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The Family Album: An Inquiry

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THE FAMILY ALBUM: AN INQUIRY

[excerpts from a longer series]

Stephen Perkins

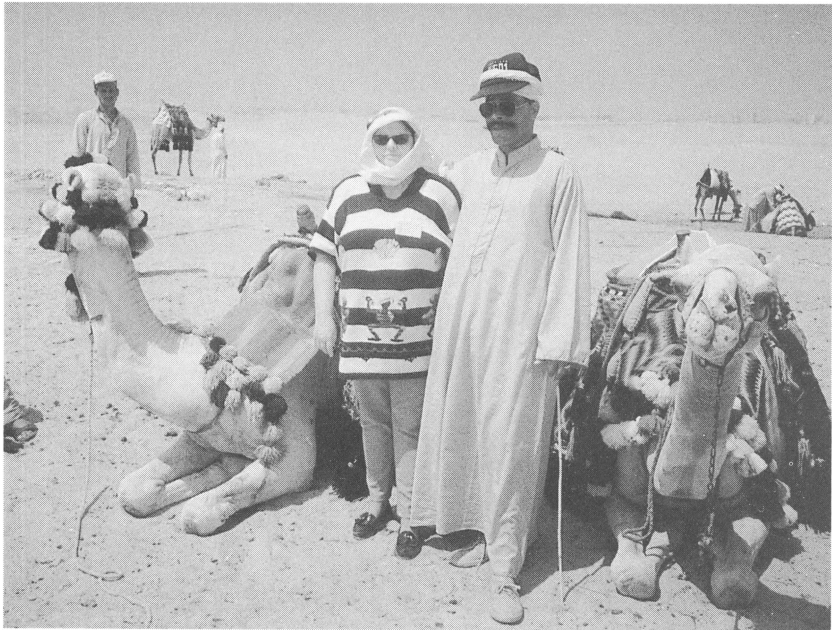
These photographs are part of a family album that was created during a trip to Egypt and England during the summer of 1995. For my wife Arda it was a journey home to Egypt for the first time in a number of years and for me it was also a return home to England after a similar absence. For Nina, our American born daughter, it was one long adventure.

Deeply imbedded in family albums are three interlocking themes. *Home* is the physical place and emotional location in which they are rooted, *family* (in all its variegated forms) comprise the subjects of family albums and the theme of *return* speaks to how we use the family album—always coming back to re-construct these sequences of photographs. But of course it's more complex than that and it's my hope that the accompanying texts will reveal some of the complexities of these rich and ubiquitous symbolic communications.



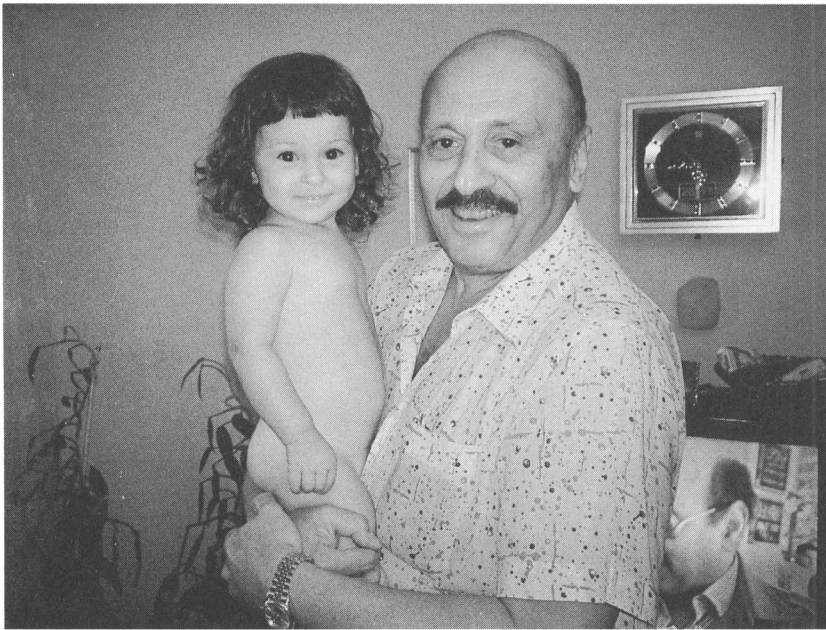
Family photographs may affect to show us our past, but what we do with them—how we use them—is really about today, not yesterday. These traces of our former lives are pressed into service in a never-ending process of making, remaking, making sense of, our selves—now.

—Annette Kuhn, “Remembrance,” in *Family Snaps*, p. 22



What else is it but tourism that takes us to the place of the 'other' and subjects it to our 'othering' gaze, where we are geographically distant from home, but also ideologically distanced from the 'other' despite actual proximity. Tourism is, of course an extension of the very economic and ideological process of metropolitization.

—Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893*, p. 60



...photography becomes a rite of family life just when, in the industrializing countries of Europe and American, the very institution of the family starts undergoing radical surgery...photography came along to memorialize, to restate symbolically, the imperiled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life.

—Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 8



I'm proud to know how to pick up the camera and take pictures. The gringo tourists always come to take pictures of us when we're making pots. I guess they want to show how we make such beautiful things. When I was small I was excited by it. I never thought about why they were doing it. Now I'm ashamed to think I might look funny or distracted in pictures that might end up in a newspaper or a movie.

—Columbian girl in Wendy Ewald's
"Portrait of a Village," in *Family Snaps*, p. 84



The private photograph—the portrait of a mother, a picture of a daughter, a group photo of one’s own team—is appreciated and read in a context *which is continuous with that from which the camera removed it.*

—John Berger, *About Looking*, p. 51