes illuminates some of the impulses at work in photography but he has not completely covered all of the possibilities. He could say more but Barthes stumbles and falls on the sensitive topic of death. He does not acknowledge, or explore the relationship between photography and life. Consequently, Camera Lucida is only a partial examination of the essence of photography. Barthes has sought to understand his reactions as a viewer to photographs and in so doing substantially altered the direction of the discourse. But as postmodernism postulates there is no totalizing discourse, nor can there be a totalizing text on any subject.

Photography and Life

Many viewers unfamiliar with Barthes or Freud, do not initially recognize the relationship between photography and death, and instead perceive photographs, especially family photographs as affirmations, confirmations, exposures of life. This genre derives part of its significance from the photographer's composing of individual elements that together form a whole. Death is only one of the elements within an image. To create the whole, to make a proper composition also requires the elements of life. For purposes of his essay, Barthes grouped all genres of photography including documentary, journalism and snapshot. But is it fair to all of these genres to treat them as the same? What about scientific or dental photography? The purpose and audience influence how and what a photographer composes; although it is true that the moment -- in any photographic genre whether scientific, journalism, snapshot -- does die. But also the moment is proof, evidence that it existed and that the fact of this existence laden with all of its possibilities of truth,

beauty or even mundane visual accuracy cannot be denied, forsaken or ignored. This is not necessarily a celebration of the moment or of life, but it is a recognition of the life of that second in the temporal flow of time.

This is not a romantic view of time but the foundation from which advertisements like Kodak's "capture the moment" have operated. To balance the discussion of death in photography, the discourse needs an affirmation of the life from which all flows. I think that this life impulse is deeply and significantly at work in snapshot photography and is perhaps what separates it from the other genres.

I know that the first portraits I made of my daughter on the sixth day after her birth were about celebrating the beauty, the wonder, the fragility of life. I did not make the photographs primarily thinking of death, either hers or mine. No. I made the photographs as affirmations of the life I had nurtured within me and which now lived outside of me. She was so perfect in all of her infantness and I wanted to have an emblem, a token, an artifact of vigour, an image of celebration. Death cannot have meaning without life. My death or my daughter's death cannot have meaning without the life that we each experience. I know that these photographs are very, very much about life: about celebrating, embracing, enjoying and most of all, loving life.

I recognize that family photos are also about death: death of the moment, death of the subject, death of the photographer, death of the viewer. But they are conversely and inversely about life; the life of the decisive moment when all components of the mini-narrative: actors, setting and plot reach a high point; the life, the actual, physical life of the subject; the life of the photographer who has perceived an opportunity to make a

photograph; and, the life of the viewer who may enter self-reflective reveries of the actual meaning of life through the free fall into a moment of time frozen, preserved for future lives. Preservation of a moment in a photograph involves death but equally so it involves the lineage of future lives, the ones who are yet to be. Time machines have yet to be invented, but until they are, a photograph has the ability to mentally transport the viewer from the present to the past and even into the future, simultaneously and multi-dimensionally if the viewer is receptive to the "text" of the photo, with its inherent and rich interpretations of the temporality of a life, either past or current or even future.

Women, who nurture and deliver life, primarily take, make and endorse photographs of family life. This is not to exclude men from this fecund world but the photographic industry has noted such information, and so by inference this may influence the significance of snapshots. There is a debate in photography and within art itself, whether women see and create differently than men. Of course, there has been no conclusion but some authors do claim that there is a difference. In my own experience as a photographer on an assignment with a male photographer, my process of creating the images was vastly different than his experience as a male. The subjects who were all male responded to me in a different manner and as a consequence what I photographed was not the same as my male counterpart. In other situations, in some aspects, the final photographic image may be very similar when both a female and male use a camera to create an image but the process involved in the making of the photograph is likely unique to each photographer and because of this fact, the influence of gender upon thinking and therefore perceiving must be at work.

In this inquiry I have come full circle with the concept of death within photography. In my initial reading when I first encountered the possible relationship between death and photography, I experienced a punctum of an academic nature. I was both repelled and attracted by the idea and the more I read Barthes, Metz, and others, the more I began to see the thanatos relationship and to see its significance within the photographs taken by my grandfather, my grandmother and myself. I did not look forward to writing or thinking deeply about death but when this chapter finally emerged I knew that I must enter into a direct dialogue with this concept.

And this I did, but it took an emotional toll. In the process of writing this chapter, two close friends suffered miscarriages, another discovered that her mother has cancer, and a man whom I have known since I was six years old had to face the suicide of his wife and mother of his three young children. Death was all around me, in the books, in the photographs and in my personal experiences. Also during this time I visited my doctor for a prenatal check as I was now thirty weeks into my second pregnancy. The baby's heartbeat was strong and healthy. Life was also around me and in me. Together they go, death and life, life and death.

But for Barthes, Freud and so many other theorists and philosophers, the discussion dominated by the significance of death: the power of death, the desire to control death, or to deny death or even to accept death. But I could not find the balance in these texts, that is, an equivalent discussion about the power of life: the desire to control life, or to deny life or even to accept life and never a word about actually celebrating life.

However, because of the feminine aspect of snapshot photography, I believe that

many of the 17 billion family photographs taken annually have a relationship to life, as an affirmation of it, or as a confirmation of it, or as a celebration of it. It is women who endure the birthing process and who bring all of humanity into the world. Men assist but they do not endure or transform from woman into mother through the physical, emotional and spiritual experience from conception to a wet and helpless infant. "To have experienced birthing pain offers the possibilities of self-knowledge, knowledge of new life as mother, and of a woman's place in the mysterious cycle of human life: birth, death, and rebirth" [italics added] (Bergum, 1989, p. 81).

To me, a balance is necessary. Perhaps it is naive, obvious or simple to say that family snapshots have a significance because they relate to the life of the subject, the photographer and to the eventual viewer. In my opinion, as a photographer, occasional subject and frequent viewer of photographs, I enjoy the rich simpleness of life. Life is full of pain, despair, injustice, and death, but to relinquish the importance and significance of the richness of life to poetry, novels and contemporary songs is to marginalise this topic within all of the academic community. As a photographer and as a mother, part of the significance of my own oeuvre of snapshots derives from a simple impulse: I am part of life and this is potently mysterious to me. Just as my photographs, like Barthes' or anyone else's, represent death so do they life: a dichotomy, a dialectic, a simple circle.

The word 'simple' originally means 'undivided, together, whole.' An approach that is 'simple' aims to ward off the pulverizing pressures of using an interest in life as a pretext for escaping from the wholeness of the lived world - fragmenting abstractions of theories about life. ...it is often more demanding to say something

worth saying while staying close to life than it is to theorize and formulate abstractions about life. (van Manen cited in Bergum, 1989, p. xii)

Returning to the Faces in the Moon

Understanding and controlling the elements of visual composition separates an amateur snapshotter from a professional photographer. And it is this control which helps to play out the success of the mythology represented in the final formal portrait. As Barthes commented a portrait photographer is a mythologist and has sensitivities to not only technical aspects of the photograph but also to the underlying myths projected by the subjects. With regard to the portraits of the couple and four young men, a viewer can begin to tease out the possible mythologies represented which simultaneously speak of life and death.

The carnival or transient location of the moon portraits makes the task of having the photos taken a spontaneous idea but a controlled or semi-controlled image. The clothes, hair and makeup are not contrived for the photograph but the poses and expressions are certainly formal, inhibited, a recognition by the subjects that a "professional" photographer is creating a representation of them. There is an air of seriousness that this representation has more permanence or greater significance than a snapshot grabbed or posed by a family photographer. Perhaps this is because of the status of a "professional" who was likely a man and did not merely naively point and shoot.

The mythologies represented are of a young couple who are contemplating a possible lifelong commitment to each other. They represent in their simple "coupleness,"

the coupleness which many young adults desire, seek and play out. Jack and Hanna represent all courting couples of their time and in all of time. They are playing out their respective roles in the mythology of being a couple, in love and uncertain of the future, especially of their life together. It is a mythology of the oldest kind, hiding truths and mistruths just as their projected image in the photograph points to the same duality inherent to the medium.

The second image of the four young men, of the four blokes, or mates or pals, or buddies or guys hanging out together also suggest a mythology but of a different nature. As Barthes asserts, a portrait photographer is a mythologist, a creator of mythology, a creator of a representation, an image maker of fact and fiction, a blender of reality and fantasy. The four adult men are in the prime of life and the anticipated richness of their lives appears to be unfolding before them. Like the landscape of southern Alberta with numerous possibilities of growth in a modern Western sense, the same possibilities of a vibrant life seem to belong to them, not solely by their effort but by more their existence.

This is a mythology of potent male virility with its various dimensions of strength, aggression, bravery and sexuality. Together the four represent all young men, all emerging males with the flow of testosterone within their blood affecting their perceptions, actions and submerged emotions. Together they are the four amigos, the compatriots, the brothers not of kin but of kind who have laid down their very lives together for lords, kings and prime ministers. They have died with each other and for each other and have lived to mourn one another. In 1911, the Great War, the war to end all wars, was an impossibility; and yet in a few years it was what drew men, just like these four, to foreign countries and

to unheralded human suffering.

But men such as they went, believing in the mythology, in the representation of who and what their collective male lives meant, believing that death was an acceptable part of their mythology, of the mythology of maleness. Through the alchemy of reversals, the subjects and the photographer have created an exposure of dualities, of the tension between fact and fiction, of truths and lies, of life and death. All of this in a simple photograph; all of this open for interpretation by any interested viewer.

Family photographs, either portraits or snapshots, are simple images of our private lives. They are exposures, compositions of elements working together to form a whole. Not only do they disclose visual mythologies, they also relate details about the mundane and of the spectacular. They tell stories which may attract or repel us or both. These compositions state the simple stories of our lived experiences, of our lives.

CHAPTER FIVE: ALCHEMY AMID THE FIELDS



Figure 9

Subjects: (standing L. to R) Polly Osachoff, Hannah Kanigan (sitting) Dora Osachoff, Martha Kanigan, Tunie Popoff

Date & Place: Summer, 1921; land bordering Kanigan's farm near Blaine Lake, Saskatchewan

Photographer: Nicholas Osachoff



Figure 10

Subject: Great-grandmother Murphy

**Date & Place: circa summer, 1921; a field south of
Fort Macleod, Alberta**

Photographer: Mary Ellen Murphy (daughter-in-law to the subject)

The Photographs

To be a subject in a photograph creates a situation where the subject may overtly unveil aspects of his or her personality and may willingly allow the photographer to capture a personal intimation of who he or she is within the context of which the image records. Or, a person may decide to withhold his or her full participation in the photograph making and project a representation, even a representation of covert denial of being a subject photographed. Often, however, there is an exchange between the subject and the photographer which negotiates the degree of unveiling and the formality of the overall composition. Although it is often the photographer who wants to make the photograph, the subjects often comply and in so doing are more than an aesthetic principle and in fact become the actors for the emerging narrative. What that narrative evolves into may be a notable statement and at other times it is not, but the interaction, the visual dialogue between the subject and the photographer which the camera captures is that which a viewer eventually engages.

The two photographs which open this chapter illustrate this negotiated space of planned narrative and spontaneous interaction that create various terraces of meaning and significance for all future viewers, including the actual photographer. For as blatant as it may be, a photographer is a photographer only once within any time and space, but after the shutter closes in upon itself and the alchemy of reversals transforms that frozen slice of time, that same photographer is perpetually a viewer after the initial making of the image. So, in making a photograph, whether with careful consideration or with reckless effortlessness, the family photographer is capturing something of the narrative of that

family's life of which the photographer will apprehend from the viewpoints of both image creator and image consumer. With these various factors at work in the taking of all family photographs, a fruitful examination of the two snapshots of women amid the fields unfolds.

In the first photograph (see Figure 9), five young women pose for my grandfather, Nicholas Osachoff. The photograph renders a typical summer's day on the northern edge of the Saskatchewan prairie as the ingenues wear simple summer frocks and have no pretensions about them. They are complacent and guileless and display varying degrees of overt cooperation in revealing their personality to the camera. The young woman in the centre whose arm loosely rests upon her thigh seems the most confident and at ease. Her tilted head creates an eye line which is ascending to the right (most viewers would interpret the photograph this way for most "texts" Westerners encounter are automatically "read" as a script, from left to right) and this ascending line creates the psychological impression of overcoming resistance, a small form of victory. The other four women have eye lines which run nearly parallel to the earth which perhaps signifies acceptance of gravities effect and its inherent stability. The overall composition is quite formal and visual "levelling" appears to be at work. Levelling is the tendency to make perceptual structures as definite as possible, which may simplify the structure or conversely, intensify the visual dynamics (Luft cited in Arnheim, 1974). The tendency to intensify the visual dynamics is the opposite to levelling and Gestalt psychologist call this tendency "sharpening." In Figure 9, levelling tendencies influence the overall composition for the image incorporates "unification, enhancement of symmetry, reduction of structural features, repetition, dropping of nonfitting detail, elimination of obliqueness" (Arnheim, 1974, p. 67).

However, some of the pictorial elements require further interpretation. Perhaps the most obvious detail is the descending horizon line. This not only establishes this image as a true snapshot, for tilted horizon lines are only now currently popular in advertising photographs with their spill off effect on snapshooters, but more importantly the descending line may be a surrender to the pull from below and as Arnheim interprets this, a passive compliance. But this is the compliance of the photographer, not the subjects for the photographer has purposefully composed the subjects and held the camera thus making the downward tilting horizon line.

A second element that disturbs the intended "levelling" of the image is the dog. The animal looks directly off out of the left side of the image and is not interested in the interactions between the photographer and his subjects. Like any canine, the dog's attention focuses on what attracts it and my guess is that the families of the young women are off to the left, perhaps some distance away, maybe talking and waiting upon the efforts of the documentor and his subjects. The dog with his eye line and nose pointing away from the camera supplies a visual "sharpening," that is visual elements of difference or obliqueness in contrast to the "levelling" tendency inherent to the photograph (p. 67).

The same young woman who holds the dog has an angular object projecting from behind her, a short distance away. A close examination of the shape reveals that it is a rectangle with a triangle on top, which is the common shape of a tombstone. This grave maker has been nearly hidden by her head but not completely. The tombstone may also explain why the two women who stand are looking down at the photographer and why the three seated women seem to be looking directly into the camera; the photographer likely

squatted down to make the photograph in an attempt to eliminate the tombstone and was nearly successful. I know that my grandfather's camera required the photographer to look down into the viewing area and that due to the camera optics it relayed a similar but not an identical image to the final photograph. I suspect that he was satisfied with his composition when he took the photograph, for he likely had gone to some effort to eliminate the tombstone. However, the incomplete erasure of it in the final image carries some interpretative significance.

Perhaps, some would say, such as Barthes, that the veneration of life is more strongly shadowed by the shoulders of death than the converse, and that this photograph overtly, although in a subtle manner, intimates the relationship between photography and death. Perhaps this is true. But to me, there may be a richer interpretation available. The tombstone may symbolize death; the young woman represents life; and the manner in which her arms cradle the dog, just as she would an infant, speaks of rebirth. These components of the photograph suggest the matriarchal consciousness, the moon-spirit, the anima.

The dominating visual element is the tree, likely the only large bush around for some distance because on the prairies the lack of dependable precipitation allows grass to flourish but not more water-dependent trees. Consequently, this tree holds a greater significance than if it was part of a grove. Perhaps the photographer instructed the young women to pose in front of the tree, despite the grave underneath its boughs. They have complied, and all of them are within its circular parameters. From the top of the tree on the left side flows an invisible line that follows the periphery of the leaves down to the three young women seated and up again along the periphery of the right side. While not perfect,

it creates a circular effect in the perceptions of a viewer. In Jungian psychology, a circle represents "the single most vital aspect of life - its ultimate wholeness" (Jaffe, 1979, p. 240) and in Zen Buddhism, the circle represents "enlightenment" (p. 241).

But the tree itself has significance for in Jungian interpretation the tree is "a symbol of great complexity and ubiquity" (Lesy, 1980, p. 25). And throughout mythologies from locations such as Mesopotamia, India and Siberia, it appears as a cosmic tree, the Tree of Life as symbolized by the Mother in Egyptian and Greek myths, and as a symbol of male potency in other ancient myths. Symbolizing the tree of Paradise, motherhood, or male fertility, the various mythologies of trees relate to their power "of creative energy that is neither male nor female but common to both" (Lesy, 1980, p. 25).

In this respect, this lone tree on the prairie represents not only the obvious creative energies of the young women but also the creative impulses that flowed through the body of my grandfather. The tree has importance to both subjects and photographer in the same and yet very different manner of creative energy symbolized.

The second photograph in Figure 10 sharply contrasts to the formal elements of the first photograph. In this less formal composition, my great-grandmother lies amid the short grass prairie with a merry expression conveying innocent enjoyment of that particular moment. She seems to have no care in the world and is completely engaged with her delight, oblivious to the photographer. And likely in many respects she was oblivious to the documenting of the moment, for by this time in her life, my great-grandmother had lost her sight. Other than sensing vague shapes of light and dark, she was otherwise blind. Whether she knew about the photograph being made or whether she did not care about her

representation in the resulting image, no one but she knew for sure.

In a manner similar to the first image, my grandmother has made a photograph which has both leveling and sharpening elements. The natural repetition of the flower, Indian paintbrush, that dominates the right side of the background, in addition to the repetition of the short grasses in the fore and back ground are leveling elements. A sharpening element is the partial form of my great- grandmother with only two thirds of her body contained within the frame. Another sharpening element is the ascending line of the hillside in the left background which is reinforced by three similar ascending lines created by my great-grandmother's lower and upper limbs and the line of her apron. Once again, these lines imply a small victory of overcoming the resistance of gravity and its grounding attributes.

This tension of leveling and sharpening details, just as in the first photograph, has created an overall visual wholeness, as in levelling with its drive to visual simplicity or in sharpening with its intensification of visual structures. This perceptual tendency to simplify or intensity is known by Gestalt psychologists as "the law of pragnanz" (Arnheim, 1974, p. 67). The first photograph (Figure 9) reflects Classicism, in a traditional sense of art, with its "simplicity, symmetry, normality and the reduction of [visual] tension" (p. 67) because the leveling details dominate the overall composition. In contrast, the second image (Figure 10) with its dominant, sharpening elements is more akin to Expressionism, a modern movement within the art world, which "heightens the irregular, the asymmetrical, the unusual, and the complex, and strives for the increase of tension" (p. 67).

Although the styles differ, these two photographs share important commonalities.

In both compositions, the collective visual weight of the subjects grounds them to the earth, to mother earth, to the rich world of life. And just as the group of five women with the periphery of the tree form a circle, so too does the curved body of my great grandmother. Once again, this circle symbolizes psychic wholeness.

The second image also speaks of the matriarchal consciousness of both the subject and the photographer, of the creative energies related to fertility but also to artistic expression. The snapshot is not only about an uncultivated execution of aesthetics but also the generative possibilities which all women share, to some degree. This photograph, like the first one, may have had psychological significance for psyches of the subjects, the photographer and perhaps now, to a curious viewer.

Emerging Horizons of Interpretation

These two photographs embody the mediating role of a photographer and of photography when creating a family snapshot. They are typical examples of the transformations that family photographs generate with their latent ability to reproduce in two dimensional form -- faithfully or distorted slightly -- what the photographer experiences in three; the layers of significance of the exposures, the compositional placing of a frame over the content thereby includes or excludes, and the eventual viewing of the contained moment which completes the synergy of the trinity coming together. All of these transformation occur and mark the power of the photographic image.

These transformations include a subject's participatory role in creating an image and her relationship to her own consciousness which may touch future viewers and their

interpretations of the psychic symbols, whether the subject or viewers are cognizant of this process or not. A viewer's reaction to a snapshot includes not just the aesthetic details, or the narrative content but the overall message of the image. Barthes refers to this as the punctum and for Jung it is the power of the image, the significance of the image for both the conscious and unconscious. These emerging horizons of meaning, these various transformation substantially unites the trinity of subject, photographer and viewer.

Jungian Psychology

In the early part of this century, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung were close colleagues and shared their thinking about the emerging field of psychology. However, in the early part of the second decade, Freud and Jung parted ways due to differences in their interpretations of introspective psychology and consequently the two men developed their own theories to explain human motivations and behaviours. In contrast to Freud, who theorized that human behaviour was intrinsically linked to the existence of only a personal unconscious which could influence behaviour due to its needs for pleasure and to avoid pain, Jung theorized that the unconscious had several layers primarily composed of the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. In the collective unconscious, archetypes, as part of an individual's inherited history of the human race, take expression in religions, myths and symbols. The personal unconscious and the collective unconscious are at work at all times within an individual's life and an astute person is able to appreciate the messages from the unconscious that surface in consciousness from the unconscious primarily through the images within dreams.

Jung theorized that there is always an unknowable aspect to any perceived reality and that this unknowable aspect becomes psychic territory and the *prima materia* of the unconscious. As Jung himself states

because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot fully define or fully comprehend....There are, moreover, unconscious aspects of our perception of reality. The first is the fact that even when our senses react to real phenomena, sights and sounds, they are somehow translated from the realm of reality into that of the mind. Within the mind, they become psychic events, whose ultimate nature is unknowable....the unconscious aspect of any event is revealed in dreams, where it appears not as a rational thought but as a symbolic *image* [italics added]. (1964, pp. 4-5)

In addition to the layers of unconscious meaning, according to Jung each individual has both feminine (*anima*) and masculine (*animus*) qualities. The *anima* exhibits the female principles of Eros (love) and sensitivity while the *animus* exhibits the male principle of Logos (the word) or rationality. Creativity is part of the *anima* and individuals who express their creativity are employing the feminine aspect of their personalities.

Jung's definition of matriarchal consciousness is quite complex and it contrasts to the male-dominated framework of Freudian psychology and even Lacan's adaptations of Freud with the "description of the human subject that psychoanalysis gives us, the male features are often dominant, mixed with (and as) general features" (Metz, 1990, p. 163). With women making the majority of snapshots, a psychological theory is necessary which

addresses the motivations and behaviours of people from a balanced gender view and psychoanalysis, even though this theory has been applied to numerous humanistic disciplines including film studies and art history, may not apply as effectively as Jungian psychology.

It is wise to bear in mind that films, art and mass communications are subject to the psychological orientation of the creators and financial benefactors of those modes of communication; the voice and psychology of the marginalized are not represented by the predominantly male creators and financiers of mainstream modern communications. However, snapshots come from the private and personal sphere; they are uncontrolled, unmonitored and disregarded in the public sphere. Because of this, the Freudian psychological framework which aptly describes the conceptualization of the public world of images may not fully apply to the world of snapshots. As a photographer and as viewer of snapshots, I believe that a Jungian framework provides a richer explanation of some of the impulses at work when I both make a photograph and, in a different manner, when I view one.

The matriarchal consciousness aligns itself with Grumet's (1987) definition of the private world and with van Manen's (1990) emphasis on phenomenology as an interpretative tool for examining the "simple" aspects of our lived experiences. The matriarchal consciousness is the conduit for reuniting body and spirit for Jung "knew that a respect for the soul - the inner life that has its own autonomy to produce images - was essential to the sacred realms of body and spirit" (Schwartz - Salant, 1995, pp. 24-5).

In general, the matriarchal consciousness expresses itself in the moon archetype and

therefore reveals itself through mythology and symbolism as a

fiery spirit - it is courage, anger, possession, and rage; its self-revelation leads to prophecy, cogitation, and lying, but also to poetry. Along with this fiery productivity, however, goes another, more 'measured' attitude which meditates, dreams, waits and wishes, hesitates and lingers, which is related to memory and learning, and whose out come is moderation, wisdom and meaning. [italics added]
(Neumann, 1973, p. 42)

This definition of the matriarchal consciousness is unique to a Jungian framework which also has a specific definition for patriarchy that differs from those found in the literature and theory of anthropology or feminism. For Jungians, the patriarchal consciousness is practical and constantly ready to react and has detached itself from the unconscious. The processes of abstraction divorced from emotional context forms the calm logic of patriarchy (Neumann, 1973). Men and women both have patriarchal and matriarchal consciousness to varying degrees and use both to function effectively on a daily basis. Photography, because of its creative nature, derives its psychic energy from the matriarchal conscious and all that it entails.

The matriarchal consciousness has a unique sense of time, and an individual method for understanding and actualizing this understanding that coalesces around imagery as a voice from the unconscious to the conscious. Images bridge the unknowable to the knowable in an unmediated literacy, and in a language for all to share.

Snapshots as images from our private lives bridge our unvoiced thoughts and emotions and shape them into recognizable forms. But as in any iconic representation the

surface layer of interpretation often dominates the perceptions of the general viewer and it is only the prick of the punctum which may initiate the peeling back of interpretations that may eventually lead the viewer to the inherent message from the unconscious. From the surface to the core, a snapshot bridges the knowable with the murky world of the unconscious.

When making a snapshot, a photographer must use a sense of time to capture a piece of time. But the sense of time differs between the patriarchal and matriarchal and perhaps this could explain some of the stylistic differences between my grandfather's images and my grandmother's. In my grandfather's snapshots, there is no decisive moment in the visual narratives; the subjects posed and my grandfather captured the moment in a measured and controlled manner. The patriarchal sense of time is quantitative and scientific, rational and predictable (Neumann, 1973). And just as my grandmother's photographs display a different style so do they reveal a different sense of time. Although not always successful, a greater instinct of the high point of the visual narrative comes through in my grandmother's photographs. In a narrative, the action waxes and wanes just like the matriarchal cadence of time which changes, assumes different qualities and has its own sense of rhythm. "As the time that rules the cosmos, it also rules the earth, and things that live, and the feminine" (Neumann, 1973, p. 43).

Another contrasting feature in the matriarchal consciousness is the act of understanding. "For matriarchal consciousness, understanding is not an act of the intellect, functioning as an organ for swift registration, development and organization; rather, it has the meaning of a 'conception'. Whatever is to be understood must first 'enter' matriarchal

consciousness" (Neumann, 1973, p. 47). This entering into may be part of the participant-observer role of the snapshot photographer, and this entering into does not involve the intellect in the same manner as an art photographer working with the snapshot aesthetic as an intended style. A snapshot is a snapshot because the photographer lacks technical skills or applies them inconsistently which creates a photograph that is primarily about the content, or visual conception, within the frame.

The visual conception within a snapshot actualizes the photographer's understanding by "realizing" it. Some would describe this as understanding with the heart rather than with the head, which intellectualizes understanding but often does not "realize" the significance of the content in a holistic, intuitive recognition. This "realizing" is part of the matriarchal consciousness and that which "comes forth" involves the

whole psyche, which is now permeated through and through with the full-grown perception that it must realize, must make real, with its full self. This means that the conceiving and understanding have brought about a personality change. The new content has seized and stirred the whole being.... The matriarchal consciousness is more concrete and closer to actual life, while the patriarchal is more abstract and further from reality. [italics added] (Neumann, 1973, p.47-48)

The matriarchal consciousness is an observing consciousness and uses life experiences not as something to analyze and abstract upon as does the patriarchal, but as contemplative events that may emotionally color, fill and permeate its essence. Interested in the meaningful rather than facts and dates, the matriarchal consciousness focuses on growth rather than deciphering logical causation. The matriarchal consciousness is "more

concerned with awareness and attentiveness than with directed thought or judgment....Matriarchal consciousness is directed by attendant feelings and intuitions that are based on *half-conscious processes and assist the emotionally participating ego in its task of orientation*" [italics added] (Neumann, 1973, p. 53).

Snapshots are about capturing feelings and intuitions, whether accurate or not, which the photographer has noticed. In the act of taking a snapshot, whether the subjects are informally posed or caught in the flow of the specific event, the photographer has observed the situation and to some degree has emotionally participated and thereby the photographer to some degree has acted upon her own task of ego orientation; snapshots may enable at least the photographer to recognize her observations and thus allow a progression in her psychological orientation and growth. Snapshots are about observing and documenting and in so doing, the subjects, photographer and eventual viewers are often caught in the matriarchal consciousness that reflects an unconscious summing up and guiding itself in a passive rather than active, more patriarchal manner.

In a small but significant way, the taking of a snapshot is a process of documenting the biography and growth of a family as well as stating the autobiographical growth of the photographer. Processes of growth are "processes of transformation and subject to the self. Matriarchal consciousness mirrors these processes and in its specific way accomplishes and supports them" [italics added] (Neumann, 1973, p. 52).

The creative aspect, the relationship to the ebb and flow of time, the nature of understanding and the transformative elements related to the processes of growth are hallmarks of the matriarchal consciousness. Together, these qualities-- in either a woman or

within the anima of a man-- may play a part in the forces which fuel the psychological significance when making a family photograph.

Photography as Alchemy

In the present day, most people view alchemy as a questionable pursuit due to the domination of scientific rationalism. In earlier times, however, alchemy was an esteemed activity although often swathed in secrecy and mystery. In its simplest forms, alchemists tried to change materials from base to more elevated forms or they attempted to permanently change the appearance of a substance by applying a tincture. The pursuit of alchemy involved the complexities of change, "the transformation from one state or form to another, from a seed to an embryo, or from an ore of little value to silver or gold....This outer or mundane work with materials was intimately linked to an inner or arcane work on the human personality" [italics added] (Shwartz-Salant, 1995, p. 2).

Jung, beginning in the later half of the second decade of the twentieth century, began to recognize parallels between the pursuit of alchemy and the theory of introspective psychology which he was developing. He believed that the creation of the self, through the individuation process, paralleled the symbolism and concepts inherent to alchemy. Throughout the rest of his life, he explored alchemy and its rich connections to psychological transformations of the self which carry significance for anyone interested in the role of images within our private worlds.

Alchemy and photography both share a relationship with Hermes. He was the mythological founder of alchemy and a metaphorical figure in hermeneutics and thereby

plays a role in the making and viewing of a photograph. In alchemy, Hermes, or Mercurious as he was later called, plays a central role in the transformation of base materials into elements of greater value. His mediating role from the common to the sacred is a component of alchemical writings as Hermes literalized the complexities of change. And in hermeneutics, which involves the meeting, mixing and merging of two horizons of being, Hermes again symbolizes the complexities of change and how one moves from one state to a more heightened one. Hermes, the conduit, the messenger, takes the message from one to the other and by this act transforms the original.

An interesting metaphorical tie occurs between what I labeled the alchemy of reversals in photography and the origins of alchemy in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians dyed fabrics such as cotton using three important steps, beginning with the dye joining with the fabric. Then it was necessary to overcome the resistance to holding the dye and the dye's tendency to lose its color. Finally, the dyed fabric had to be stable over time, in other words it had to be "fixed." One cannot help notice the role of the "fix" which stabilizes both the cloth and the photographic image. Both "fixing" procedures involve the meeting, changing and permanent transformation of the initial materials. The original becomes something new and no turning back is possible; cloth cannot be undyed and nor can a film or piece of photographic paper be unfixed. The alchemy involved transforms the original into a novel object, which has a perceived greater value or significance than the original. With respect to photography, the encounter, change and transformative act occurs not only within the camera and film but perhaps also upon the subjects, the photographer and the viewers of the permanent image.

For some critics of photography such as Sontag (1977), this valuing of the transformed over the original equates with valuing the simulacrum over the actual lived moment. But seen within the perspective which alchemy presents, the transformed moment captured in a photograph is not just that moment, but is rather a transformed, alchemical moment. The act of transformation has permanently changed the perception of that moment and the transformation itself is sacred. The resulting image is more than a record of sensitized silver, it has flourished under the complexities of change to become a transformed authentication of that moment. This is the madness of photography (Barthes, 1981); this is the power of the photographic image laid bare.

A final connection is the importance of transformation to all three pursuits: alchemy, Jungian psychology and photography. Transformation, however, is not a simple thing and it requires an openness to its mystery. In alchemy, transformation involved material life and the human personality; a true alchemist would experience a psychological death and rebirth resulting in more profound understanding. However, the alchemist could not explain nor understand this death and resurrection other than recognize the mystery involved. In a similar manner, the transformations within photography require an accepting of the mysteries involved and a suspension of rationalism.

Although Jung saw alchemy as a very sophisticated parallel to the process of individuation and the eventual creation of self, my contention is that family photographs are a simulacrum of that same process. Few people formally engage their psychological development through dream analysis and the guidance of an Jungian therapist, yet perhaps in a simplistic manner, family photographs are part of this playing out of the importance of

images to the development of the psyche. Perhaps family photographs are rudimentary, elemental attempts at psyche development by individuals who have no conscious awareness of such possibilities. This may speak to the societal obsession with family photographs and the billions of personal images made every year throughout the world.

Messages Mediated by Hermes

When I first viewed the photograph of my great-grandmother embracing the earth, I was a child looking through my grandmother's photo albums in Fort Macleod. At that time, I felt the prick of the punctum although I had no sophisticated word for the attraction. Years later, in examining photographs from the oeuvres of my paternal and maternal grandparents for this inquiry, I once again came upon this photograph of my great-grandmother. I knew immediately that I wanted to include it for several reasons: the spontaneous pose and the spontaneous reaction of the photographer intrigued me as a viewer and as a fellow photographer; the few other photographs of great-grandmother Murphy reveal less of her personality; and most of all, I liked the photograph because I could look for a long time and not tire of it. In some manner, there was a connection between me and her, and I thought that I would have liked her and that our personalities would have immediately understood one another, not solely as family but as kindred spirits.

In contrast, I examined my grandfather's collection of photographs several times before I decided on the posed composition of the five young women. Due to the staid formality, the image initially had no prick of poignancy and I acquiesced to including it because of the similarity of content which would provide a useful comparison. But as I

examined the photograph, the richness of the content became more evident and when I actually began to explore the compositional elements within the photograph, I was bruised several times by the prick of the “sharpening” elements: the ascending eye line of the young women in the centre, the visual disturbance created by the dog, and most importantly the discovery of the grave stone.

Identifying the grave stone, literally was a discovery because I did not pay attention to the shape behind the young women’s head until I began writing the visual analysis. However, once I recognized the shape, the image made sense on several levels. I understood how my grandfather had physically made the photograph as well as the significance of the tree. In a subsequent conversation with my mother, she confirmed that the snapshot had been made in a cemetery which bordered the family property of two of the young women in the photograph; although this fact came out only after examining the image with a magnifying glass and discussing the location of similar trees. From my initial lack of connection to the image, my relationship had substantially shifted to a meaningful dialogue with both the subjects and the photographer. I wanted to talk with these young women, to hear them chatter about the substance of their lives. I also wanted to discuss with my grandfather his thinking when he made this photograph, to hear his opinion of its significance and of its value. But as a viewer seventy-seven years later, such dialogues were incomplete, only phantoms of what might have been but never could be. But at least I had the questions and I had anticipated responses despite knowing that such conversations never would, nor never could, occur. My connection existed: brief, intense and real.

My grandfather, with the help of the hermeneutical tool of photography, had

bridged time and consciousness. He had created an image that united subjects and viewer. In this trinity, subjects transformed from a simulacrum to reality, and as a viewer I experienced a passage from minimal attraction to a complicated appreciation for the significance of the image and its layers of meaning. Through the alchemy of reversals arose an alchemy of life, for as Schwartz-Salant suggests alchemy “reflects upon the mystery of relations between things, and upon one’s relationship to the cosmos” (p. 19).

As members of the vast genre of family photographs, these two snapshots of women hold greater significance than brief seconds recorded on film. They hold psychic associations although subjects, viewers, and photographers seldom overtly recognize this countenance and its alchemical possibilities. For as Jung stated

even the most matter-of-fact contents of consciousness have a penumbra of uncertainty around them. Even the most carefully defined philosophical or mathematical concept, which we are sure does not contain more than we have put into it, is nevertheless more than we assume. It is a psychic event and as such partly unknowable. The very numbers you use in counting are more than you take them to be. They are at the same time mythological elements (for the Pythagoreans, they were even divine); but you are certainly unaware of this when you use numbers for a practical purpose. Every concept in our conscious mind, in short, has its own psychic associations. (1964, p. 29)

Snapshots as “matter-of-fact contents of consciousness” carry complex meanings. They hold truth and lie, reality and the simulacrum, consciousness and unconsciousness, representation and authentication. Their significance is neither minor nor uncomplicated.

CHAPTER SIX : CHILD TO MOTHER TO CHILD



Figure 11

Subject: Mercedes Osachoff, (approximate age 2.3)

**Date & Place: early winter, 1927; Outside of the house at Slavenka,
near Blaine Lake, Saskatchewan**

Photographer: Nicholas Osachoff



Figure 12

Subject: A young Murphy family: (L to R) Donna (age 5), Mercedes, Connie (age 3), Betty Jo (age 8).

Date & Place: August, 1963; the backyard of the Murphy grandparents, Fort Macleod, Alberta

Photographer: Mary Ellen Murphy



Figure 13

Subject: Anastasia Blomgren (age 2.5) and Connie Blomgren
Date & Place: October 18, 1998; Pavan Park, Lethbridge, Alberta
Photographer: Terrance Blomgren

The Photographs

It was a sunny day when my grandfather Osachoff posed his only daughter on the wooden chair (see Figure 11). I am speculating that it was early winter when he made this image; somehow the first snowfall of the season might be reason in itself to make a photograph. So although he did not spontaneously make the snapshot, his conceiving of the image might have been an impulsive act.

To have a successful exposure the little girl squints into the sunshine with a happy expression. She will grow up and one day become my mother, but here she is a child, innocent, compliant and somewhat happy about the attention. The shadow of the photographer, my grandfather, falls on the lower half of the image and the overall composition has balance and stability. Although the chair is slightly off to the left, the photographer has placed the child nearly symmetrically. Her arms provide a sense of animation and anticipated movement which appropriately fits her age. There are few sharpening agents in the image and as other photographs in my grandfather's oeuvre demonstrate, a Classical sense of aesthetics dominates. The child's expression enlivens the image while the repetition of vertical lines indicates the perceptual preference of the photographer. Her face continuously attracts a viewer and for a posed snapshot, the image works because of its simple but effective composition.

As a photographer myself, I wonder why my grandfather placed his daughter on the chair rather than squat down and take the photograph from her eye level. The possible reasons include the camera that he used, or that he thought it necessary for her to make herself equal to him rather than him visually look down upon her, or her look up to him. I

question how he made the photograph because it suggests how he saw his world, and specifically how he may have viewed his daughter. But I will never know his thinking and no one can.

In the next photograph (Figure 12) taken in August 1963, similar elements are at work. My grandmother did not spontaneously grab the photograph, but like first image the conception of making the snapshot was impulsive. My grandmother reacted to a specific moment and documented her son's family as they shared time together in the double swing set. All of the subjects are well aware that the photographer is making an image and to varying degrees they look into the camera quite happily.

In addition, the major compositional elements are similar to my grandfather's photograph because of the numerous vertical lines. But what is interesting to note is how the subjects' heads rise above the major set of vertical lines and contrast against the dark band of horizontal garden space. The neighbour's house contextualizes the scene through the clothes and setting as a yard of a middle-class home during the mid 1960s, and the house also provides both levelling and sharpening lines. Visually, this composition has more information in it and the circularity of the subjects' heads provides perceptual variety and attracts the eye. In a manner similar to my grandfather's photograph, the faces substantially engage a viewer's eye.

Within the four faces, other compositional elements are at work. My mother's face is the highest and the glare from the camera's flash attracts a viewer's eye due to the intense small white dots, four in all. From her face, two lines extend down to her first born on her left and to her second born on her right. A third line connects the faces of my two

older sisters and passes right through the fourth and smallest face, my own. These three lines create a triangle, with my mother as the highest point and my two sisters as vertices and myself as part of the connection between my siblings. So within the two bands of vertical lines is this triangle of faces; a visually stable unity of faces, a unity of females within a family.

This snapshot has significance for me because I remember spending numerous hours sitting and playing with my sisters or visiting cousins in this double swing. On the left side of the photograph one can see toys strewn on the lawn; when I first studied this photograph an amazingly quick recall of the doll's appearance came to me. It belonged to my sister and without the visual trigger of this photograph I am sure that I would never have remembered it. Part of me believes that I can remember the actual making of this photograph because so many elements of it are elusive but nearly tangible to me. On the other hand, I question whether I am reconstructing a memory by using the visual clues in this photograph in combination with other less specific memories. I enjoyed that swing and it is one of the places that I remember most clearly from my numerous visits to my grandparent's home. Regardless of the resulting fact or fiction, I cherish looking at the photograph and the reverie it creates for me.

Figure 13 is the final photograph and again it is of me, only thirty-five years later. I am holding my young daughter, Anastasia (the English translation of Nastya) and from my unusual stance a viewer might notice that I am eight months pregnant with my second child. Unlike the two previous snapshots, this image is in colour which influences a viewer's perception and interpretation of a photograph. My husband made the photograph

and he was very specific about having the two of us in the shadow of the tree because he was considering the degree of contrast which the film could tolerate. Of the various images he made, I selected this one because I am curious to see my daughter and I looking at each other. Our gaze is something in which I can only participate and never observe except through the aid of technology. I know how it feels to look into my daughter's face but I cannot know how others see this exchange; this photograph is how I can never see myself, yet I am curious to view my daughter and I, as my husband, or as any observing person, would.

Like the two previous photographs, lines dominate the composition of this third image. However, these lines are primarily oblique with less important lines on the vertical. The elements of the cottonwood trees, the grass, bushes and coulees in the background attracted my husband and he feels close to nature in this park. As a couple we like to spend our leisure time hiking and camping and these are values which we hope to pass onto our children.

The three photographs illustrate how time passes but in so doing the essential elements of life repeat in a cyclical fashion. From a child growing to becoming a mother so that her daughter may one day birth yet another daughter, is the cycle of birth, maturation and the seed's seed now bearing fruit. This is a circle making its way in its spiral path and in its circularity, the circle, the Jungian symbol of Self, expresses "the totality of the psyche in all its aspects....It always points to the single most vital aspect of life - its ultimate wholeness" (Jaffe, 1964, p. 266).

And it is this circular wholeness that family photographs frequently reveal. The

aperture within each and every camera is a circle and within the genre of family snapshots, this circle enables the documenting of lives growing, maturing, bearing fruit, and the fruit repeating the cycle of birth, growth and maturation. The camera's aperture creates an ethereal mandala from the flowering of a family's growth and change. From a child to a mother, to a child to a mother, to a child to a future mother, the bud of my mother's childhood matured into motherhood just as my childhood matured into my own motherhood and from which my children's growth and maturation will widen the aperture, will increase the photographic oeuvre of these families.

Emerging Horizons of Interpretation

In each chapter of this thesis, the photographs from the Osachoff family have appeared first, partly because organization is necessary but also from a desire to know better what I did not know so well. I never met my grandfather Osachoff, and I hardly know of him. Yet his photographs have compelled me to think and even to weep for him, and for the conversations that I never had--either as a child growing up or as a grown adult--with my grandfather. His photographs have enabled me to know a little more of him. I believe that he cared deeply for his family and for the farm which was more than a source of livelihood; it was part of his identity. He likely had a desire to create something with care and attention to detail. His life was a source of pride but I do not think he was prideful. He was obviously a man caught within the framework of history and society. I think I would have liked and respected him.

In contrast, I had known more of my grandmother Murphy, but by studying her

snapshots, I have come to see her in a different light. I have come to appreciate the amount of domestic work that she performed within her lifetime and the sacrifices that she made. I admire her desire to document, through her dairies and photographs, her life as a wife and mother. She had a faith in the future which likely came from her personality and her religion. My respect for her has been deepened by this hermeneutic experience. I am no longer a child engaging her; my horizon of meaning as a mother and a photographer has come to meet her horizon of meaning as a mother and photographer. The two have met and encountered each other and I can no longer think of her in my old way. The messages as photographs have been delivered by Hermes and I cannot ignore the meanings they convey.

Selecting the photographs for each chapter has never been easy. I have wanted to explore so many more images than what this study can allow. In selecting photographs for this chapter, I considered the unity of the three images. I had to sacrifice possible discussions about other photographs in the two oeuvres and despite this inability to probe the entire depth of the oeuvres, I chose images that engaged me through their punctum or through my emerging discussion. The visual narratives of family photographs--this bridging of time and place--have attracted me ever since those days of examining my grandmother's albums enraptured by the stories which the silver halides told.

As I journeyed through the oeuvres and the exposures contained within, I slowly recognized how family photographs permeate my life and the lives of other. My exploration of their significance has taken me in many different directions and through layers of metaphors. Unforeseen connections, such as the role of Hermes in both hermeneutics and

in alchemy, appeared in my research as I wrote, not before I began this interpretative journey. And in my daily life, I noticed how a television talk show host projected snapshots of her guest, as a child destined for adult fame. I wondered how and why the producers decided on such a technique and how effectively it made me, the television viewer, feel emotionally closer to both the guest and the program host. I noticed that we were all female and the midafternoon time slot belonged to soap operas, home improvement shows and commercials pitched at portraying acceptable domesticity to the domestic. Snapshots here, snapshots there, even snapshots arriving in my mail from students who had documented my teaching role in their lives. Pictures, snaps, photos: all are images of the private entering the public and the public merging into the private, through the mediation of the camera, through the mediation of the image.

My purpose in examining all of these photographs has been to peel back the layers of connections and meaning, so as to encounter the various interpretations of the significance of family photographs. The hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 1979) has engaged my entire being and family photographs will never again be simple snapshots to me. My journey needs an ending, a place to rest from which I may embark upon other journeys. In the following pages outstanding issues and reoccurring themes create my concluding thoughts, the ending to the peeling back and the embracing of my findings.

The Evolution of Colour Photographs

The paired photographs for each chapter have been black and white images, primarily because these dominate the two oeuvre of my grandparents. However, my own

growing oeuvre of family photographs are mostly in colour and this shift mirrors what has occurred on a societal level. Colour photographs are quite different from black and white images and these substantial differences require exploring the history of colour photographs and the perceptual implications upon viewers as this outstanding issue strongly influences the direction of the genre of family photographs and their past, current and future levels of significance.

Since the beginning of photography, variations of black and white images have been the norm and it is only in the last 45 years that colour photography has become common for both commercial and personal use. At one time, black and white photographs were the only choice for any photographer. Variations were possible in sepia toning or hand tinting with coloured oils. However, the standard has now shifted away from black and white to the predominance of colour. But what does this shift represent and what is the significance of black and white or colour images for family photographs?

When photography first began, even black and white prints were difficult to obtain (Time-Life: Great Photographers, 1983). Some of the first photographic images, or daguerreotypes, made by Louis Daguerre in 1839, were on silver-coated copper sheets that had been chemically treated to be light sensitive. Using this process, photographers exposed the copper sheets in the camera and then later developed the latent images with mercury vapours. These images were exciting not only for their novelty but also because of their clarity and fine detail in the print.

Within ten years of the advent of the daguerreotype, William Henry Fox Talbot had devised the calotype which produced images on paper using a negative to create the image,

a process that modern print photography still employs. Following the calotype came the making of negatives on glass plates which produced sharper prints with a shorter exposure time. Collodion plates came next. Collodion required working quickly before it dried and became desensitized which was a draw back to this "wet plate process." No photographic companies existed during the early years of photography. Photographers had to mix their own chemicals, including grinding them into exact amounts of powder for their "recipes" which were relatively simple as black and white images required only variations in the density of silver halides associated with the monochrome processes. During the late nineteenth century as the role of photography within personal and public life grew, so did its commercial value and small companies began to provide photographers with some of the necessary supplies (Time-Life: Great Photographers, 1983). Although people commonly accepted and used black and white photographs, they had a great desire to have colour images.

Colour photography has been slower to establish itself although the desire to have colour images that replicate an exact human perception of a scene is as old as photography itself. Both Joseph-Nicephore Niepce, who took the first actual photograph with a camera, and his contemporary, Louis Daguerre, attempted to create colour photographs. Both photographers had blue and green colours register in some of their prints. Many other inventors tried to create colour images and in 1850, Levi L. Hill actually succeeded but was unable to repeat the process. It seems that he made an accidental combination of chemicals that produced the first colour images but he was unable to determine the actual combination that had been so successful. Other photographers produced colour images but

the colours were never permanent and they quickly faded. For the next eighty-five years, various scientists and inventors continued to pursue colour photography. In April 1935, the American company, Kodak, announced the advent of Kodachrome. This invention made colour slide film available to the general consumer and home slide shows became popular among those who could afford the technology.

Kodak's pursuit of colour prints continued and after some exceptional events they eventually realized this goal. Other companies such as Agfa, a German photographic company, shared the search for colour prints and they introduced in 1935 Agfacolour, the first colour print film ever made. At the end of the Second World War, when American troops seized the Agfa plant in Wolfen, Germany, the Allies seized Agfa's patent rights as war indemnity thereby making the secrets behind Agfacolour public property. The Allies also distributed the film's formula to film manufacturers throughout the world. Agfacolour became the fundamental basis for various colour processes and by the 1950s, colour photographs had somewhat true-to-life colour reproduction (Time-Life: Color, 1981).

However, colour snapshot photography did not become the norm until the mid 1960s when the price of the film and its development became affordable for the average consumer. Until the mid 1970s, black and white film was commonly available and family photographs were often monochromatic. People were slow to accept colour photographs because of the poor colour reproduction. The colours produced were not true or even close to the original, and in a few short months, even stored in shoe boxes in closets, a definite deterioration in the colour was apparent. It is only in 1998 that the Japanese film company Fuji has announced Fuji Crystal paper which they predict will achieve colour

permanence for 75 years. In contrast, black and white prints--if they are properly processed and stored--have archival qualities for more than 150 years. Although most consumers are unaware of the impermanence of their visual diaries, the deterioration and fading of colour photographs taken to date is a very real phenomenon.

The shift away from black and white prints to colour photographs parallels other shifts in technology, especially within the last half of the twentieth century. A technologically dated approach to consuming music or entertainment or other aspects of daily life lacks the status and glamour of the new technology and this disdain for the old has affected the preference of colour photographs over black and white. It could also be argued that the human eye sees in colour and therefore feels more comfortable with colour prints. One could also interpret the shift as a move from a traditional world to a modern one where technology rules and affects all aspects of life. Still, many people like viewing black and white photographs and will immediately attach a feeling of nostalgia to them even if they were made only recently.

Currently, there is a trend in commercial photography to use black and white images for advertisements and formal portraits. In addition, some people perceive black and white photographs as having greater aesthetic merit because the majority of canonized images of art photography are monochromatic and the vestiges of such thinking influence the general population. Black and white photographs have a cachet which colour prints will never equal even though most of the seventeen billion family snapshots made every year are in colour.

As a photographer, I have purposefully used black and white film to capture various

moments of my daughter's life in a direct attempt to have photographs that could aesthetically complement and continue the visual narrative of family which my maternal grandfather and my paternal grandmother initiated within their own families. Photographs of me as child are primarily in black and white and I prefer these images rather than the few colour prints with their obscure and inaccurate renderings of colour. As a viewer, a black and white print is more acceptable than a colour print with poor panchromatic reproduction; somehow I react with "that wasn't how it was" when I view an old colour print but black and white images never affect me in the same manner. I suspect that not only I, but others, embrace a black and white print as a monochromatic image and the absence of colour actually allows the viewer to enter into the visual narrative without an internal dialogue that criticizes how unacceptable the colours appear. Black and white images are a novel representation of pieces of life chronicled in film where as current colour photographs, which now have true-to-life colours convey a sense of true replication, of authenticity. This shift from black and white to colour parallels the technological shift in visual forms from static representations to animated, authentications of reality.

Encountering the Photographer's Persona

Whether black and white novelties to interpret or colour images that reproduce two dimensionally what we know three dimensionally, family photographs make a biographical statement for all viewers to encounter. And when a collection of photographs by the family photographer present themselves, the autobiographical statement of the photographer becomes apparent and a viewer can come to know him or her as more than the family

chronicler. By examining the partial oeuvres of my Russian Doubkobour grandfather and my Irish Catholic grandmother respectively, I have come to know them as fellow photographers and as individuals, rather than just as ancestors. The discoveries of who Nick Osachoff was, and further information to add to my memories of Mary Murphy are unexpected gifts from this inquiry.

This discovery of personalities, long deceased and accessible only through the vagaries of collective memories and retold anecdotes, awaits any viewer of family photographs. Such a viewer must be aware of these possibilities and be patient in the unveiling of the photographer's personality. The viewing of image after image, of snapshot after snapshot carries a message but one must participate in the dialogue from photographer to viewer. And the influence of the subjects upon the message carries its own significance of which a viewer must develop a third sensitivity for the trinity of interstices is constantly at play and enhances the transformations possible. Any photographic exposure is an exposure of numerous terraces of meaning for more than just the viewer, or subject or photographer.

When I first began this endeavour, I initially considered using only my grandmother's photographs but I reconsidered and decided to also use my grandfather's. My reconsideration came from several motivations. I realized that my grandfather had actually made numerous photographs of which I was ignorant. With his early death when my mother was fourteen, I never had the opportunity to meet or know him and my mother seldom spoke of her father when I was growing up or even now. My mother's silence likely has several explanations, including her personality, but I suspect that her grief was

extremely potent, if my observations from family photographs are true. She was emotionally very close to her father as two different formal portraits physically tie her to him, more so than her two brothers. In the family in which I grew up, my mother had merged into the Murphy surname, the farm they owned and their way of being. She even became a Catholic. She has lived away from her mother tongue (Russian) and culture all of her married life. My inquiry has been an opportunity to learn and interpret more about mother's father, about his life and also of my mother's life as a child. Such learning has helped me to further understand my mother's family, my mother and the family that I am now a parent within.

Initially I was both attracted to and frustrated by the photographs that my grandfather had made. I was attracted to the novelty of the experience for most of the images I had never seen before but my frustration came from the lack of spontaneity in the images. As a viewer, I was wanting to see candid, uninhibited, unposed family photographs but nearly all of the photographs are formal, inhibited and posed. My desire suggests that rather than engaging my grandfather's text in a true hermeneutic fashion, I was wanting to see candid spontaneity by the subjects and the photographer. This desire is the result of knowing the Osachoff family superficially from occasional visits and my limited experience with who they are as a collective body and as individuals. I wanted to see something similar to the Murphy's relaxed life but the photographs only offered careful representations of subjects and a staid autobiographical statement by the photographer.

Within my grandfather's oeuvre, I studied numerous posed subjects all taken outside with the sun as the light source. My grandfather did not use a flash to make his

photographs which limited when and what he could record. As a dedicated farmer in the early part of the twentieth century, most of his waking hours were spent outside of the house, away from his wife and children. He was a serious man and had no inclinations to carry around his camera just in case something caught his eye. With this in mind, he made his photographs on the days when he had the time and opportunity.

His style is very formal. Frivolous activities seem to have been inappropriate for the expense of a photograph and like many images within the oeuvres of other families, posed photographs dominate. I suspect that for my grandfather, however, the influences of iconolatriy in the Russian Orthodox Church made the use of, and relationship to, images a sensitive but likely unconscious undercurrent within his photography. Images were acceptable only if they had an appropriate use and function and there was always the danger of fusing the image and the original object, the prototype. The misuse of the image could easily lead to idolatry and false worshipping which had dominated the Russian Orthodox religion, including the belief that the Czar was God's representative on earth. The Douhkobour religion was a reaction to the ideological abuses of Russia's state church and Douhkobour practices emphasized a simple religion with few rituals and no statues, icons or images. In fact, the word Douhkobour means "spirit wrestler" and in some manner my grandfather may have had a dualistic relationship to the photographs he made and the potential seductions which images could wield.

To counter these possibilities, he may have used a bridled, posed approach to document the formal events of his life because of the control of technique and representation which posing affords (Musello, 1980). In addition his style reflects, as

Arnheim (1974) notes a Classical aesthetic sense of “simplicity, symmetry, normality, and the reduction of tension” (p. 67). From the images that I viewed and eventually included in this text, such as “The Osachoff Family” (Introduction), “Me with My Boys” (Chapter 2), “Alchemy Amid the Fields” (Chapter 4) or “Mercedes” (Chapter 5), it appears that my grandfather had a traditional idea of what was appropriate to photograph which influenced how he made his photographs. His oeuvre exhibits a male vision of the world with its logical, organized poses and technical approach (Hattersley, 1971).

My grandmother’s oeuvre directly contrasts to my grandfather’s. Her visual narrative reveals a candid and spontaneous style which minimizes “the photographer’s intrusion through shooting discreetly in order to ‘catch’ the ‘everyday,’ the ‘typical’ and the ‘natural’” (Musello, 1980, p. 25). Although she does have some posed subjects, many of her photographs seem to be authentic reflections of what she saw in her daily life. Many of the earlier photographs were taken outside, but the children, as the subjects of such photographs, ignore the camera and continue in their activities. In contrast to grandfather Osachoff, her life centred on the household and if she took a notion to make a photograph she just had to pick up her camera and record the event. And much of what she photographed was a record of her life, just as her daily journal entries were a record of the weather, farming concerns and domestic activities. She did not openly state her emotions or personal reflections in her journals and in a parallel fashion her photographs have a domestic, documentary style.

As a photographer perhaps this was what she intended and it is only now as a viewer that I openly invest emotions into what she recorded. However, her images

including "Grandpa and Betty Jo" (Figure 4), "Some Snow" (Figure 6), "Great grandmother Murphy" (Figure 10) and "August 1963" (Figure 12) all reveal an aesthetic sense of Expressionism as the compositions suggest "the irregular, the asymmetrical, the unusual, and the complex, and [her photographs] strive[s] for the increase of tension" (Arnheim, 1974, p. 67). I believe a female vision exists in her images as they are non-logical, receptive to the visual world within itself, and are "filtered through, directed and limited by emotion. Its values, which tell one what is worth looking at are built on emotional bases" (Hattersley, 1971, p. 142). Her images are definitely now-centered and here-centered. Consequently, at a deeper level one can interpret a play between documentation and emotional investiture within her oeuvre.

Her sense of what was permissible to photograph was a bit broader and less rigid than my grandfather's because she would photograph my grandfather and his grown sons drinking beer and smoking. She also photographed women engaged in the same activities and did not edit such photographs from her albums. Apparently she saw such realities as part of the flow of her life and worth documenting. Although she certainly had boundaries as to what was appropriate to photograph, the frank nature of her visual narrative has always attracted me.

Both photographers made autobiographical statements of their lived experience by the activities they believed merited recording, and therefore in which they took part at least to some degree. From examining these two oeuvres I have my own sense of who these two individuals were, rather than solely relying on the opinion of other family members.

The subject of a photograph has significance to the person behind the camera.

Collectively these statements create a personal essay of the photographer's life. The peeling back of subject matter and the photographer's role exposes the lived experiences, the values and beliefs of the image creator, even if the photographer seldom appears in the family albums. His or her absence, and some would say, erasure, has a significance in itself. But both my grandfather and my grandmother became the family story teller rather than the photographer's subject. The story teller shapes the story's form and its telling and the significance of this responsibility lies mostly unacknowledged within the oeuvres of family photographs.

Revisiting Marginalizations within Photography

Family photographs have been studied as "native documentation" within anthropology, sociology and psychology (Berger, 1972; Bourdieu, 1984; McIssac, 1983; Sontag, 1977), yet within the photographic discourse scholars seldom discuss their significance. This absence of discussion is partly due to the amateur status which the genre entails but other influential elements are also at work.

The majority of family photograph are currently made by women, usually wives and mothers who see part of their responsibility as the visual diarist in the family. This is not to say that men do not photograph their families but the data from the Canadian Photographic Marketing Association (1998) strongly suggests that this activity is more commonly executed by women than men. When viewing a photograph "consciously or unconsciously, even unwillingly, we all respond to art [an image] on an emotional as well as an intellectual level. Consequently, knowing a photographer's sex influences our

judgment of the photographic content and even its value" (Tucker, 1973, p.1). Snapshot photographs are not artworks in the traditional sense of the word, but I suggest that they have aesthetic value despite their domestic--and therefore commonly marginalised--subjects of children, daily activities and family life in general. This subject matter is the world of the private, the personal, the home life in which we all share but seldom acknowledge in the public world. A family photograph is

the ordering of daily life [which] requires the aesthetic processes of symbolization, reinterpretation, the incorporation of alien cultures, objects, meanings, the blending and crossing of boundaries, the choosing of sacred objects, sacred spaces, secret names and jokes and curses and songs. ...[the unity which a home has is the result of men and women creating aesthetic achievement] working to draw [aesthetic] form out of the chaos of their own lives. (Grumet, 1991, p. 71, 81)

Despite these aesthetic processes, Western art, politics and education have treated the domestic world with scorn and also the belief that domesticity is a source of knowledge with even further scorn. I believe that family photographs with their representations of the private world have consequently been marginalised by the public world in part because of the subject matter. Both subject matter and the gender of the typical family photographer have tainted the genre with less importance than other photographic pursuits.

With this in mind, one can turn to the collective oeuvres of family photographs and begin to interpret their significance. For many families, mine included, the documentary power of family photographs is a major part of their value. But I believe that to some extent, the family photographer is exploring the meaning of family to that photographer and

to family members through the use of images. In the expectations of society, exploration, whether of jungles or minds, is considered unfeminine and dangerous....Rather than develop their intellectual sense and regardless of personal inclinations, many women are directed by societal pressures to develop their intuitive faculties....In twentieth-century America, ninety percent of the women photographers have been portraitists, journalists, and documentarians, whose primary concern has been people. (Tucker, 1973, p. 3)

Tucker contends that some males and females need to explore a territory but what comprises that territory differs according to gender and the influences of society. For many visual diarists the family is at hand and is in itself a hermeneutic inquiry to explore. And so, to photograph the family is an acceptable exploration and one with which women, for various reasons, feel comfortable.

The nature of a photograph allows the viewer (which could now be the photographer) to carefully examine moments in time and aspects of family life that ordinarily pass by quickly and without the possibilities presented by a snapshot. It is the contained moment, decontextualized and independent that can be picked apart, mulled over, interpreted and reinterpreted. Although many viewers quickly examine family snapshots, the opportunity to spend time, to reflect, to make new understandings and interpretations continually presents and represents itself with each and every viewing. "A snapshot seems to me *a simultaneous representation of the thinking and feeling parts of people, ... it is very difficult to distill a simple objective observation of direct correlation of meaning from its initially spontaneous origins. [italics added]*" (Weiser, 1993, p. 3)

Death and Rebirth

Although Barthes examines the death of the moment inherent to a photograph with skill and insight, he did not flip the moment of viewing onto the converse, the side of the rebirth of that moment captured on film. He ignores how the moment lives again each and every time that a viewer seriously engages a photograph. And it is also possibly part of the feminine impulse, the anima in each of us that wants to bring to birth what we hold dear, to examine, to live again, perhaps in a better way or more intently or sweetly. This is part of reverie, of remembering the past, of creating memories by visually engaging the characters, setting and plot of the photograph's visual narrative.

This dualistic impulse of death and birth seems to pull in opposite directions, exposing the significance of death to us within our daily pursuits. It also exposes the significance of our birth, and what we create within our lives. Both death and life seem bound by fear, fear of death and fear of forgetting our lives and their collective, cumulative creations. A photograph which transforms this fear into an actual death and rebirth allows the dualism of death and life to exist and flourish.

I now see that it is the death, and rebirth, of the moment that has always attracted me, especially to photographs of times and places that I could never experience as the subjects did. Through the alchemy of reversals "a photograph, then, has the special quality of being simultaneously a realistic illusion and an illusory reality, a moment captured -yet never fully captured." (Weiser, 1993, p. 4)

Truths and Lies

But what about the dark side of life? The anger, hurt, mistruths, the abuses which occur within a family, any family to some degree? Why haven't I explored this aspect of family photographs?

Am I scared? Naive? Or is it that family photographs seldom reveal this dark side and instead tries to hide and therefore can project lies, specific to each family?

Lying is part of the moon archetype. The matriarchal consciousness will lie. This is not to say that only women lie, or that the animus does not delve into misrepresenting the truth. But what it does mean is that within the rich fullness of what the matriarchal consciousness enfolds is the recognition of misrepresentation, that the anima can and will create lies.

Many people are sceptical, critical and disaffected by the possible truths portrayed in a photograph, any photograph and it is conversely true, that a photograph does lie. But it is the viewers for various reasons including the believability quotient who imbue the photograph with truth. Many people "know" that a photograph "lies." They "know" that it is a representation of a reality but somehow deny this fact and invest themselves in the mistruths, the simulacrum of reality.

This investment can be part of the subject's role as he or she may purposefully project a false smile, an insincere hand on another's shoulder, a boredom with the entire experience. But this projection may have other explanations including dislike of photographs of self because the results portray how others see us rather than how we see ourselves. It is a face that one lives in but can never see in the same manner as those who

surround us. We all live in a face, in a body but only others are able to "see" it. While a mirror is a reversal of our image, a photograph reproduces not only how others view us but how we will never be able to physically view ourselves. We are the reality. The photograph is the simulacrum, but we can never "see" the reality, only the simulacrum.

Some people who dislike having their photograph made are perhaps reacting to this irreconcilable duality. There is dis-ease in viewing the simulacrum because it is not how they "see" themselves from an embodied way of knowing: the photograph is not them.

Subjects may also project a particular face and emotion because they may feel that if they do not then the truth may uncomfortably reveal itself, to the photographer and to future viewers. People may prefer lies for viewers to encounter rather than the pain of the truth. Knowingly or unknowingly subjects may partake in the construction of a false reality. The more composed a photograph, such as "Faces in the Moon" (Chapter 3), the greater the movement toward representation on the continuum between authenticity on one pole and representation on the other.

The photographer too may construct an image, especially when a photograph is not truly grabbed as a spontaneous reaction and the photographer arranges the subjects. As a photographer I have posed many people and my intentions came from sensitivities to aesthetics, technical concerns and trying to create a still photograph which was successful on several layers. Although I never intended to create or reinforce visual mistruths, I have likely done so. By placing my frame over content, I am selecting and deselecting information. This act creates the tension of off-frame and in-frame information which compels a viewer into speculating about the elements within the plot of the visual story.

Which brings us to the viewer and the truths or lies that either consciously or unconsciously permeate how the viewer sees the photograph. Unlike the subjects or photographer, the viewer is not part of the production of the image and may view a snapshot decades after the shutter closed upon itself. Like a book, a reader “reads” the text within his or her temporal time and place which influences the interpretations of that specific piece of light writing. The viewer, as the spectator of the signified, carries the variables of historicity, gender, education, cultural background and these influence how the viewer interprets the photograph. If the viewer is open to the experience, a snapshot has rich hermeneutical possibilities.

So a photograph lies and tells truth simultaneously and each part of the trinity has a role in the expansion or contraction of either dynamic. This is the nature of the medium and it relates to the simultaneous attraction and repulsion to photographs; their duality is more obvious than other forms of representation which may parry or beguile. In the words of Derrida (1987)

attraction/repulsion of the same object. Double bind. There is an excess here, a surplus, a superabundance (überschwänglich) which opens an abyss (Abergund).

The imagination is afraid of losing itself in this abyss, and we step back. (p. 129)

Concluding Thoughts

The aesthetics of a snapshot are not part of the traditional expectations of art; yet, there is something about the snapshot which art photographers have recognized and appropriated, even before the introduction of postmodernism. This appropriation stems

from the sense of authenticity which attracts a viewer despite the weak use of traditional aesthetics in a snapshot. Like folk art, snapshot photography exhibits a less inhibited, primal sense of aesthetics.

In contrast to the formal aesthetic approach of form over content, snapshot photographers are placing a frame over content. The decision of placing the camera's frame over the unfolding drama, of which the photographer may be both participant and observer, involves a spontaneous aesthetic judgement.

Aesthetic judgment must properly bear upon intrinsic beauty, not on finery and surrounds. Hence one must know...how to determine the intrinsic - and know what one is excluding as frame and outside-the-frame. (Derrida, 1987, p. 63)

Part of this aesthetic judgement entails the intentionality of the photographer.

Within the hermeneutic tradition, both Brentano and Husserl advanced that the intentional is the fundamental structure of consciousness and that intentionality "indicates the inseparable connectedness of the human being to the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 181). Intentionality is only available to the consciousness through retrospection and each individual must tease out the meanings of his or her own internationalities and connectedness to his or her world. As a researcher, I have continuously encountered the internationalities of the photographers within this inquiry, primarily my grandfather Osachoff and my grandmother Murphy. I can never be sure about my speculations of why certain photographs exist but the hermeneutic circle has frequently and consistently touched upon examining the photographer's connectedness to his or her world. As an outsider, I am retrospectively examining each specific snapshot as well as the intentionality

inherent within my grandparents' photographic oeuvres. These examinations bear further implications for the oeuvres of all families.

All thinking (imagining, perceiving, remembering, etc) is always thinking about something. The same is true for actions: grasping is grasping for something, hearing is hearing something, pointing is pointing at something. (van Manen, 1990, p. 182)
And all photographing is photographing something.

What that something is has various levels of meaning and therefore various levels of interpretation and significance. The intentionality of the photographer mirrors what he or she perceives as valuable, as genuine, as authentic.

In returning to the etymology I discussed in Chapter One, the word genuine has its roots in the private world being made known to the public through the actions of a new father, claiming a newborn child as his, from his source of being. It is a claim that authenticates, confirms and affirms. Being authentic in the original sense of the word was to act and speak on one's own authority, from an individual's true sense of self and not from the influences of authority and power. Snapshot photography is not a pure form of authenticity but with its marginalized status and limited viewership, a photographer may feel comfortable to explore her voice, her authentic self. This is not a simple process and it certainly has numerous outside visual influences from television and magazines and other societal influences concerning gender roles, socioeconomic positions and the like. But at the very pulse of the spontaneous photograph lies a spark of recognition by the photographer of something genuine and authentic.

This authenticating momentum incorporates a desire to affirm the significance of

the photographer's life, the subjects' lives and even the life of an eventual viewer. Although most people live mundane lives with mundane expectations and minimal significance to the march of time and history, it is the only life that these people will know. To them it has the greatest of significance; it is their life. Family photographs are artifacts of this life, of the presence that they had on this world, of the significance of their daily world, of their private lives. Some scoff and criticize that this would seem important to a person, a common person caught in the flow of her temporal time, but the volume of snapshots per year and its consequent economic impact speaks of significance. Few people write out the story of their lives yet the family photograph album displays this life, with its wrinkles and tears, smiles and denials, ups and downs. For as Grumet (1988) sets forth "what is most fundamental to our lives as men and women sharing a moment on this planet is the process of reproducing ourselves" (p. 8) and what better way of reproducing ourselves than through the power of the image?

But this desire to reproduce ourselves, to see ourselves reproduced in an image whether from the tales of Narcissus or in the mistrust of images by religions has always created a fear of idolatry, of worshipping the simulacrum and submitting to the image what rightfully belongs to the original, the prototype. For as Freedberg (1989) comments "art historians have shied away from the evidence...of the relations between images and people; and in so doing they reveal yet another aspect of the way in which we repress what is most troubling about images" (p. 388).

In the history of iconoclasm in the Christian church, polemics concerning the power of the image raged during the time of the cult of the Virgin. Images with their

material worldliness were condemned as seductions that appealed to a specific population within the Middle Ages.

But who are the people who are seduced by the obviousness of colours and materiality? Not, of course, those for whom God is the Word, nor the intellectuals who live in - or aspire to - so spiritual a realm that they do not need the crutch of the senses or of material sensuality in general. Rather its women themselves, and the large body of ignorant people - illiterate above all. They are the ones to whom the seductive charms and pleasures of material images are most likely, and are supposed most directly, to appeal. (Freedberg, 1989, p. 398)

We are no longer in the age of limited literacy and church control of education, but the vestiges of judgements from the past seep through into the judgements of today. People may turn to snapshots because of the "epiphanic nature of representation. The image declares and makes present that which is absent, hidden, and which we cannot possible know - but then do" (Freedberg, 1989, p. 404). However, the distrust of the image and its latent association with women, the illiterate, and the marginalized pervades in the distrust of the power of the snapshot.

The whole framework of denial [of the power of the image] is of a piece with the massive fortifications of repression with which we seek to protect ourselves from the powerful emotions and the distracting and troubling behaviour that we sometimes experience in the presence of images: especially ones we strongly like and strongly hate. (Freedberg, 1989, p. 407)

I know that images, especially those within my family's visual chronicles of times

and places forever lost to physical experience, are powerful to me and that this interpretative journey of exploring the significance of those exposures has been a creative pleasure. I know that I have changed, in my knowledge, in my thinking and in my appreciation for the levels of significance within family photographs.

These changes have and will effect me, as a teacher, as a mother and as a photographer. To peel back the layers of meaning and interpretation while encountering the meaning of personally valuable photographs has been a wave of emerging horizons of meaning, constantly meeting, communicating, cleaving and leaving. This hermeneutic experience has enriched my being and whatever contributions I bring to the pedagogy I practice, to the life that I lead.

EPILOGUE

In the Preface I asked the reader to come to my exploration in the same frame of mind that one would have when thoughtfully encountering an album of family photographs. It is worthwhile to note that the etymology of the word *album* comes from the Latin "blank tablet" (Sykes, 1976, p. 23) and that a photography album, a blank book where the organizer of the photographs assembles the captured pieces of time, has a ubiquitous presence in modern life. The album's collection of photographs is a visual assemblage of the representative and authentic statements concerning the individual family members and the family as a whole. As my exploration has indicated, the nature of this statement has numerous terraces of issues and meanings, ranging from the very personal, such as my relationship to my maternal grandfather and my paternal grandmother, to the significance of family photographs for society as a whole.

Throughout my writing a constant difficulty has been to weave together the range of topics which the inquiry has encountered. But as in a family photo album, there are numerous topics to explore because in both situations one is examining life: in all of its messy connections and subtleties, interconnections and complexities. Or as Taylor (1977) noted, "the meaning of a situation for an agent may be full of confusion and contradiction; but the adequate depiction of this contradiction makes sense of it" (p. 109).

My writing has been a partial depiction of the confusion and contradiction which family photographs hold. To tease out the significance of family photographs has required me to examine only partial connections, subtleties, interconnections, and complexities. And even in the explorations that I have made, the depth of the discussion could press wider and

deeper.

This spiralling out and down is perhaps the *sunyan*, the void which Barthes (1981) also encountered. It is the nature of the hermeneutic circle, the attempt to make a lucid interpretation of a web of connections that draws in the interpreter, the viewer, the voyeur, the one who is curious about knowing his or her identity in the richest and most complex sense.

Throughout the process of exploring this topic, I have encountered new information and also old, but it has been the merging of my interpretative encounter with the text of family photographs which has enabled me to come to an answer to my initial question. Family photographs are visual artifacts of the personal world which we all share.

This seems like a sparse answer, but its breadth and depth is substantially complex for the snapshot forces one to see differently what one, lives.

By simply isolating a group of forms and textures within the arbitrary rectangular frame provided by the edges of its glass plate or film, a snapshot forces us to see, and thereby teaches us to see, differently than we could have seen through our own unaided eyes, and also differently than people had been taught to see by pre-photographic pictorial conventions. The peculiarity of snapshot photographs is that the hierarchy of images within its frame is not ordained by the picture maker.

Whatever hierarchy of forms appears in the snapshot is ordained by the indiscriminate neutrality of light. Once people began to look at snapshots they had taken, they therefore began to see as significant a great many things whose significance they had never seen before. (Kouwenhoven, 1974, pp. 107-108)

As a young girl, lying on my tummy upon my grandparents carpet, I was exploring my identity, my place in this world. I was curious to know of the past and of times and places accessible only through stories, either oral or visual. And often the two types of narrative conflated in my grandparent's living room and a richer drama unfolded before me. This was, and is, the drama of life and all of its latent messages that await a curious interpreter.

Today as I wrote these final words, I made another small discovery about the history of photography: the early hand cameras used for snapshots were commonly called "detective cameras" (Kouwenhoven, 1974, p. 107). In searching out the significance of family photographs, I have traced out clues, connections and interpretations to create a depiction of the confusion and contradictions that involve us in the trinity of photography as subjects, photographers and viewers of our visual life writings.

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