

Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT Digital Institutional Repository

Theses

3-1-1986

The photographic snapshot

Michael Simon

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.rit.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Simon, Michael, "The photographic snapshot" (1986). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology.
Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the RIT Libraries. For more information, please contact repository@rit.edu.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

by

Michael Simon

March 1986

Master of Fine Arts Thesis
Rochester Institute of Technology

Thesis Board

Richard D. Zakia

Chairman: Richard Zakia, Professor,
School of Photographic Arts & Sciences,
Rochester Institute of Technology

Members: Elliott Rubenstein, Associate Professor,
School of Photographic Arts & Sciences,
Rochester Institute of Technology

Keith A. Boas

Keith Boas
Eastman Kodak Company, Supervising Editor,
Commercial Publications

CONTENTS

Thesis Board	1
Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	3
Snapshots -- a Definition	4
Photographs as art	6
The ubiquitousness of the snapshot	12
Survey of past definitions of snapshots	15
A definition of folk art	25
Photographic snapshots as folk art	34
Snapshots and the media	44
Snapshots as ritual	55
The Evolution of the Snapshot since 1880	66
Enjoying Photographs.....	79
Bibliography.....	103
List of Illustrations.....	107

Acknowledgements

My thesis board, Richard Zakia, Elliott Rubenstein, and Keith Boas, have been of great assistance in the preparation of this essay and have supported my work through its many drafts. For their contribution I owe them many thanks.

In addition, I should like to thank all those who helped with comments, suggestions, and who read the manuscript in its many stages. Kasey Grier of the Strong Museum in Rochester, New York, provided many insightful comments as did my colleagues at Beloit College, Larry Breitborde, Dan Shea, Clint McCown, Thomas McBride, and Mary Weismantel. Brock Spencer helped with some of the bibliographic details.

George Talbot, David Mandel, and Jack Holzeater of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin provided ideas, comments while the Society's Iconographic Collection served as the source of many illustrations.

I owe special thanks to my wife, Carol, for her willingness to do repeated proofreadings; to my daughter, Amy, for her suggestions for several references and sources; and to my son, Nicholas, for his encouragement.

Introduction

The following essays attempt to illuminate the photographic snapshot. The first piece aims to define the word and the concept and suggests sources for its imagery. The second creates a historical overview of the snapshot's visual evolution over the last hundred years. The collection ends with twenty-one short pieces interpreting individual images.

Snapshots -- a Definition

Extended inquiry into the secrets of linear perspective, begun with use of the camera obscura during the Renaissance, and repeated chemical experiments in the eighteenth century led to the development of photography and its presentation to the public in 1839. The process, as it was then known, required considerable perseverance and dedication. Plates had to be made just before exposure and developed immediately thereafter. In spite of this, the medium's use spread rapidly as people found in this process an excellent tool for faithful documentation of family, friends, famous people, important buildings, and places most individuals were not likely to visit.

Because the process remained difficult to handle until the eighteen-eighties, only professionals, those who made their livelihood by making photographs, used the camera. There were a few exceptions in the persons of devoted amateurs, but their devotion made them more like photographers of vocation than casual users of the photographic process. Around 1880 dry-plate materials, which could be purchased in a store ready made, appeared on the market and changed the use of the photographic process forever. From that time on a growing majority of photographic images have been made by casual users of the process, usually called "snapshooters."

Although the products of these snapshooters form an important part of most people's lives -- almost everyone makes and owns snapshots, -- these images have received little academic attention. Cultural anthropologists have tried to create definitions, sociologists have used these pictures for field studies, photographers have used them as source material for their work; but there has been no attempt in the past to tie these strands into a unified structure. This essay aims to do so.

To place snapshots into a context, these pages will attempt to define photography's relationship to traditional media, collate past definitions of the photographic snapshot, do the same for folk art, and then define snapshots as contemporary folk art. The essay shall conclude with the description of the societal functions of the snapshot, functions that parallel those of the traditional folk arts.

Photographs as art

All photographs have posed special problems for the critic accustomed to works made in traditional media. In addressing these issues, John L. Ward points out the dissimilarities that have distinguished photographs from other two-dimensional images. He cites the impersonality, the indiscriminateness, the comparative ease of the photographic process as the difficulties traditional aestheticians could not resolve; then he emphasized the most difficult point, the credibility or verisimilitude of the photograph. According to this argument, photographs are so realistic that viewers look at the subject matter rather than at the image itself. The viewers see the picture as a frame through which reality may be examined directly.¹

One must emphasize that this question did not arise with the arrival of photography. Before the introduction of photographic processes painting and drawing served the function of representation. Through the verisimilitude of paintings and drawings arose the question which has now become a problem in the criticism of photography. E.H. Gombrich speaks of this when he describes traditional concepts of art. Writing about the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of art, he states,

_____ The implication of its definition of an image is

¹ John L. Ward; The Criticism of Photography as Art, University of Florida, Gainesville, 1970, pp. 2 - 3

that the artist "imitates" the "external form" of the object in front of him, and the beholder, in his turn, recognizes the "subject" of the work of art by this "form." This is what might be called the traditional view of representation. Its corollary is that a work of art will either be a faithful copy, in fact a complete replica, of the object presented, or will involve some degree of "abstraction." ²

Now that photography has taken on the task of representation, photography has become the medium that must face the confusion between the subject matter and the image.

In the eyes of many viewers, the photograph becomes the thing itself. The information photographic images carry appears to be the actual event, pictured, rather than a report of an event. William M. Ivins, Jr. in his influential book, Prints and Visual Communication, writes, "...at any given moment the accepted report of an event is of greater importance than the event, for what we think about or act upon is the symbolic report and not the concrete event itself." ³ Blurring the distinction between the subject matter, or event, and the report of that subject matter has confused people understandably. When ordinary people started using the photographic process for making personal records and mementos -- snapshots --, the lack of distinction between the subject matter and the finished picture only helped to intensify the picture's memory-jogging properties. ⁴

² E.H.Gombrich; Meditations on a Hobby Horse, Phaidon, London, p. 1

³ William M. Ivins; Prints and Visual Communication, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1969, p.180

⁴ Walter Benjamin made the same point when he remarked that photography as a language system has taken the place of actual experience in determining one's world view.

The lack of distinction between the subject matter and the image poses serious problems. Without perceiving that the image is but a report, the viewer may consider the image as an exact reproduction carrying all the qualities of the original. If the photograph were a facsimile, it could be only as good or as bad as the photographed scene itself happened to be. Russel Sturgis, the art historian and critic, argued this point when he stated,

This is the essence of the photograph, that it preserves every record, with some drawbacks and shortcomings, of what is put before it. If that thing is artistic, the photograph, in an indirect and secondary way, becomes itself artistic, as the reflection of a man's face in the glass is the man himself; so far and no further. ⁵

In contradiction of this argument, one could stress that of the same event an infinite number of photographs may be made, each one, ultimately, reflecting to a greater or lesser extent the photographer's point of view in addition to showing the physical properties of the subject matter. Hence the photograph is a report and not the event itself; just as a painting, a drawing, or a written description of the event is not the event but a report. Making these distinctions is essential as most photographs confuse with their convincing verisimilitude. ⁶

The surface of a painting or the pencil lines in a drawing remind the viewer of the hand-made origin of the depiction; the

⁵ Kenyon Cox and Russel Sturgis, "The Lesson of the Photograph," Scribner's Magazine 23, (1898): 639.

⁶ See: Joel Snyder and Niel Walsh Allen; "Photography, Vision, and Representation," Critical Inquiry, Autumn 1975, pp. 143-169

hand made quality does not have the convincing power of the mechanical faithfulness of a photograph. Trompe-l'oeil paintings use this very device to fool the eye. In such photograph-like paintings the painter teases the viewer to accept the painting as if it were the subject matter. Even nearly a century and a half after the introduction of photography, viewers still find the seeming faithfulness of photographic images confusing. Because of this apparent realism, many art historians and critics have called photography a "handmaiden of art" or relegated it to be a lesser form of expression than images made by the human hand which are more evidently the results of the artist's vision.

Photographs, of course, are more convincingly realistic than pictures in other media; but, at the same time, they are, basically, two-dimensional representations just as are paintings or drawings. Photographs follow the visual patterns that have evolved during the history of art. Although the process implies a stronger relationship between the pictured event and the resulting picture, the form photographers have used to organize their images follows traditional patterns. This combination has made photographs truly revolutionary. It has allowed viewers to examine subject matter distant in space and time and, at the same time, to contemplate the photographer's point of view. Elliott Rubenstein wrote in this context that,

Photography as a complex symbol system of retrieving cultural memory has radically transformed the nature of the historical process itself. Since Daguerre introduced his invention to the world, the "mirror with a memory" has become a paradigm for future

generations; photography has eroded the old world of appearances and has developed a fresh visual language as a tool to create a new cultural reflection.⁷

This new visual language has served well to retain memories, to document with certainty faces and appearances; as a matter of fact, it has done so well as to make the distinction between the subject matter and its image less apparent than that had been with less mechanical modes of reproduction.

Ward and several other writers since have come to grips with these issues and have supplied the definitions necessary for the inclusion of photographs with traditional media, but even Ward and most of his colleagues have addressed only photographs made by self-conscious artists whose aim was to make images with content or photographs in which viewers have found some deeper meaning.⁸ Hardly any writer has spoken of the consideration of photographs made merely for their ability to retain important moments of personal lives, to describe beloved faces at a certain moment, and to enshrine important personal events.

Comments on photographic prints made by those who selected photography as a vocation did not completely resolve the theoretical difficulties that arose when critics attempted

⁷ Elliott Rubenstein; "Determinants in Employing Photo-Historical Texts in Teaching," Symposium 1981 The Proceedings and Papers from the symposium held in Bath, England, April 9 - 12, 1981, by the European Society for the History of Photography. p.61

⁸ According to Ward, the definition: "Perhaps we must simply say that a work of art is anything which is separable from nature and which is contemplated for that portion of its meaning which may be intuitively experienced apart from its practical value" allows photographs to be included in an aesthetic construct along with traditional media. (Ward, p. 23)

comparing photographic prints with drawings, paintings, or prints made by the traditional processes -- etching, engraving, lithography --, but, at least, they allowed certain parallels. In contrast, when ordinary people started to use the photographic process, their products, snapshots, had no parallel among the traditional media. Snapshots, as they had no precedent in experience, have been seen, enjoyed, but rarely commented upon with any consequence.

The ubiquitousness of the snapshot

Few contemporary objects are as ubiquitous and as little noticed as photographic snapshots. Nearly everybody makes them and even those who do not make them own them. Possibly, some small groups, like the Amish and Orthodox Jews, have little use for these graven images; but most people living in at least moderately industrialized countries during the second half of the twentieth century make and own snapshots. "It would be almost impossible today to locate a human being in America who has not been photographed," write Ken Graves and Mitchell Payne, and their statement holds true in most countries where the cost of photographic technology is within common reach.⁹

Snapshots exist in many contexts. In many households, snapshots occupy neat pages in albums, illustrating the life of the family through time. "Family photographs fill the desk drawers, albums, walls, attic chests, closeted boxes of our homes in ways that personal diaries, writings, or documents never have and perhaps never will."¹⁰ As the Bible held in the past the significant dates in a family's life, now births, confirmations, birthdays, graduations from college are marked by snapshots

⁹ Ken Graves and Mitchell Payne; American Snapshots, Scrimshaw Press, Oakland, California 1977 p. 5

¹⁰ Christopher Musello; "Studying the Home Mode: An Exploration of Family Photography and Visual Communications." Studies in Visual Communication. Volume 6, Number 1, Spring 1980 p. 23

pasted on pages of albums. Where the snapshots have not been edited and affixed onto pages, they exist in shoeboxes and are viewed with no less excitement and reverence for the lack of organization. For those away from home, the wallet serves as the repository wherein snapshots are held.

Whether framed expensively to sit upon the mantle or to be carried frayed from many viewings, snapshots are treasured. Gunter Grass's description may appear exaggerated by those who live unthreatened lives, but the emotions he expresses differ only in degree from those of casual snapshot viewers.

I am guarding a treasure. Through all the bad years consisting only of calendar days, I have guarded it, hiding it when I was not looking at it; during the trip in the freight car I clutched it to my breast, and when I slept, Oskar slept on his treasure, his photograph album. What should I do without this family cemetery which makes everything so perfectly clear and evident.¹¹

That in the course of living a normal, average life snapshots are hardly noticed proves their ubiquitousness. Now that snapshots have become everpresent, they are assumed to have always existed and are remarked less than most other trappings of daily life. In the search through literature one finds few, if any, workable definitions for these photographic images, possibly because they have come to be amidst little conscious contemplation; but references to snapshots exist in many novels, and they appear in comic book stories and in films.

¹¹ Gunter Grass; The Tin Drum, Vintage, New York, 1964, p.

A group of artifacts as ubiquitous as snapshots must play a significant role in contemporary civilization, but so far few writers have given them the necessary notice. The aim, then, is to place snapshots into a context that should allow the understanding of the content these images carry and the form within which that content comes to be communicated.

Survey of past definitions of snapshots

To develop a deeper understanding of the photographic snapshot, it becomes necessary to survey the past definitions that have been applied to this group of photographs.

In contemporary usage, the word snapshot has many different meanings. It describes, primarily, photographs in albums and in shoeboxes, but the word has acquired many other uses. For illustration, one may cite a paragraph from Fernand Brandel's The Structures of Everyday Life, in which the translator uses the word to indicate significant detail, a meaning that must have come from the experience of observing photographic snapshots.

Through little details, travellers' notes, a society stands revealed. The ways people eat, dress, or lodge, at the different levels of society are never a matter of indifference. And these snapshots can also point out contrasts and disparities between one society and another which are not superficial.¹²

Starting a more systematic search with general references, dictionaries provide concise definitions. The American College Dictionary defines snapshots: "1, an instantaneous photograph, and 2, a quick shot taken without deliberate aim." Webster's Third International Dictionary defines the word: "1, a casual photograph made by rapid exposure and usually with a small hand held camera; 2, a brief transitory view, a mere segment." These

¹² Fernand Brandel; The Structures of Everyday Life, Harper & Row, New York, 1979, p.29

dictionary definitions show the common understanding which, however, provides little help for a deeper insight; but not only such general sources as dictionaries supply information of so little precision. The available recent scholarly efforts add scanty information.

In the Aperture issue dedicated to the snapshot, Jonathan Green opens his introductory essay by stating: "the word snapshot is the most ambiguous, controversial word in photography since the word art."¹³ While this is of little help, it hints of the inherent difficulty of this task. In the same volume several photographers approach the subject with limited success, their attempts elaborating on the information the dictionaries have provided. These defined the photographic snapshot by the time it took to make it, and by the lack of "deliberate aim" on the part of the photographer.¹⁴

On reading that issue of Aperture, the dictionary, the encyclopedia, and other pertinent sources, it becomes evident that snapshot as a word has many different meanings, that the very word has been borrowed; and in the process of use no one has made the effort to precisely define its meaning. The word comes from hunting, originally. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the snapshot as "a quick or hurried shot taken without deliberate

¹³ Aperture 19:1, p. 3

¹⁴ The "Snapshot" issue of Aperture, Aperture 19:1, although done with the best intentions, hopelessly confuses the issue by filling its pages not only with illuminating quotes by photographers but also with photographs done in the snapshot style by them. As shall be seen later in this essay, the form in itself does not define the snapshot, and the photographers in the Aperture essay borrow nothing more.

aim, esp. one at a rising bird or quickly moving animal." The actual word appears first in 1808 in a Col. Hawker's Diary, published in 1893. That date implies that the sense of the word in its original hunting context had not been in use long at the time when photography appeared, although the name of snap gun, a gun using a fire lock mechanism, dates back to the seventeenth century.¹⁵ When the hunter carries his gun loaded and cocked, then he is ready to make a snap shot; when the photographic plates became sensitive enough to hand-hold the camera, then the photographic snapshot became a possibility.

Sir John Herschel first used the word in a photographic context in an article he wrote in 1860 for the Photographic News. In this first application of the word snapshot to a photographic task, Herschel implies rapid exposure. "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."¹⁶

However, this definition is not very helpful as, at the present time, most photographs are made with hand-held cameras ready cocked for the quarry. If only the original definition of the term were used today, then most photographs should deserve the name: snapshots. But by now this term has acquired additional connotations, so the word conveys a more inclusive group of images than all those made from the hip with a pre-loaded camera.

¹⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, Snap-work

¹⁶ Photographic News, May 13, 1860

On reading about photographs, examining the available contemporary sources, and asking people what they believed the word snapshot meant, the following pattern has emerged. Several definitions were based on the intent of the photographer. If the photographer intends to make an image to record simple events of life, then the resulting image becomes a snapshot.¹⁷ However, this definition leaves much to be desired; there are many situations for which this definition does not apply. What are then the photographs made by professional photographers, photojournalists, street photographers? Their photographs, like the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Joel Meyerowitz, Mary Ellen Mark, and those of many others have the intent to show people's lives, but the resulting images, according to the many other connotations attached to the word, could not be called snapshots.

Some have stated that snapshots are made by amateurs. "...snapshots are defined as photographic pictorial forms, generally made by nonprofessional photographers,..."¹⁸ ¹⁹ This definition, of course, contradicts the previous point according

¹⁷ Quotes from statements by Beloit College students, 1985: "When I think of a snapshot, I think of the family on vacation ... the snapshot: the ideal way to capture those precious moments." (Sonya Bowker)

¹⁸ Richard Chalfen, "Redundant Imagery: Some Observations on the Use of Snapshots In American Culture," Journal of American Culture, Volume 4, Spring 1981, No. 1

¹⁹ Quotes from statements by Beloit College students, 1985: "A snapshot is a photograph taken by an amateur photographer." (Kathe Schneider) -- "When I hear the word snapshot, I immediately think of an amateur photographer. ... They are not thought-out pictures as pictures taken by an experienced photographer. ... people having fun with the camera for the purpose of capturing an event." (Jennifer Taylor)

to which the intent defines the snapshot. If one is to define the word amateur, then another ambiguous term appears in the place of the word snapshot. Who are amateurs? Today with automatic cameras on hand, everybody becomes a photographer after having purchased a camera and having read the instruction booklet. How does one separate amateurs from other photographers?

One should create another difficult task by positioning amateurs against professionals. Professionals make their living through the craft; but there are many photographers who make excellent photographs for reasons other than financial reward. The term amateur is so ambiguous in itself that it should be a flimsy foundation on which to build a definition; but if that were not enough, one could point out many professional photographers who go home and make snapshots indistinguishable from the snapshots janitors, doctors, or sailors make.

Others have said that snapshots are photographs made with simple cameras.²⁰ The Kodak, as a generic term, comes to people's lips. If the question is turned around, it shall

²⁰ On examining the photographic output of the last quarter century, it shall appear that numerous photographers of significant stature have turned to simple equipment for making photographs. While some of these images employ the visual conventions associated with snapshots, many others utilize for artistic purposes the unsharpness of simple lenses inherent in inexpensive cameras. See David Featherstone, "The Diana Show," Untitled 21, Friends of Photography, Carmel, California, and Nancy Rexroth; Iowa, Violet Press, 1977. Jerald Maddox in "Photography as Folk Art," Van Deren Coke, ed., One Hundred Years of Photographic History, p. 105, writes, "Perhaps the only positive aspect of this basic folk photography that comes to mind (other than the pleasure it gave to its makers) is that it has a stylistic influence on the work of creative photographers."

quickly appear that while snapshots often originate in Kodak Instamatic, Kodak Brownie, or other inexpensive cameras, expensive, more complex equipment can also produce snapshots; and photographs that could not be called snapshots have originated from inexpensive, simple-to-use equipment.²¹

Jonathan Green, in the Aperture issue on the snapshot, quotes several noted photographers whose statements contradict each other. Paul Strand says: "The snapshot ... is also more or less synonymous with the hand camera," while Lisette Model states: "Snapshots can be made with any camera -- old cameras, new cameras, box cameras, Instamatics and Nikons."²² ²³ If these quotes prove little else, they certainly establish that the equipment is not the deciding factor as to whether a photographic print is a snapshot or not.

Snapshots have also been defined on the basis of their subject matter. Some people have answered the question, "What is a snapshot?" by stating that snapshots are images that document family events, the faces of loved ones. "From the beginnings the snapshot has had two basic characteristics: a constant focus on family life and an informal, casual style ...,"

²¹ Eastman Kodak Company fostered the use of the word KODAK as a generic name for its inexpensive cameras and as a verb describing the action of making a quick, instantaneous exposure with such a camera from the turn of the century until the 1930s. Since then the policy has changed for trademark protection reasons.

²² Aperture, 19:1, pp. 46,47

²³ Ibid, p.6

wrote Steven Halpern.²⁴ Certainly, in most cases snapshots do document such events, but they also may show other subjects which are identical with photographs that could not be called snapshots. The family as subject matter is not the sole domain of snapshots. Snapshots may show other subjects; and photographs showing the family are not necessarily snapshots.

From many responses, it appears that one could define the snapshot on the basis of its informality, but informality is not a measurable quantity. Besides, so many journalistic and illustrative photographs are informal in their approach that that quality should not serve as the deciding factor whether a photograph is a snapshot or not.²⁵ To these attempts to classify snapshots, one may add the common belief that photographic prints that are awkward, with which something is "wrong" could be collected under this heading. Sandy Skoglund expressed this view in a talk she gave at the Rochester Institute of Technology during the spring of 1985. Trying to describe a photograph that looked like a "mistake," she called it a snapshot.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 66

²⁵ Quotes by Beloit College students, 1985: "...moment's notice...a sort of impromptu feel within the snapshot ... separates it from a portrait photo or some other well-orchestrated picture." (Mark Treat); "In a snapshot, there is no real premeditated planning for composition, placement of objects ... A snapshot requires a certain amount of spontaneity." (Tracy Beaudin); "A snapshot is an informal photograph taken quickly and easily with a camera." (Sonya Bowker); "An informal, spontaneous record ..." (Cathy Kuble); "...people having fun with the camera for the purpose of capturing the event." (Jennifer Taylor); "...snapshots are informal..." (Kathi Greenlee)

From the previous paragraphs it appears that all previous attempts have not gained a clear definition. It has become evident that one cannot define the snapshot by its maker, the equipment used, the subject matter, or by the maker's intent. One would, however, make a serious mistake by discarding these ideas. It seems that a simple, clear, precise definition does not exist. Paul Strand states his qualms rather clearly: "I have always taken the position that the word snapshot doesn't really mean anything."²⁶

Paul Strand's statement may imply futility for a search of a definition of the photographic snapshot or it may indicate that past attempts approached the question from the wrong angle. All past definitions have aimed to define the snapshot visually, and that very issue has been the source of the confusion. Snapshots may look like mistakes, they may appear to be the result of brilliant insight, or, most commonly, they may be pedestrian products of people without special sensitivity. Artifacts of such a wide range do not easily fit into a single pigeonhole.

To understand the problem, one must consider that it is quite unlikely that an untrained person, one with no special talent for drawing, should, on doodling, come up with a brilliant work of art. A child sitting by the typewriter, randomly hitting the keys, has little probability of writing a novel. A person doodling on a piece of music paper has little chance of producing playable music. The photographic camera allows just such fortuitous accidents to happen. Researchers examining large

²⁶ Aperture 19:1, p. 46

numbers of snapshots have repeatedly been startled by the wonderful images untrained and otherwise unlucky photographers have produced. Because of these happy accidents the photographic camera allows, snapshots may not be defined by their appearance alone.

And still, snapshots, on the whole, show a similarity to each other that is insistent and indicates that they are definitely a group of images with common properties. Michael Lesy speaks about this phenomenon at length, and most others who have examined large numbers of snapshots carefully have also come to this conclusion.²⁷ One does not need to be a photographic historian with special interest in the photographic snapshot to notice that these images have some common denominator; people with interest in contemporary objects observe this commonality, as the following quote indicates. The piece appeared in the New Yorker as the introductory paragraph to an article describing a mathematics conference at New York University, a topic rather distant from the photographic snapshot, but the writer perceived the visual similarities that distinguish snapshots and date them.

Given that superficialities age at an astounding rate, so that a twenty-year-old snapshot of, say, a pretty young woman at a picnic will show her to sit in a different fashion (legs folded under, back straight), and even to smile somewhat differently, from a comparable young woman of the present day,...²⁸

²⁷ Michael Lesy; Time Frames, Pantheon Books, New York, p. xii

²⁸ "Old Math;" The New Yorker, November 4, 1985, p. 35

If snapshots may not be defined by their maker, by the equipment used, by the subject matter, by the maker's intent, or by their appearance, then the only likely locus of definition may be in the photographer's attitude. Possibly, snapshots are the folk art aspect of photography. To make this argument, folk art must be defined and then that definition applied to snapshots.

A definition of folk art

Objects of fine art could be described if not by their power or their inherent message, at least by their social function.

In our society a first criterion, crude but fairly accurate, of art is access to the art market. Objects belonging to that network are art objects. ...Beyond the fine arts level, there is no generally accepted systematic classification, and the word "art" denotes a body of methods and techniques oriented toward the performance of a set of activities.²⁹

Because of this use of the term "art," the term "folk art" does not denote a group of objects with precision.

From a survey of literature, it seems that the definition of folk art is almost as equivocal as the definition of the snapshot. Everyone seems to know what folk art is, and many cultural anthropology texts use the term as if there were a shared understanding on the meaning of the concept. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find a definition on which the literature agrees.

Harry R. Silver speaks of this problem when he writes,

A survey of literature on the anthropology of art reveals tremendous variation in those terms used to describe the actual materials under investigation. "Primitive," "tribal," "non-Western," and "traditional"

²⁹ Jacques Maquet; "Introduction to Aesthetic Anthropology," A McCaleb Module in Anthropology, Addison-Wesley, Phillipines, 1971, p. 4

have all been so employed. However, each of these terms leaves something to be desired.

and then he continues,

The terms "folk," "native," and ethnic art also have common currency in the field. These categories suggest minority traditions operating outside of, but not totally divorced from, dominant or "great" civilizations.³⁰

With these thoughts in mind, it becomes evident that one must define folk art so that such ambiguities should not interfere with the precision of this essay. It seems that the literature does not provide a definition of folk art that should allow the inclusion within that term of objects like snapshots, advertising jingles, and other aspects of contemporary popular culture made by nameless individuals or by the public at large, and by which future generations of anthropologists shall know -- besides the more consciously made fine art, architecture and music -- the civilization of the twentieth century.

Although a dictionary may not be the most authoritative source for serious definitions, one can find insight on its pages. Webster's Third International Dictionary defines folk art as, "... the traditional typically anonymous art of the people that is an expression of community life and is distinguishable from academic or self-conscious cosmopolitan expression." Southwest Indian women, for example, did not consciously approach

³⁰ Harry R. Silver; "Ethnoart", Annual Review of Anthropology, 1979. 8:267-307 pp. 267 -268. Silver's footnote: Clearhout, A.G.H. 1965. The concept of primitive applied to art. Curr. Anthropol. 6:432-38

the decorating of pots; they did not seriously analyze the patterns in which they wove their baskets. The patterns existed in their minds on the border between conscious thought and subconscious response. The patterns existed closely enough to consciousness to have been repeated and to have evolved with time, but not so closely that radical, personal changes would have occurred in the patterns' evolution. Folk art is the expression of people's need for decoration and for ritual purposes at any time in history. Through decoration, individuals have marked their environment and their surroundings and have created icons.³¹

Webster's definition contains the implication that "academic" art is "selfconscious" while folk art is not. In support of this statement one may quote Emil Stephan who commented that he "considers all ornament as representation and sees the origin of art in that unconscious mental process by which the form appears as distinct from the content of visual expression."³² The unconsciousness of form is important, as shall be seen later, for the argument that is to follow.

If finding precise definitions of the term folk art is difficult, statements about primitive art are easier to come by.

³¹ "...Bunzel ... concluded that Pueblo potters were 'entirely unconscious' of the principles of design their pots exemplified." Robert Redfield quoting Bunzel in "Art and Icon," Charlotte M. Otten, ed.; Anthropology and Art, American Museum of Natural History, Natural History Press, Garden City, New York, 1971, p. 59

³² Emil Stephan; Sudseekunst, Berlin, 1907 as quoted by Franz Boas in Primitive Art, Dover, New York, 1955, p. 15

Robert Redfield attempts to distinguish primitive and modern art when he writes,

The very modern artist creates or invents his own style, one peculiar to himself, or characteristic of his small group, his "movement." He is self-conscious about this; he knows he is departing from the familiar systems of forms to find fresh ones; he and his fellows are creating styles. A Picasso may keep on creating them. But the primitive artist is, of course, making works of art within a highly formalized, intensely local and very long established style. If the primitive artist works in true primitive isolation, he is probably largely unaware of the qualities of the style he follows; he uses it as he does his language, rightly, and without self-consciousness.³³

As the previous quotes imply, folk art is often equated with primitive art and seen in the context of distant self-contained societies in which communally shared concepts of art serve as a unifying force. Folk art often appears, even to those studying the field, as something distant in space and time. Michael Owen Jones expressed this view when he quoted Jean Lipman's definition of American folk art as: "'A free artistic expression of the very spirit of the American democracy,' which bloomed when 'America came into its own as a nation, when its American independence won in the Revolution'; but the toxic effect of photography, mass printing and machine production' caused this flowering of

³³ Robert Redfield; "Art and Icon," Charlotte M. Otten, ed; Anthropology and Art, The Natural History Press, Garden City, New York, 1971, p.48

³⁴ Jean Lipman, "What is American Folk Art? A Symposium," ANTIQUES, 57 (1950), 359; and Erwin O. Christensen, AMERICAN CRAFTS AND FOLK ARTS (Washington, D.C., 1964) as quoted in: Michael Owen Jones; "The Study of Folk Art: Reflection on Images," Folklore Reprint Series, Folklore Students' Association, Bloomington, Indiana, Volume 1, Number 9, March 1974, p. 2

American folk art to wither by the mid-19th century."³⁴ and Jones continues,

the hypothesis that folk art died because of industrialization is disconfirmed by the present perpetuation of revival of traditional art after the basis of society generally has shifted from agricultural subsistence to industrial plenty, and by its existence among people who are not backward and isolated, but among whom these units of expressive behavior and these styles, designs, and techniques of construction usually called folklore or folk art continue to be learned and utilized primarily in situations of first-hand interaction, as in the past.³⁵

According to Jones there exists a strong belief that folk art is of old. He sums up by saying, "We are often told ... that American folk art was a short-lived growth in the past."³⁶

The Encyclopedia of Anthropology, published by Harper & Row, speaks of the same issue under the heading of "Folklore."

The concept of folklore varies in different countries according to the notion of folk held in those countries. In 19th-century Europe, the folk was defined as the illiterate in a literate society -- that is, people who could not read and write in a society which had a written language. Even in the 20th century, some scholars restrict the term folk to rural peasant society.³⁷

In the introduction to Ethnic and Tourist Arts, Nelson H. H. Graburn writes in the same vein, when he speaks of the definition of folk art

³⁵ Jones, p. 3 Jones's footnote: This is what Bunzel discovered in her study of THE PUEBLO POTTER; see also Jones, "Culture Change," and Jones' review of Gerbrands' ASMAT.

³⁶ Jones, p. 2

³⁷ David Hunter and Phillip Whitten, eds.; Encyclopedia of Anthropology, Harper & Row, New York, 1976, p. 173

... "folk" art was a concept invented in the nineteenth century by which the literate upper classes of such stratified societies as those in Europe and India could label the arts and crafts of the lower classes, the often non-literate rural peoples who followed local as well as national traditions.³⁸

The attitude Jones, Graburn, and the Encyclopedia of Anthropology describe is more pastoralist than scientific. It is imbued with a nostalgia for the past, a past with "good" days when people lived in harmony with nature. Such an assertion is, of course, patently wrong. Urbanization did not kill the soul of people either during the last two hundred years or in Roman and Greek cities two millenia ago. At the mentioning of the term folk art, one is likely to have the image of a quaintly dressed older man, woman, or a child in torn clothing whittling wood, throwing pots on a primitive wheel, or an appropriately attired woman embroidering folk costumes, although a person in her tee-shirt or in his sport jacket taking a snapshot while standing in front of the Carousel in New York City's Central Park or photographing her or his child at Disney World or on a New England beach may also be making folk art.

Folk art is made at all times of human history, as the environment at any given time does not alter the human need for

³⁸ Nelson H. H. Graburn; Ethnic and Tourist Arts, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976, p. 4

³⁹ Nathan Lyons has used the phrase "mark making," a phrase with special significance in the context of this essay.

⁴⁰ Richard March, in a lecture at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, on November 26, 1985, defined folk culture as the "information one learns with mother's milk," something "everyone learns in the normal context of life."

decoration and for making personal marks.³⁹ ⁴⁰ Because folk art springs from such strong emotional roots, it reflects the very essence of the community that created it. To support this position, one may quote the definition of folklore in the Encyclopedia of Anthropology according to which:

Folklore is autobiographical ethnography that provides a unique picture of a people from the inside-out rather than from the outside-in. In their folk music, folk art, and folk literature, people find a socially sanctioned outlet for anxiety as well as a prized means for expressing feelings of a sense of group identity. Hardly a survival, folklore is a viable functioning part of modern societies, ...⁴¹ ⁴²

In the process of writing cultural history, Robert Darnton perceived the same issue and commented,

Instead of following the high road of intellectual history, the inquiry leads into the unmapped territory known in France as l'histoire de mentalites. This genre had not yet received a name in English, but it might simply be called cultural history; for it treats our own civilization in the same way that anthropologists study alien cultures. It is history in the ethnographic grain.⁴³

Snapshots seem to exist on the border where cultural anthropology, art, ethnography, cultural history, and sociology

⁴¹ David Hunter and Phillip Whitten, eds.; Encyclopedia of Anthropology, Harper & Row, New York, 1976, p. 173

⁴² See the extensive discussion of this issue in Henry Glassie, Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1969

⁴³ Robert Darnton; The Great Cat Massacre, Vintage, Random House, New York, 1984, p. 3

meet. As Darnton indicates, no word has yet been assigned in English, to describe this concept.

Objects or ideas too close in time and space to the observer are often difficult to discern. Just as many brilliant people received no appreciation in their own time, contemporary folk art melts into the everyday cultural background. Because of this, the stylistic aspects of folk art are difficult to perceive for the maker of the object and even for the anthropologist without previous experience in the particular topic. Redfield writes about this dilemma,

But it is difficult for him who looks at such a work for the first time to see the style it represents. The system of forms within which this creation lies is strange to him; it takes time to see the style and to appreciate it. And this fact is the other half of the difficulty of the common viewer of primitive art. Neglecting the garden, because it is hidden from him, and trying to attend to the interest and beauty of the window, he is, at least at first, insensitive to the traditional forms within which this particular artist worked to produce this particular work of art. So the common viewer is blocked when he tries to see the work as icon, and he is at least much hindered when he tries to understand and appreciate it as a work of art.⁴⁴

Redfield speaks of particular folk artists, individuals who produce icons or saleable images for their particular societies. Artists occupy rather special positions within their societies. According to Harry R. Silver,

d'Azevedo distinguishes two polar "artist's

⁴⁴ Robert Redfield; "Art and Icon," Charlotte M. Otten, ed; Anthropology and Art, The Natural History Press, Garden City, New York, 1971, p. 48 - 49

ideals." In the first, "... artistry is a way of life, replete with an ideology and system of beliefs concerning the techniques and purposes of art as well as the personal conduct of the artist himself." ... In contrast, in the second type, artists are "... primarily oriented to the application of their creative ideas and skills in the elaboration of standard forms that meet ready public approval and provide an income.⁴⁵

If one accepts d'Azevedo's model, snapshooters do not fit either of the polar opposites described. One makes snapshots neither because of a personal stance or ideology nor for the purpose of earning an income. As a matter of fact, snapshot makers think very little of the aesthetic aspects of their photographic work.

Taking the argument just one step further allows one to see snapshots as folk art and all snapshooters as folk artists. Folk artists, like all other artists, have been treated with reverence in most societies; seeing the snapshooter as a folk artist eliminates the exclusivity of her or his position. If one calls all snapshooters folk artists, then few contemporary individuals do not deserve the title. While such a definition does not match well with past thoughts, it does make perfectly good sense. While folk artists until now have been defined by their social role, it seems to make more sense to define the social role of folk art and then include all those who make such aesthetic contributions on the list of folk artists.

⁴⁵ Harry R. Silver; "Ethnoart," Annual Review of Anthropology, 1979 8:267-307, Annual Reviews Inc. Silver's footnote: d'Azevedo, W.L. 1966. The Artist Archetype in Gola Culture. Reno: Univ. Nevada/Desert Re. Inst. p. 3

Photographic snapshots as folk art

Past efforts have only suggested possible relationships between photography and folk art. For this lack of research, one may find an explanation in what Melville Jacobs wrote about the work of the folklorist.

Almost everyone except the actual collector of non-Western folktale -- and sometimes even he -- has experienced boredom and frustration in trying to comprehend its content or warm up to its style. The collector himself may develop an appreciation of the tale only after he has studied it carefully and related it to its cultural milieu.⁴⁶

If there are such problems with the collection of folktales, a field with a long history of literary acceptance, there can be little wonder that the mounds of snapshots, without previous academic comment, elicit little intelligent response.

Michael Lesy attempted such explication in several books. In the introduction to Time Frames he attempted to explain the difficulty he had faced. "The Truth conveyed by the stories and the pictures ... is sometimes contradictory and always multivariate. It is the Truth of Paradox." He continues by calling snapshots, "Pictures that are both cliches and

⁴⁶ Melville Jacobs; The Anthropologist Looks at Myth, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1966, p. 3

⁴⁷ Michael Lesy; Time Frames, Pantheon Books, New York, p.xiv

archetypes, vulgar and miraculous, fact and fiction."⁴⁷ 48

In one of the few essays attempting to find connection between photography and folk art, Jerald Maddox points to the possibility of such a relationship, but he cites no references.

Folk art in the traditional sense is a well-established concept, and has been an area of scholarly study for some time. It has not, however, frequently been applied to photography, and yet there would appear to be a large amount of work that can be profitably considered only within this context.⁴⁹

Maddox's difficulties appear to stem from a lack of definition. He speaks of all photographs as folk art, an argument that should be well-nigh impossible to make. All images made by the same process do not necessarily fall into one category. Not all paintings are folk art nor are they all aesthetically significant objects. If one is to derive meaningful definitions, photographs must be sorted into sub-classifications.

Earlier paragraphs of this essay have compared photographs made by self-conscious photographers with photographic snapshots. A parallel can be found between the work of photographers who approach their medium consciously and the products of artists working in traditional media. If the same parallel could be found between folk art and the photographic snapshot, a workable

⁴⁸ Lesy collected snapshots and interviewed the snapshots' owners. In these lines he states that even the knowledge of background information is of little help in understanding snapshots.

⁴⁹ Jerald Maddox; "Photography as Folk Art," Van Deren Coke, ed. One Hundred Years of Photographic History, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1975, p. 105

definition may be at hand. If folk art may be defined as art in which the artist did not think of stylistic aspects consciously, in which the artist follows societally defined patterns, then snapshots are easily incorporated within that definition. One may contrast self-conscious art, in which the artist is aware of his or her locus within the art field, against the folk artist, who does what others have done for generations. Folk artists not only accept the making of the art as a traditional aspect of society but also accept without questioning the stylistic context within which they happen to be working.⁵⁰

A statement by Christopher Musello may provide good reason for including photographic snapshots into the group of objects generally classified as folk art. He speaks of the making of snapshots, "As a craft, it is transmitted largely on an informal basis through word of mouth and imitation. Products are employed unself-consciously in an ongoing process to meet daily needs, interests, and obligations."⁵¹ This is how the visual anthropologist sees the process of making what he calls "home mode photographs." To a large extent his definition, although made for the sake of greater clarity and specificity with a less ambiguous term than snapshot, parallels the purpose of this essay. Musello's definition directs toward folk art as he describes the transmission of the craft as informal, and the

⁵⁰ References in the previous chapter, the Definition of Folk Art, point to sources.

⁵¹ Christopher Musello; "Studying the Home Mode: An Exploration of Family Photography and visual Communications," Studies in Visual Communication. Volume 6, Number 1, Spring 1980, p. 23

employment of the pictures as unself-conscious. These parameters allow the inclusion of all snapshooters into the group one may call folk artists.

It is essential, at this juncture, to make clear that the term folk art does not necessarily refer to something especially beautiful. If beauty were the primary determining factor, many objects now covered by the term, including many snapshots, could not be called folk art. This qualification has support in the literature. Franz Boas writes,

The daubing of paint, the whittling of wood or bone, the flaking of stone do not necessarily lead to results that compel our admiration on account of their beauty. Nevertheless, all of them assume aesthetic values.⁵²

In support of his argument, Boas quotes Thurnwald, "Art, however inadequate its means may be, is a means of expression that belongs to mankind."⁵³

Art with so much emotion but with inconsistent polish may be hard to incorporate into a broader definition in which art is often equated with beauty. Besides being a response to the need for decoration, folk art also satisfies emotional needs. Tod Papageorge writes: "The eye which created the family album was the heart's eye, and by its innocence, its very love blindness, let Swerve and Fracture invade the domestic precincts to

⁵² Franz Boas; Primitive Art, Dover, New York, 1955, p. 10

⁵³ Richard Thurnwald; Handbuch der vergleichenden Psychologie, herausgegeben von Gustav Kafka, Vol. 1, p. 211 as quoted by Boas, p. 14

transform memento-portraits unto flat, half-cocked photographs."⁵⁴

While Papageorge's statement casts little direct light on the subject in this attempt to define the photographic snapshot, he introduces another word one finds repeatedly used in connection with snapshots. That word is innocence. Lisette Model emphasizes: "Innocence is the quintessence of the snapshot."⁵⁵ And while this word does not solve the puzzle, it points in a direction which may provide more success than the previous attempts. Snapshots, as has been seen, cannot be defined simply, according to the intent, equipment, subject matter, or by their maker. The sense of the snapshot is more elusive and ephemeral; it seems to reside more in the photographers' attitude than in any tangible factor.

John A. Kouwenhoven defines snapshots with these words: "Snapshots are predominantly photographs taken quickly with a minimum of deliberate posing on the part of the people represented and with a minimum of deliberate selectivity on the part of the photographer so far as vantage point and framing and cropping of the image are concerned."⁵⁶ Lisette Model used the word innocence; Kouwenhoven described the snapshot as "...taken quickly with a minimum of deliberate posing ..."

One may try to define the difference between those who use the camera thoughtfully, with an analytical set of mind, and those who use it as an automatic recording device. Those who see

⁵⁴ Aperture, 19:1, p. 25

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 6

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 106

the camera as a trap in which one catches the images of personally important events are people who do not question what goes on in the photographic process, they only think of the subjects, they seek only the end result. One may consider this to be the innocence Lisette Model talks about. The lack of analytical attitude toward the camera generates photographs dictated by the particular camera used and by the subconscious photographic style present in society.

This subconscious photographic style manifests itself in visual conventions snapshooters follow in their picture making. The choice of subject matter may be the simplest of these conventions to pinpoint. Be the subject family members, friends, possessions -- like pets, houses, cars, -- the snapshooter follows the norm. The visual organization of the frame also reflects subconsciously accepted patterns. These visual conventions dictate the position and size of the subject matter within the frame, and they prescribe points of visual emphasis, symmetry, and relationships between the background and the foreground.⁵⁷

Describing how snapshooters use cameras is a difficult task because the description shall be mainly negative. In contrast, the thoughtful use of camera can be defined in positive terms. When one sets out to make photographs that will reflect the photographer's view, vision, and thought, then the photographer

⁵⁷ The following section, The Evolution of the Snapshot since 1880, elaborates on these points. The history of the photographic snapshot has been the history of change in these visual elements.

will think of the subject matter's position in the frame, will think about the relationship of the subject matter to the final image. Framing becomes important, just as the technical aspects of the process do. However in the mind of the maker of the snapshot these questions hardly ever appear. The question -- the only question -- the snapshot maker finds important is whether the subject is plainly visible or not. Using an inexpensive, simple camera made especially for snapshooters or an expensive instrument like a complex single-lens-reflex camera to photograph family events, the photographer thinks only about the scene to be documented. The camera is a nuisance, something to be bothered with rather than a creative tool. The viewfinder becomes a window through which the photographer looks, aims at the event to be documented, and then pushes the button.

In the snapshooter's eyes the only part of the process that deserves attention in aiming the camera is to get the face, the faces or the objects, a new car, for instance, in their proper places. And here the word proper becomes significant. The properness of arrangement in the snapshot is not easily defined, although it seems to have a greater influence on the resulting photographs than does the equipment. In the communal mind exists an un verbalized expectation of what a snapshot ought to look like. Expectations like this one provide the framework within which folk art evolves a consistency.

This slow, semi-conscious evolution of imagery separates folk art from the more conscious fine art; and snapshots have been the folk art use of the photographic process. George

Devereux in his Art and Mythology: A General Theory defines art by stating: "...genuine art, whose language is, by definition, conventional."⁵⁸ If that is so, then the difference between folk art and fine art is, simply, whether or not the practitioners have considered and verbalized those conventions. Snapshooters, as has been seen, do not think of the process; they only think of the event to be documented, and, hence, keep their conventions undefined. If snapshots are defined as photographs in which the feedback process is subconscious, in which the photographer does not consciously learn from past mistakes, in which a common semi-consciousness exists rather than an individual analysis leading to a conscious synthesis, then the definition becomes clearer.

The evolution of ideas, among them folk art, must be examined within the particular society and social setting.

...fundamental point to be borne in mind is that each culture can be understood only as an historical growth determined by the social and geographical environment in which each people is placed and by the way in which it develops the cultural material that comes into its possession from the outside or through its own creativeness.⁵⁹

This quote from Boas points out some differences between the traditional concepts of folk art and snapshots. In a society that possesses such excellent communications as does twentieth

⁵⁸ George Devereux: "Art and Mythology: A General Theory" Carol F. Jopling, ed.; Art and Aesthetics in Primitive Societies, Dutton, N.Y. 1977 pp. 193-197

⁵⁹ Franz Boas; Primitive Art, Dover, New York, 1955, p. 4

century industrialized society, the spread of visual ideas is so rapid that the geographical differences amongst snapshot styles are minimal. On the other hand, snapshots show a definite and rapid change of style in time. Social and historical influences may be more easily discerned on the snapshot than on traditional folk art because isolated traditional societies changed slowly while contemporary industrialized society, in which most individuals make snapshots, changes swiftly. Besides the improvements in communications, this rapid stylistic change has several additional reasons: first, snapshooters are unselfconscious; second, they are unaware that they are making art and because of that they are not defensive about the style of their work; and, thirdly, the high percentage of snapshot makers within society reduces, or nearly eliminates, any sense of importance of snapshot-making beyond personal considerations.⁶⁰

In most societies, folk art has been practiced by a small group of individuals. Among the Pueblo Indians only the women make pots, among the Australian aborigines only men carve the ritual stick.⁶¹ This specialization of tasks allows many parallels with fine art in which field only self selected individuals produce. Snapshots are extraordinary in this regard for almost all members of society become folk artists. Because

⁶⁰ The use of the word art, in this context, requires that the meaning of this word be considered in the framework earlier defined in this essay. Art, as applied to the snapshot, does not follow the designation the art world has applied to it.

⁶¹ "...pottery is a woman's art, women are the most productive artists among the Pueblos." Franz Boas; Primitive Art, Dover, New York, 1955, p. 19

nearly everyone makes snapshots, the making of these images is hardly noticed as an aesthetic involvement; class boundaries do not halt stylistic changes. Stylistic aspects of snapshots spread rapidly through all strata of society. The snapshotter's un-selfconsciousness makes him or her open to new patterns.⁶²

Folk art from a given culture has its special flavor. By the embroidery of a peasant blouse one may pinpoint the origin of the object. The sweaters Irish fishermen wear may be the best example as the women who knit them use patterns particular to the individual village because then the sweater's pattern should identify the individual in case of drowning. Snapshots do not carry a stamp of locus although their stylistic changes identify them within time. That snapshots are somewhat different from other folk art must be the reason for not having had these objects previously included under this heading.

⁶² Franz Boas observed about other forms of folk art, "that where a technique is practiced that gives free range to the development of form, naturalistic forms, that is forms relatively free of stylistic mannerisms, although sometimes bold generalizations, occur." And this certainly seems to be true in the case of the snapshot. Franz Boas; Primitive Art, Dover, New York, 1955, p. 85

Snapshots and the media

In the past and in small self-contained societies, folk art evolved slowly, each generation adding a bit of new, then discarding some of the old patterns, and changing ever so slightly in form and in content because of the slowly changing technology and taste. In contemporary society, snapshots exist along with professionally generated images. The public media bombard nearly everyone with imagery through television, magazines, films, and visual advertising.⁶³ Most people see both public imagery and their own snapshots, and it is, therefore, likely that the two have mutual influence on each other. The relationship must be significant as one may find definite similarities on close observation.

Franz Boas observed that "...where carving is practiced, we may expect artistic form in carving; where painting, pottery, or metal work prevail, artistic form is found in the products of those industries in which the highest degree of technical skill is attained."⁶⁴ Contemporary industrialized societies depend greatly on photographically reproduced images for all kinds of communication. The news appears on the television screen, on magazine pages, or in books through photographic processes;

⁶³ In their ability to influence viewers about values, it appears in the context of this essay that news, documentary images, and fiction are little different from images whose primary purpose is to sell a particular product.

⁶⁴ Franz Boas; Primitive Art, Dover, New York, 1955, p. 81

advertising communicates patterns of apparel and behavior through the same means. In a society so heavily dependent on a specific group of technologies, it is not surprising that the use of the photographic camera comes naturally to most individuals.

According to the previous arguments presented in this essay, snapshots may be defined as the folk-art aspect of photography. While a photographer thinks about the process of image making and considers past images at the time of making new ones, snapshot makers look through their cameras' viewfinders with complete concentration on the subject in front of the lens. Snapshooters do not analyze, do not consider past attempts, except, possibly, for their worst mistakes; they wish only to "capture" the scene, most often of family or friends, for future record. Snapshooters use the camera as a magic device with which to create the building blocks of a personal history, a personal mythology. Life, personal life, is made up of personal events. Birth, death, marriage, divorce, confirmation, bar-mitzvah, graduation, joining the Army, illness and recuperation are the events by which one remembers; the calendar is but an external yardstick which allows people to compare their personal histories. Snapshots document and enshrine memorable occurrences for future reference and they serve as proofs that the subjects were alive and that they did leave their marks on this world.

If such a definition of snapshots is accepted, then possible relationships between them and the media, either printed or televised, become evident. Public media depict and extol the common ideal. Advertisements imply that through the possession

of certain objects one may attain popularly accepted aims. If one is properly beautiful, lacks certain odors, or owns certain accouterments of well-being, then one is supposed to be happy. Judith Williamson writes in her book, Decoding Advertisements, "Advertisements are one of the most important cultural factors molding and reflecting our life today."⁶⁵ Advertising defines life culturally; snapshots personalize the process.

Earlier societies had well organized systems of rituals by which individual members of those societies led their lives. Rites of passage, as these rituals have often been called, marked those significant moments of an individual's existence by which one measured the passage of personal time. In this century, society has dispensed with many formal patterns. Where religious ceremonies or public celebrations marked the turning points in the lives of individuals who lived only a hundred years ago, with few exceptions those who live at the end of the twentieth century find fewer traditional guideposts marking their passage from birth to death. But as Jungian psychologists have pointed out repeatedly, people cannot live without myths and rituals. "...myth is ... 'living,' in the sense that it supplies models for human behavior and, by that very fact, gives meaning and

⁶⁵ Judith Williamson; Decoding Advertisements, Marion Boyars, New York, 1979, p.11. Also, cf. Goffman, Gender Advertisements.

⁶⁶ Mircea Eliade; Myth and Reality, translated by Willard R. Task, Harper & Row, New York, 1963, p.2

⁶⁷ see C.G.Jung; Man and his Symbols, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1964 and Joseph Campbell; Hero with a Thousand Faces, The World Publishing Co. Cleveland, Ohio, 1956

value to life."⁶⁶ 67

Not having societally defined rituals by which to live one's life, people find themselves forced to develop their own by which they can measure their own journey and by which they can express their allegiance to their community. Advertising illustrations, pictures of movie stars, professional beauties serve as the devices by which society defines those "ideals" to which individuals need to aspire to feel part of the community. Making snapshots allows people to replicate the larger process on an individual scale. The argument is, then, that advertising illustrations and other images appearing in the public media have become models for individual behavior as did the paintings on church walls during the Middle Ages. The images show a standard from which the individual may conclude the norms of acceptability. Clothes, manners, piety, and the attitude shown by the pictures direct the viewers in their quest for acceptance and distinction in their community. Today, when few seek religious organizations for such guidance, another mode has become necessary to define standards for individuals to aspire. Instead of going to public functions, people of this era open magazines or turn on the television set to find the guidance for which their ancestors attended religious or public events.

Snapshots appear to be the obverse of professionally produced images. They define societal norms by illustrating not what society expects but how the individual fulfilled those expectations. This last point is hard to prove directly, but approached in a round-about way, its correctness shall quickly



Ill. 1-1/a



Ill. 1-1/b



Ill. 1-1/c



Ill. 1-1/d



19

Ill. 2-2/a



Ill. 2-2/b

become evident. (Illustration 1-1) If snapshots had only personal meaning then they should look different from family to family. They are not different, as becomes evident if snapshot albums of families who are contemporaries, live in the same area, and are of similar ethnic and economic groups, are compared. In fact, such a comparison is likely to show that two similarly situated families at the same time appear more alike in their snapshots than the same family at different times. If snapshots were truly personal expressions this should not happen; but snapshots are not that, they are images created subconsciously and with great care to follow the pattern society subliminally defined at the given moment. According to Michael Lesy, "If you look at a couple of hundred thousand snapshots, in various regions, under various circumstances, over a long enough period of time, you begin to lose track of the idea of people's individuality"⁶⁸ Snapshots reflect more clearly a common ethos than individual ones of their makers.

But how does society subliminally define the style of snapshots which individuals find themselves following so precisely? Simply, through the media. Images people see influence them strongly. Pictures in magazines, in books, on the television, or on the movie screen leave behind a deep impression, and, when snapshots are to be made, the images are recalled subconsciously and used as templates.

⁶⁸ Michael Lesy; Time Frames, Pantheon Books, New York, p.xii.

Female beauty may be the simplest example. (Illustration 1-2) Movie stars and fashion models define the criteria of physical beauty in this era as members of the aristocracy did in previous times. It is interesting to mention here that one of the early commercial uses of photography was the offering for sale of portraits of professional beauties. Winston Churchill's mother, Jenny Jerome, posed for photographs when her husband's career catapulted them into the public eye. While her fame might have been a reason for women to purchase her portrait, it is much more likely that the purchaser hoped to become part of the pictured beauty. The practical aspect, copying the clothes and the bearing, must have been secondary to the subliminal partaking in Mrs. Churchill's attractive exterior. It is rather likely that when the purchaser of such a portrait went to the photographer, she asked to be photographed to look like the person on the purchased portrait. The same still stands or young women would not have flocked to hairdressers in search of Princess Di haircuts.

From here to the snapshot, it is but one short step. Since George Eastman popularized amateur photography with the introduction of the Kodak #1 camera in 1888, people have not needed to go to the photographer to be pictured; from that time on, they could make their own. Of course, it is only logical that in making their snapshots they should follow the examples they had seen in purchased portraits or in commercial advertisements. This process has become less and less conscious as people have come to see more images and make more images. The

December 1888

SPORTS AND PASTIMES



KODAK—Abroad.



THE KODAK

With this camera is presented an entirely novel and extremely attractive system of Amateur Photography, by which the finest pictures may be taken by persons having no knowledge of the art. The comparative size of the "KODAK" is shown by the accompanying illustrations, and its popularity is not surprising when its compactness and its practical worth are considered.

AS A TOURIST'S CAMERA

it is unrivalled. No cumbersome tripod, plate-holders, or other effects of the ordinary outfit are needed. In its carrying-case, with shoulder-strap, it is of no more trouble in transportation than an ordinary field-glass—in fact, it looks not unlike one.

A trip SOUTH, to CALIFORNIA, or to EUROPE

may be rendered doubly enjoyable, and a complete illustrated record of interesting scenes and incidents secured by use of this little instrument.

ONE HUNDRED EXPOSURES

may be made without "re-loading" the camera

AS A HOLIDAY GIFT

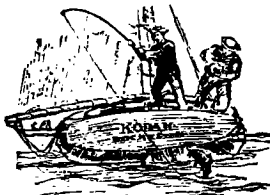
the Kodak offers novelty, beauty, and usefulness, and cannot but be highly appreciated by the recipient

PRINCE HENRI D'ORLÉANS has used the "Kodak," and writing regarding it said:

"The results are marvellous. The enlargements which you sent me are superb."

Mr. Geo. G. Rockwell, of 17 Union Square, New York, an authority on matters pertaining to photography, writes:

"I have used one of your 'Kodak' cameras during the past summer and am greatly pleased with its work. It is simple, practical, and perfect."



KODAK—Caught on the "Fly."



KODAK—The Landmark.



KODAK—Rapid Transit Photography.



KODAK—On Board Ship.



KODAK—Caught in the Air.

The Eastman Dry Plate and Film Co.,

ROCHESTER, N. Y.

115 OXFORD STREET, LONDON.

SEND FOR DESCRIPTIVE CIRCULARS.

43

Lippincott's Monthly Magazine

"Stand by, sailors, for snaps"

Sailing, swimming, hiking, every good time calls for snapshots. Pictures tickle the gang—and spark lively gab fests time and time again. Nowadays they're a cinch to take—black-and-white, and full color too. Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester 4, N.Y.



Kodak Film America's favorite by far
—the film in the familiar yellow box.



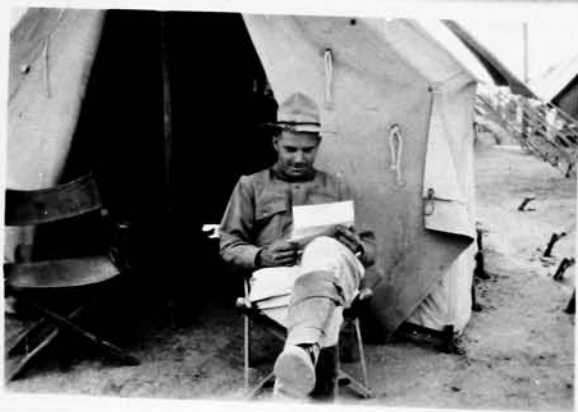
Kodak

Ill. 1-3/b

• NOV • 67



Ill. 1-3/c



Ill. 1-3/e



The Picture From Home

EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY,
ROCHESTER, N. Y., *The Kodak City.*

Ill. 1-3/d

professionally made photographic portrait of a hundred years ago had physical distinction. It looked like a serious picture, having been posed formally and mounted on an elaborate card. More recently people make their own snapshots, and these images appear less formal; they are easier to see as windows through which the viewer sees the original subject than the carte de visites and cabinet photographs of hundred years ago. Hence, it is easier to perceive them as parts of one's own life.

One may point to specific examples. For instance, the advertisements selling snapshot cameras influenced the snapshots the cameras were to take. (Illustration 1-3) The snapshots ordinary people have taken may have never and can have never reached the polish of "snapshots" professional advertising photographers produced. The very unattainability of that perfection has only made the snapshooter make more and more "snaps" in pursuit of the ideal. This situation is rather similar to the frustration induced by the perfect cakes on the packaging of cake mixes. Those beautifully printed images came to be in the studios of professional photographers with the help of several well paid professional home economists. The ordinary housewife, or anyone else who uses the mixes, has little chance to reproduce the perfection pictured on the mix boxes. Following camera and film advertisements yields similar disparities.

Some early advertisements by the Eastman Kodak Company illustrated clearly how snapshots influence advertisements which, in turn, aim to influence the making of snapshots. Those who designed the ads had perused the existing body of snapshots. By



Ill. 1-4/a



Ill. 1-4/b



Ill. 1-4/c



Ill. 1-4/d



IMAGES BY EASTMAN KODAK CO. TO R. H. J. & CO.

There are no Game Laws for those who
Hunt with a Kodak

The rod or the gun may be left out, but no nature lover omits a Kodak from his camp outfit.

EASTMAN KODAK CO.

Rochester, N. Y.

with a camera that will
 develop its own prints

selecting some to be held up to present and future snapshooters as examples to be followed, the advertisement re-emphasized the existing snapshot style. The illustrations imply that there are proper subjects which have their own proper treatment. With such guidance it is obvious that when holding the camera to make a snapshot, the snapshooter should have a mental image to recall.⁶⁹

By photographing people and things of personal experience -- and doing this in a pattern public media crisply defines --, people have created an outlet for their needs of rituals. The examination of politicians' and movie stars' haircuts, haircolor, outfits, and cars defines social aspirations. The media brings these definitions, in the form of still and moving images, to the public. The public accepts the message by looking at the pictures carefully. When the need to mark personal time comes, the snapshot camera becomes the ritual device. At such moments people make photographs of each other and of each others' possessions. The patterns they use are those gleaned from public media.

Female beauty appears as an important subject for the family snapshot. Young people on a date often make snapshots of each other, snapshots in which they try to reproduce the commonly held norm of male and female beauty. The poses of Marilyn Monroe or Clark Gable could be copied, if not precisely, at least with a

⁶⁹ It seems that not only advertisements influenced snapshots, but that noteworthy photographs have made their impression on the designers of advertisements. A few years after Peter Henry Emerson's Life on the Norfolk Broads appeared, Eastman Kodak Company ran an advertisement echoing one of Emerson's most successful images. (Illustration 1-5)

sense of spirit. (Illustration 1-4) Later, of course, shrieks accompany the viewing of the photograph, but the shrieks speak not of embarrassment. Looking like a movie star means much to young people in search of adult identity. Snapshots allow them to experiment with looks less fleeting than those that appear in the bathroom mirror.

Snapshots reflect not only the beauty ideal as defined by the movie screen for adult women or for adult men. Shirley Temple set the norm of beauty by which little girls of the forties found themselves measured. A black and white snapshot in the Eastman Kodak Company's archives illustrates this point. The little girl not only looks like Shirley Temple but she has Temple's smile and pose. Of course, Shirley Temple was not the only child star of her time. Judy Garland influenced many parents in their choice of name for their baby girls. Her looks also found a strong echo in snapshots. (Illustration 1-6)

"Manly beauty," to use a term of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, has been defined by screen and advertising in our day. If one watches young men drag on their cigarettes, he shall find echoes of the Marlboro Man. Snapshots reflect this attitude. When an advertisement finds amplification in the movies, the results become very strong. James Dean reflected the cowboy-Marlboro Man's attitude, combined it with fashionable anger and alienation, and exaggerated it. Snapshots showing young men looking "cool" echo both the Marlboro advertisement and James Dean's films.



Ill. 1-6/b



Welch's. Poster, 20" x 24", c. 1927. Collection of Vivian and Ira Brichia. During the 1930s grape juice was a popular drink. Today orange juice, grapefruit juice, and tomato juice have replaced it in popularity.

Ill. 1-6/a



Ill. 1-7/a



Ill. 1-7/b



Ill. 1-7/c



SAXON \$395

SAXON
VALVE-IN-HEAD

See Illustrated Catalog, "Motor Cars," and "Saxon Roadster" in this issue. Saxon Motor Car is a household name.



More and more women are buying Saxon Roadsters

The American woman of today is a most lively critical motor car buyer in the world.

To the selection of a car she brings all the careful observation also employers in making household investments.

Her daily contact with many different car-people has taught her the purchasing power of the dollar. And she has a wonderful sense of value—a sense that a lady lacking in none.

Consider then, for a moment—the splendid cars that attract the fast that more and more women are buying Saxon Roadsters in their personal cars. Consider the beauty and style on their part in the supreme style of Saxon Roadsters.

Refined in simplest terms it means that, after careful comparison, they have concluded that Saxon Roadster is the best investment in the present class.

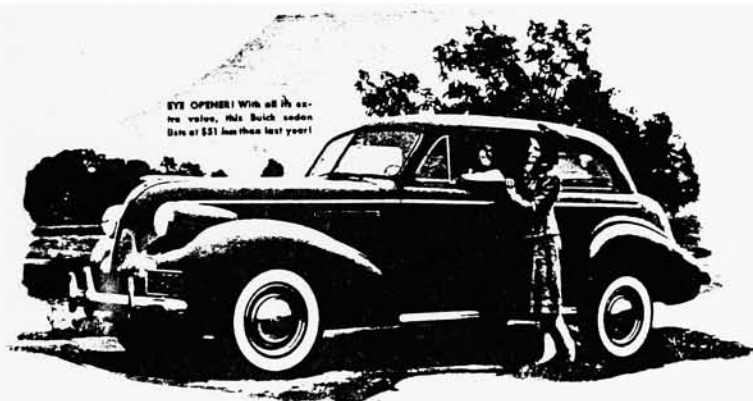
This is not a barren talking, that is a barren body that it will go further, more safely, more comfortably, at less cost than any other car in its price class.

And the adjustment of these women buyers is easily evidenced by the remarkable records for low mileage and long service that Saxon Roadsters are daily reporting.

Value for money is the goal to point to, for the woman has no language of "value." Value is a thing that is not a thing, but it is that you may judge its relation to the price of the car by money. Addicts' Credit 15.

SAXON MOTOR CAR CORPORATION
DETROIT

*The Saxon Motor Car Corp.
has the greatest credit rating*



Ever hear the One *about* the Farmer's Daughter?

IT seems that one day a traveling salesman in a smart new 1939 Buick pulled up at the gate where the girl was standing.

"Nice day," said he, lifting his hat. "Wonderful!" she agreed. "Nice sort of day to take a nice long automobile ride," he suggested. "Wonderful!" said the farmer's daughter.

"Got a pretty snappy car here," said the traveling salesman. "Just about the handsomest thing to be seen in anywhere!"

Again the girl agreed — "It's wonderful!"

"It's got a swell engine," said the salesman. "Gets more good out of every drop of gasoline. A Dynafash straight-eight! You ought to see it travel!"

"Wonderful!" said the farmer's daughter.

"Darned comfortable car too. Those BuiCoil Springs cer-

tainly do make the rough roads behave. Never driven a car that travels smoother."

Said the farmer's daughter:
"Just wonderful!"

"And look! Big windows. You can see the country. Why there's 413 more square inches of safety glass in this sedan. It's a treat to travel in a car like this!"

"Wonderful!" agreed the girl.

"Well," said the salesman, "how about taking a little ride with me?"

"Listen, mister!" said the farmer's daughter. "Where you been? We've two Buicks in the garage. Want to race to town?"

NO OTHER CAR IN THE WORLD
HAS ALL THESE FEATURES

- DYNAFLEX VALVE-IN-HEAD STRAIGHT-EIGHT ENGINE • SWAYON TORQUE-FREE SPRING • GREATER VISIBILITY • HANDSHOT TRANSMISSION • ROOMY UNSTEEL BODY BY PHSER • TORQUE-TUBE DRIVE • FIFTON HYDRAULIC BRAKES • CROWN SPRING CLUTCH • "CATWALK COOLING" • OPTIONAL REAR AXLE GEAR RATIO • FLASH-WAY DIRECTION SIGNAL • SELF-FLAMING KNEE-ACTION FRONT SPRING

"Buick's the Beauty!"



Snapshots often show women standing by the counter of their kitchens. (Illustration 1-7) The examples for such images must have been found in the innumerable advertisements selling kitchen appliances. That the woman in the snapshot should smile does not represent her joy of kitchen work. Rather, it reflects advertising photographs which the subject had seen before posing. Housewives owning a well equipped kitchen must be happy, at least that is what advertisements imply. Contradicting such an axiom of popular culture should show anti-social tendencies in both the snapshot maker and in his or her subject.

Once the snapshot has been made and retrieved from the processor, it becomes the subject of the ritual of owning and viewing it. The snapshots their owners deem to be most important are displayed in frames on walls or on dresser tops. Others may find permanent homes in albums or in shoe-boxes. Wherever people keep their treasured pictures, viewing them becomes a ritual event. When guests come and are given the house-tour, the snapshots on the walls and on the dressers draw attention to themselves. They make the house, most often furnished with factory made furniture and fabrics, personal.

Sitting on the couch and providing a running commentary to accompany the prints held in the snapshot albums has become a ritual in which most people have partaken. To give the commentary is to show the acceptability of those pictured within. They appear as they are supposed to appear; and the viewer acknowledges this conformity. And, so, the ritual becomes complete. (Illustration 1-8)

As it has been seen, the relationship among snapshots and public images, like advertisements, films, etc., is mutual. Snapshots follow the imagery advertisements put before the public, and advertisements often use snapshots as sources for ideas. Because of this, it is nearly impossible to define which of the two is the primary instigator. Rather, it is evident that the two interact and form a whole together, a whole which one may call contemporary public art.

Snapshots as ritual

In the making of the photographic snapshot, a process about which only a few snapshot makers have thought -- had they, they should have ceased to be snapshooters -- the visual patterns have remained undefined. The imagery might have been borrowed from the public media and the snapshot maker's attitude may reflect the contemporary ethos; but to understand the essence that makes the snapshot different from other photographic images, one must look further into the motivation that spurs people to make such pictures. Following this line of thought, one is bound to perceive the ritualistic nature of these images. Timothy Obermiller, a Beloit College student, wrote in a paper about snapshots: "Photo-albums: it is a rare family indeed that does not have at least one tucked away somewhere in the house, kept less, perhaps, as a means of enjoyment than as some vague homage due to the distant relatives pictured within."⁷⁰

Folk art, in all its forms, in all its media, has ritualistic undertones. Baskets, pots, room decorations, folk songs relate to celebrations, and all celebrations find their roots in rituals. In some instances this ritual appears to be more evident than in others. For instance, the statement that the design painted on pots will make the pot's content more

⁷⁰ Timothy Obermiller; "Every Picture Tells a Story," Bruce Puffer, ed.; The Perceptive Viewer, Turtle Press, Beloit College, Beloit, Wisconsin, 1981, p. 13

attractive to the spirits -- and thereby blessed -- needs more support than does the practice of Portuguese fishermen who paint eyes on their vessels for safe voyage: with eyes on them, the boats shall see their way. If it can be proven that the making of snapshots has similar motivations then it shall become clear that snapshots are folk art and are made for ritualistic purposes.

As finding references for snapshots within the folk art context proves difficult, one must turn to parallel fields. Folklore provides such. Mircea Eliade describes the relationship of myth and reality in the following terms, terms that appear valid not only for verbal but also for visual images.

"Living" myth, then, implies a genuinely "religious" experience, since it differs from the ordinary experience of everyday life. The "religiousness" of this experience is due to the fact that one re-enacts fabulous, exalting, significant events, one again witnesses the creative deeds of the Supernaturals; one ceases to exist in the everyday world and enters the transfigured, auroral world impregnated with the Supernaturals' presence. What is involved is not a commemoration of mythical events but the reiteration of them. The protagonists of the myth are made present, one becomes their contemporary.⁷¹

Eliade's subjects are the myths ancient folk tales contain but it appears probable that late twentieth century myths shall appear similar in their potency to those who shall live in the future. People of the late twentieth century may call their supernaturals by names other than gods and goddesses but they

⁷¹ Mircea Eliade; Myth and Reality, translated by Willard R. Trask, Harper & Row, New York, 1963, p. 19

fill the same niche in psyches even if they are but famous people of the stage, playing field, screen, or politics. Snapshots allow everyone to add to this Pantheon one's own relatives, friends, and oneself. Seeing oneself young, healthy, happy when one feels old, ill, and disappointed must have the same sense of magic as folk tales brought to those who lived in the past.

Snapshots are central elements in a series of rituals. The making of the snapshot is a ritual. Families meet for ritual purposes, to mark the lapse of time through celebrations; and the document that most often preserves the event for future times, for future generations, is the snapshot. The process of finding the Instamatic or the Brownie camera for the taking of a family photo has been one of the significant childhood associations with family events for most people. Those events, without family snapshots to document them, fade quickly from memory.

The small pictures people save become like so many little shrines in front of which people pay homage to their ancestors, parents, relatives, friends, and to their younger selves. One could cite many examples from contemporary literature to illustrate the intensity of feelings snapshots awake and keep alive, but let the following example suffice.

Photographs form a substitute memory. Our past has been expanded by them. Possibly, it is sometimes the photograph itself we remember (tricycling along the promenade at Torquay at the age of three) rather than the incident that was being photographed. But a photograph may also trigger an act of remembrance. The faces that stare out of faded sepia-toned photographs a century old are like the peat-preserved bodies that

have been drawn from the bogs of Denmark -- relics of real life, real death. The photographs prompt a compassion that surges around the people preserved there on film. So that was me, I think now, with a stab of sorrow for the child in a feathered warbonnet, who felt no pity for himself.⁷²

Saving snapshots, owning the past, has become a ritual in itself. The photographic album or the shoebox serve as ritual repositories, not unlike Delphi to hoard the Greeks' gold. The gold helped to fight wars, but the objects made of gold had value beyond the value of the precious metal. Having images of gods, of nymphs, and in later years pictures of saints and heroes, strengthens one against the fates. Many Civil War soldiers carried tintypes of sweethearts, of parents or siblings over their hearts. Sometimes the sheet of metal, carried next to the Bible not to bend the sheet of tin, saved the soldier from the enemy bullet. Sometimes the soldier parted from the snapshot only after archaeologists separated the artifacts from the skeletons.

Owning and carrying snapshots as talismans have not ended in the last century. When people meet, and talk turns to the family, words find help in the pictures the wallet treasures. They remind one of the loved ones, but they also prevent separation. As long as one has the photograph, the separation is not complete. Many who escaped in great danger during the last world war carried away little besides a few family snapshots,

⁷² Anthony Bailey; "A Wartime Childhood," New Yorker, January 19, 1981, p. 89

just like Aeneas carried with him the images of the household gods while Troy collapsed behind him in flames.

Families often survive only as pictures. Wars, disasters end whole families; all that remains is a bundle of photographs. Sometimes the photographs are the only evidence which proves that the people did not live and die in vain. The snapshot of Anne Frank conveys the soaring of the human spirit; without the photograph showing her eyes, readers of her story should have a more difficult time identifying with her strength and her sensitivity. Snapshots of long-gone families preserved by historical societies give meaning to the common past and a purpose to the lives of those pictured.

Snapshots, by defining the past, define traditional values. Richard Chalfen puts it precisely when he writes, "A collection of snapshots may be understood then as an attempt to maintain a particular status quo. These images represent an ordering of the world and a way of thinking about the world." By having made a record and by having kept it, the makers of snapshots establish norms. The pictures' permanence perpetuates the status quo.⁷³

Another ritual connected with snapshots may be called "required sharing," a process in which most people feel obliged to participate. It may not be a gross exaggeration that many of those who take their cameras on vacation trips enjoy the showing of photographs, either prints or slides, more than the trip

⁷³ Richard Chalfen; "Redundant Imagery: Some Observations on the Use of Snapshots in American Culture." Journal of American Culture, Volume 4, Spring 1981, No. 1

itself. Members of a society which determines social status on the basis of leisure time activities understandably use snapshots to prove their success.⁷⁴

Redfield, like most writers on the topic, projects the locus of folk art to be distant in space or time, sometimes in both. This attitude explains Redfield's use of the term "primitive peoples" when in the context of snapshots, most contemporary people ought to be included. Still, his explanation illuminates the approach people take when making folk art, and within that context, in the case of this essay, snapshots.

The position, or general attitude, taken by primitive peoples with reference to their place in the universe has always a positive character. In every case it is an assertion that things are in some comprehensible order and a declaration as to how man should accordingly act. It is never an abandonment to chaos.⁷⁵

Snapshots come to be mainly because their makers want to document events in their individual lives and in the histories of their families. "They seem to record what they want to remember, never which they do not."⁷⁶ Or as Margaret Weiss put it, "...the sunny side of the street eclipses the seamy side."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Larry Breitborde, professor of Anthropology at Beloit College, used the expression "required bragging," words which may be more to the point.

⁷⁵ Robert Redfield; "Art and Icon," Charlotte M. Otten, ed; Anthropology and Art, The Natural History Press, Garden City, New York, 1971, p. 52

⁷⁶ Graves and Payne, p. 9

⁷⁷ Margaret Weiss; "Honoring the Amateur," World, March 27, 1973

Photography allows snapshot makers to create their own narrative emphasizing the moments they hold dear and discarding the unpleasant ones. What a delightful freedom it is to write one's revisionist history!^{78 79 80}

Births, deaths form the structure on which the individual's life is stretched, the elements of which life is made: rites of passage celebrated with confirmation, marriage, graduation, and the like. People measure time by these events. The calendar is but a mere external structure to compare personal histories; the real events are one's own. To watch the passage of these real, personal events, people make and treasure snapshots.

⁷⁸ Richard March, in his introduction to Steve Zeitlin's Home Movie: An American Folk Art, spoke of the "idealization" with which home movies present family events. March, as Zeitlin, emphasized the aim of home movies, which is parallel with the snapshots', to create a "golden age" in the family's past. (Richard March, introductory remarks to a presentation of Steve Zeitlin's films Home Movie: An American Folk Art and Harmonize: Folklore in the Lives of Five Families at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, November 26, 1985.)

⁷⁹ During the last decade, clinical psychologists have often turned to snapshots as diagnostic and treatment tools. Echoes of this have surfaced not only in the professional literature but also in popular magazines. In an article in Glamour magazine, the writer, Roberta Israeloff, quotes clinical psychologists who in their responses speak of the selective nature of snapshots. Israeloff quotes Alan D. Entin, Ph.D., a family therapist in Richmond, Virginia, who stated, "Families often stop taking pictures in times of stress, such as divorce ... But we can use photos to reconnect with positive experiences of the past as a way of offering hope for the future." (Roberta Israeloff; "What Your Childhood Photos Say About You," Glamour, February 1986)

⁸⁰ In a short essay, in which Beloit College students were asked to define the photographic snapshot, a student, Cathy Kuble, wrote, "How often does one see a camera at the funeral of a loved one in comparison to the number of cameras at a birthday party or a wedding? Snaps are for happy, joyous occasions."

In the process of getting out the camera, in the process of making snapshots -- just as in rituals when formalized -- people follow established patterns. The mass, the service in the church or in the synagogue follows a written structure; the celebration of national events is prescribed, at least partially, by documents. In a society in which many rituals have become informal, the personal celebrations follow implicit patterns. Birthdays are not celebrated according to prescribed rules; no official rules exist for the eating of the Thanksgiving turkey. People in their common task evolve implicit, un-verbalized rituals which can be as strict as written ones, but without consciously realizing the rules by which they are bound. People follow these strictures when making snapshots. No one who makes snapshots thinks of the process critically; few consider that their pictures follow an established pattern. They just make the pictures to make a memento, a document to counteract the effects of time, to save a moment or a happy face. The snapshot maker thinks not what a snapshot ought to look like. No explicit structures exist, the memory of past snapshots fades into a haze; only the event in front of the camera's lens counts. In this state of mind the photographer calls up past patterns subconsciously. The patterns exist without ever being defined; the patterns in their unstated form force themselves on all members of society. The pattern, the form of the snapshot, exists as a part of the common subconscious.

In the dictionary definition of folk art appears the phrase "the expression of community life." This phrase now becomes more

meaningful since it has been seen that the style, the organization of the snapshot is just such an expression of communally held values. Society defines how snapshots must look, and most people follow the rules.

Doing what all others in the community do gives strength to the individual. Making snapshots ties people together this way. By conforming to such an accepted societal norm snapshot-makers and snapshot-savers declare their allegiance to the community. "This is how we -- our family, our town, our nation -- looked at that time in history." Ideals of standards develop this way. Ideals of beauty, which originate in advertisements and movies, create an echo in the snapshots mothers make of their daughters and sons, the snapshots boyfriends and girlfriends make of each other. Magazines and television advertisements define standards of affluence -- the proper interior decoration, the value of belonging to the jet set, and glamour. Snapshots reaffirm these ideals.

This attitude, when only the subject matter counts -- the event that signifies the passage of personal time -- is the element that separates the snapshot from all other photographs. The snapshot, then, is an attitude -- an attitude that has evolved from the past patterns of making personal pictures with no interest in the photographic process aside from its ability to record. The form of the snapshot results from societally-held compositional structures, and it shall continue to evolve in the future influenced to a smaller degree by the available equipment,

Snapshots, a definition

and to a larger measure by the communally-held pattern of how snapshots are expected to look.

Conclusion

After having considered on these pages the photographic snapshot, the following concepts may be enumerated as a summary. It has become evident that these images must be defined not by their looks, their subject matter, the professional or amateur standing of their makers, or their makers' intent, but by the snapshooters' attitude. When the photographer thinks only of the subject matter without thinking of the resulting picture, then she or he is making a snapshot.

These informal images come to be made because their makers have a personal need to mark time and because they need to ritually define themselves within their social contexts. As the snapshot maker does not care about the resulting image -- beyond it matching some semi-conscious ideal -- snapshots do not exhibit strongly stlylistic qualities. The same person may make some interesting images while many others may look more like mistakes, and the maker could care less for this difference of visual quality.

The resulting picture, whether a black and white or a color print or a slide, serves as a visual repository of the past. Snapshots stop time, save appearances for the future so that the viewer may remember the past by them and revere the appearance of the subjects as they appeared in time past. Such ritual uses cause the universality of making, owning, and viewing photographic snapshots in contemporary society.

The Evolution of the Snapshot since 1880

Snapshots have become everyday objects in the lives of most contemporary people. Still, there have been few concentrated attempts to examine how these seemingly ubiquitous objects have changed through time. It is well known that snapshots may be dated by the clothes people wear, but on closer examination it becomes evident that the visual patterns snapshooters have followed have also changed drastically. The purpose of this paper is to examine these changes and suggest some of the alterations that have taken place.

The changes in these visual patterns have many sources. The most obvious among these must be the effect of technology. As cameras have become more automatic and complex, their improvement has influenced strongly the visual appearance of snapshots. But this alone does not, in itself, explain all the visual changes snapshots show. As shall be evident, there seem to be definite variations in the physical distance snapshot makers have kept between themselves and their subjects, in the kind of subjects they selected, and in their approach.

*

Although the term snapshot appears in the 1850s, before snapshots, as they are now known, appeared on the scene, true snapshooting started with the commercial availability of the dryplate around 1879. What one may call the "snapshot era" began with the first KODAK camera in 1888. To illustrate the evolution since then, snapshots need to be arranged in a chronological sequence.

Early snapshots, the first pictures people made with their Kodak Number 1 cameras, were innocent images. Those snapshooters had no photographic pasts, they looked only at their subjects through their cameras' viewfinders and pushed the button. Besides illustrating the effects of the instruction book, the resulting prints clearly show the lack of snapshot tradition. "Have the Sun shine over your shoulder" was the basic rule, and most users of simple equipment adhered to it until the arrival of the flashbulb.

The earliest snapshots show a wide variety of subject matter, at different distances, but they are consistent in their frontal approach. It is quite possible that the frontal approach drifted into snapshots from the formal portraiture people were accustomed to see during the latter part of the nineteenth century. This frontal approach may be traced back to the millions of photographic portraits based on the miniature painting which had preceded them. In Western countries familiarity with carte-de-visites and with cabinet photographs was universal. The snapshooters may not have decided on copying formal portraiture, but, rather, they applied subconscious visual

Ill. 2-1/b



Ill. 2-1/a



Ill. 2-1/c



Ill. 2-2/b

Ill. 2-2/a





Ill. 2-3/a



Ill. 2-3/b



Ill. 2-3/c

Ill. 2-3/d



Ill. 2-3/e



memories they had stored away in the process of examining family albums and photographs of famous places and important people. (Illustration 2-1)

As the dry plate became less expensive, and therefore more common, many people became amateur photographers. These amateurs existed between the snapshot-generating public and the photographers who produced for sale the portraits and other commercial images. These amateurs created a style, and as their photographs were widely seen, -- most families had a son or a daughter whom the photography bug bit -- snapshots followed the visual organization of their pictures. (Illustration 2-2)

No special name exists for these photographers. They were amateurs in the best sense of that word. They made pictures because they loved the process; they made pictures because they enjoyed the view on the camera's ground-glass; they made pictures because they enjoyed looking. Some of these amateur photographers, such as Jaques Henri Lartigue, became well known in latter days. Others remained obscure with their plates and prints kept in the limbo of the shoe box and the attic. But while Lartigue's work speaks to latter day viewers with a special clarity, in essence his photographs differ little stylistically from the many made around the same time.

These photographs almost always showed fragments of daily lives: family members, groups of friends, houses, horses, farm machinery, family reunions, and views of the local landscape. Such amateurs often produced surprisingly large bodies of work. In the process of repeatedly using their cameras, they learned

from their pictures. They understood that certain actions lead to foreseeable results. In the practice they had a tool to improve their pictures. And that is the point where their photographs ceased to be snapshots.

Between the late 1880s and the First World War, most snapshooters aimed their cameras at their immediate environments. Early snapshots, therefore, show broad, open spaces in which small figures have space to move. Most of these early snapshots show boundless horizons and completely lack the claustrophobic feeling that appears in similar images made around the middle of the twentieth century. The broad expanse of space in which people could freely move may be read as a metaphor for the opportunities people perceived. Such subconscious imagery reflects explicitly the thoughts of their makers, and as their makers were the average citizen, the images reflect clearly the concerns and hopes of contemporary society. (Illustration 2-3)

The viewer must remember that not all snapshots from that era show all these characteristics. These definitions are but patterns that fit snapshots of an era, statistically. Most snapshots from a given time will fall into a pattern, while other images will hark back to the past, point to the future, or be just simple accidents or aberrations. One cannot expect a speedy process employed by people whose visual motivation remained subconscious to show consistency beyond reasonable limits.

Snapshots from the late nineteenth century show everyday objects people treasured, the possessions which made people proud of their affluence, and the pleasure people had had with the

photographic process. Showing items of affluence must have been a great desire, as not only snapshots display possessions but also the work of local and itinerant professional photographers. In the Midwest, and, possibly, in other parts of the country also, one finds many professionally made images showing families sitting in front of their freshly built frame houses. Sometimes the family, possibly on the urging of the photographer, moved all their prized possessions to the front of the house, where after setting up the table, the dresser, the piano, the family sat amidst their wealth. The recipients of these prints must have been those who stayed in the old country or on the Eastern Seaboard, although most people kept some of the prints as mementos. Whatever the motivation might have been, the pictures influenced their viewers who, in turn, made pictures of their loved ones, their family members, friends in front of their houses, barns, and horses hitched up to their best wagons and carriages. (Illustration 2-4)

Pictures from the first decade and a half of this century clearly show the hope people had in the future. The prospect of general war receded as the immensely growing firepower of the new breach-loading guns made war unthinkable. Most Americans, and Western Europeans also, believed that the world would remain at peace. According to May, a symposium in World's Work found "only a few of the leading citizens who had been asked for their opinion, thought that man's nature made war ultimately



Ill. 2-7/a



Ill. 2-7/b



Ill. 2-7/c



Ill. 6



Ill. 2-4/a



Ill. 2-4/b



Ill. 2-4/c



Ill. 2-5/a



Ill. 2-5/b

ineradicable." (Illustration 2-5) 1 The concept of ever growing, elevating, improving civilization made people optimistic -- or, possibly, their optimism created the concept -- and their snapshots stood witness to their optimism.

People appear on their bicycles at this time, enjoying the good life as most of those who made snapshots for pleasure belonged to the reasonably affluent classes. In the prosperity of the turn-of-the-century this included farmers, small businessmen, professional people, and even some of the working class. They could afford the making of snapshots. Because of this, in 1914, many young men took their cameras to the front in all lands when the Great War called them to Belgium, France, Italy, or to the Russian front.

Snapshots by soldiers of all participants of the war describe the mud, and the life in the trenches. A few photographers are known for their especially telling images, such as Andre Kertesz who photographed in the Austro-Hungarian trenches on the Galizian front; but many quite similar pictures came from the hands of other photographically inclined soldiers.

Only a few snapshots made during the First World War glorify the fighting. Most show the human side of the conflict, others criticize. T. E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia, may be cited as an exception. He photographed his troop's charge at Aqaba, an image that speaks of speed and excitement. (Illustration 2-6) Most other snapshots of similar vintage speak of the small pleasures of camp life. (Illustration 2-7) No systematic

¹Henry May, The End of American Innocence, Quadrangle, Chicago, 1964

research has yet attempted to survey the snapshots from the Great War, but the ones known seem to show similarities. The camp life often appears as a reasonably pleasant venture, not totally unlike an uncomfortable but interesting Boy Scout camp. The snapshots show people in close proximity with each other, enjoying the situation as far as that is possible. When one compares these snapshots with those of latter wars -- the Second World War, Korea, or Vietnam -- one finds the earlier prints almost nostalgic and pleasant.

After the Great War, peoples' lives underwent drastic changes. In earlier times, on the conclusion of wars, life had often returned to its previously known patterns. That did not happen in 1919. A large part of the world remained in conflagration, life styles changed rapidly along with the dramatically growing economy and with the rapidly changing political ideas. Changing lifestyles would have been sufficient to alter the pattern of snapshots; but along with the change in life styles, changes in the arts also had their strong effect.

As defined earlier, snapshots are photographs on which previous photographic experience has little influence. Snapshots do not exhibit conscious thought about the photographic process; people who make snapshots think only about the subject matter and not about the picture. Hence, the influences remain subconscious. In the early twenties the visual stimuli changed. The Bauhaus, advertising, changing fashions, and the new outlook on life had strong influence on how people saw, or, rather, perceived themselves in the landscape. People became more



I11. 2-8/a



I11. 2-8/b



I11. 2-8/c



I11. 2-8/d



I11. 2-8/e



Ill. 2-9/a



Ill. 2-9/b



Ill. 2-9/c



Ill. 2-9/e



Ill. 2-9/d

concerned with their individual lives; the rapidly growing population, in all parts of the world, made people aware of the space around themselves. Cameras making snapshots then came closer to their subjects. The large vistas disappeared and people sat on their cars' runningboards for the family picture. Individual lives received more emphasis. Often, fewer people filled the snapshot frame. Heads became larger, the personal facial expressions more important. (Illustration 2-8)

The prized possession worthy of a snapshot became the family car. (Illustration 2-9) Interiors still appear but not in the profusion as did before the Great War. The ubiquitousness of movies had an affect on snapshots at this time. Young men wanted to see their girl friends as the then fashionable movie star, and young women hoped to find their visual ideals of manhood in their boyfriends. An easy shortcut, in the fulfillment of this dream, sired snapshots with young men and women trying to look glamorous.

Social mores changed rapidly during the decades following the Great War. People shed much of their protective clothing and allowed others to see more than their newly exposed skin. Freud became a household word; the psycho-analytical attitude that followed influenced snapshots. In pictures from this time people do not appear as they were supposed to have been, rather, they often exhibit personal moods. The informality that appeared in photography, partially a result of the miniature camera, rubbed off on the snapshots of this time. Still, they look very different from the photographs reproduced in books, newspapers,



I11. 2-10/b

I11. 2-10/c

I11. 2-10/a



I11. 2-10/d



I11. 2-10/e

I11. 2-12/a



I11. 2-12/b





I11. 2-11/a



I11. 2-11/b



I11. 2-11/c



I11. 2-11/d



I11. 2-11/e

and magazines or exhibited as the result of the new interest in art photography.

It is from this time that "candid" photographs became more prized than "formal" ones. Up till the twenties even snapshots followed the professional portrait photographer's patterns. The decreasing social and moral inhibitions influenced not only behavior patterns but also the pictures people made of their children, their family and of their friends.

The Depression in the United States and in Europe turned people back to their personal lives. The time of financial difficulties made people more aware of the small pleasures, the small luxuries they continued to have. The snapshots from this era seem to be part of the few remaining luxuries. Getting through the tough years became a proud subject for these pictures. (Illustration 2-10)

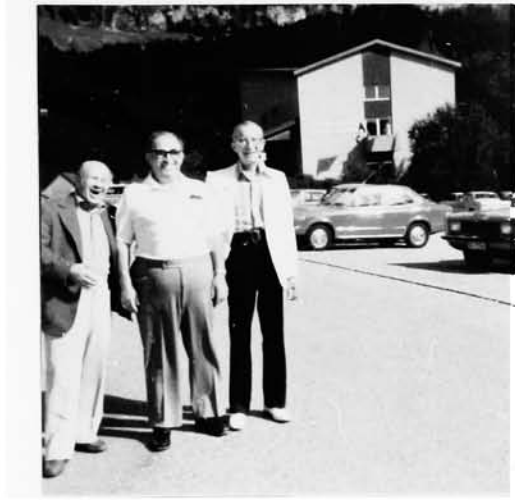
When war returned, soldiers were photographed at the dockside or, if they were in Europe, at the railroad stations. The snapshots from the Second World War are much less friendly than those from a generation earlier. The violence, the cruelty of this conflict hurt people deeply. The snapshots often reflect this. More directly visible is the newfound importance of technology in war. In this war the actual combatants were few; the mechanized spearheads met, and often decided the course of events. The machines -- the tank, the airplane, the heavy truck -- serve often in these pictures as the main subject. (Illustration 2-11) Holding onto each other, standing together squeezed into the frame is a common form of the

snapshot from the forties. Maybe it was the fear of not seeing each other again that made snapshooters frame their subjects so tightly. (Illustration 2-12)

The years following the war saw the first appearance of the inexpensive color print. The ease of making the exposures grew with the automation of photographic equipment, and the growing market made commercial processing quick and inexpensive. Postwar snapshots show the technical revolution Japanese cameras brought to photography. In Korea, and even more so in Vietnam, soldiers bought expensive cameras and made a flood of snapshots. From Vietnam came a surprising range of pictures. Soldiers photographed their local lovers, the people they met on their hours off, and some of the unpardonable aspects of military occupation. On the other hand, many snapshots became statements of protest against this particular war and war in general. Film was cheap, the sun shone much of the time in Southeast Asia, and soldiers received quickly their color pictures from the processor in Saigon, Hawaii, or from the States.

Introspection and self love became important parts of the sixties, and photographing oneself and the life around that all-important person became even more important. The affluence of those years, the cameras soldiers brought back, added to this explosion. By this time color prints predominate.

But not only the subject matter changed through these years. Photographers came closer and closer to their subjects, the pictures show a growing number of head-and-shoulder portraits. In 1963 the Eastman Kodak Company introduced the Instamatic



I11. 2-13/a



I11. 2-13/b



I11. 2-14/a



I11. 2-14/b



I11. 2-15/a



I11. 2-15/b



I11. 2-15/d



I11. 2-15/c



I11. 2-15/e

camera, using #126 film, which, with its square format, might have been partially responsible for this visual change. The square frame allows for simple visual construction with the subject's face placed in the center. (Illustration 2-13)

These cameras incorporated simple devices for the synchronized use of "peanut" (AG-1) flashbulbs and, later, flash cubes, explaining the many indoor photographs made with cameras of this format. Before the nineteen fifties, mainly professionals used the large, clumsy flashbulbs. As these devices became smaller and less expensive, and as the flash-gun came to be incorporated into inexpensive cameras, there is a rapid rise in the number of photographs that had been taken indoors. By the seventies the use of convenient flash devices, like the Flip-Flash and the FlashBar, and inexpensive electronic flash units made indoor snapshooting as easy as it used to be out of doors, or even easier. As a matter of fact, snapshooters came to believe so completely in the necessity of flash illumination that even at outdoor events flashbulbs are used regularly. Watching the television screen showing outdoor sport events one notices many flashes emanating from the audience although the flashbulb has little chance to illuminate the action hundreds of feet away, but the snapshooter feels more secure about the resulting image with the pop of the flashbulb. (Illustration 2-14)

The affluence of the fifties and sixties provided many happy subjects proudly standing in front of their material acquisitions. Cars, boats, farm machinery, new houses served as

excellent backdrops for smiling people, and these objects also reflected the subjects' pride. In these pictures one may clearly see the social context, the social content of snapshots.

Travel as a common pastime has influenced snapshot photography. Since the mid-sixties the appearance of large jet airplanes and the low airfares allowed many Americans to see parts of the United States and distant parts of the world. Citizens of other affluent countries also travel widely to distant places. And travel is an important time for making snapshots. To many, though rarely stated explicitly, traveling is a glamorous act with strong implication to the traveler's social standing. To describe fashionable people, one uses the phrase jet set. If one can prove having gone on a journey to some more or less fashionable part of the globe then one has a proof of belonging to the elite. Snapshots, or, rather, travel photographs have become such proofs. As a result, many travel not so much to look, but rather to have a chance to make pictures to be shown later to the awe-struck relatives and friends as a proof that their maker can be counted successful by an important criterium of society. (Illustration 2-15)

Snapshots, during their nearly hundred year history, have gone through several changes. The innocent experimentation of the earliest snapshot is followed by a pattern of broad horizons that narrows until a single individual fills the frame in the twenties. Through the thirties the photographer backs off somewhat, although not to the degree as in the more distant past. The sixties see a return to tighter framing, an attitude that

exists even in our day. The visual content of these pictures reflects social changes through composition. In the future, the visual evolution of snapshots is likely to be the result of the same factors: camera technology and the prevailing visual style known by all snapshooters subconsciously.

Enjoying Photographs

Acknowledgements

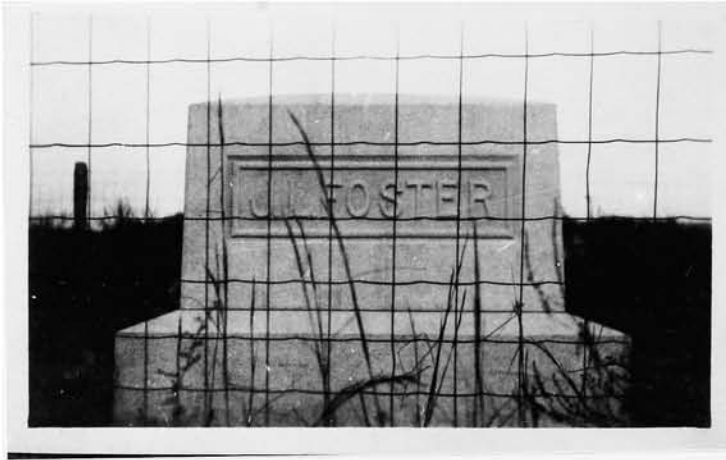
I should like to thank those who supplied the pictures: the photographers, the subjects, and the owners of these prints. With the exception of a few, I do not know who made these photographs or who their subjects were. I acquired the prints from junk shops, from household sales, and from students. Among the students, I should like to thank Mark Helfer, Elijah Cobb, Julie Anderson, Betsy Rosenwald. I should also like to thank others who were generous enough to part with the treasures and for their insight, as in some cases I borrowed more than the pictures. I should like to thank Ann Wilmot who printed plates by E.E. Combs for the Rock County Historical Society in Janesville, Wisconsin, and Merle and Mary Timmcke, who allowed me to use their family photographs.

Introduction

Stacked in shoeboxes or pasted in albums, photographs remind their viewers of faces and events past. They jog the memory; they bring back moments of old; they serve as shrines to one's past, to one's ancestors. But is there any other meaning, message, content in those pictures? Can we find other meaning in snapshots, in photographs treasured in family collections? This book aims to show that family pictures may be seen not only for their value as personal information but also for their general meaning and for their visual content.

The Victorian idea persists that art must show the sweat of the artist's brow. Most people believe that an art work which took many hours to make must be better, have greater aesthetic merit, than one created in a few seconds. To people holding this conviction, photographs and photographic snapshots are damned to remain mementoes and nothing more. But they are more; if we look at them carefully, we shall find unselfconscious insight. Family photographs can be seen for their visual content; they can be enjoyed even by those who do not know the people those pictures depict.

In these photographs the reader will find visual structure, surprising insight and meaning, although these images appear little different from those in the reader's collection of photographs at home. The writer of these pages hopes that after having read this book and looked at the photographs, the reader will find the same ideas in his or her own family album.



Tombstones weigh heavily on the ground as the deaths of those who lie below them weigh on those who mourn. Once one has passed death's door there is no return.

The rusty metal of the fence rubbing his palm and heart as he looks at the grave from across the wire speaks of the finality of death. With grass and weeds growing around the stone, with the grey sky lowering, with only the fence posts standing guard over the stone he feels alone. But who is he?

We are he, whether we are men or women; and we all contemplate the finality of death as we stare at the tombstone across the fence. The horizon brings no relief. We see nothing but the fence on the other side of the small cemetery. People must have moved away from the town; the grave, though not old, is not new either, and the weeds have taken over.

An unkempt grave. The stone speaks of solid middle-class values. It is proportioned, well carved, it is the kind of stone reasonably affluent families put on graves to speak of their wealth and of their taste. But why is the ground so unkempt? Why has the grass not been mowed?

To have our grave abandoned to the elements frightens us all. Who would want to exit this world without some memory left behind? The stone will jog people's memory but only if visitors come to the cemetery. This picture does not speak of many. Those who have come must stare through the fence catching a glance while their hands become gritty with the crumbling dark brown rust as they hold on to the wire for support.

The wire mesh of the fence covers the whole picture. We cannot go under, over, or around it. We are locked out! This formal device the photographer used -- unselfconsciously, most likely -- becomes an important part of the photograph. It tells us, with finality, of the complete separation between this world and the one which may follow.

When we look at the photograph, we all become the sad young man who thoughtfully stares through the wire. We all mourn. A tombstone is much like the next. Tombstones, like people, appear special only to those who know and love them. But if we think about it long enough, this similarity allows us all to take part in the grief of any individual. This is how literature works; this is how paintings work; this is how photographs work.

*



The soldier stands in the center; the flagpole grows from his hat as if he had become the flag in his patriotic dedication. On one side of his newly uniformed body -- his belt has not yet found its comfortable, horizontal position -- a tent speaks of the uncertain life facing him, while on his right stand the things that represent his past: the solid building, built by a prosperous community, well-dressed people, a young girl wearing a white dress. And he is the meeting between these two worlds. In the future, if he comes back from the Marine, he shall have to resolve the tension between these two conflicting facets of his past.

The rules of traditional composition forbade a central division of a picture. Those rules spoke of "golden sections," of arrangements which made the image complete and beautiful. In our century these rules appear anachronistic. We had to learn to face problems facing us, directly. Photography brought to the visual arts an easy process of breaking the old rules. Quickly made photographs, snapshots, did not lay on their makers a sense of aesthetic responsibility. One could say: "Let us see how it will look! It is only a few cents worth of film."

Although the photographer must have paid little conscious attention to symbolism, the photograph contains much. Besides the flag, the central division, the tent, and the solid building, we notice that the tent-stakes echo his feet as they stick out of the ground at angles which parallel his puttee-enclosed calves, as if they were stating his being a part of the earth. The girl's virginal outfit and over-sized bow speak of her purity, her frown speaks of her feeling uncomfortable with his departure. She may symbolize traditional values, the strength of home and hearth our soldier must leave. The man behind her looks out of the picture-frame indicating that the world does not end at the picture's edge. Photography allows such significant detail to appear without serious forethought. The camera often captures more than the photographer saw consciously.

And here, in this picture, we see a new aesthetic. The maker of this photograph had no inhibitions about placing his subject squarely in the middle. As a matter of fact, by making the uniformed man serve as the central division, the photographer made a statement. We, the viewers, see the two worlds this young man will need to unify, with which he will need to learn to live. In the day of awareness for mental health and clinics for Vietnam veterans, we may not find the photographer's perception of those two worlds special. But how would have the photographer been aware of such psychological complexities in 1917? Freud and Jung were working hard when the photographer made this picture, he is unlikely to have known much about psychology or been aware of his picture's symbolism. But here it is! a photograph which shows an awareness of the difficulty all those who leave for the war must face on their return.

*



The figure of the sailor, in his whites, seems to have been cut out with a pair of scissors and then pasted upon the grassy background. The figure floating in front of the background is more a picture than a slice of life. As we look at it, we become aware that we do not look at a window, through which we see reality, but, rather, we are aware of the picture itself. Although the shadow speaks of the sailor's three-dimensionality, we see him as a white shape against the darker background.

If that is the case then we may find in this photograph the thought which led Manet to his innovations in painting. He, around the middle of the nineteenth century, came to realize the distinction between the picture and the faces, events the picture was aiming to document. In reality we do not see frames around things. The camera places the frame on reality. The making of a picture is the subject of this snapshot.

The photographer found the contrast between dark and light and the shape of the light area against the dark background fascinating. The kerchief around the sailor's neck echoes the dark tones of the background. By perceiving the rhythm of dark, light, and dark again, the photographer contemplated the picture making process. The framing -- however simple that may appear -- shows the same awareness.

The white shape floats on the dark background because the photographer placed his subject the way he did. While there are no rules on how to position the photographic frame, we -- the viewers -- sense when the frame becomes an integral aspect of the image. This is such a picture.

*



Although we are accustomed to rectangular photographs, the first Kodak, camera in 1888, made circular pictures. These early, truly the earliest, snapshots came back from the processing plant as circular pictures pasted on pieces of cardboard. Before the first Kodak cameras, very few amateurs made photographs; but with them in hand all tourists became photographers. Because they had no preconceived notions about how a photograph should look, they made wonderfully fresh images.

In the front we see three figures depicted almost as if they were the Trinity. The triangular composition of this picture had been around since the Renaissance, but the new process, photography, introduced other elements which make this image worth our attention.

The figure who rests her hands on the children's shoulders appears to be an apparition. The flare caused by the sky makes her transcend earthly boundries, as if a mother goddess came to earth, or a guardian angel, to secure those two children's lives. Her strength to protect must be needed as another more ominous figure lurks in the background. Is she ready to tear those children away from the woman who guards them? She may be awaiting when the woman guarding the children loses her aura and then drag the little ones into the dark shade. The darks and the lights, the sky and the trees, set the tone of this picture. We associate values with dark and light, we do respond to them even if the photographer did not consciously contemplate his symbols. But the symbols are there, and we, the viewers, respond to them.

*



The photographer has created a catalogue of human types in this photograph. He must have been a professional photographer, one who earned his living from making pictures of people and views. He must have worked fast -- the ground is littered with objects -- but in that short time he sensed a broad range of human emotions in the five men he came to photograph.

The man in the center, his gold watch chain shining brightly, appears to be the man of authority. He must own the place or be the manager. The man to his right seems to be his opposite; while the man in the center radiates authority, the balding man to his right looks at the camera defensively.

The older man who sits on the far left, in dark shirt and suspenders, stares at us with wisdom gained from experience. His eyes reflect resignation; he knows, one can get only that far. His hands reflect his thoughtfulness while the hands of the large man in the center show energetic tension echoed tentatively in the hands of the man who sits in between.

The man sitting on the left of our central figure appears to be bright, a man whose boat has not yet come in but who still hopes. His eyes focus sharply; perceptive insight radiates from his face, but he has not coupled his perception and understanding with authority. On his left sits a young man, his image slightly blurred, whose future, most likely, will bring the alienation we see on the face on the balding man on the central figure's right. His hands are tentative, his facial expression tells of little comprehension. His head measures lower on the clapboards than the fellow next to him.

The photographer lined up his subjects, as the cans are lined up in the window. The clapboards imitate the height indicating lines of police line-ups; we can gauge how tall they are. The pharaohs had themselves painted and sculpted larger than their subjects. In this photograph we see the same. The largest man holds the authority. The photographer emphasizes this hierarchy by positioning his subjects and by photographing them against the horizontal lines of the building.

The windows and the door also emphasize the rhythm of the cans and of the men. The window on our right and the door on the left hold the photograph within its frame. Every time our eyes attempt to run off the page, those patterns in the background bring them to the subject, the five men.

This photograph does not speak of traditional approaches to painting. It is a truly photographic image. The maker of this picture did not consciously contemplate organizing his subject in a preconceived style, he wanted to have faithful likenesses; but in the process he perceived, and showed, the range of these men's personalities.

*



Works of art, photographs, novels, prints or paintings, show their makers' perceptions of their worlds whether that perception is conscious or not. We do not know who made this photograph, but whoever it was, he perceived significant aspects of rural America in the early nineteen fifties. The print speaks of a time and of a place through showing significant detail. The pumps, the price of gasoline, the car describe life in 1952, the date on the license plate.

But detail alone, however significant, will not make a complete statement. The photographer has to select and organize those bits of detail in some understandable pattern; the photographer must convey his perception in a visual statement which shall appear complete and unambiguous; only then will the viewer be able to participate in the experience fully. In this photograph the significant details appear as parts of a vision of a summer afternoon. The attendant seems barely to be awake; no urgent business calls the boy sitting on his bicycle in the background.

We may ask: what ties these bits of detail into a complete whole, into a visual statement? The visual organization, how the photographer organized the building blocks of his scene, make this image strong. The rectangular blocks of brick on the left, gas pumps in the center and on the right, the door in the background, and the white horizontal rectangle in the right rear create a rhythm that sets the scene, as on a stage, in which the actors -- the attendant, the car, the boy and his bicycle -- may appear as in a tableau.

These details alone might create the effect of a set of dominoes neatly lined up ready to be pushed over, but our photographer softened his composition by introducing diagonals, the attendant's arm, the trunk of the car, the boy's back, and the steps above him.

The lines, the verticals, the horizontals, and the diagonals, weave a fabric through which we perceive that summer afternoon, now over thirty years ago, when the photographer stood under the trees, facing the gas station with his camera. American literature is rich in glimpses of small town life. Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio may be a good example of this genre, and in this photograph we meet a similar perception. What we see is not the trees, the gas station and its attendant, but rather the perception of the photographer who, in that instant of pushing the button on his camera, summed up summertime rural America.

*



Pyramidal composition has been traditional in painting; no wonder a photographer arranged his subjects in that pattern. While painters carefully organize their subjects and leave out detail for which they have no use, photographers have to include everything in front of the camera. One cannot tell an object not to reflect light.

And so, this photographer of the American prairie arranged his subjects in the manner he knew from art reproductions popular during the late nineteenth century. No painter would have included those scraggly pine trees in the background, but our photographer had no choice. Neither had he any choice about the details like the boards and the log in the foreground.

A fragment of life from a new community, the people pictured stare at us with optimism and with hope. Their urban clothes show that they feel to be a part of a larger community. These thoughts must have run through the photographer's mind, he must have been aware of his subjects; but there are many small details on which he is not likely to have meditated.

The arrangement of the people, of the trees indicates a sense of space. The print shows that the photographer was accustomed to wide open spaces where no one felt hemmed in. The boy in the left rear sits on a log by the fence. He needs more room than the others, but even those in the foreground group move their arms and legs freely. The bits of lumber in the foreground also speak of this sense of space. The newcomers felt the prairie and the forest lands to be inexhaustible. Throwing away a few pieces of wood made little difference; there was enough standing in the forest awaiting the axe.

The two men watching the photographer from the edges of the picture are the most tantalizingly ambiguous detail in this photograph. They stand there like two pillars holding up the structure. If classical columns stood in their places, we would find that more acceptable. That we would be able to explain with a classical reference like: those columns have watched the ages pass. The two men serve this purpose in this photograph. They stand there like Roman gods surveying the field to assure good luck and at the same time they frame the picture.

In this photograph we see glimpses of how those settlers perceived the land. But is there something more general we may glean from this picture? The first word which comes to mind after having looked at this photograph may be optimism. Young, well dressed people moving so freely in an open, newly acquired landscape describe to us the attitude those who came to the prairies had. And they formed much of what this country is today.

*



On first glance this snapshot appears to be just that, a snapshot showing the photographer's inability to organize disparate detail into a cohesive whole, but on further examination we are able to find meaning in its fragmentation.

The tree growing from the baby may be just an accident, but it could also speak of the photographer's hope that the child will become strong as a tree. Tree symbolism was everpresent in prehistoric times, and even today tombstones in the shape of broken trees often serve to identify that the deceased departed before his time. Here the tree may be a description of hope and of blessing.

The woman guarding the perambulator, in her official looking garb, does not appear to have too many visual parallels with antique divinity, but her stance and unblinking stare conjure up images of a guard, of a defender of the child. No one may reach the child without passing her stare. The baby buggy and the woman take up the central portion of the photograph; without question, they are its topic.

But in the background we see fragments of life against which the symbolism of the foreground becomes emphasized. The houses speak of the community's well being, they speak of money and upward mobility. So does the car and the two well-dressed women leaving the picture on the right. These fragments speak of life as it goes on and against which a ritual act, the presentation of the child, occurs.

The photograph may seem, on first view, to be inadvertent and unplanned, but as we look at it with care, we see how the two women in the background, their dark clad shapes, find balance in the dark shape in the lower left of the picture. The symmetry of the arrangement pushes the child and the woman guarding him forward. The photographer created a visual emphasis which we, the viewers, cannot escape.

Now that we have spent some time with this photograph, we may conclude that the photographer spoke of time and hope. He spoke of the past through the woman's figure; spoke of the present by showing the life that goes on; and he spoke of the future through the child and the tree. The ambiguity of this photograph may confuse us but it may help us see the mystery that whets our appetite to look, to discern, and to understand.

*



Some pictures contain whole stories; they become novels in their viewers' eyes. When a picture, be it a painting or a photograph, generates such a response, we may find ourselves looking for long periods, trying to complete the story, trying to imagine what led up to the scene and what the future promises to bring to the dramatis personae.

Novels often set out to describe the journeys of families through time. The question, how did the elders' promise come to fruition in the younger generation, seems to spur the author. This photograph carries the same question. Who are the parents, and what end will their son come to?

The photographer drew the characters with precision. The father's dour expression disapproves of the sickly mother's resigned presence. She tires easily and tells her husband with a sigh, "does not matter, dear, I'll do it." He knows she suffers but cannot break through her facade. The son sits separately, oblivious to his parents' heartache. He thinks of himself, he enjoys his books, his mother's adulation; and suffers his father's company.

On seeing this photograph we may ask, how can a story so simply be condensed into a picture? Another question might be, is it fair to read all this into a photograph of a family about whom we know nothing?

Let us first consider the second question, the one about our right to make strong value judgements about pictures and the people those pictures show. It is quite unlikely that our opinions would in any way hurt those people. Most likely they have been dead for a long time, and even if they are not, little harm would come to them from our musings. We could approach the same question by asking, what right do novelists have to make judgements, strong, sometimes biased statements about the people about whom they write.

Our problem seems to be whether the photograph is a window through which we see the family whom the photographer photographed or whether we see a picture which is the photographer's interpretation of what he saw. The distinction seems slight but its importance is central to looking at photographs.

The other question, how a novel could be summed up in a single image, promises us a less philosophical, but no less important, answer. The separation we see at the center of the photograph, the vertical line of the trim, the mirror, the two separate tables, the stairs going upwards are symbols we have met. This photograph is special because it implies so much. The parents, the child, the setting and its details come together in a story clearly told, a story which describes a turn-of-the-century family's hopes and aspirations contrasted with the harvest they reaped.

*



At some time of our lives, if not more regularly, we meet with a companion who walks beside us but about whom others know little. Pinocchio had Jiminy Cricket, Joseph Conrad wrote about the Secret Sharer, and we all have known children, even if we were not one of the many, who have imaginary friends with whom they often converse.

The secret sharer rarely shows his face; one cannot tell who he exactly is. This snapshot shows a woman whose face we can clearly see while the person standing behind her remains anonymous under the shadow cast by her hat's brim. Her hand rests on the woman's shoulder but whether her feet touch the ground, we do not know. The woman in front smiles with a warm, personal smile; her shadow retains her distance with a frown.

The smiling woman lives in a cage. The photograph encircles her with lines. On the top the windows create an unpassable edge; on the right the bush, on the left the masonry provide the barrier; on the bottom there is little place to go.

Is the shadow-woman, who so authoritatively rests her hand on the woman's shoulder, keeping her in this prison or will she liberate her charge, lead her to the open field where no bars limit.

Certainly, for those who knew these two people the note on the print's back "Oh you boobs!!!!" made more sense than this analysis has brought to us, but this more general interpretation may contain insight for those also who knew these two women.

*



A true snapshot; it is simple, direct with no sense of artifice. Almost everyone has pictures like this one in their collection of family photographs, if not of oneself then of one's children. Still, we may find many parallels between this photograph and Renaissance painting of the Madonna with her child.

The adult's face remains undefined in the shadow while on the baby's face the sun shines. The adult becomes anonymous, babies look much alike. The relationship between mother and child is truly universal. The child signifies the future, rejuvenation, and promise, something that could not have happened without the mother.

Not only the child, his mother and their relationship touches us with its universal symbolism but also the window and the curtain that shades it. On the child falls the sunlight; we can almost hear the minister's, or the rabbi's, or the priest's blessing: "May the sun shine upon thee..." In the window we see the sunlight illuminating the landscape. It may speak of the future, although the curtain cuts part of our view as if it were to tantalize us with ambiguity.

The broad areas of light and dark, the simplicity, and the directness of this photograph reaches us; we have all thought of future's promise. In this photograph the simplicity, the unsharpness, and its very snapshot quality convey the universality of the emotions and perceptions the photographer sensed at the moment of making the picture.

Although the picture is truly informal, if we search for visual structure, we shall find it. The dark frame within which the photographer enclosed the woman and the child holds our attention. Our eyes can leave the picture only by traveling through the light area depicting the sky. On the left the woman's silhouette holds us within the frame, on the bottom our eyes stop in the hills and dales the sunshine created in the blanket's folds, and on the right the window's edge frames the picture.

What ever happened to this baby in his mother's arm? He must be a grandparent by now. Has the caressing sunshine brought blessing to his life? We cannot speak of such things without personal knowledge, but we may all partake in the parents' vision and hope for their newborn child.

*



E. E. Combs, a photographer active in Janesville, Wisconsin around the turn of the century made this photograph of his little daughter Wilma. Combs liked mirrors; they must have appealed to his Victorian sense of metaphor and symbolism. The final print was to have the woman, likely to be the child's mother, cut out of the photograph leaving the little girl and her reflections for the viewers to see.

Mirrors are often thought to reflect more than those who stand before them. Snow White's stepmother owned a mirror which talked; we may also think of Dorian Gray's portrait as a mirror, and of the double head of Janus who looks backward and forward in time.

Flat images, like photographs, do not show the whole person, they show only one view. What a wonderful idea it would be to photograph someone showing several views, by using mirrors. Such a picture would be truer -- instead of one view it would show several -- and it would imply the experience of the three-dimensional presence of the sitter.

The multiple images appearing in the mirrors would also describe time. Showing a person from several angles simultaneously speaks not only of the person but of the process of looking, the process of photographing. Amongst the separate views, time enters.

The woman holding the folding mirror becomes a magician who makes possible this act of seeing front and rear simultaneously. She hardly intrudes into the field, but her presence is echoed in the little girl. The caring expression on the woman's face explains the little girl's ease of being seen in the magic glass.

Parents perceive the future in their children; children see the past in those who are older than they are. This photograph sums up these feelings in one touching image.

*



and I wish to see you when you are home.

and doing out
 with
 you have lost a camera
 is christ. as and they are
 all of my best. I have. I have
 as a fraction of the whole. where
 Mr. W. H. H. and family. I have.

and I wish to see you when you are home.

You know I got a camera for Christmas and this is one of my 1st pictures. This is a picture of the place where Mr. Wm. Hofer and family lives.

Words and a photograph came together in this photographic postcard mailed some eighty years ago. The picture shows its maker's lack of experience with the camera, but, at the same time, it shows fragments of what the new century was to bring. The Surrealists, during the nineteen twenties, thought first consciously of juxtaposing pictures and the words which explain the images. On closer examination of this idea, we see that when words accompany an image, the words strongly influence the viewer's response. The same picture conveys different information when it is accompanied by different captions.

The juxtaposition of words and pictures becomes strong when the image is interesting enough in itself and when the words touch the reader directly. The young person who received a camera with which this postcard was made perceived this complex system. She made a photograph with visual interest, a photograph which reflects twentieth century visual sensibilities. The single windblown corn stalk echoes the trees in the background while it confronts the viewer as if it were a guard forbidding others to enter. The cornstalk standing is the last one to do so as if it were the last of the Spartans halting the Persian advance. Broken bits remain in the background, but only one complete stalk reaches the sky, the upper edge of the frame, defiantly.

The house and the barn tell little. They sit there amidst the snow. Who lives in this desolate landscape? What a dreary land, the viewer may say. The words along the picture's edges contradict the desolate feeling. The handwritten words speak with optimism and energy; they quickly explain the simplicity of the image.

The words speak of optimism; the shadow of the photographer's head, barely entering the bottom left corner, speaks of human presence. The buildings do not house desperation and solitude, as we first might think; the words explain, the house serves as home to nice people like Mr. Hofer.

The words, "I would like to know what that Roseman was doing out there?" and "Is there any left for me?" have no visual counterparts, they tell us little. This postcard speaks of a contradiction between the image and the words accompanying it. The statement appears when the viewer attempts to understand this contradiction.

*



Words like misty, hazy, seen through a veil of tears appear in descriptions of emotional events. When people part, when they remember with warmth and nostalgia some fragment of their pasts, they often use such adjectives to describe their yearning. Snapshots remind us of such moments, and this picture does just that with its mistiness.

We see the homestead where the woman, wrapped in her winter jacket, the boy, and his dog must live. The boy in the center catches our attention first. His inquisitive stare at the woman -- maybe his mother -- clutching her camera reminds us of our childhood when we stared with absolute concentration at small events.

The telephone pole tilts at a threatening angle, the woman and the dog do not look at the child, little of the print appears to be sharp. And still, the photograph conveys a definite emotion.

Although neither the woman nor the dog look at the boy, we sense a strong bond amongst them. His concentrated attention tells us of his security. He knows that his mother and his dog love him. We can see the dog turning the other way and with wagging tail running to the boy; we can imagine the woman looking up from her camera and smiling at the child; we see the house waiting for them with its warmth.

A misty, unsharp photograph, a picture most would condemn to the wastebasket. By interpreting the fuzziness, the apparent disorganization, the unsharpness as metaphor, the snapshot is come to life. Its simplicity fades and we face a touching statement of rural life in America with all its warmth, with its quiet emotions that bring tears to the eyes of those who have experienced it.

*



Carte-de-visites were extremely popular during the second half of the nineteenth century. The idea of a standardized size photograph caught on rapidly for it allowed standard sized albums to be marketed. These albums, in turn, were filled with family photographs and portraits of famous people in standard sizes. Every commercial photographer in every little town produced these images; some filled their pictures with more meaning than others.

This carte-de-visite catches our eyes because the photographer perceived the intensity of his young sitter. We may think of romantic novels so popular when this portrait was made. The young man's face exudes self-confidence, the self-confidence that made the United States the rapidly growing country it was following the Civil War.

One may ask whether we, the viewers, see the face with its intensity or whether we see the photographer's perception of the young man's energy and determination. If we assume the image to be made the action of the light alone then, of course, we see the young man as he was; but if we think about it long enough, we shall understand that the photographer could have exposed the plate a minute later when the young man might not have looked this determined and purposeful.

If the photograph shows the photographer's perception rather than the subject matter, then we may find meaning and insight in the most pedestrian photographs. As we mentioned before, almost everyone had his or her carte-de-visite made during the second half of the nineteenth century. Most of these pictures offer meaning only to those who knew the persons pictured or to their descendants. In some cases the photographer transcended his daily routine and produced portraits with deeper meaning.

This young man may symbolize the energy with which the West came to be tamed. His determination may symbolize all those men and women who braved the difficulties to create a new life free from the limitations they had left behind in Europe. We all admire the insight, the brilliance on the face of Thomas Jefferson or Benjamin Franklin, the qualities that gave these men strength to build a new country out of the wilderness. We may see this photographic portrait as an homage to the determination, to the energy of the common man.

*



Areas of black and white interlock in a visually stimulating pattern. The Navy-whites gleam, the navy-blue ribbons, the background become infinitely deep in their darkness. The neckties, the hats, the eyes and the hands make the pattern come alive with vitality. If we squint to destroy the small detail, we see movement not of people but of areas of light and dark.

If we open our eyes again, the two young men's innocent smiles touch us. What is this picture, then? Is it an abstract image in which we find ourselves carried away by the energy the arrangement of blacks and whites creates, or is it a snapshot of two young sailors full of energy, happy, hardly being able to contain their excitement about life?

Of course, our answer is, it is both. And we know that pictures, writing, music, or theater have a strong effect on us when they combine form and content into a complete unit. We cannot tell whether the arrangement of lights and darks touches us more than the optimism of the two young sailors. We can only say that the picture fills us with energy as we rediscover the visual and the emotional excitement the photographer felt aiming his camera at these two fellows.

*



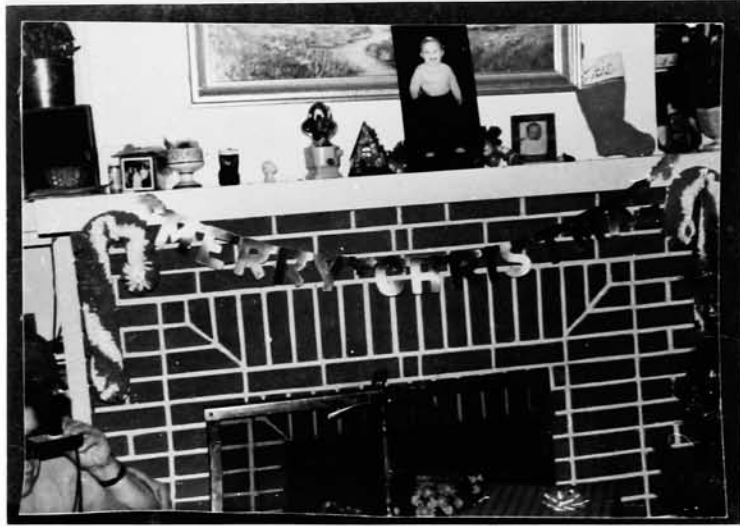
The buildings in the background have no foundation. They must be at an Army fort where he trains or trains others to go overseas to fight the Japanese or the Germans. Their attachment is strong. Look at their hands; his pulling her strongly toward himself, hers resting affectionately on his belt. Her eyes do not focus on the photographer, as his do, but, rather, see someone or something on the side. But, although she does not look at the same place as he does, she looks from the security of his embrace. Baby chicks look out from their mother's wing feathers with the same sense of security.

As they stand there, so carefully centered in the photograph's frame, they look out at the world with optimism. There is a tentativeness in his smile; they may clutch each other because of his upcoming trip on a troopship; they may fear the future while reveling in the present's embrace.

They are there, in the center of the frame, whole without the frame cropping into their legs or into the tops of their heads. Maybe the photographer wanted to preserve them whole, shooing away thoughts of mortality the war keeps so close to the mind. The frame holds them and protects them from the outside. The small roof over their heads keeps out the elements but allows the sunshine to fall upon them. Only the visor of his cap casts a shadow reminding the photographer, and the viewer, of his present employer.

We could go further and speak of how her light dress contrasted to his darker Army outfit speak as symbols. We could read more and more into how the light falls upon her face and how the visor casts a shadow on his. But searching for symbols and pursuing them too far may take the energy of life out of this snapshot. And that energy of life and vitality keeps our eyes riveted on these two people as they stand there in the sunshine in front of some officers' housing on an Army base in nineteen forty-three, forty-four, or forty-five. Seeing them there allows us to experience the conflicting thoughts the World War brought to people.

*



Snapshots often seem that they could have been the considered work of Surrealist painters. Possibly, Surrealist painters saw much in snapshots that was to their liking. They found incongruous juxtapositions fascinating because they felt that such juxtapositions generated their own meaning.

This photograph brings together fragments that, in their combination, acquire new meaning, a meaning much more complex than the photographer was likely to have imagined. The "Merry Christmas" garland is the only part of the subject, aside from the fireplace bricks, that exists in the center of the image. The other items find themselves ringing the print's edge.

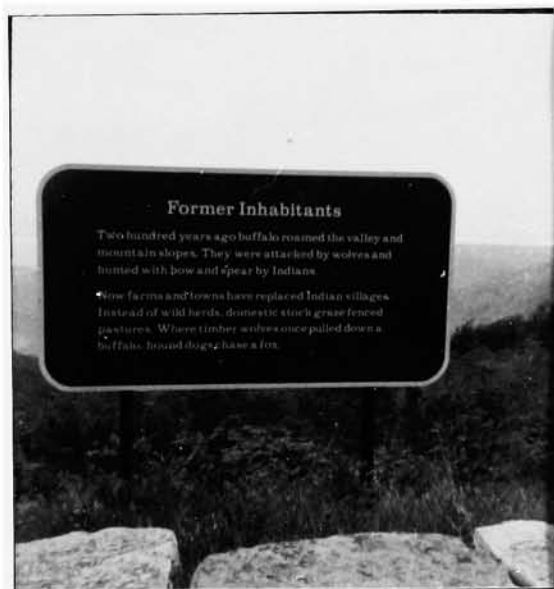
Many of these objects relate directly with the central message of the garland. The candy-canes, the Christmas sock, the bow on the table, the fragment of the Christmas tree in the lower left corner, all speak of the holiday this picture is to celebrate. These fragments, none of them in itself a complete message, together become a metaphor for Christmas. This is how most of us celebrate. Meaning exists in the juxtaposition of the details we all take for granted.

Photographing each other, mainly the children opening their gifts, is an integral part of the celebration. In this snapshot, we see not only the picture but we also see another photographer taking a picture. She was not the intended subject, otherwise she should appear in the picture's center; nevertheless she is there completing holiday activity with making a record of the event for future viewing.

We do not only see the photographer, we also see a picture the like of which the photographer is possibly taking. The print is on the mantelpiece and shows a smiling child facing the photographer. The child seems to look over at the photographer, as if to close the circle of the process, as if he were to say that we are either photographers or subjects. In some cases we are both.

The print appears surrealistic in the interrelationship of the photographer, the child looking at the photographer from the picture, the photographer who made the picture, and in our ability to bring all these fragments together. The picture in itself does not resolve the relationship of its details, it is we, the viewers, who accomplish or, at least, attempt to do so.

*



Former Inhabitants

Two hundred years ago buffalo roamed the valley and mountain slopes. They were attacked by wolves and hunted with bow and spear by Indians.

• Now farms and towns have replaced Indian villages. Instead of wild herds, domestic stock graze fenced pastures. Where timber wolves once pulled down a buffalo, blood dogs have a fox.

This is a snapshot, one might say, as dull and ordinary as a snapshot could get. What could be interesting about a sign, centered in the frame, a sign about which we know nothing?

The frame is square, the bottom paved with stones, the top third covered by the sky. The legend speaks of the former inhabitants. The snapshot may attempt to remind its maker of the place visited, it might have been made to retain the information the sign carries. In the distance, the haze turn the hills blue, the foreground is green and reasonably sharp.

The print speaks of time, if that is what we want to see in it. Not personal time, the time of the snapshooter, but the time the sign speaks about. It tells of buffalo, timber wolves, Indians hunting with bow and arrow. We would all like to return to the past to see it as it was. We know that is impossible. But words, spoken, written in books or on signs can awaken our imagination.

This sign speaks of Indians, buffalo, wolves, pioneers, farmers, hunters, and foxes the hunters chased. The photograph is much like a three-by-five card in a gallery showing conceptual art. We may think of this snapshot as such a written document to conjure up life in the valley, in the valley the sign is blocking from the viewers' eyes.

*



Traditional painting dictates careful use of the frame. Parts of bodies are rarely crossed by it as we shall find if we examine canvases painted before eighteen-fifty. When photography appeared, those who operated cameras continued retaining the use of the frame as that had been learned from painting. Fortunately, accidents happened, and photographs showed to all who would look that breaking the frame and the rule has much new to offer.

This snapshot describes a moment in a small child's life. He sits in a baby-buggy sporting embossed metal sides and rolling on metal wheels. The buggy, parked by the cement steps, stands before a background that may be either rural or suburban. The cement steps reach toward a clapboard house, the cement walk is edged by grass that leads to the next house, the space being interrupted only by some trees.

Although it is unlikely to have been conscious decision, the snapshooter organized the frame carefully. On the bottom, the wheels and the walk imply closure; on the right, the windows of the far house create an edge; on the left, the vertical window creates a dark shape running parallel with the print's left border, they all together create a frame that holds the baby buggy and the child within, ensconced.

And then we notice the tail of an animal on the right, a black tail towards which the child reaches. On first view, the child appears to be the photograph's center. What else could have been the photographer's purpose but to show the child healthy and plump, sitting in a modern, metal wheeled contraption. As we keep on looking at the child, we cannot help following the child's gaze. Our eyes keep on sliding to the print's lower right edge making us wonder of the animal whose tail this snapshot shows.

By attempting to imagine the tail's owner, we break the frame. We, the viewers, become aware that the photograph is but a detail, that it is not complete, that life goes on beyond its limits. The snapshot speaks not only of what goes on within its four edges but it also tells what may be beyond.

*



Some snapshots speak of what is; this one tells of dreams. Some snapshots show new cars, vacations, remodeled kitchens, cute pets. This one shows a dream, most likely one dreamed by both the photographer and the subject.

In a society as emphatic about beauty and glamour as American society is during the second half of the twentieth century, few can escape dreaming about being like a movie star. What should then be easier than photographing one's loved one like beautiful women are photographed for magazines, film, and television.

But she is not only beautiful, she is, also, mysterious. The strips of light and dark fall on her face and arms as the window shades refused the sun rays to enter. The stripes of light illuminate only part, the rest remains in shadow. The lighted parts we can see clearly, those in the shadow we, the viewers, must complete as if we were to solve a puzzle. From the known parts we must figure out the ones we are not shown.

In the process of deciphering her beauty we may add to it, we may detract from it. The photographer's thoughts shall remain an enigma for us. What did he think, as one may assume that it was a man, of the woman of his dreams who sat on the sofa with her arm outstretched, dappled by the light of the sun.

*

Bibliography

Aperture 19:1

Bailey, Anthony; "A Wartime Childhood", New Yorker, January 19, 1981

Boas, Franz; Primitive Art, Dover, New York, 1955

Brandel, Fernand; Structures of Everyday Life, Vol. 1, Harper & Row, New York, 1979

Campbell, Joseph; Hero with a Thousand Faces, The World Publishing Co. Cleveland, Ohio, 1956

Chalfen, Richard, "Redundant Imagery: Some Observations on the use of Snapshots In American Culture" Journal of American Culture, Volume 4, Spring 1981, No. 1

Chiarenza, Carl; Aaron Siskind, Pleasures & Terrors, New York Graphic Society & Little Brown, Boston, 1982,

Clearhout, A.G.H. 1965. The concept of primitive applied to art. Curr. Anthropol. 6:432-38

Coleman, Alan, "Autobiography in Photography," Camera 35, 19 (July 1975)

d'Azevedo, W.L. 1966. The Artist Archetype in Gola Culture. Reno: Univ. Nevada/Desert Re. Inst.

Darnton, Robert; The Great Cat Massacre, Vintage, Random House, New York, 1984

Devereux, George: "Art and Mythology: A General Theory" Jopling, Carol F., ed.; Art and Aesthetics in Primitive Societies, Dutton, N.Y. 1977

Eliade, Mircea; Myth and Reality, translated by Willard R. Trask, Harper & Row, New York, 1963,

Featherstone ,David; "The Diana Show," Untitled 21, Friends of Photography, Carmel, California

Glassie, Henry; Pattern in Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1969

Gombrich, E.H.; Meditations on a Hobby Horse, Phaidon, London.

Graburn, Nelson H. H.; Ethnic and Tourist Arts, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976

Grass, Gunter; The Tin Drum, Vintage, New York, 1964

Graves, Ken and Payne, Mitchell; American Snapshots, Scrimshaw Press, Oakland, California 1977

Hunter, David and Phillip Whitten, eds.; Encyclopedia of Anthropology, Harper & Row, New York, 1976

Ivins, William M., Jr.; Prints and Visual Communication, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1969

Jacobs, Melville; The Anthropologist Looks at Myth, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1966

Jones, Michael Owen; "The Study of Folk Art: Reflection on Images," Folklore Reprint Series, Folklore Students' Association, Bloomington, Indiana, Volume 1, Number 9, March 1974

Jung, C.G.; Man and his Symbols, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1964

Lesy, Michael; Time Frames, Pantheon Books, New York.

Lipman, Jean; "What is American Folk Art? A Symposium," ANTIQUES, 57 (1950), 359; and Erwin O. Christensen, AMERICAN CRAFTS AND FOLK ARTS (Washington, D.C., 1964)

Maddox, Jerald; "Photography as Folk Art," Van Deren Coke, ed. One Hundred Years of Photographic History, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1975, p. 105

Maquet, Jacques; "Introduction to Aesthetic Anthropology," A McCaleb Module in Anthropology, Addison-Wesley, Phillipines, 1971

Musello, Christopher; "Studying the Home Mode: An Exploration of Family Photography and Visual Communications." Studies in Visual Communication. Volume 6, Number 1, Spring 1980

Obermiller, Timothy; "Every Picture Tells a Story;" Bruce Puffer, ed.; The Perceptive Viewer, Turtle Press, Beloit College, 1981

Otten, Charlotte M., ed.; Anthropology and Art, American Museum of Natural History, Natural History Press, Garden City, New York, 1971

Oxford English Dictionary, Snap-work

Photographic News, May 13, 1860

Redfield, Robert; "Art and Icon," Charlotte M. Otten, ed; Anthropology and Art, The Natural History Press, Garden City, New York, 1971

Rexroth, Nancy; Iowa, Violet Press, 1977

Rubenstein, Elliott; "Determinants in Employing Photo-Historical Texts in Teaching," Symposium 1981 The Proceedings and Papers from the symposium held in Bath, England, April 9 - 12, 1981, by the European Society for the History of Photography.

Sturgis, Russel and Kenyon Cox, "The Lesson of the Photograph," Scribner's Magazine 23, (1898): 639.

Silver, Harry R.; "Ethnoart", Annual Review of Anthropology, 1979. 8:267-307

Snyder, Joel and Neil Walsh Allen; "Photography, Vision, and Representation," Critical Inquiry, Autumn 1975

Stephan, Emil; Sudseekunst, Berlin, 1907 as quoted by Franz Boas in Primitive Art, Dover, New York, 1955

Thurnwald, Richard; Handbuch der vergleichenden Psychologie, Herausgegeben von Gustav Kafka, Vol. 1,

Untitled 21, (David Featherstone; the Diana Show) Friends of Photography, Carmel, California 1980

Ward, John L.; The Criticism of Photography as Art, University of Florida, Gainesville, 1970

Weiss, Margaret; "Honoring the Amateur," World, March 27, 1973

Judith Williamson; Decoding Advertisements, Marion Boyars, New York, 1979

Wolfman, Augustus, "The Wolfman Report," Modern Photography, New York, 1984

List of Illustrations

- 1-1/a Forrest Steele ca. 1900
from the author's collection
- 1-1/b Anonymous Family Portrait, ca. 1900
from the author's collection
- 1-1/c Anonymous Family Portrait, ca. 1960
original in color
from the author's collection
- 1-1/d Anonymous Family Portrait, May 1964
original in color
from the author's collection
- 1-2/a American Airlines Ad., ca. 1960
- 1-2/b Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1960
from the author's collection
- 1-3/a Eastman Dryplate Company Advertisement, December 1888
from the Eastman Kodak Company's archives
- 1-3/b Eastman Kodak Company Advertisement, ca. 1955
from the Eastman Kodak Company's archives
- 1-3/c Family Snapshot
original in color
Timmcke family's snapshot album, Beloit, Wisconsin
- 1-3/d Eastman Kodak Company Advertisement, ca. 1918
from the Eastman Kodak Company's archives
- 1-3/e Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1918
from the author's collection
- 1-4/a Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1950
from the Eastman Kodak Company's archives
- 1-4/b Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1960
from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 1-4/c Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1960
from the Eastman Kodak Company's archives
- 1-4/d Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1955
from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 1-5 Eastman Kodak Company Advertisement, ca. 1890
from the Eastman Kodak Company's archives

- 1-6/a Welch's Advertisement
- 1-6/b Anonymous Snapshot
from the Eastman Kodak Company's archives
- 1-7/a Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 1-7/b From the Milwaukee Journal's files
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 1-7/c Family Snapshot
Cindy and Dan Nelson, Chicago
original in color
- 1-8/a Advertisement for SAXON automobiles, 1916
- 1-8/b Anonymous Snapshot
from the author's collection
- 1-8/c Buick Advertisement, 1939
- 1-8/d Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection

- 2-1/a Krueger Collection, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-1/b Krueger Collection, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-1/c Krueger Collection, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-2/a Forrest Steele, ca. 1900
author's collection
- 2-2/b Krueger Collection, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-3/a Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-3/b Krueger Collection, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-3/c Krueger Collection, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-3/d Krueger Collection, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-3/e Krueger Collection, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-4/a Krueger Collection, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-4/b Krueger Collection, ca. 1900
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-4/c Anonymous Snapshot
from the author's collection

- 2-5/a Krueger Collection
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-5/b Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-6 T. E. Lawrence; Agaba, 1918
- 2-7/a Anonymous Snapshot, 1914-1918
from the Museum of Contemporary History, Budapest
- 2-7/b Anonymous Snapshot, 1914-1918
from the Museum of Contemporary History, Budapest
- 2-7/c Anonymous Snapshot, 1914-1918
from the Museum of Contemporary History, Budapest
- 2-8/a Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1930
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-8/b Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1930
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-8/c Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1930
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-8/d My Father and I, 1940
from the author's collection
- 2-8/e Anonymous Snapshot, ca. 1930
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-9/a Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-9/b Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-9/c Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection

- 2-9/d Anonymous Snapshot
from the author's collection
- 2-9/e Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-10/a Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-10/b Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-10/c Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-10/d Anonymous Snapshot
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-10/e Family Snapshot, ca. 1942
from the author's collection
- 2-11/a From the collection of the
Museum of Contemporary History, Budapest, Hungary
- 2-11/b Anonymous Snapshot, Execution on the Front, ca. 1942
From the collection of the
Museum of Contemporary History, Budapest, Hungary
- 2-11/c from the Milwaukee Sentinel collection
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-11/d from the Milwaukee Sentinel collection
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-11/e from the Milwaukee Sentinel collection
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-12/a Anonymous Snapshot
from the author's collection
- 2-12/b Anonymous Snapshot
from the author's collection

- 2-13/a Anonymous Snapshot
original in color
from the author's collection
- 2-13/b Anonymous Snapshot
original in color
from the author's collection
- 2-14/a Linda in the Y, 1960
original in color
from the author's collection
- 2-14/b Robbie by the Piano, 1960
from the author's collection
- 2-15/a Anonymous Snapshot
original in color
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Iconographic Collection
- 2-15/b Carol on Cape Cod, 1960
original in color
from the author's collection
- 2-15/c Carol on Cape Cod, 1960
original in color
from the author's collection
- 2-15/d Anonymous Snapshot
original in color
from the author's collection
- 2-15/e Raymond Flying to Europe,
original in color
from the author's collection