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PROBING THE SURFACE:
THE FAMILY ARCHIVE REVISITED IN INSTALLATIONS BY
WYN GELEYNSE, MINDY YAN MILLER AND YVONNE SINGER

Shannon Anderson

A Thesis
In
The Department
Of
Art History

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ABSTRACT

Probing the Surface:
The Family Archive Revisited in Installations by
Wyn Geleynse, Mindy Yan Miller and Yvonne Singer

Shannon Anderson

The family photograph represents the past in a restrictively visual, static manner.
It contains none of the complex interweaving of selectivity and sensorial interplay that
characterizes how our own bodies remember. Despite this, the photographic image is
often relied upon to remember our past for us, and hence given an authority to represent
lived experience. Further, the image is able to captivate the viewer into a search for the
essence of the individual locked within it. Roland Barthes attributes this phenomenon to
the *noeme* of photography: the "That-Has-Been". Despite the fact that the past cannot be
physically captured, it has in some strange sense been accomplished in the image. In an
instant, the body has been engraved through light into the paper's surface, creating what
Barthes terms an "umbilical cord" between the viewer of the image and the person within
it.

It is through an examination of this premise that this thesis presents the work of
Wyn Geleynse, Mindy Yan Miller and Yvonne Singer. Three installations that
incorporate images from the artists' archives are employed as windows through which a
discussion on the nature of the family photograph is expounded. What distinguishes and
unites Geleynse's *A Film Projection at Building 70, Granville Island, Vancouver, B.C.*,
Miller's *Papa* and Singer's *Projections for the unseeing* is their common search for the

very essence that draws us to the image, a search that is frustrated by the authority of the image in the presence of lingering memories.

Beyond the use of Roland Barthes, this thesis relates the writing of those who may not directly address the photographic experience to enrich Barthes' notions and to further explain the encounters that these three installations encapsulate. Jean Baudrillard's semiotic structure is employed to expand on the frustration inherent in the search to link self-identity to that which is presented in the image. Andreas Huyssen's reworking of Lacan's mirror stage through the writing of Rainer Maria Rilke is likened to a 'photographic stage' in an attempt to understand the split between self and image. Other themes include an interpretation of these installations through their expanded use of the senses: the place of gender in creating family 'roles' through photographic documentation; and the use of film technique to bridge a gap between the photographic image and memory. Throughout, the overriding themes of memory, identity and the family photograph are addressed specifically in terms of how they are brought together in installations that operate from different perspectives while sharing this desire to forge a link with the image. The result of this investigation are installations that reconstitute the photographic image as a new experience, one that begins to suggest the complexity of memory. The urge to connect with the image in these works is acutely articulated; creating a frustrating and ultimately more intimate and resonating desire to probe the surface of the family photograph.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

long bus rides, Kevin and Catherine for getting me away from this thesis on a Saturday night, and Thomas for being there when I got home.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the person who sparked my interest in art and whose own enthusiasm for art will be forever inspirational. It seems appropriate that I dedicate the end product of my formal schooling in art to the high school teacher who started it. Thank you, Ms. Sheppard.

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INTRODUCTION

Gazing at the surface of a family photograph, I find it fascinating to consider how the moment it documents with such technical certainty has come to be colluded with memory. The temptation to confuse the two is evident. A photograph, with its ability to capture a scene in intense detail, is certainly more reliable than the best 'photographic memory'. Yet this neglects a large part of what is important to memory: how it shapes identity through how it remembers and why. A reliance on the family photograph to depict the past and render it meaningful means instilling an authority in the image to speak for lived experience. Generally speaking, the conflation of memory and photography happens all the time. Camera advertisements interchange the words 'memory' and 'photography' on a regular basis. Most people have felt the momentary panic and disappointment that can accompany the realization that they have forgotten their camera to record a moment that they want to remember.

Examining the camera's product reveals quite clearly how much the photograph, despite all the visual detail, is unable to recount. The camera does not extend its function beyond the visual. Although a photograph is tactile to the extent that the paper can be touched and contains an odour to the extent that the musty pages of the photographic album release a scent, these are sensory triggers that remain quite separate from the content of the image. In terms of its relation to memory, the photograph remains a strictly static, visual trigger, a signifier that neglects much of memory's multi-layered domain. Even the visual image of the photograph differs from memory. Memory's images tend to morph with the passage of time. They are selective, cloudy, sometimes

far removed from any distinct visual image. This is because memory is composed of a varying multitude of fragments taken in from all areas of the body. All the senses are capable of triggering the emotional undercurrents that urge memories into being. Conversely, the photograph depicts a static and visually permanent image within which everything within the confines of the frame is presented before the viewer without the biases that memory-images necessitate. Unlike memory's seemingly random selection process, the family photograph is generally created under fabricated 'moments': the birthday parties, weddings, vacations... a combination which makes it appear as though the world is "perpetually on holiday".[1]

The oeuvres of Wyn Geleynse, Mindy Yan Miller and Yvonne Singer include installations that investigate the viewer's relationship with the family photograph in terms of memory. Each artist has chosen to work with one or two images that document moments of their family's past, and have reworked the conditions under which they are viewed using film, light, and the creation of a space for the viewer's body in the installation. Through this, their installations construct an investigation into the nature of the relationship between the photographic image and memory. The purpose of this thesis is to examine one particular installation by each artist in terms of how issues of memory and identity are reflected. It is specifically the 'how' of these installations that is the focus, in that the artistic decisions that have generated the work are considered in detail. These three installations do not simply incorporate family photographs; the images are the crux of these works in that they are the nucleus from which each artist strives to

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[1] Quotation from the narration in Vern Hume's *Lamented Moments:Desired Objects* as cited in Hutcheon, Linda and Mark A. Cheetham. Remembering Postmodernism: Trends in Recent Canadian Art. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991. 67 (For more on Vern Hume, see Chapter One.)

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generate an intimate investigation into the nature of their relationship to the family photograph.

Wyn Geleynse: A Film Projection at Building 70, Granville Island, Vancouver

Wyn Geleynse has been working with installations involving family photographs and films for over a decade. His conceptual material has consistently dealt with the constructed nature of photography: how it affects experience, how a sense of identity is formed in relation to these images. Simple actions are documented on film and projected in a film loop so that the action repeats itself indefinitely. Geleynse often deals with his own family history in these constructions. For example, in *Family Portrait* (1986-87) (Fig. 1), Geleynse returns to a photograph of his family where he is shown as a young boy. In the film loop, he alternately inserts himself as an adult in the young boy's or the father's position in the photograph.[2] Here, Geleynse uses himself in the present moment to call his own identity into question. In the photograph, where time remains frozen, he will always be the young boy, which negates his fatherly role in the present.

Another example from Geleynse's oeuvre is *Home Movies* of 1986 (Fig. 2). Two picture frames are placed on a shelf in the gallery. The film projector that stands in front of the frames projects two changing images into the frames: one of a man (Geleynse) sitting with his back turned who occasionally turns around to look out at the viewer.[3] He is watching the home movies that play in the other photograph, mimicking the audience's

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[2] Fleming, Marnie. "Radiant Places: Bill Barrette and Wyn Geleynse." Radiant Places: Bill Barrette and Wyn Geleynse Oakville: Oakville Galleries, 1993. 8.
3 Yau, John. "Picture Shows: The Art of Bill Barrette and Wyn Geleynse." Radiant Places: Bill Barrette and Wyn Geleynse. Oakville: Oakville Galleries, 1993. 18.

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own viewing perspective of the installation. Again, the position of the photographic viewer is addressed. What the family photograph presents to a viewer, how it becomes part of the formation of identity, and its role in relation to memory are all aspects of the photographic image that Geleynse investigates in his work.

Despite the fact that Geleynse has worked with this subject matter extensively, the discussion of his work will be focussed on one central piece – *A Film Projection at Building 70, Granville Island, Vancouver* (Fig. 3, 4). This installation was created in 1990 for the Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver. Rather than a traditional gallery space, Geleynse has chosen a warehouse setting for the film projection. The projection loop depicts an adult hand holding a photograph of a young girl in a toy car. The hand reaches out to touch the image, then slowly, thoughtfully, caresses the surface of the photograph. The image appears to hover in space, as the hand and photograph can be deciphered, but not the edges of the projection. Geleynse achieves this illusion by rear-projecting the image onto a sheet of plexiglass that has been selectively ground. This alters the transparency of the medium to one that is opaque in these grounded areas. Therefore, the image from the projection can only be viewed on this section.

There are carefully chosen elements in this installation that highlight *Film Projection* as the piece from Geleynse's oeuvre that relates most strongly to the work of the other artists and the topics of discussion in this thesis. One important element in this film projection is the uncommon use of a frame-less image. In my interview with the artist, Geleynse revealed his ongoing interest in the frame of photography – the frame that breaks the boundary between what is metaphorically and literally left in or out of the picture. In much of his work, the frame is present in the installation. In *Film Projection,*

the framed photograph is in the film's content but the presentation of the film is as frameless as possible. By projecting the film onto selectively ground plexiglass the traditional use of a projection screen is abandoned. Another key element in this piece is the practice of creating installations in site specific locations, where the atmosphere of the setting is allowed to play into the construction of the piece. This is fairly new territory for Geleynse, whose installations are generally displayed in a gallery setting. The use of a warehouse adds to the reading of the work, playing into the concept of storage, both in terms of how memories are stored and the literal storage of photographs in family albums. The choice of images for the projected sequence is curious – Geleynse's focus on the hand and its gestures stray from his tendency to use the whole body in his installations rather than parts of the body. The focus on the gesture of touch holds a multi-layered meaning in terms of photography and possession, the blurred boundary between the tactile and the ephemeral, and the attempt to reach beyond the visual. This study of the moving body in relation to this static image sets up a dynamic conversation between the two components.

Mindy Yan Miller: Papa

The use of repetition and labour are two elements that consistently present themselves in Mindy Yan Miller's work. With a background in textile work, many of the principles that applied to her textile-based pieces were carried on to other materials such as hair and the medium of video. For example, in *I Fell Asleep* (1989-92) (Fig. 6), carefully folded and layered piles of used clothing bear witness to the meticulous

repetitive process of making the piece.[4] Installed for several years in a condemned

industrial building in Halifax, the bundles formed with such care were left to the

elements. Arranged under windows, the piles of clothing were slowly destroyed by the

elements until the day the building was torn down. The use of old clothing and its

implied reference to missing bodies combined with Miller's Jewish heritage has often led

to the association of this piece to the Holocaust. As Rebecca Todd notes in her essay on

Miller's work, *I Fell Asleep* was the first to be interpreted as a piece on the Holocaust,

and "marked the beginning of her struggle to balance her immediate autobiographical

concerns with their implications for her identity as a Jewish artist."[5]

One of a series of pieces made of hair, *Mindel (Every Word Their Name)* (Fig. 6)

is perhaps the one that best exemplifies Miller's use of the autobiographical in her work.

In *Mindel*, the names of real and imagined family members are meticulously fabricated

out of strands of human hair pinned to the gallery wall. With this piece, the artist's own

family history is specifically referenced in relation to the process of mourning.[6]

Although *Papa* (Figs. 8, 9) is her first piece that employs a family photograph,

some of its elements share commonalities with previous installations. There is the

aforementioned use of repetition and labour, an autobiographical thrust, reference to the

body, a concentration on process that remains evident in the final piece, and a carefully

considered sensitivity to her choice of materials. The installation for *Papa* is composed of

a table and a small video projector. The projector lies on the table, and the image

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[4] The description of this installation is drawn from Todd, Rebecca. "The Body of Remembrance." Chorus: Mindy Yan Miller. North York: Koffler Gallery, 1997. 8.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Sarah Quinton and John Armstrong identify the link between Miller's use of hair and the Victorian tradition of saving the hair of the departed in Quinton, Sarah and John Armstrong. Textiles, that is to say. Toronto: The Museum for Textiles, 1994.

projects onto the wall. The image is quite small in comparison to the Geleynse installation, just 9 inches by 12 inches. The projection shows the artist consuming a photograph. First, she presents the image to us - an image of a young girl and her father. In slowed time, the photograph is brought in front of the woman's mouth, and then her mouth covers the photograph at which point it is chewed and then swallowed. As with Geleynse's installation, the use of repetition is employed. After the photograph is swallowed, we are back at the beginning of the sequence with the presentation of the photograph. But significantly, this repetition is not quite like Geleynse's film loop. Although Miller's performance is repeated in exactly the same sequence each time, the act has clearly been repeated by the artist, rather than mechanically repeated. Watching carefully, slight changes are noticeable from one sequence to the next – where her hand is placed on the photograph, the speed of which it is brought to her mouth... Throughout the performance, the musical backdrop of a lullaby is hummed. This aids in lending the video a melancholy yet hallucinatory quality, lulling the viewer into watching this act repeat itself over and over.

The photograph is of the artist as a young girl sitting in the lap of her father. It seems to depict a happy moment: both are smiling, the girl directing her gaze at the camera while the father smiles down at his daughter. But clearly there is a history between the two that the photograph does not reveal to us. Miller's adult face is solemn as she consumes the photograph, willingly destroying it. A lapse is made apparent between the reality that this photograph presents and the reality of the artist's memory.

Two main factors have drawn me into this installation. I am compelled to examine this piece by the fact that this is the only installation Miller has created that

employs a family photograph, or one that uses projection. Unlike Geleynse's work, which has repeatedly dealt with images from his family archives, this seems to be the single instance in Miller's oeuvre where these images come into play. Secondly, I find the gesture of eating a photograph captivating. It is as unusual as it is simple, symbolic and loaded. The act of destroying the image through the attempt of trying to make it part of her own body creates an air of fatality wherein the distance between the artist and the photograph is rendered forever present.

Yvonne Singer: Projections for the unseeing

  Yvonne Singer's work has often returned to the theme of history and memory. Sharing Miller's Jewish background, she too has confronted issues of the Holocaust in her work. Her recent installations have begun to gravitate towards the inclusion of her own family history as a focus. A transitional piece that combines both subjects is *Veiled Room* of 1998 (Fig. 10). The installation is composed of a triangular arrangement of sheer white curtains placed in the middle of the gallery space.[7] The viewer enters through the curtains into the interior space. In the confined area, the interior of the curtains is printed with excerpts from Freud's writing and names of intellectuals associated with the Weimar period (Germany's first democracy) that predated Hitler's rise to power. In the middle of this space, a small television is playing a scene from Singer's home movies. Her mother and father are shown; the father appears to fall down a flight of stairs and then catching himself, turns to his wife and they kiss. The short comedic scene is on a loop, playing itself out over and over. Freudian psychoanalysis,

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[7] The description of this installation has been drawn from Conley, Christine. "Yvonne Singer: The Red Head Gallery, Toronto, November 4-28." Parachute 95 (July/Aug/Sept 1999): 46-47.

with its focus on the family unit as the underpinnings of societal behavior, provides a joining foundation in this piece between Nazi Germany and Singer's family history.

This reference to home movies becomes the central focus of *Projections for the unseeing* (Figs. 11, 12, 13). In the process of culling source material from her own background, memories of film footage of herself as a child compelled her to search out the old material and to work with it. While Singer employs film images other than photographs per se, much of this discussion of her work will focus on how her installation re-instates the photographic element by halting the fluid motion by which we normally differentiate film.

Although the piece was first exhibited at the Red Head Gallery in Toronto, I viewed *Projections for the unseeing* at Expression, an exhibition centre in Saint - Hyacinthe, Quebec, in March of 1999. The installation space consisted of the following elements: two film projectors mounted on adjacent walls, each projecting a different film sequence, and five pairs of eyeglasses set at eye level and placed throughout the space of the room. The first projection was of Singer, at about seven or eight years old, in her home. She is showing off for the cameraman (her father), twirling in circles with her arms above her head as though she is a ballerina. She smiles radiantly, and is dressed up in a white shirt, a skirt, and a bow in her hair. This projection rests nearly flush with the bottom of the wall, and the other is raised somewhat to about the middle of the wall. The second projection seems to have been filmed the same day, as Singer is wearing the same clothes. This time she is with her younger brother and the two are play fighting over one of the girl's toy dolls. There is what appears to be a mock tug-of-war, as the two are smiling and laughing during the sequence, acting for the camera in a sense.

It is the methods used by the artist to re-present her home movie footage that is a key element in the installation and one that is particularly relevant for this thesis. The film fragments have been manipulated by the artist; these otherwise brief sequences have been slowed down to the point where each film still is made viewable. The illusion of movement that comes when the film is shown at its regular speed is eliminated. The young girl twirls with such slow velocity that each turn of the body can be viewed. Literally breaking down the scene, this fleeting moment that has been recorded on film is analyzed to extent that it begins to depict a deeply significant moment event from the past.

The eyeglasses that are interspersed throughout the space are the second component of this installation. These specially designed mechanisms are not like ordinary eyeglasses: their arms rise up towards the ceiling. They are attached to motors that turn the arms in a way that is not unlike the turning mechanisms used for the animals on a merry-go-round – the ones that allow the animals to slowly move up and down while the base moves in circles. This causes the eyeglasses to move up and down in a similar fashion, while simultaneously rocking from side to side. Each pair of glasses contains a different set of text etched onto the frames: "je tu/ne pas" "stop/smile" "look/stop" "look/smile". One pair of glasses does not move, and each frame contains a short narrative. The left side reads: "I could never co-ordinate my arms and my breathing at the same time so I would take a deep breath and swim the length of the pool this left me breathless." The right side contains a French text which translates as: "In my grandmother's room was my Barbara Ann Scott doll who lost her head. I could never go into that room." Through the use of narrative, memories that have not been documented

on film weave their way into the space. Text and image find a space in this room, deconstructing the imagery, and setting up an underlying dialogue between the tactile documentation that our lives leave behind, and the memories that we carry with us.

Navigating through the space of Singer's installation was an act of continuous re-shifting and focusing. The multiple layers of looking provided by the text, the magnifying lenses of the eyeglasses, the rocking movements of the glasses, and the flickering images themselves began to create a sense of dizziness. There was a subtle unhinging of the body's groundedness that is generally taken for granted. The noise that echoed throughout the room from the projectors and motorized eyeglasses added to this atmosphere. The space was far from silent, filled with the mechanical tickings and whirrings of these simple mechanics. *Projections for the unseeing* was not simply about an installation of film images and text, but an environment within which the visitor begins to become immersed.

A brief structural outline

The purpose of this thesis is to employ these three installations as windows through which a dialogue can be created between the perception of the image in the family archive and memory. Each piece represents a search to discover how the image still manages to captivate despite its limitations as a static, purely visual signifier for the past. To this end, these installations place the voice of the artist in the role of interpretant of the image, changing how it is received by creating a new space for its interpretation.

The methods by which these artists re-present the image carry both similarities and differences that, when examined in comparison, create a complex investigation into

the lure of the family photograph. The categories of relationships that are examined in this thesis involve the different ways personal background is carried into the work; the methods of creating an installation space that complicates the visual experience by introducing the other senses; and the use of film and video techniques in which the image is reworked.

For example, each artist employs images from their own family archives in these installations, but each has come towards doing so from a different artistic path. For both Singer and Miller, these are essentially the first pieces they have created using images from their archives as a focus, whereas Geleynse has been working with them for more than a decade. All three artists in these pieces use an image of a young girl: Miller and Singer have chosen images of themselves and Geleynse incorporates an image of his daughter. Likewise, there is a prominent role for the father in each work: Miller's father is present in the photograph, Singer's father operates the camera, and Geleysne *is* the father. The father/daughter relationship present in each work extends a questioning of the authority of photography into the realm of gender relations, placing a focus on *how* the childhood of these girls has been presented to the viewer photographically. Each installation creates a space for the viewer's engagement with the work, opening up the traditional notion of the viewer's potentially passive involvement with artwork (and photography). Geleynse uses a space outside the gallery confines for his installation, Miller creates an intimate space within the gallery setting, and Singer uses the gallery to create an environment that requires the viewer to navigate the space. Each installation incorporates some of the other senses that bring the experience closer to the way memory functions, but each piece has a very different approach. Geleynse focuses on touch;

Miller on taste and sound; Singer on sound and kinaesthesia. The same holds true for the use of film or video. Each artist combines photography with a filmic element to alter the static nature of the image, but in three significantly distinct manners. Geleynse places the photograph into the film sequence, limiting the elements to a photograph and a hand. Miller opts for video projection and uses a much more intimate presentation style. Singer begins with film from home movies, and through manipulation, turns fluid motion into halting photographic stills. The technical methods by which the films and videos are presented (slow motion, repetition, reversal) allow for breaking down the magic of photography's production and placing the image in new contexts that make room for the voices and memories of both artist and viewer.

In working through these comparisons, this discussion will aim towards generating an understanding of how these three works have created an intimate investigation into the nature of the photographic image. The challenges they present towards the authority of the image, the methods they employ for presenting memory, and the paradoxical place the photographic image occupies in relation to identity constitute the central framework for probing the surface of the family photograph.

Chapter One
In Context: Investigating the Family Photograph

As with any attempt to analyze art, a discussion that does not situate a work into an artistic, societal or theoretical discourse places the piece into a vacuum that disregards the influences that brought the work into being. The purpose of this first chapter is twofold: to create a context for the work of Wyn Geleynse, Mindy Yan Miller and Yvonne Singer by outlining the use of family photographs in work by their contemporaries and the theoretical writing that has accompanied typical analyses of these works (and writing on family photography in general). From this, the approach that this particular discussion plans to adopt will be highlighted against this foundation.

The lure of the archive – artists looking at images of the family

Before delving into the central arguments of this thesis, it is necessary to present a background of artistic production that connects the work of Wyn Geleynse, Mindy Yan Miller and Yvonne Singer to Canadian art as a whole. By way of introducing different ways in which contemporary artists have employed the family photograph in their work, a selection of Canadian artists are presented below. Many of these artists share biographical similarities in terms of age group and the experience of being a first or second-generation immigrant to Canada.[8] In terms of the work, beyond the use of family photographs or home movie footage, most of these comparative works also share one or two conceptual similarities with the central artists of this thesis. A list of artists not only

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[8] This said, it should be made clear that the immigrant experience, which may play a role in creating a desire to question the family photograph, is not a necessary condition to making work that probes these themes and not a condition that will be explored in detail in this thesis.

situates the work of these three artists of focus, then, but also provides an entry point for discussing the rationale for choosing these particular artists in light of the plethora of artists who also employ family photographs in their work.

Sara Angelucci was born in Guelph, Ontario and is a second-generation Italian-Canadian. Her multimedia works consistently explore issues of cultural identity. Drawing from her personal and family history, Angelucci incorporates family photographs to question the links that are sustained to one's country of origin after immigration. *Evidence of her Disappearance* (1997), an installation incorporating Duratrans proofs and a video excerpt, focuses on her grandmother and the isolation that can accompany the abandonment of home for a new country.[9]

Sorel Cohen was born in Montreal. Her father emigrated from Poland and her mother, from Russia. Cohen's work springs from diverse influences, but some recent pieces have been culled from her own personal history. *Made Ash* of 1996, consists of a series of portraits of the artist's female ancestors from her father's side of the family.[10] The source of the images is actually a group snapshot, from which Cohen separated and enlarged the images of each woman in the portrait. On top of these now-individualized portraits, Cohen has superimposed images of her own face by way of slide projection. This simple manipulation suggests many meanings. Placing her own image on top of these ancestral images could be interpreted as a search for identity with these virtual strangers. All of the women in the photograph were victims of the Holocaust, and this snapshot was one of the few remnants of their existence. Cohen seems to be forging a

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[9] "Sara Angelucci: Evidence of her Disappearance." CV photo (info): 8-9.
[10] Information on this installation has been drawn from Lerner, Loren. Class Lecture (in relation to Sorel Cohen). Concordia University, Montreal. 28 Jan. 1999.

connection with these women, perhaps looking for facial similarities, anything to feel a

bond with her female lineage. This rather haunting installation speaks not only of loss

and mourning, but also of the ambivalent nature of photography. These images are

sometimes the only remaining documents of the past of someone connected to us

(although often only by blood), but at the same time they reveal such superficial

information, lending no real insight into the people themselves. *Made Ash* involves a

search of sorts by the artist, a desire to connect to a past that only remains tangible in

photographs.

Sara *Diamond's* videos and video installations have consistently returned to the

theme of the representation of women in history, constructing and challenging narrative

structures in her work. Two films have looked to her Italian-Canadian family

background as a catalyst for her videos: *The Influences of my Mother* of 1982 and

Patternity (sic) of 1991. The first, an early work in the artist's oeuvre, is an attempt to

present a more complex portrait of her mother than might be found in a photographic

image.[11] Visually representing her mother by way of photos, Diamond supplements the

imagery with her own personal memories, stories and testimonies from friends and

family. This video acts as an attempt both to construct a video that portrays her mother,

and to do so in a way that allows a space for the artist's own voice and memories.

Likewise, *Patternity* forms a narrative around a family member – this time, her

father. Using eight video screens placed around a domestic setting with sofas and

curtains, images are combined with stories (some told by her father, who unlike her

mother, was still alive when Diamond made the piece). Not as reliant on the family

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[11] The descriptions of the following installations have been drawn from National Gallery of Canada. Sara Diamond: Memories Revisited, History Retold. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992.

photograph to present a person, *Patternity* creates a portrait that makes use of diverse

elements and approaches to construct a picture of the artist's father.

Caroline Dukes was born in Hungary, and did not arrive to Canada until she was a

young adult. Her work draws from her family background and history, using diverse

methods to express the ways in which we remember. The installation from her oeuvre

that most directly makes use of family photographs in relation to memory and identity is

Remember... Relate... Retell..., first exhibited at Plug In Inc. Gallery in Winnipeg.[12] This

multi-faceted piece combines family photographs with drawing, video projection, found

objects, text and audio. The work's origins stem from Dukes' desire to learn about her

family history, particularly in relation to her father who passed away when she was five

years old. Her efforts to remember her past through hypnosis are woven into the

installation through audio extracts from the recordings of her sessions, and text and

images that emerged from undergoing hypnosis.

Three family photographs play a central role in the installation. One of her

parents, another of her mother as a young woman, and one image of Dukes herself at

three years of age have been enlarged to beyond life size. The surface of each

photograph has been physically manipulated by the artist through the use of charcoal and

erasure and the addition of text. Certain areas are highlighted, others are made vague and

difficult to read, investing new meaning both visually and textually into the image's

contents. By reworking the surface of the images, she allows the voice of the present to

integrate itself with the past. In doing so, the imagery reflects not what a camera chooses

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[12] The description of the following installation has been drawn from Plug In Inc. Gallery. Caroline Dukes:
Remember...Relate...Retell... Winnipeg: Plug-In Editions, 1996.

to represent, but the memories Dukes associates with the images, directing the viewer to look at the images the way she feels they speak most strongly.

Miriam Fabijan has worked extensively with her own family photographs in her installations. Born in Calgary, her parents emigrated from Slovenia. Fabijan's pieces also incorporate Slovenian culture and language to talk about her familial links to Slovenia. The photographs are used to talk about identity and how one connects to one's past ancestry.[13] For example, in *Translations; My Hat Has Three Holes* of 1992, Fabijan mechanically enlarges a selection of fourteen family photographs. A photograph of herself is placed next to ones of her father and paternal grandfather, alluding to an ancestral line. The images are carefully manipulated by the artist, over-exposing certain areas to render them vague, leaving the eye to focus on certain details that have been left properly exposed.[14] A Slovenian children's rhyme is included ("My hat has three holes./ Three holes has my hat./ If it would not have three holes,/ Then it would not be my hat.") conjuring memories of childhood, the experience of growing up with disparate senses of identity, and using the metaphor of the hat to refer to family history and the making of identity.

Freda Guttman's installation *Cassandra: An Opera in Four Acts* of 1995 employs footage from her family's home movie collection.[15] Connecting herself to the silenced prophet of Greek mythology, Guttman's film footage depicts a moment between her father, herself and her brother, taken when the artist was a young child. In the scene, the

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[13] "Miriam Fabijan." Canadian Artists of Eastern European Origin. Ed. Dr. Loren Lerner. Concordia University, Montreal. February 20, 2000. <http.//art-history.concordia.ca/eea/artists/fabijan.html>.
[14] Goodes, Donald. "Fabijan." Hour Magazine. Montreal, 20-26 May 1993. 20.
[15] The description of this installation is drawn from Lamontagne, Valerie. "Cassandra: an Installation by Freda Guttman." Artfocus (Winter 96/97): 21.

two children run up to greet their father. As all three pose for the camera, the father is shown favouring his son by slipping his arm around the boy while gently pushing his daughter aside. The silenced daughter, Guttman extends this personal moment from her history to link it to women's history in general. The second 'act' in the installation is a 1940's radio within which a small video screen shows a scene between Hitler and a young girl who is bowing before him with an offer of flowers. The third act is a series of audio interviews that deal with the female voice. The last act depicts a series of photographs taken at Guttman's thirteenth birthday party which slowly fade out and reappear with a maid standing in the corner. The four acts speak of the position of females in history and society, both in personal relation to the artist and on a larger scale. Here, footage of family movies are interpreted by the artist; given a voice and new meaning.

Vern Hume, an artist from Calgary, works with altered home movie footage presented in a domestic setting in his installation *Lamented Moments Desired Objects* (1988).[16] The 'room' contains an oriental rug, a floor lamp, and a chair for the viewer to sit in and watch the television that plays the home movies. Enlarged family photographs from Hume's archives line the walls of the space. The home movies consist of both old footage and new footage that Hume has added based on his own memories. A soundtrack has also been added which includes both narrative describing Hume's memories of the past and 'aural recollections' such as the sound of footsteps on gravel.[17] This is the only installation presented in this list of artists that deliberately alludes to non-visual memory

[16] Described in Cheetham, Mark A. and Linda Hutcheon. Remembering Postmodernism: Trends in Recent Canadian Art. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991. 67–70.
[17] Ibid. 69.

in its construction (an important element in Geleynse, Miller and Singer's works

analyzed in detail in Chapter Three). In his narration, Hume recalls the feeling of

walking barefoot across grass, describing that "cool feet sent shivers up my spine. There

are no shots of this."[18] *Lamented Moments Desired Objects* is a thoughtful consideration

of the memories that photographs and home movies are unable to document, questioning

the role each play in memory's construction.

Ernie Kroeger was born in Manitoba and his parents emigrated from Ukraine.

His early work adopted a documentary approach to photography in capturing everyday

scenes, later focusing on the Canadian landscape. In the 1990's Kroeger began to explore

his own family history and immigration experience.[19] *Family Stories* uses family

photographs, memorabilia and narrative to tell the history of his parents' travel from

Ukraine to Winnipeg. Working with this material, Kroeger retells his family history with

his own construction. Exhibited in book format, the piece allows the viewer to flip

through the material and put a story together.[20]

Élène Tremblay takes a decontructive approach towards family photography. Her

series of found photographs, *Memory Gaps* (1996),[21] literally cuts away aspects of these

images into a series of image fragments. The spaces in the photographs are left

untouched, creating literal representations of 'memory gaps'. Tremblay starts to make

comparisons between the fragmentary nature of memory, altering the 'complete' image

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Information on Kroeger from "Ernie Kroeger." Canadian Artists of Eastern European Origin. Ed. Dr. Loren Lerner. Concordia University, Montreal. February 20, 2000. <http.//art-history.concordia.ca/eea/kroeger.html>.
[20] Lipsett, Katherine. "Place Meaning." Backflash 11:4 (1993): 5-8.
[21] Exhibition at Gallery 44. For more information, see Gallery 44. Élène Tremblay: Memory Gaps. Toronto: Gallery 44, 1996.

of a photograph to reflect the way our minds actually remember the past. Her alterations to the images do not relate to her own memories of these images, since she does not refer to her own archives, but to family photography in general. In this respect, Tremblay places herself in the same role as the viewer, allowing for imagination to be triggered from the images of strangers.

There are some obvious similarities between the work of these other artists and the three artists who are the focus of this discussion, but their key differences are what distinguish the choice of artists for this thesis. One element that does not appear in the films by Sara Angelucci and Sara Diamond, and works by Ernie Kroeger and Miriam Fabijan is the use of the photograph as a means of self-reflection. These artists certainly draw from their past, but although images of themselves may be included, the focus is more clearly on the immigration experience or other family members. Much of this thesis revolves around the importance of self-reflection and the disjunction between memory and the image presented in the photograph. This is personally the case for Singer and Miller, and the subject matter of Geleynse's installation. One other key element that does not present itself in most of these other artists' works is the use of film or video. Again, this is a key ingredient of this discussion, and particularly the foundation for chapter three.

Freda Guttman's use of home movie footage in *Cassandra*, because of its visual similarities to Yvonne Singer's approach may appear to make the two interchangeable for this discussion. Both focus on one particular incident from childhood, repeating it to invest the moment with some of the significance that it holds for the artist. But the choice of discussing Singer's installation was based on many differences that made her

piece resonate more deeply in relation to the other two artists in this discussion. Of primary importance is Singer's probing of the image, pushing the mechanics of the home movie so that it occupies a space between film and photography. A compulsive, involved investigation into the surface of the photograph image is an intrinsic part of Wyn Geleynse and Mindy Yan Miller's installations as well that does not present itself as clearly in the work of the other artists presented here. Guttman's *Cassandra* is not so much about the image itself as the moment presented within it. A sense of identity is certainly pondered, although not exactly in terms of her representation in the home movies. The investigation into the image is the crux of this discussion, and it is much of what distinguishes the work of Geleynse, Miller and Singer from these other artists dealing with family photographs in their work.

One last word of note is that these three works were chosen from the range of options available for the complexity of their inter-relational dialogue. I enjoy the similarities and differences these works hold, how they play off each other (although the three artists work quite independently and are not necessarily familiar with the work of one another) to construct new insights about the work of the others. It is an inter-relationship that continues to grow and deepen throughout this thesis.

Past Analyses

Due to many of the reasons outlined above, other artists dealing with the family photograph in their work have been analyzed with a different focus from what is being presented here. The majority of texts that have been written about the list of artists provided in the previous section are generally magazine reviews or catalogue essays, both

of which tend towards the descriptive, or analytical without a theoretical framework (see

Bibliography for examples). Some exceptions are references to Laura Mulvey and

Griselda Pollock's writings on the gaze in Karen Knights' essay on Sara Diamond's

work,[22] and references to Paul Ricœur's concepts of the space of experience in Jean

Gagnon's essay in the same catalogue.[23]

Of greater importance are the ways in which the work of Geleynse, Miller and

Singer have been analyzed in the past. Of the three installations that are presented here,

very little has been written. Geleynse's *Film Projection at Building 70* has been

discussed in the Presentation House catalogue that accompanied the installation,[24] but this

particular piece is not addressed in any depth. A carefully descriptive article by Sylvie

Fortin has been written about Miller's *Papa* which also briefly evokes Julia Kristeva and

Sigmund Freud.[25] The psychoanalytical approach is also one that has been turned to

Geleynse's past work and Yvonne Singer's, but it is not one that will be addressed here.[26]

A brochure written by Joyce Millar to accompany *Projections for the unseeing* was

published as this thesis was nearing completion.[27] It provides a thorough description and

analysis of the exhibition without, due obviously to the length and breadth of the

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[22] Knights, Karen. "Imaging the Feminine: The Video Art of Sara Diamond." Sara Diamond: Memories Revisited, History Retold. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992. A discussion of the gaze is presented in chapter two of this thesis.
[23] Gagnon, Jean. "The Installations of Sara Diamond." Op.cit.
[24] Presentation House Gallery. Wyn Geleynse: Film Works. Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery, 1990.
[25] Fortin, Sylvie. "Mindy Yan Miller: B-312 Émergence, Montréal, January 7 – February 4." Parachute. 79 (1995): 47-49.
[26] For psychoanalytically influenced readings of Geleynse's work see for example Campeau, Sylvain. "Wyn Geleynse: Souvenirs de Personne." Parachute 69 (Jan/Feb/Mar 1993): 4-12. Much of Yvonne Singer's work is directly influenced by Freudian thought.
[27] Millar, Joyce. "For Now We See Through a Glass, Darkly..." Yvonne Singer: Projections for the unseeing. Saint-Hyacinthe: Expression centre d'exposition de Saint-Hyacinthe, 2000.

publication, a theoretical thrust.[28] A common theoretical text that has been used in

readings of the use of family photographs in art is Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*.[29] It

is also a text that will be adopted for this thesis, although looked at quite specifically in

relation to these three works and the way they echo Barthes' process of searching for the

"That-Has-Been", or the essence, of the lure of the image.[30] Furthermore, the

combination of Barthes' theories with Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum, Andreas

Huyssen's analysis of the mirror stage, Constance Classen's work on the senses, Marshall

McLuhan's concept of Narcosis and the insights of early film theory work together to

create a different approach towards analyzing the work of these three artists. Lastly, this

thesis is the first instance that these three installations (and the work of these three artists

for that matter) have ever been presented together.

The foundation of inspection – writing on the discord between memory and photography

Investigations into the nature of the photographic medium can be found in

theoretical texts since its conception. The deconstruction of the image is by no means a

new task, and many writers have grappled with its nature in relation to our process of

memory.[31] Although a variety of sources will be referred to throughout this discussion, it

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[28] Millar's brochure also describes the works *Still Life* and *Dem Braven Kinde* which were companion pieces to *Projections for the unseeing*. When speaking with Yvonne Singer, she mentioned that she saw these two works as separate pieces from *Projections*, and it is for this reason that these other pieces are not included in this discussion.

[29] Barthes, Roland. Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1999. Trans. of La Chambre Claire. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980.

[30] See page 25 and Chapter Two for a fuller explanation of Barthes' ideas.

[31] Scott McQuire provides a well-rounded account of much of this inquiry in McQuire, Scott. Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera. London: Sage Publications, 1998.

is appropriate to mention some authors whose writing seems particularly pertinent to this subject matter.

Two examples of authors who were writing about photography circa the 1920's are Siegfried Kracauer and Marcel Proust. Kracauer's 1927 essay entitled simply "Photography"[32] is significant in that his reference point is a family photograph from his own family album. The text begins with a comparison between a photograph of a film diva and one of his grandmother. The two photographs he holds are similar in that they both depict women of twenty-four years of age from the same era. While the history of the grandmother has been enriched with memory, her image on its own, Kracauer claims, is essentially interchangeable with a photograph of any woman from that time period. Throughout the text, he compares the image's visual information to his own memories of his grandmother, and the relationship in general between photography and memory. The random existence of photographs and their complete visual detail is contrasted with memory's selective, incomplete process based on that which holds meaning for the individual. Kracauer remarks:

> ... memory-images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance. Since what is significant is not reducible to either merely spatial or temporal terms, memory-images are at odds with photographic representation.[33]

While Kracauer treats memory in a somewhat limited fashion by only looking at it in visual terms, he is still able to set up a comparison with photography in terms of the limitations by which photography records the past. Memory-images are selected and

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[32] Kracauer, Siegfried. "Photography." Trans. Thomas Y. Levin. Critical Inquiry 19 (Spring 1993): 421-436. First published as "Die Photographie" in the Frankfurter Zeitung, 28 Oct. 1927.
[33] Ibid. 425.

created in terms of meaning whereas photographic images are less meaningful and more objective fabrications.

Marcel Proust's contribution to the study of the photographic image is found throughout his monumental text *Remembrance of Things Past*.[34] Dealing primarily with memory, Proust occasionally slips the photographic image into the scene, trying to glean its significance in relation to his task of remembrance. All of the senses are invoked in Proust's search for the past, whereas photographs portray a shallow, overly visual reality. One key encounter with the photograph in the book is the moment when he presents an image of his beloved Albertine to Robert Saint-Loup. His friend's reaction to the image comes as a surprise in that Saint-Loup finds it hard to see in the image of Albertine what has made the narrator so enamoured. Proust claims:

> The time was long past when I had all too tentatively begun at Balbec by adding to my visual sensations when I gazed at Albertine sensations of taste, of smell, of touch. Since then, other more profound, more tender, more indefinable sensations had been added to them... Robert, to whom all this stratification of sensations was invisible, grasped only a residue which it prevented me, on the contrary, from perceiving.[35]

Therefore, the rich picture the narrator has of Albertine has less to do with the simple image of her, and more to do with the complexity of his relationship with her, and the memories which stem from all the senses. This focus on the other senses that Proust evokes throughout *Remembrances of Things Past* echoes the focus of Chapter Three in this thesis.

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[34] Proust, Marcel. Remembrance of Things Past (Volumes I, II, III). Trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff et.al. New York: Random House, 1981.
[35] Ibid., "The Fugitive" (Volume III) 445.

Susan Sontag's *On Photography* of 1977[36] is a more recent example of a study in this area. The first part of her book is the most relevant for this discussion. Here, she discusses how the family album serves to reaffirm the family unit, often artificially. Family photographs are examined as a comforting presence in the symbolic manner in which they make one's ancestry tangible. She claims that the family snapshot was of particular importance to the nuclear family in that it created an illusion of continuity from past into the future of the family line.[37] Photography as intrinsically tied up with death, a common observation in writing about the image, is also addressed in her text. She notes how taking a photograph participates in turning the subject into *memento mori*.[38] Without actually pointing it out then, Sontag places the family photograph in an ironic position as something that confirms our identity and simultaneously threatens it. By acting as a reassuring signifier for a grounding of identity and as a reminder of mortality, Sontag inadvertently suggests that one's relationship to the photograph could be characterized as somewhat ambivalent.

For the purposes of this thesis, Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* has provided the most carefully considered, insightful concepts. In part, the text was born out of Barthes' frustration with texts on photography which he felt did not discuss the image in a way that really interested him.[39] Other works approached the photograph in what Barthes would term the *studium*, an analysis that is somewhat removed, academic, and thoughtful while not really delving into the essence of the image. And it is this essence, derived

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[36] Sontag, Susan. On Photography. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.
[37] Ibid. 9.
[38] Ibid. 15.
[39] Barthes, op.cit. 7.

through the *punctum*, which Barthes goes in search of. The *punctum* is a detail which pricks the attention of the viewer and creates an engagement with the image. It cannot often be named precisely, but its effect changes the perception of the photograph. Barthes summises that "the *punctum* then, is a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see."[40]

In following the *punctum* through a variety of public photographs in the first part of the book, Barthes focuses on more personal images in part two. The death of his mother is the more personal impetus for writing this book. Barthes elaborates on his contemplation of photographs of his mother. In search of finding 'her', he rejects image after image until resting on one that was taken when the mother was five years of age. It is the one image where the *punctum* is at work for Barthes, where her image extends beyond the frame, so to speak. And because of this very quality found in this particular image, Barthes opts not to reproduce the photograph in his book, preferring instead to use narrative to convey the sense of the *punctum*. Part of lure of this image for Barthes comes from the recognition of the *noeme* of photography: the "That-Has-Been."[41] The person in the image was intrinsic to its creation in that he/she actually passed in front of the lens for a brief moment of time. It is this discovery of what generates the power of photography that provokes both Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and, as will be explored in chapter three, these installations by Wyn Geleynse, Mindy Yan Miller and Yvonne Singer.

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[40] Ibid. 59.
[41] Ibid. 77.

Chapter Two
Beyond Image: A Search for Identity

A key element that unites the approach Roland Barthes takes in *Camera Lucida*

and the one adopted by these installations is an analysis of the image on a personal level.

Barthes' search for the essence of photography that pervades *Camera Lucida* is also a

personal search inspired from his own family archives, an inspection that is echoed in

these installations by Geleynse, Miller and Singer. Barthes opts not to include the

photograph of his mother in *Camera Lucida*, replacing its representation through his own

description. Likewise, these artists through reworking the image have also allowed their

own interpretations of these photographs to replace a solitary presence. In both cases, the

perspective of the interpretation of the photograph is brought to the forefront. The

purpose of this chapter is to examine in which ways these installations refer to the

personal, and how this beginning is expanded to investigate a more general search into

our connection to the image.

(Photographic) images and the making of identity

An important aspect of these three installations is that each utilizes a childhood

photograph to refer to the past, an image that is revisited in adulthood. It is in the image

of his mother as a child that Barthes is able to find 'her', and this search for identity is

also found in images of youth for these installations. While each work is created with a

viewer in mind, there are varying degrees of the artist's personal involvement in each

piece.

In *Papa*, Mindy Yan Miller adopts a deeply personal approach. On the most obvious level, she places herself into the video, continuously ingesting this image of herself and her father. Here, the viewer is able to confirm that the artist is also the little girl in the photograph: the close-up on both the girl's image and the woman's face reveal characteristic similarities. If there is any uncertainty as to Miller's relationship to the people in the photograph, the title *Papa* confirms the notion. The word *Papa* implies a relationship between two people; it reveals affection and intimacy.

As the death of Barthes' mother was an impetus behind writing his book, this installation was originally conceived in relation to the death of Miller's father. The difference being, when I spoke with Miller, she described how her search for an image of her father that best depicted what she was looking for turned out to be as much about herself as her father.[42] Probing the image was also about Miller's own identity, something that can be inferred from Barthes' search, but which remains an element of photography that Barthes ultimately puts aside. The repetitive ingestion of the image in *Papa* is a metaphor for mourning the death of her father; it demonstrates a desire to bring back what is gone. Her unsuccessful attempts to bring the image into her body suggest an effort to alter the past, to make the pleasant moment depicted in the image a reality. It is also a metaphor for reconciling the self with the image of the self, to make real what remains only a brief moment captured on film.

Yvonne Singer's installation culls film footage of two moments from her own childhood. Although the artist is not present in the final installation, she makes her link to the girl on the film evident in part through her use of narrative. The two stories that

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[42] Miller, Mindy Yan. Personal Interview. 4 Dec. 1999.

are presented on the one pair of immobile glasses describe personal childhood memories. The first describes her difficulty of learning to swim ("I could never co-ordinate my arms and my breathing at the dame time so I would take a deep breath and swim the length of the pool this left me breathless"), the second about her grandmother's room ("In my grandmother's room was my Barbara Ann Scott doll who lost her head. I could never go into that room"). The mediators of the text, the glasses, and the optical manipulations of the film itself can all be interpreted as evidence of the presence of the artist, the adult woman, interjecting her present self into the revisitation of her childhood.

Although Wyn Geleynse has often incorporated his own image, in both the past and present, into his installations, *Film Projection at Building 70* diverges from this tendency. Here, the image is of his daughter, but in a sense it could be anyone. Other than asking the artist directly, there is no indication that this is an image from his own archives, making the relationship between the hand and the image the real focus. An adult hand caresses the image of the girl, and we are left to consider the connection between the two. The hand, long and slender, appears to be female also. Looking at the images from the installation, I make the assumption that the hand belongs to the same person as the little girl in the photo. It is the same girl who has grown up and now revisits this past image of her childhood. Equally, the scenario could be a mother who is touching the image of her daughter. In either case, the hand's touch is intimate, searching.

Despite the use of personal archives in these installations, the inclusion of Geleynse's piece as one that does not directly refer to himself as a child is deliberate. For each artist, it is important that the viewer have access to these installations. This is in

part achieved through the ways in which the installations are created (an element which will be elaborated upon in chapter three). But the use of personal images does not exclude the viewer. In fact, a vicarious relation is set up whereby viewers place themselves in relation to these images, recalling their own photographic images from the past. Although the relationship between the artist and image is elaborated here, the same relationship is implied for the viewer in relation to his or her own experiences, which may find themselves brought to the surface in these installations. Family snapshots or home movies, although chosen for particular reasons by these artists, also operate as 'types'. They depict everyday events, moments that reflect those that are part of the past for many other people. Thus, they operate on a personal level for both the artists and the viewer.

Although the actual condition of childhood is not a focus of this thesis, I do contemplate if there is a relation between these artists' experiences of growing up and the turn to using family photographs. Both Wyn Geleynse and Yvonne Singer, when I posed the question, admitted that this tendency towards using autobiographical material had stemmed from their pasts.

Wyn Geleynse emigrated with his family from Rotterdam when he was a young boy. Likewise, Yvonne Singer was also a first-generation immigrant. She came to Canada from Hungary at the age of three. Both felt a sort of schism between their lives at home and school where two different sorts of identities were being encouraged. For Singer, there was a subtle realization that she was different from her peers. Another language was spoken at home, different cultural influences were apparent in comparison

to the lives of her friends. In retrospect, Singer notes that the sense of feeling different came through in subtle ways:

> You know you didn't grow up there (in Canada), and you go home to a house where people speak other languages or there are heavy accents, and eat different kinds of foods. You're very aware of your differences. Especially when you go to your friends' homes it's not the same, but you can't understand what the difference is.[43]

There seemed to be an understated yet acutely felt conflict of identities existing in the same child. One could extrapolate that this conflict that presents itself in Singer's childhood extends into her investigations of identity in her work.[44]

A similar experience was articulated by Geleynse, who attributes his particular artistic inclinations to this sense of marginalization and conflicting identities:

> That experience is what made me start questioning how we structure our identities; how we structure who we are, what determines what those things are....Specifically, I think it just created a proclivity towards that type of thinking. But I think... it comes from that sense of operating within two cultures as a young child.[45]

In relation to Geleynse's work then, there is a tie between these questions of identity formation and his own past. Most of his installations refer to family photographs to investigate these issues of identity – what they say about others, about ourselves, and how we structure ourselves in relationship to them.

Although Mindy Miller was a second-generation immigrant, having been born and raised in Canada, perhaps a similar experience can be inferred. She had a rather strict upbringing that revolved around her Jewish heritage. She was taught to question

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[43] Singer, Yvonne. Personal Interview. 8 Oct. 1999.
[44] Yvonne Singer suggested this in our interview. She noted that "a lot of my work deals with identity but the identity becomes based on the fact of my dislocation from where I was born. I've always felt that I didn't have a language of my own."
[45] Geleynse, Wyn. Personal Interview. 28 Aug. 1999.

everything except the family's Judaism, and her father told her that it was a "moral imperative" that she not stray from Judaism[46]. Perhaps she felt the same discord between her lives within and outside the home, constructing her own sense of identity from these two different situations. Yet it is important to remember that *Papa* is an isolated incident in the sense that her use of the family photograph here is her first such piece. Interestingly, it would be through her relationship with her father that this separate identity would manifest itself. His stated desire that she not stray from her Jewish heritage placed a large weight on Miller's young shoulders. She claimed that:

> By the age of four I recognized myself as living on top of a pile of corpses. I was tied to my history through death. It was not a question of whether I believed in the religious aspects of Judaism or not. To turn away from my history would be like spitting on the graves of those murdered and could only be construed as an act of cowardice.[47]

Therefore, a sense of imposed identity was experienced by Miller as a young child. With the knowledge of the commitment to Judaism which her father placed upon her, the use of the image of her father and herself takes on an extra weight of significance. The photograph, showing the two in a harmonious state, belies the conflict between them and behind the construction of Miller's own identity.

In the light of the background of these artists, the use of the family photograph in these installations can be seen as a method of questioning assumptions that equate identity and the image. Certainly Roland Barthes made the difficulty clear in the frustration of his attempts to search out the person who was his mother from a pile of

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[46] Miller, Mindy Yan. "I Fell Asleep." Harbour Magazine on Art and Everyday Life 1.3 (1991): 9
[47] Ibid. 9-10.

photographs. But these artists narrow this search to one between image and self, revealing that the link between the two is more complex than might generally be assumed. Perhaps the identificatory difficulties experienced by these artists in their youth gave them an early start towards questioning how selfhood is constructed. That said, it is not implied that a background of this nature is a necessary component for producing this sort of work. On the contrary, this thesis attempts to discuss these issues from a more generalized perspective, one where anyone can experience this rift between the image and the self. At one point in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes discusses how the photographic image of the self is "the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity."[48] Wyn Geleynse, Mindy Yan Miller and Yvonne Singer seem to be operating, deliberately or not, from a similar recognition: that the photograph has constructed a different sort of reality, a different relationship to the self. When looking at these installations, what I see is not the use of a photograph to confirm identity, but rather a search for identity that struggles in a state of suspension when it comes in contact with the image.

Destabilizing the authority of photography

This recognition of the disparity between a photographic image of oneself and one's own identity is the first step towards deconstructing the authority of this image. These three installations, through separate approaches, begin to shift our relationship towards the image. A recognition of the disparity between the image and the self begins with the understanding that the person in the image has lost their subjecthood. Barthes'

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[48] Barthes, op.cit. 12.

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search for the essence of his mother in an image was so difficult because the moment a photograph is taken, the subject is transformed into an object.[49] Barthes describes this in one of the few references to photographs that have been taken of himself:

> Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes:
> I consistute myself in the process of "posing," I instantaneously make
> another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image.[50]

This concept can be seen in these works through changing perspectives on the image as object. In one sense, the constructed nature of the image is emphasized and its tangibility and unchanging existence is felt in terms of frustration rather than comfort. The very nature of the relationship with the family photograph is visually re-presented. Second, a desire to re-connect to the image, to feel out what it is that pulls us towards it, is explored through the use of film and video.

The integration of the photograph into film or video projection is a method of complicating the image. In the final product, the image has been lifted from a tactile realm and placed into an ephemeral medium. Film projection is ephemeral in that it cannot be grasped; it is an image in motion and one that is projected through light. The reliance on the photograph as an existing object is denied, creating a new visual dynamic. Perhaps one of the strongest elements of the photograph that convinces us of its authority is the fact that it exists – it is something that can be held in the hand. Unlike memory, the object-existence of the image does not allow for the possibility that the event documented did not occur.[51] At the same time, transforming the photographic into an ephemeral

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[49] Ibid. 14
[50] Ibid. 10.
[51] With the common use of digital manipulation in current photography, this certainty is no longer possible, although a general tendency towards "seeing is believing" could be argued as a continuing belief in the truth of the photograph.

medium emphasizes how ungraspable the photographic moment is, how impossible it is to return to. It is an ironic method of addressing the subject in the image.

In *A Film Projection at Building 70*, the focus is on the frame of the image, how it accentuates the photograph-as-object. This is the only installation where the photographic image has been placed in a frame. In a sense, a frame separates one image from potentially being lost in a family album. It becomes almost iconic, representative of a period in time, given even more significance and weight. In relation to this, Geleynse was "intrigued by the object/image being touchable, and thought about touch as another type of possession that paralleled taking a picture."[52] Here, the sense of possession is related not only to the hand that reaches out to grasp the image, but also refers to the reasons we take photographs in the first place. Photography is about *taking*, about turning an ephemeral moment into something you can hold in your hands. What is interesting about this installation is that Geleynse uses a framed photograph, but the resulting projection is frameless. By back-projecting the image onto glass, the filmed sequence can only be viewed in the areas that are glass-ground. Therefore, an interesting dialogue is set up between the framed and unframed. The framed image is neat, enclosed, as though the moment it documents could have been photographed no other way. But Geleynse's untraditional, unframed approach to the image reminds the viewer of the frame through its absence. This reminder suggests that the framed image is not as documentary as one might assume, but in fact it speaks of choice: what is left out of the photograph becomes as important as what remains. In the unframed projection, we are

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[52] Geleynse, Wyn. E-mail to the author. 18 Nov. 1999.

perhaps more aware that the identity of the person touching the photograph is left out of the image. The photograph is felt as complete and whole, but perhaps the fragmentary, ephemeral nature of the projection reveals that the photograph is not the whole picture. It too, is fragmentary and incomplete.

Miller's *Pupa* is similar to Geleynse's installation in the sense that another body is brought into the scene in order to construct a dialogue with the photograph. In this video sequence, however, Miller's relationship ventures beyond simply making contact by actually eating the image. What I would like to focus on here is the cyclical and ironic nature of her act. Her attempt to destroy the image is repeatedly unsuccessful; each time the photograph is presented to the viewer, and eaten anew. But at the same time, her act is also an attempt to merge with the image, to bring it into her own body. This too proves unsuccessful; the picture reappears untouched with each new cycle. Metaphorically, the photograph has a strength that overrides her desire to swallow it. Although the artist seems quite calm throughout this performance, there is an underlying sense of frustrating unfulfilment. When I watch this sequence, I feel as though the photographic image has been placed in a metaphorical situation where it is at odds with the body and the present moment. It seems to set up a vicious circle of sorts; one where the static, tangible nature of the image is emphasized as a disconcerting presence at odds with the self.

A more formal emphasis on breaking down the image to reveal the layers that make up the process of seeing is the focus for *Projections for the unseeing*. As the title suggests, the installation constructs a space whereby the methods of how we see are revealed. The process of visual perception is shown to be multi-layered. Literally speaking, when the viewer stands in front of a pair of glasses, there is the surface layer,

where the eyes focus to read the text. Next, the eyes look beyond the text, looking through the glasses to the projected image on the wall. The image itself is bound up with visible and invisible layers of screens. There are the mechanics working within the film projector that allow the image on the film to project onto the wall; there are the mechanics of the recorder that originally filmed the event; there are also the many ephemeral layers of time that have passed for the artist between the moment when this event was filmed and the present moment. Singer has complicated the nature of our process of seeing, revealing that the perception of sight is not a straightforward ingestion of stimuli, but that there are many levels of mediation involved.

In chapter three, the relationship between film and photography will be discussed in detail, but it is worth discussing here the method by which Singer intersects film and photography. Although she begins with film footage, she reveals that film is simply a series of photographs through a process called 'optical printing'. This tedious process involves re-photographing each original frame of the film. This contributes to the sense of seeing as a complicated sense organ. It reveals that film, which we may think of as being closer to depicting a sense of reality through the addition of movement, is really an optical illusion. Singer also slows down the motion of the film so that each film still is made apparent to the viewer. The entire installation becomes a theatre of vision, a new way of seeing that in a sense unravels our assumptions about the image. *Projections for the unseeing* places us in a space that is exactly about that – unseeing in order to re-see, to deconstruct the image into the complex parts that have brought it into being.

In a sense, Singer's deconstruction of the image confronts Barthes' views on the animated image which he claims does not have this *noeme*. His claim in that with the

photograph, something *"has posed* in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever." But in cinema, or the animated image, something *"has passed* in front of this same tiny hole."[53] But Singer's concentration and breakdown of these sequences presents the "That-Has-Been" in just as strong a fashion. Halting the fluid motion of the image captures the pose of the moment, and hence, the *noeme* of the image.

The other side of seeing that Yvonne Singer investigates is the process of being seen. This starts to deconstruct the visual process from the other side of the image – the person who is being photographed. Three eyeglasses in the space read 'stop/smile', 'look/stop', and 'look/smile'. These, of course, are the three main commands intrinsic to the photographic moment: stop what you're doing so the image will be clear; look at the camera; smile for the camera. The first is practical but also a telling part of the image construction. The moment is not natural, but very conscious. Although there is a certain desire to catch a 'natural moment', the requests to stop, look and smile automatically add artifice. To return to Barthes' moment of recognition, this is the transition phase where the subject is preparing to become an object through the pose;[54] this is where the two realms hover. This is the moment where "I transform myself in advance into an image."[55] The act of smiling is a key part of that transformation. In all three installations, the participants in the photograph are smiling. They depict contented moments; whether they are created or otherwise is unknown. The smile put on for the camera is part of this act of posing; transforming oneself into an image in preparation for the immortal image that is about to be engraved.

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[53] Barthes, op.cit. 78.
[54] Barthes, op.cit. 14.
[55] Ibid. 10.

The photograph as mirror: encountering the self

What then, occurs when the person photographed encounters this image in the future? How does the subject react initially to the self-made-object? Perhaps a moment could be postulated that is not unlike the mirror stage, when the body is able to recognize the self in the mirror that is and is not the same person. When one thinks about the mirror stage, one automatically makes the association with Jacques Lacan.[56] This stage is outlined by Lacan as a part of human development, a realization where a sense of self is defined and understood in relation to the mirror image. However, an alternative to this theory has been described by Andreas Huyssen in his chapter on Rainer Maria Rilke in *Twilight Memories*.[57] It is this description of the *mirror moment* that seems more closely related to the photographic experience of a reflection of the self. Huyssen compares Lacan's mirror stage to the encounter as it is expressed by Rilke's protagonist Malte Laurids Brigge in his fictional account of Brigge's notebooks. At one point, Brigge's memoir of childhood takes the reader to a particular day of make-believe where the young Malte had discovered a closet of costumes to play with. Looking at himself in the mirror, he would smile at the new personas he had adopted through these fanciful costumes. However, in his play, he accidentally knocks over a bottle of perfume. Hurrying to clean up the spilled contents, he quite by happenstance catches his reflection in the mirror:

> But the mirror had been waiting for just this. Its moment of revenge
> had come. While I, with a boundlessly growing anguish, kept trying

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[56] Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage." Ecrits: A Selection. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977.

[57] Huyssen, Andreas. "Paris/Childhood: The Fragmented Body in Rilke's Notebooks of *Malte Laurids Brigge*." Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia. New York: Routledge, 1995.

to somehow squeeze out of my disguise, it forced me, I don't know how, to look up, and dictated to me an image, no, a reality, a strange, incomprehensible, monstrous reality that permeated me against my will: for now it was the stronger one, and I was the mirror. I stared at this large, terrifying stranger in front of me, and felt appalled to be alone with him. But at the very moment I thought this, the worst thing happened: I lost all sense of myself, I simply ceased to exist. For one second, I felt an indescribable, piercing, futile longing for myself, and then only *he* remained: there was nothing except him.[58]

This idea that the mirror image creates an authoritative reality that threatens the existence of the one reflected is one that seems similar to the photographic moment. For Brigge, this moment threatened the boundaries of the self: here was an image that reflected back his own image so completely that *he* felt like the reflection of the image in the mirror. Huyssen's account notes that in this recognition, the moment does not generate the pleasure that Lacan's stage describes, but is rather a moment of overwhelming trauma.[59] The boundary between inside and outside is disturbed, the mirror "voids him, sucks all images of self out of him."[60] The photograph holds this same ability, to tell us what we really looked like, despite the images memory has generated within us. Like the mirror, there is little ground for dispute with the image that confronts us. In Brigge's experience, the mirror takes on a life of its own, becomes separated from the self.

The photographic experience is similar in that the image becomes separate from the self. While Brigge's moment may be overstating the case somewhat, his confrontation with the image is not unlike what occurs in these installations. Brigge's encounter with the mirror feels one step closer towards describing the driving force that creates these probings and considerations into the significance of the photograph. To

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[58] Ibid. 117.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid. 120.

further this moment of the disjunction of identity with the photograph, the last section of this chapter will expand upon these ideas through the semiotics of Jean Baudrillard.

The family photograph in the context of Baudrillard and simulacra

These three installations seem entranced in the moment of experiencing the photographic image, almost caught in suspension. The encounter between the photograph and the viewer can inspire a sense of frustration to grasp the subject within the image. Using Rilke's mirror metaphor, the encounter with the image of the self in a photograph can present an intensified disjunction and dissatisfaction with the image of the self that is reflected back. A primary aim of this thesis is an attempt to describe in words the manner in which these installations have artistically presented this encounter. Barthes' notion of the *noeme* of photograph, the "That-Has-Been" points a finger towards this state, and here the injection of Jean Baudrillard's insights on semiotics will be adapted in an effort to articulate this in greater detail. Reading his insights on semiotics, the system he postulates can be a helpful tool towards pointing out where the anxiety in these works originates.[61]

Two points are important to set out before incorporating Baudrillard's semiotic structure to the case of photography. One, it will be made clear that Baudrillard's method does not fully encapsulate the encounter that these installations articulate. This by no

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[61] Baudrillard's insights on photography (in relation to his own practice and in general) have been probed in Zurbrugg, Nicholas, ed. Jean Baudrillard, Art and Artefact. London: Sage Publications, 1997. However, much of what is discussed in this text is not particularly relevant to this discussion, and does not refer to family photography. For this thesis, Baudrillard's semiotic structure provides the most relevant insights in relation to these installations, and his theoretical contributions will be limited to this area. Although Baudrillard himself does not tie this structure to photography, it seems to be an insightful method of contemplating the photographic image as signifier.

means reflects a flaw in Baudrillard's analysis, as his use of the semiotic system was never intended to apply to all signs in society, but was more concerned with mass media and advertising. Second, discussing Baudrillard's ideas in relation to the photographic encounter is a method of demonstrating how this experience is a unique semiotic encounter, revealing *why* his analysis of signs cannot fully account for the photographic experience and yet how it can still be useful towards describing the encounter.

In Baudrillard's conception, signs in our society have lost their referent to 'reality', the relationship is not straightforward. Signs, or simulacra, take on a reality of their own, and their ability to represent reality comes to replace it, to create a 'hyperreality'. Baudrillard defines the hyperreal as that which is a model of the real which has no origin or reality.[62] Rather than treating the sign as a mirror which reflects reality, simulacra substitute reality with hyperreality. The mirror is reformulated in a manner that recalls Brigge's mirror stage as a moment where the reflection is transformed into a reality of its own. Signs are no longer about simulation, but more about the illusion of simulation. The whole concept of what is real is destabilized in Baudrillard's conception, and it is this disruption between the sign and signified that is pertinent to this discussion. This form of simulation begins to disintegrate binaries like true/false and real/imaginary.[63] Looking at signs in this manner changes our relationship to reality. For this hyperreality is not described as necessarily evident. Rather, the sign's function is also to hide the disappearance of reality. Baudrillard explains that "we live in a world of simulation, in a world where the highest function of the sign is to make reality disappear,

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[62] Poster. Mark, ed. Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings. California: Stanford University Press, 1988. 166.
[63] Ibid. 168.

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and at the same time to mask this disappearance."[64] Therefore, the role of the sign is complicated, given a certain authority that goes generally unnoticed.

This underlying authority of the sign to substitute reality offers a manner of approaching the photographic image. Perhaps the best way to describe this is through the four successive phases of the image that Baudrillard outlines.[65] This may be considered an experiment of sorts – how far does this semiotic model (based on advertising and mass media) take us towards describing the photographic experience? Baudrillard's four phases are steps towards a realization about the way signs appear to operate. It is also a sequence that is echoed in the installations presented in this discussion.

The first phase is that the image is the reflection of a basic reality. This is also what Baudrillard terms the "good appearance".[66] This reflects the assumptive notion of how a family photograph operates - that it documents an event in a straight-forward manner. This is perhaps most evident for those who take photographs with the aim of 'capturing' a moment on film.

The second phase is that it masks and perverts a basic reality, what is termed the "evil appearance".[67] Perhaps the exposure of this process is the impetus that brings these installations into being. The way that Singer allows the viewer to 'unsee' images, to reveal their constructed nature, is a reflection of this phase. Different layers of screens comprise her installation, making it difficult to view everything at once. It is almost impossible to read the text on the glasses and look through them simultaneously. To

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[64] Baudrillard quoted in Zurbrugg, op.cit. 12.
[65] Please refer to Baudrillard, Jean. Simulations. Trans. Paul Foss et al. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983. 11, 12.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

focus on the view through the glasses means changing your vision to adapt to the magnifying lenses and the way they shift up and down. The smooth flow of film is manipulated to a series of halting gestures, making it difficult to forget that the film is a mechanical product. Revealing these layers points to the realization that film and photography manipulate the past and present it in a new form. This phase is also echoed in most literature that deals with the primacy of vision and the photographic image. Photography is revealed to be *one way* of seeing, and one that is different from how we naturally view the world.[68]

It is the third and fourth stages of the image that begin to work their way towards the crux of these installations. The third stage is that the image plays at being an appearance, that it masks the absence of a basic reality. Here, our assumptions about what is real come into question and begin to destabilize themselves. In the case of these installations and their reflections on the image, I think part of the struggle with the image comes from the realization that the image does not reflect a reality. Rather, it constructs a particular view and posed moment that is intended to represent an individual's identity. Because these works deal with self-reflective photographic encounters, and because the photograph is a tangible marker of the past whereas memory is not, it can be said that this third stage reflects the moment where the reality the photograph claims to represent is questioned. Baudrillard's third stage must be adapted somewhat to reflect this particular encounter since there is a reality behind the image. As will be seen with Roland Barthes' writing on the image, a photograph is actually constructed from the body of the subject,

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[68] For example, see Jay, Martin. Downcast Eyes: The Denegration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993; Levin, David Michael, ed. Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.

whereas part of the third stage for Baudrillard is a realization that there is no origin to the image. While memories may certainly exist from the past, it is only the photograph that presents them in an unchanging, graspable form. When faced with the photograph, there is a certain frustration emergent in the realization that what the image is thought to simulate has no tangible origin. The moment it captures visually is not so much a distortion of our experience as a constructed moment that replaces experience, and in a sense, reality. The image begins to act as a substitution for reality, to ironically create a link to the past that in the end serves to reinforce the notion that it is the past, and irretrievable.

This sense of frustration surfaces in both Miller's and Geleynse's installations. Miller's consumption of the photograph tries to put the image back into the body, as though to make it real. By ingesting the image, perhaps she can feel a connection with the past again. The inherent futility of the gesture reflects a disillusionment with the image, that no action can reconnect the image with the past. When the hand in Geleynse's installation caresses the image, it reflects a desire to make contact with the image, to retrieve the past. The gesture is reminiscent of rubbing a jar to call forth a genie. Baudrillard also calls this third phase the realization of the sorcery in the image,[69] the illusion of an existence that is irretrievable, perhaps not unlike a mirage. Therefore, in the case of the photographic encounter, one could say that while there is a reality behind the image, this is not the straightforward relationship that one might initially expect. The photograph represents just one 'reality', yet because it documents that past

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[69] Baudrillard, Jean. Simulations. op.cit. 12.

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with such visual acuity and tangibility, it can overshadow the past as it exists for the viewer's own memories.

Finally, in Baudrillard's fourth phase, the image is revealed to bear no relation to any reality; it is its own pure simulacrum. This is perhaps reflected in the futility of the repetition of the work. Instead of the focus on the image coming to some sort of resolution, it seems to hover in this repetitive realm, as though caught in a vortex. It is as though the image propels one to look for an underlying 'truth' that is ungraspable, ultimately because there is nothing there to grasp. The illusion that the image reflects a reality is broken. The magic, in a sense, has the illusion slipped out from under it, and is betrayed to be simply a trick.

While Baudrillard's conception of simulacra can be applied to the photographic encounter to a certain extent, what makes this particular experience unique is that which began to be addressed the discussion of the third phase. Working through these four stages reveals that a photograph occupies an intricate position as a sign and requires a slightly shifted method of looking at the relationship between photograph and reality and the viewer. While the dismantling of the reality behind the image is helpful, there seems to be something somewhat more complex at play in these installations. The use of family photography seems to have a unique relationship to the viewer as a sign. An important ingredient that must be added to Baudrillard's semiotic structure in order to apply it to the photograph is the role of the individual who interprets these signs. Here, the viewer holds the key role by providing meaning to the image. What allows the frustration to surface in these works is the desire to reconcile the past itself with the viewer's memory of it, to the image that documents it in a tactile realm.

While in Baudrillard's model there is no reality existing beyond simulacra, in the unique case of the photograph, it appears that it is precisely the ungraspable traces of reality that stand between the viewer and the subject of the image that are in fact the driving forces behind these installations. Perhaps the most important connection is one Barthes describes in *Camera Lucida* as the umbilical cord linking the body of the person photographed to the gaze of the viewer. He observes that "the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent from a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here."[70] Literally speaking, a photograph requires the subject's body to come into being. Created by light, the body creates the template for the image as light traces the person, registering the forms on light-sensitive paper. In this important sense, there is, despite all that can be said about the manufactured nature of the photographic process, a part of the person in the image itself. There is a trace of the original event in the final image. Barthes' observation is that the one who gazes upon the image feels a sense of connection to the subject. It is a connection that in a sense is literally there. Yet when confronted with an image of the self, this connection can feel like separation from the self: as Barthes notes, a "cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity."[71] This is another reason why the experience of the 'mirror stage' can be associated with a 'photographic stage': both involve a literal confrontation with the self. Unlike a painting, the body of the individual has been a component in the creation of the image.

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[70] Barthes, op.cit. 80.
[71] Ibid. 12.

These notions of the relationship between the self and the image act as catalysts for these installations. In each, the encounter with the image has been reworked into an installation that depicts this encounter and elaborates upon its significance. It is an elaboration that reflects both a personal route of investigation and one that incorporates the viewer of the work into the piece. This investigation is spurred by something that can be described as a combination of Baudrillardian and Barthesian thought. Two apparently oppositional perspectives coexist in the encounter with the image. The image of the self contains an element of the real, the person who once posed in front of the lens. At the same time, the photograph holds an authority containing its own depiction of reality and one that exists independently from memory.

As has been noted, a key part of Barthes' lengthy examination of his own family photographs is his decision not to include a reproduction of the photograph of his mother that invokes the *punctum*. And while both Barthes and the artists creating these installations are interested in presenting the encounter with the image rather than simply the image itself, an important distinction in these installations is that they depict the images whereas Barthes does not. His rationale for this decision is that presenting it would only invoke a *studium* in the viewer, a detached interest that is nothing like the *punctum* that it generates for him.[72] While this may be true in a simple presentation of the image, the next two chapters of this thesis are a way of examining *why* these three artists employ the image. It is not simply the use of a family photograph that is important, but how it is used, and to what end. Essentially, these installations carry out the search for the essence of the image through the work itself. These three installations

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[72] Ibid. 73.

represent this search, and awaken for the viewer this sense of the "That-Has-Been" that is so important for Barthes. They depict the struggle that is discussed in this chapter between Baudrillard and Barthes. The referent lingers in the image, yet the image itself is a separate entity from both memory, experience, and even reality. As will be shown, these installations demonstrate the frustration that lies in a desire to grasp the ungraspable.

Chapter Three:
Awaking Memory through the Senses

In the first chapter, Roland Barthes' description of the photographic moment was explained as the instance where the subject becomes object. He proposes that the essence of photography is the "That-Has-Been": an encounter wherein the photograph provides a document of the real yet simultaneously documents its loss. The image occupies this paradoxical position, retaining a real trace of the subject while holding it in a permanent state of deferral to an irretrievable past. Throughout this chapter, the routes by which these installations search out this essence and attempt to reinvest the subject will be discussed. The process of memory is reconstituted from the place where it has been made absent. The elements that make up our process of memory become a physical part of these installations, re-constructing our relationship to photography in a manner that makes evident the way we interact with the image mentally. If one goal of these three works can be suggested, it is that they each go in search of remembering the subject, of returning to the moment where the subject became object and revealing that shift.

Up until now, memory and photography have been discussed mainly in terms of the visual. Baudrillard's use of the simulacrum has been primarily a visual construct – his notion of hyperreality is about media's surface in terms of what we see. Although Baudrillard does not speak explicitly of memory very often, the brief moments where he does reveals this preference for the visual. For instance, in *Cool Memories*, he hypothesizes that "perhaps our eyes are merely a blank film which is taken from us after our deaths to be developed elsewhere and screened as our life story."[73] But such a film

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[73] Baudrillard, Jean. Cool Memories. Trans. Chris Turner. New York: Verso, 1990. 63.

would tell very little of our life story; it would present what was seen rather than what was felt. Furthermore, what is seen through the eyes reflects a fragment of how information is taken into the body, let alone how it is interpreted.

The photograph is an example of a primarily visual experience. Although we can hold these images and smell the decay of the paper, these are sensorial aspects that are unrelated to the content of the image. The only aspect of memory that can be recorded on the photographic surface is visual. Although vision is clearly a part of how we form the memories that aid in our creation of identity, its remembrance is selective and often incomplete. Memories are rarely formed through one sense alone, but often involve a variety of sense stimuli.

These three installations, through the body and the senses, start to add complexity to photographic documentation; changing this static, visual moment into one that comes closer to echoing real experience. Through the additions and manipulations made to these three installations, the use of the visual is complicated and stimuli for the other senses are incorporated, adding kinaesthesia, sound, touch and even taste to the equation. This not only complicates the visual experience of the photograph, but does so in a way that incorporates a viewer's interpretation and experience of the moment captured in the image. In turn, the encounter becomes enlivened and begins to echo the intricacy of memory.

A great deal has been written about the place of vision in society, both past and present.[74] The dominance of the sense of vision, or 'ocularcentrism' has engendered

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[74] For example, see Jay, Martin. Downcast Eyes: The Denegration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993; Levin, David Michael, ed. Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.

much discussion. Most of the texts on vision can be broken down into two categories: investigating vision in history, how it has played a dominant role; or a study on vision itself with the intent of complicating its nature. This second, more deconstructive approach to vision has been discussed in chapter two of this thesis in relation to these three installations. [75]

The study of ocularcentrism from a gendered perspective is one key method of investigating vision's place in society. This next section examines the deconstruction of vision in terms of the questioning of the male gaze. Part of the construction of the photographic image involves a necessary producer, someone who composes the scene and releases the shutter to capture an image. Each of these installations, through reworking both the way we see and experience these photographs, challenge this invisible presence behind the camera. In addition, the use of photographic images of young, contented girls is a commonality these works share. By questioning the person in the image, or the memory of the person, assumptions about stereotypical female roles are subtly addressed.

Destabilizing the male gaze in the family and society

In her search for a photograph of her father for *Papa*, Miller was drawn to and chose an image that, as she remarks, was as much about her as it was about him. [76] In fact, in each of these installations, the father/daughter relationship is addressed on some level. Miller's piece is the most obvious, from the photograph to the title to the subject matter, all revolve around her relationship with her father. In Yvonne Singer's

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[75] See the section entitled *Destabilizing the authority of photography*
[76] Miller, Mindy Yan. Personal Interview. op.cit.

installation, the father is not present, but is the one operating the camera. Lastly, and less clearly in the final product, Wyn Geleynse has chosen to work with a photograph of his daughter. The father in this piece is both the eye behind the camera (most likely), and the eye creating the final installation. Yet in this piece, the fact that the image in the photograph is his daughter is not a necessary detail for the reading of the work. Although some of the same concepts discussed here regarding the gaze could be applied to this piece as well, the focus will rest on the other two installations.

In both *Papa* and *Projections for the unseeing*, the artists work with images of themselves as young girls. But these images portray a rather stereotyped sort of little girl. Miller is resting on her father's lap; she is smiling, well behaved, and wearing a frilly dress. She is almost doll-like in her appearance. Singer's image is very similar: carefully dressed in a shirt, skirt and a bow in her hair, she too smiles for the camera. Although these images are captured on film, her actions also fit into the little girl role. Pretending to be a ballerina, playing with her doll, she appears in a state of bliss. Part of what makes these images so accessible for the viewer is that they portray little girls in a fairly universal manner. Most women viewing these installations likely own similar archival material.

The type of role these girls are filling falls under a patriarchal construct. In Singer's installation, the girl is under the gaze of the cameraman, her father. And for Miller, although it is her mother behind the camera, the photograph positions the little girl directly under the gaze of her father. With his arms around her, he is simultaneously holding her in place, being affectionate, and protecting her. In each of these installations,

the image of the girl is tied to the father, created under the approving gaze of the patriarch.

The male gaze, here, can be viewed from two perspectives: gender and vision. The primacy of vision in photography can be interpreted as the result of a male-dominated history.[77] Constance Classen's *The Color of Angels*[78] maps out a history of the Western approach to the senses from a gendered perspective. She discusses how Renaissance rationalism, where sight and hearing were categorized as the most 'rational' senses, was also tied to a hegemony of the male. Plato (just one among many other male philosophers) remarked that sight was the most important sense. It was the foundation of philosophy, and the road towards "Truth and God".[79] The categorization of the senses has associated sight and hearing not only with rationality and Truth, but also with masculinity. Touch, taste and smell, on the other hand, have been attributed to the female gender.[80] Likewise, these more 'base' senses were also scorned as animalistic, to be frowned upon in an enlightened society. A reliance on sight and sound to perceive our world keeps society tied into this categorized, gender-biased construct. In this light, these installations can be seen as subtle challenges to this perspective.

In the historical relation between sight and Truth, *Projections for the unseeing* is focused on demonstrating how manipulative the sense of sight can be. Singer plays with what we see, what film presents to the eye, and she deconstructs this 'Truth'. By

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[77] Writers like Laura Mulvey, Luce Irigaray and Griselda Pollock (specifically in relation to art history) have written at length on the male gaze, but it is not my intention here to delve into these theories.

[78] Classen, Constance. The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination. New York: Routledge, 1998.

[79] This is discussed in greater detail in Synnott, Anthony. "Puzzling over the Senses: From Plato to Marx." Howes, David, ed. The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.

[80] Classen, Constance. "The scented womb and the seminal eye: embodying gender codes through the senses." The Color of Angels. op.cit.

beginning to address the other senses, each of these installations reconfigures traditional 'Visual Art'. The revisitation of this archival footage is involved in destabilizing its visual assumptions and constructing new experiences that are less straight-forward.

Considering sight as the male gaze, the breakdown of the imagery – mechanically for Singer and literally for Miller – brings the authority of this gaze into question. Through their attempts to reassert authorship over this imagery, these artists take an active role in challenging how the male gaze has chosen to represent their childhood. Singer is explicit about her empowering role of the artist; she claims that:

> As the artist I can replay, re-configure, re-construct my childhood. I replace my father the invisible cameraman, calling the shots, directing the action in the home movie and as the female artist, I take the masculine position as the active subject of looking by remaking the film, replaying the narrative and inserting my viewpoint.[81]

Reworking our assumptions about vision (through the photographic image) makes it possible to question the categorization of the senses and the hegemony of sight. Watching Miller eating the photograph, one is naturally led to question what it is about the content of the image that the artist finds disturbing enough to destroy in this manner. Clearly, something about the content of the image does not match her own experience of the event. In Miller's case, her relationship with the image is more ambiguous. When speaking with her, Miller expressed the fact that the image represented a relationship that was not as contented in reality.[82] The photograph of the two of them shows a loving, close relationship – almost too perfect. The solemnity of Miller's face as she eats the

[81] Singer, Yvonne. "Art or Biography? Fact or Fiction?" Concordia University, Montreal. 22 March 1999.
[82] Miller, Mindy Yan. Personal Interview. op.cit.

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photograph suggests that perhaps all was not as blissful as this image represents. At home, Miller's father was very much the patriarch and desired that his daughter fill the stereotypical 'little girl' role that had been prescribed.[83] The image depicts Miller comfortably acting out this stereotype; it fails to show the reality of Miller's resistance to being expected to play this role. Eating this photograph becomes a metaphoric method of trying to come to terms with the disjunction between a photographic view of her childhood and her own memories. This photograph has a separate reality that, despite her efforts, cannot be brought into herself or destroyed, maintaining the existence of and distance between two different perspectives of the past.

In light of the gaze then, these installations question the image of the photograph as a visually exclusive construct that can be seen as dictating a singular method of seeing. It is a construct that is operating here under the male gaze and one that places the identity of a young girl into a stereotypical model.

Opening the sensory gates of body memory

Questioning the methods of vision in relation to photography not only leads to new ways of viewing the image in these works, but it also opens up the possibility for new ways of *experiencing* the photograph. By creating installations that involve the viewer's body in new ways, not only is the photographic experience challenged as a substitute for memory, but the entire notion of 'Visual Art' and the role of a 'Viewer' is challenged.

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[83] Ibid.

Awakening the other senses and complicating what is otherwise a static visual experience is to open our 'sensory gates'.[84] Unlike many studies on deconstructing vision, Constance Classens's *The Color of Angels* focuses on the roles that the other senses have occupied historically and currently. Her study has been influential in this discussion for her adoption of this approach. The incorporation of the senses in the experience of viewing these family photographic images is an important link between the image and memory. Implying that the visual alone does not account for the construction of memory, these installations shift the experience of the image into one that comes closer to describing how we remember. C. Nadia Seremetakis writes:

> Sensory memory is a form of storage. Storage is always the embodiment and conversation of experiences, persons and matter in vessels of alterity. The awakening of the senses is awakening the capacity for memory, of tangible memory; to be awake is to remember and one remembers through the senses, via substance.[85]

While the visual is certainly one way in which we remember, the concentration on the visual in photography neglects the other sensory paths that are involved in memory. The issue is also addressed in Mark A. Cheetham's discussion of Vern Hume's work in *Remembering Postmodernism*.[86] Hume's *Lamented Moments Desired Objects* of 1988 fabricates a living room in the gallery space, replete with an armchair the viewer is invited to rest in while watching Hume's video sequence on the television. Splicing home movie footage with new video that attempts to describe his own memories, the artist's voice is evident in the new footage he adds and in his narration that accompanies

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[84] Classen, op.cit.
[85] Seremetakis, C. Nadia. "The Memory of the Senses: Historical Perception, Commensal Exchange, and Modernity." Taylor, Lucien, ed. *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R. 1990-1994*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 216.
[86] Cheetham and Hutcheon, op.cit.

this imagery. In Cheetham and Hutcheon's description of this installation, some fragments are selected from Hume's narration. One example is as follows:

> Recalling a fleeting experience of walking onto grass in bare feet, the narrator reports that 'cool feet sent shivers up my spine. There are no shots of this.' Visual cues, technological supports, are not directly responsible for this type of body memory.[87]

This is an excellent example of how memory is not necessarily tied to any one sense. In a memory like Hume's, is there even a sensory vocabulary to talk about the way the textual stimulus on his feet carried deep into his entire body? Not only are visual elements in this memory relegated to the background here, but it is not any one sense that replaces it – the whole body created this memory.

While for convenience sake, the next few sections refer to the other senses in a categorical manner, this is not an accurate method for describing how the senses operate. Analyzing the senses from an anthropological standpoint, David Howes emphasizes the inter-relation between the senses.[88] He notes that the tendency to categorize the senses into touch, taste, sight, etc. is to neglect the interplay between them. Howes claims that this categorization is part of a traditional Western method of treating the senses by philosophers and psychologists, one which neglects much of the subtlety of how the senses operate. Keeping this in mind, these next sections while organized by sensation, should be seen as aspects that come together in these installations to inform each other and create a total experience.

The body enters – dispelling distance through installation

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[87] Cheetham and Hutcheon, op.cit. 69.
[88] Howes, David. "Sensorial Anthropology." The Varieties of Sensory Experience. op.cit. 186.

A similarity between these pieces is that they function in an installation format. While installation art is certainly common in contemporary practice, this does not mean that it can be glossed over when looking at how these works operate. Installations such as these can serve as a reminder that Visual Art is not simply a visual experience. The creation of a space for the viewer is a key element in much installation work; these three particular pieces do so in a variety of ways. Much of Visual Art does not limit the viewer to one vantage point. Rather, the works can be viewed from a wide variety of perspectives. Unlike the controlled viewing space of the family snapshot, in these installations perspective is alterable, allowing more room for the viewer to interact with the work and to bring the art and the viewer closer together.

Wyn Geleysne's work has always been concerned about the viewer's involvement in the installation. *A Film Projection at Building 70* is actually an exception to his usual tendency of making the viewer turn on the projector in order to view the work. However, Geleynse employs other devices here to include the viewer in the work. First, the main protagonist of this film is unidentifiable and we are only able to view a hand. The photograph of the girl is generally covered by the hand, so even the image loses its specificity. The significance of this is that Geleynse's lack of specific personal identification allows the viewer to insert his or her own experience and memories into the installation. While this is possible with all three works, in *A Film Projection* the imagery facilitates this to a greater degree. One other aspect of this installation that separates it from the other two is that it is site specific. The environment of the warehouse was part of the installation. This piece was the first of a series Geleynse conceptualized as

conversions of large, empty spaces into 'image idea warehouses.'[89] Instead of the

controlled parameters of the gallery space, the artist chose a space that is outside of our

general encounters with art. In this unexpected site, a place that the general public could

also come across by happenstance,[90] Geleynse felt he could generate a stronger sense of

ephemerality with his imagery.[91]

The setting of a warehouse is also significant in terms of choosing a site that

relates to memory. A warehouse is a place for storage, and perhaps these random sites

where the image flickers for a brief span of time is closer to how memory functions.

Building 70 is a random choice – leading the viewer to wonder what could be found

within buildings 1 through 69 and 71 and beyond. As often happens with memory, the

encounter with this installation is unexpected. Just as we might question what triggers a

given memory that we had forgotten about for years, the person who encounters this

piece by chance is left to ponder how it came about. By placing his work in a public

space outside the gallery setting, Geleynse is able to play with chance, the unexpected,

and the fleeting.

The other two installations, while operating in a traditional gallery setting,

incorporate a space for the viewer by creating a room where one is aware of one's body

in space. The awareness of the body in space, or kinaesthesia, is a commonly neglected

area where the senses are discussed. Perhaps this is because it does not lend itself as

easily to categorization as the other senses. Kinaesthesia is a less specific, more abstract

sensation in that it requires all the senses to some degree. In the installations by Miller

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[89] Geleynse, Wyn. E-mail, op.cit.
[90] Presentation House Gallery, op.cit.
[91] Geleynse, Wyn. E-mail, op.cit.

and Singer, the role of the viewer in the installation becomes part of the piece in a way where the body's position and awareness of the body is considered.

Papa adapts to the gallery setting by creating an intimate space within it. Unlike Geleynse's installation which is created on a large scale, Miller utilizes a small space that is intended for one viewer at a time. The artist coaxes the gallery-goer into her space by placing the audio component at the entrance to the space, so that the viewer is drawn in by the sound of the humming voice. From the outset, an atmosphere of calm and quiet is manifested through sound. At the back of the room, the small table and video equipment partially obstruct the viewing of the small-scale image. Viewers must insert themselves in the narrow space between the table and the wall to properly view the image.[92] The 9" x 12" image is really only large enough to accept one viewer at a time. While the space for experiencing the work is small and confining, it creates a sense of personal intimacy. The importance of the individual is emphasized through this one-on-one configuration.

In *Projections for the unseeing*, Yvonne Singer employs the whole space of the gallery for her installation. By interspersing different elements throughout the space and by making it necessary for the viewer to move around the room in order to experience all the elements, the installation operates as an active event rather than a passive viewing. The eyeglasses presume a viewer in order to read and look through them, making the piece incomplete without an audience. Singer also makes movement a large part of the space: the eyeglasses move by motors, and the projections flicker and slowly run their sequence. The experience is heightened through the inclusion of the sound provided by the eyeglass motors and the film projectors. The slowed-down speed at which the film is

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[92] Miller, Mindy Yan. Personal Interview. 4 Dec. 1999

re-presented even matches the pace of a human heartbeat,[93] as though the boundaries between artwork and life are beginning to merge into one entity. The piece becomes more about experiencing a space than viewing a work. In *Projections for the unseeing,* 'viewer' becomes a limited term for describing this artistic encounter. The whole body of the individual becomes involved in the experience of the work. The dizziness I encountered in the space came about through this movement and continuous shifts of vision that had heightened my body's own sense of awareness in the space.

By creating a space within and around which individuals are able to navigate themselves, the experience begins to extend beyond the static viewing experience of photography. Rather, the work comes closer to expressing the complexity of memory, the way we record our past and make sense of it. By including elements of movement, construction, and ephemerality, these installations show that memory is also a process. Just as the process of photography is revealed as multi-layered, memory is also a complex structure - an essential difference being, of course, that the memory product, unlike a photograph, is susceptible to change, including forgetfulness and unexpected retrieval. Andreas Huyssen makes a key observation about the transient nature of memory:

> The temporal status of any act of memory is always the present and not, as some might have it, the past itself, even though all memory in some ineradicable sense is dependant on some past event or experience. It is this tenuous fissure between past and present that constitutes memory, making it powerfully alive and distinct from the archive or any other mere system of storage and retrieval.[94]

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[93] Singer, Yvonne. Personal Interview. 8 Oct. 1999.
[94] Huyssen, Andreas. Twilight Memories. op.cit. 3.

Therefore, while the photographic image is locked in a fixed moment, the fragments of memory undergo shifts and transformations.

Sound as a sensory component is another way in which the body is able to take in these installations. The experience begins to unhinge itself from that which can be contained or controlled. The sound of a lullaby can be a strong stimulus for memory, awaking memories from early childhood. They may not even be specific images or moments the mind can define so much as a feeling. Music and sound often conjure memories of feeling fearful, calm, or sad that are associated with a particular stage or time in life. Sound memories are not as easy to control as visual ones; they are not confined to places, and one sound may remind you of another. Sound memories are also not confined to the past. The same sound is not necessarily tied to any one moment, and can trigger different memories or be associated with any number of moments from a life whereas the content of a photograph will always *document* the same moment despite the different memories it may conjure. A photograph can certainly recall different memories as well, but sound is more ephemeral and less explicit. Any non-visual sensation can act as a trigger that allows the mind to form its own image, whereas the photographic image can often dominate the scene, and can even replace or cloud images that the mind's eye recalls. This grants the photographic image a greater authority over memory's own ability to recall.

The mechanical workings of the projectors are a strong sound component in Singer's installation, sounds which can generate memories of watching home movies, school educational films, any moment where this sound or one like it was encountered.

These sounds envelope the body in space and enter beyond the skin, provoking the past in ways that cannot be contained.

Another trigger for memory is presented in Singer's installation through the use of narrative. The two stories that are placed on the mobile eyeglasses both describe memories of childhood. The first describes the difficulty of swimming for her as a child, the second about her fear of entering her grandmother's room and seeing her decapitated doll. The inclusion of these narrative memories suggests how much memory is about interpretation, and how many memories are impossible to capture in a photograph. As with Barthes' descriptions of the photograph of his mother, Singer allows these memories to be taken in by the viewer through reading about them rather than seeing them. The two memories she describes are specifically unpleasant and create a disjunction between the child we see smiling in the home movies and the disturbing memories told through narrative. In terms of the senses, the use of text is not only part of the domain of the visual, but also alludes to the aural: reading this text while looking at the images, I can almost hear the artist's voice whispering these memories into my ear.

It is important to note that these installations are not about creating fully sensorial environments. Rather, the allusions to the other senses are subtle, and in the cases of touch and taste, they are utilized by the artist or the individual in the projection, not the viewer. The role of the 'viewer' occupies an interesting position. We are distanced in that we can only physically observe the senses of touch and taste in relation to these images, but they provoke a mimicking effect in that a desire to become further involved with the image is evoked. Rather than being unwittingly distanced from the past in the photographic image, here the lack of connection is made evident. By breaking down

vision, adding sound, depicting touch and taste, and involving the body into the space of

the installation, the need to become closer to these images is aroused. By creating an

environment where we begin to experience the photograph on a different level, the fact

that we are only able to *observe* the inclusion of touch and taste becomes a more palpable

exclusion. It serves to heighten our awareness that our experience is *not* involving the

whole body, that we are being deprived on some level.

Feeling the surface – touch and its negation

   In *A Film Projection at Building 70*, the gesture of touch is highlighted. Focusing

on the hand of the body, it is projected larger-than-life, emphasizing its thoughtful

movements. The person holding the image seems not as occupied with viewing the

image as she is with feeling it, even if it means obscuring the image. She seems to be

trying to make a stronger connection to the image, to somehow reach beyond the visual

stasis of the paper image. Touch can be a more intimate sensory gate to memory than

vision. Constance Classen observes:

> This leads to a fundamental difference between sight and touch. To see
> something properly one must distance oneself from it. Even if the object
> is very small, it is necessary to keep it at least a few inches away from
> one's eyes in order to focus on it. To be able to experience something by
> touch, however, one has to do exactly the opposite and unite oneself with
> it. This makes the tactile experience of art a much more intimate process
> than the visual experience of art. When touch is involved a physical bond
> is created between a work of art and the person perceiving it.[95]

The intimacy of touch is complicated through the type of touch in this installation. The

gesture of the hand is searching and loving; it is not so much a touch as a caress. In fact,

in 1997, Geleynse made a similar piece called *Caress* (Fig. 5). In this piece, the hand is

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[95] Classen, op.cit. 149.

the only element that is present in the projection. The method of installation is the same in that the film is projected onto a selectively ground piece of plexiglass, although this piece was made for a gallery space. In *Caress*, the focus is on the gesture of the hand, leaving the viewer to guess as to the object of the hand's search.

The gesture of the caress is revealing. Emmanuel Levinas explained the significance of this gesture as follows:

> But what is caressed is not touched, properly speaking. It is not the softness or warmth of the hand given in contact that the caress seeks. The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This 'not knowing', this fundamental disorder, is the essential.[96]

The probing nature of the caress in the context of *A Film Projection* is then quite significant. This indeterminate seeking recalls Roland Barthes' search for the essence that draws him to the photographic image. In *Caress*, the search is carried out through the hand that caresses the image for something to bring the self closer to the person in the image. In this installation, then, the sense of touch can heighten the sense of distance between the viewer and the person in the image. Caressing the surface of the photograph, despite the fact that it eliminates the distance physically, does not carry the one who touches beyond the surface of the paper. Ironically, it is through touch that the hope of being able to connect physically with the person in the image is recognized as an impossibility. The distance vision provides us with helps to preserve the successful illusion that we are seeing a straightforward depiction of reality. The sense of touch breaks this illusion.

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[96] Levinas, Emmanuel. "Time and the Other." The Levinas Reader. Ed. Seán Hand. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc. 1989. 51.

Despite the focus on the sense of touch in Geleynse's installation, the viewer actually experiences a negation of touch through the use of images projected with light. In fact, in all three installations, the image is taken out of the tactile realm and placed in the realm of light. One result of this is that the viewing experience loses the sense of the tactile. While this may at first seem contradictory, by placing the image in film, touch is heightened through its absence. In Geleynse's installation, the gestural focus on touch highlights the fact that we as viewers are deprived of feeling the image ourselves.

Ironically, then, the use of the projected image in these installations by removing our ability to touch the surface rekindles our desire to touch. In turn, we are left to ponder what this desire to touch would satisfy. In Singer's installation, the sequence of the twirling girl is projected at eye level in such a way that the viewer can stand in front of the projection, placing themselves in the space of the girl. By this, the viewer makes actual contact with the image as it projects off the body. But while the distance between the viewer's body and the image is virtually eliminated (physically), the body cannot *feel* the image, made up as it is only by light.

At the same time, eliminating this distance in each of these installations necessitates blocking the imagery, so that part of it is lost. Metaphorically, this could also be seen as a physical enactment of forgetting.[97] In each case, the involvement of the artist in interpreting the imagery involves obscuring the image to some extent and thereby altering its illusion of completeness. The incomplete image echoes the fragmentary, selective, and forgetful process of memory. The irony then extends to act out the process of memory: while the mind's memory is incomplete and forgetful, it is a deliberate sort of

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[97] Cheetham and Hutcheon, op.cit. 29.

absence. It makes what is saved in memory that much more meaningful, and acts as a reminder that memory is about interpreting the event rather than documenting it.

Disturbing the border between exterior and interior

All use of the senses could be seen as a method of taking objects into the body, hence the aforementioned term 'sensory gates'. But no sense does this quite as literally as taste, where the faculties for tasting an object require bringing the object into the body. This is what occurs in *Papa*. Miller begins with touch by holding the photograph of herself and her father in her hands. But this contact with the image is pushed further as she actually puts the photograph into her mouth and consumes it. Here, the boundary of the skin that separates us from the world is transgressed. Miller does not simply lick the image, but takes it in whole, chews, and swallows it. And she does this over and over again, ceaselessly trying to make the photograph part of her body.

Papa actually began with a formal concept. As Miller described it, she had noticed how frequently in contemporary art artists try to invest some part of themselves *into* the work, to "make it like a body."[98] Her thought was based on the question of what would happen if the process were to reverse itself, and the inanimate object was taken *into* the body. This line of thought led to the photograph, "because a photograph is an object and you can think of it as carrying an image of a body."[99] Miller's father had passed away a year ago, and she had been spending time searching through photographs of him, already trying to find the details of his face that were beginning to fade in her memory. Bringing the photograph of her father together with this concept yielded the

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[98] Miller, Mindy Yan. Personal Interview. op.cit.
[99] Ibid.

piece. However, the act of ingesting the photograph seems invested with a far greater strength than what can be described in such an organized fashion. At the time, Miller was still in process of mourning, and *Papa* reflects this stage in her life. Although she maintains a calm facial expression, and the soothing sound of the lullaby hums in the background, her act is both destructive and full of melancholy. By eating the photograph, it is as though she is trying to weaken the boundaries between the outer world and her inner unrest. Clearly, her emotional state is not as calm as her facial expression suggests.

As with Wyn Geleynse's installation, *Papa* also employs the senses with a certain sense of irony. In *A Film Projection*, the woman's caress of the photograph not only reveals that the act is a futile gesture, but it is also subtly destructive. Touching the image obscures the visual; another sense seems only able to detract from the information we can see. Unlike memory, where sensual fragments tend to overlap, the photograph is not only strictly visual, but also confined to the visual in a sense that an attempt to bring in the other senses only serves to our detriment. Touching the image is also a way of slowly deteriorating the paper. By placing the hands on the surface, oil and dirt is rubbed into the surface, threatening to make the image illegible. When Miller eats the photograph, the destruction of the image is brought to the forefront. By trying to decrease the distance between the photograph and herself, two things happen. One, she destroys the photograph. But second, it appears to be a metaphorically impossible act, as we watch the image resurface only to be eaten again. The photograph is in a continual state of being inside and outside the body. This is not unlike subject/object paradigm of the photographic process. The photograph is continually an object while simultaneously maintaining part of the subject within it. In *Papa*, it is as though Miller is trying to access

that other side of the photograph, but if she wants to make it a part of her, it ceases to be a photograph. With the object/image, the distance is permanent.

The incorporation of the senses in these installations, then, work towards describing the paradoxical encounter with the family photograph. They attempt to reinvest a connection to the subject in the image; they create an experience that begins to echo memory; they reveal how much is lacking in the photographic image. At the same time, the use of the senses evokes a desire for connection that is left unsatisfied. They take the photographic experience out of the statically visual only to describe the loss that accompanies it.

Chapter Four:
Memory's Construction Through Technology

In chapter three, the incorporation of senses other than the visual in these installations was outlined. Their use, as was discussed, worked towards removing the photographic image from its static state and placing it in an environment that extended beyond a strictly visual experience. The use of vision is picked up again in this chapter, where the interplay between film and photography in these works is discussed. The use of projectors in the space of the installations adds a whole new dimension and level of interpretation. Vision is extended to include an investigation of how we see, putting the image in motion and playing with its presentation. While the analysis in this chapter may be essentially visual, the way we *see* these works is very deliberate; reworking the image to invest some of the complexity we bring to memory.

Extending the body into a state of amnesia

The issues surrounding the production of memory are especially pertinent in the wake of the computer age: a time when the internet has become a fixture in most homes and businesses, when virtual reality is quickly becoming accessible, when technological advances in communication are expanding rapidly. What place does memory hold in a world of instant communication and real time? Andreas Huyssen suggests that:

> (Memory) represents the attempt to slow down information processing,
> to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to
> recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation
> and fast-speed information and cable networks, to claim some
> anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening hetero-
> geneity, non-synchronicity, and information overload.[100]

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[100] Huyssen, op.cit. 7.

Memory, then, operates in a manner that is quite separate from the current technological

perspective. One might even say that the two are dichotomous and that in a society

where the instantaneous retrieval of information is sought, the importance of memory

becomes threatened as obsolete. Part of the make-up of memory is that it is bound up

with forgetting[101] and is unreliable and selective. Reviewing the plethora of artists who

incorporate family photographs in their work (discussed in chapter one), one might

hypothesize that the heightened interest in memory that has characterized contemporary

Canadian art in the last twenty years of the millennium is a reaction to a growing reliance

on technology to record our memories. It is not an area that this thesis proposes to delve

into, but one that is ripe for discussion.

The point where technology and memory collide is the focus of this chapter. The

use of the term 'memory' when we speak of the computer's information storage suggests

how unspecific our use of the word has become. But technology is also involved in the

"memory industry"[102]: the erection of monuments, the advertisement of video, digital and

automatic cameras to record weddings, birthdays and other significant moments in life.

Huyssen describes it as the "musealization" of the world wherein "self-musealization"

plays a large role.[103] The family photograph is currently the most pervasive tool of this

ever-expanding domain. Huyssen suggests there is a danger in relying on the production

of memory through the archive:

> But is the archive the appropriate metaphor to think through our current
> obsessions with memory? If, as I think we have to, we conceive memory
> as dynamic and subject to mutation and change, as always bound up with

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[101] Huyssen, Andreas. "Sculpture, Materiality and Memory in an Age of Amnesia." Displacements:
Miroslaw Balka, Doris Salcedo, Rachel Whiteread. By Jessica Bradley and Andreas Huyssen. Toronto:
Art Gallery of Ontario, 1998. 36.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid, 35.

forgetting, then the archive, with its rather static feature of storage and retrieval, would miss the dynamics of the contemporary memory boom, the instability of the sense of historical time that underlies it, and the inherent danger of a memory industry actually producing amnesia rather than any 'real' memory of the past.[104]

It is ironic to think that the archive's obsession with memory and information could actually serve to produce forgetfulness. Is it possible that with the increasing ease of storing and accessing information about the past, our own capacities to remember begin to disappear? But what Andreas Huyssen doesn't explicitly address, and what I find interesting, is his use of the term 'amnesia'. The word is not exactly synonymous with 'forgetfulness'. While the dictionary definition of amnesia is "a partial or total loss of memory",[105] this seems to be a fairly simplistic definition to apply to Huyssen's use of the work. Perhaps what is lost in a dictionary definition and what is relevant about Huyssen's discussion is the *condition of* amnesia. It is almost like a disease, something that has been brought on, and can disappear. However, it does not make memory disappear so much as it covers it, like a sheet. Rather than generalizing about the ability of technology as a whole to create this state, the focus here is on photography's ability to produce a certain 'amnesia' in the viewer.

To return to the senses, a state of amnesia could also be generated from an over-reliance on one of the senses to the detriment of the others. This concept was postulated by Marshall McLuhan in relation to media communications.[106] The term he employs is

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[104] Ibid.

[105] "amnesia." Collins Concise Dictionary & Thesaurus. 2nd ed. 1995.

[106] The discussion of our current technological state up until this point should be considered quite separate from McLuhan's ideas. The use of McLuhan here is restricted to his concept of Narcosis, which is being adapted in order to discuss the photographic experience. It should be made clear that McLuhan does *not* view the state of narcosis as a condition of society in the face of developing technologies. Whereas Huyssen's discussion of amnesia in today's society is addressed with a view to question a general condition, McLuhan's state of narcosis is discussed as the body's adaptation process.

'narcosis', or a state of numbness.[107] To paraphrase McLuhan, an encounter with a new technology shifts the ratio of the senses. In the case of photography, for example, the human eye has been extended into the realm of the machine. In a sense, the sensory mechanism of the eye has literally been extended out from our bodies; its function has expanded. McLuhan claims that this confrontation acts as both an extension and self-amputation. When a single sense is extended, the other senses are numbed. In order to compensate for this extension/amputation, the sense ratio of the body has to adapt.

But even though photography is not a new technology, perhaps this sense of narcosis still occurs. We have been conditioned to accept the photographic image as a sufficient substitute for memory. The prevalence of the camera in the home makes it easier to document a moment when we feel it is worth doing so rather than relying on our own capabilities for memory. And, as has been discussed at length, the photographic image is strictly a visual experience, and a distorted one at that. This reliance on the eye to remember and store information has been extended to a wide variety of other technologies since photography's invention. Therefore, our assumptions and reliance on the technologically extended authority of the eye has dulled the importance of our other senses in perceiving the world. Furthermore, the tendency to ignore our other senses (an extended result of this initial narcosis) has resulted in a general state of amnesia. If we rely on technology to document our past, the results are non-selective, unchanging, sensorially limited, and essentially depersonalized. The forgetfulness that is a meaningful component of human memory is replaced by a dulled amnesiatic state which relies on technological wizardry to inform us about our memories.

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[107] McLuhan, Marshall. "The Gadget Lover." Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964.

McLuhan's use of the Narcissus myth also recalls Malte Laurid Brigge's

encounter with the mirror as examined by Andreas Huyssen (see chapter two, *The*

photograph as mirror: encountering the self). The myth of Narcissus is described by

McLuhan in the following manner:

> The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for
> another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his
> perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own
> extended or repeated image... He was numb. He has adapted to his
> extension of himself and had become a closed system.[108]

Like Brigge, Narcissus was taken aback by his own image. Both were unable to

recognize their mirror reflection as merely that, and rather felt a split between their self

and what they saw. Both were also illuded into seeing the image as a person; and while

perhaps Brigge had certainly caught his own reflection many times in the past and was

well aware that this was a mirror, in this one instance, he was transfixed. Like Narcissus,

Brigge was pulled by the mirror image, feeling it was the stronger one, and that he had

lost all sense of himself. The state of numbness that McLuhan pulls out of this Narcissus

myth is even closer to Brigge's mirror moment. For McLuhan, "self amputation forbids

self-recognition";[109] in the need to adapt our sense ratios to technology, it could be said

that we momentarily estrange ourselves. Therefore, our encounters with technology

change our relationship with our own bodies and how they perceive the world. It seems

to me that this, in combination with viewing the product of this technology, a mechanism

that has managed to present ourselves back to us in a tangible, visual form, could only

prolong and intensify this sense of disassociation.

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[108] Ibid. 41.
[109] Ibid. 43.

Light and mechanics: articulating the subject object paradigm

Thus far in this chapter, technology and its effects have been discussed in a fairly general manner. At this point, I would like to narrow my focus to the specific technologies that have been adopted by these installations and how their usage relates to the issues discussed in this chapter and in relation to some concepts addressed in the previous chapters. In the manipulations of their family archives, Yvonne Singer and Wyn Geleynse both utilize film projectors, and Mindy Miller has chosen to work with video projection. These choices reflect two important similarities: working with a technology that has a physical presence, and the use of light projection. These two qualities of the technology found in these installations reflects the subject/object paradigm of the image that Roland Barthes discusses in *Camera Lucida*. The presence of the film and video mechanics emphasizes the objectness of the image: how it is produced and re-presented through technology. The light that these mechanisms project reflects the sustained referent to the subject of the image that remains an intrinsic part of the photograph.

In the installation of each of these works, an important component of the design was that the projectors remain visible. In *Papa*, the projection equipment was placed just in front of the back wall, so that the distance between the projection and the mechanisms were only a few feet. One thing this allowed for was the creation of an intimate space for viewing the projection. Miller also described it to me as creating a sense of responsibility, and that it made the viewer more aware of being in the position of a

voyeur.[110] By creating a physical space between the technology and the projection, the viewer was forced to come between the two in order to view the work. The viewer becomes more connected and involved with the image, but also becomes aware of his or her own role in the piece. The viewer is placed in a dichotomous position where the call of the lullaby, and the intimacy of the imagery and the installation can lure him/her into coming very close to the image only to feel quite distanced from the intimate ritual taking place on the small projection.

Geleynse's and Singer's installations similarly make no attempts to hide the mechanisms of their projections. Singer places her film projectors on adjacent walls, but not so high up that their presence is lost. Geleynse's projector is behind the image, projecting onto the frosted glass in front, but it is by no means hidden. The glass, being selectively ground, makes it possible to peak through to the other side. Unlike Miller's video projector, these film projectors announce their presence through sound. These mechanisms are of a technology that is dated enough that its operations still involve noise, or 'chatter'. This sound fills the installation spaces, calling attention to the mechanisms that are generating the imagery. With all the gears in full view, we can *see* exactly how these projectors operate in a way that video does not allow.

Giving the technology that produces the imagery a visible place in the installation echoes the notion that not only are we able to view the mechanisms, but that they are also able to view us. Paul Klee once remarked that "now objects perceive me"[111]; in the case of these installations, this could be interpreted as the ability cameras possess to create their own views of who we are with their 'eyes'. The camera is not simply a method of

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[110] Miller, Mindy Yan. Personal Interview. op.cit.
[111] Quoted in Virilio, Paul. The Vision Machine. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994. 59.

recording reality, but is a mechanism with its own viewing biases. Marshall McLuhan remarked that the camera is an extension of the eye, and this notion could be expanded to include the fact that the camera image retains the eye's selectivity.

Part of the lure of the film projectors used in Geleynse's and Singer's installations is hearing and seeing the gears turning over. There is a strong sense of animation that comes from the installations that use film projection. With the touch of a button, the gears come to life, reviving the images held in its reels. Perhaps because it is outdated equipment and has the aura of an antiquated found-object it seems to bring the past back to life, in a sense. Film projectors have a tactility to their mechanics that simply is not found in digital technology. Not only can we as viewers make full sense of how the object functions, but the projector also has a stronger physical presence and holds greater weight as an *object*. Watching the gears turn over, hearing the film move through the reels, there is a stronger sensorial involvement in watching a film projector operate than could ever be found in a silent, box-shaped VCR.

Film projectors not only have this sense of tactility and animation as objects, but they also appear to generate life back into the image; metaphorically, the mechanics that reanimate the image and return the life that has been captured within it. It feels as though we are able to travel back to the moment where the image was first produced to see not only all the screens and layers and mechanics involved, but also the moment where the subject became object. Watching the turning of the gears is also like watching a mediator at work, the connective point between the viewer and the object/subject in the image.

To reiterate very briefly from chapter one, Roland Barthes has described the photographic creation as the moment where the subject becomes object. I have also

discussed how there is still a trace of the subject in the image, as through light, the subject's silhouette has aided in the creation of the image. This "umbilical cord"[112] by which the extensions between the subject, the camera and the viewer which links our gaze to the subject has been made possible through light. Light wraps itself around the subject and is caught by the film. Perhaps this is why the lingering link to the subject feels so tentative. While its presence is possible to record on film, light cannot be felt through any other means but by sight. Light and touch generate a strange relationship – light can be felt through the heat it generates on the body, but it cannot be touched in the sense that it has a tactile weight. The choice of using projectors in these installations re-instills the moment of the image's creation and extends this umbilical connection to the viewer through light, making a circular connection between the inception and perception of the image.

The ability to view film material years later, with the aid of light, recalls an analogy Baudrillard makes in *Fatal Strategies* between light travel and stars. He hypothesizes what might happen if images traveled towards us via light in the same time it takes for light from a star to reach our gaze. He writes:

> We would then need to generalize from the case of light reaching us
> from stars that have long ceased to exist – their image is still crossing
> light-years to get to us. If light was infinitely slower, a lot of things,
> even the closest ones, would have suffered the fate of those stars: we
> would see them, and they'd be here, but they would no longer be there.
> Wouldn't this be the case for the real itself: something whose image is
> still coming at us, but which no longer exists?[113]

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[112] Barthes. op.cit. 80.
[113] Baudrillard, Jean. Fatal Strategies. Trans. Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski. Ed. Jim Fleming. New York: Semiotext(e), 1990. 19.

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Because of distance, our gaze is not able to perceive the presence of a star until many years later, even after it has died. As Baudrillard parallels this with the real, perhaps an analogy could be formed with the perception of the film image. For example, watching Yvonne Singer's installation, light travels from the projector to form the image of a moment that no longer exists. A period of time captured through light is fixed through a chemical process and re-presented to the viewer. But no matter how quickly this transference occurs the original moment has ceased to exist. The use of film projection, then, by making light part of the perception of the image has the dual ability to heighten both the original photographic moment (suggesting a return to the subject) while intimating how transient, ephemeral, and ultimately extinct that moment is.

The use of light is a method by which one can speak about the process of photography. It is a necessary component for the production of the photographic image, but only in projection does it resurface in the presentation. Although this thesis has focussed on photography as a medium by which to discuss issues of memory and identity, the installations themselves fall somewhere between film and photography. The conceptual drive of these installations revolves around the nature of photography, but each uses film to express these ideas. Some of the rationale for this has already been discussed: it re-connects the photographic image with the *process* of taking a photograph, it allows for a stronger sensory experience for the viewer in terms of sound and movement, and the use of film projectors dates the photographic medium as one that is somewhat obsolete in contemporary society. Film is an interesting choice because its production is closely related to photography in many ways, but the final product has a greater versatility in terms of presentation. A key part of this rationale has not yet been

addressed, and that is *how* the imagery is presented. The next section will deal with these

details of presentation, especially in terms of how they relate to memory.

Re-presenting memory through film technique

The term 'ephemeral' has been used throughout this thesis as an adjective for

memory, one that has been used as a comparison to the static nature of the photographic

image. The use of light in these installations evokes this association with memory, as it

shares a similar ungraspable and unpredictable character. In my interview with Yvonne

Singer, she noted that:

> (What) interested me about the idea of using film, which was more
> interesting for me in this piece (*Projections for the unseeing*) than an
> actual photograph, is that film depends on light. It flickers, it can be
> turned on and off. It has that kind of fragility and ephemeral quality to
> it. That's also closer to your experience of memory. [114]

The element of light, then, can be seen as a key reason for using projection in these

installations if the artists are interested in talking about memory. The adoption of film

and video projection, in this instance, both allow for a different language of

communication and versatility that photography does not hold. The *methods* by which

film and video are utilized in these works provide a great deal of insight into how they

can be read in relation to memory.

Having already discussed the aged appearance of the film projector, it is also

important to note how the image it projects informs the work. These projectors produce a

grainy, somewhat fuzzy quality that is not found with higher-tech equipment or video.

This sort of image has a less 'complete' quality that makes it seem both aged and less

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[114] Singer, Yvonne. Personal Interview. op.cit.

visually commanding. Old photographs can also certainly age with time, but the same sort of aging on film seems more like a deterioration that complements the ephemerality of the light – as though the deterioration reflects a greater sense of permanent loss. The lack of full clarity that results from using dated film projectors also relates to memory in the sense that visually, memories are often quite vague and incomplete.

This type of grainy imagery that is typical of older films also has two other qualities that are employed in the works that use film projection. First, there is a certain unreliability in the projection of this imagery in that it can flicker and shake. The movement of the images is momentarily interrupted by a black screen, or it can shake back and forth briefly as though it might shatter. This adds to the sense of ephemerality that pervades film projection. Yvonne Singer makes particular use of this flickering effect in her work by editing the film in places so that there is a 'jump' or break in the continuous motion. For Singer, this served as a reminder to viewers that they were watching a film. Rather than allowing for the 'suspension of disbelief' and absorption into the film, she 'jolts' viewers back into an awareness of their positions as distanced from the images.[115] This lack of continuous motion is also heightened in *Projections for the unseeing* through the aforementioned optical printing process. By re-photographing each still from the film footage and presenting it in slow-motion, she reveals the break between images. It is as though the fragmentary gaps in the event act as a physical metaphor for memory gaps.

The film projector also dates itself through a strictly visual documentation lacking in sound. The sounds that are absent from the filmed scene – the dialogue between the

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[115] Ibid.

subjects or the ambient sound present during the filming – is replaced in the filmed

presentation by the mechanics of the projector's operations. In Singer's home movie

footage, the lack of sound contributes to the sense of time that has passed since the

footage was originally made. As film was at this time not able to capture sound, gesture

is relied upon to communicate with the future viewer of this footage. The absence of

sound in this footage gives the gestures within it a strange emphasis to the effect that

everyday actions are made strange and empty. This transference of attention to gesture in

the absence of sound has been noted by early film theorist Rudolf Arnheim. In his

comparison of silent film to the then recent developments for sound in film (he was

writing in 1933), Arnheim remarks:

> The absence of the spoken word concentrates the spectator's attention
> more closely on the visible aspect of behavior, and thus the whole
> event draws particular interest to itself. Hence it is that very ordinary
> shots are often so impressive in silent films... the spectator surrenders
> entirely to the expressive power of the gestures.[116]

This same attention to gesture is also relevant to Wyn Geleynse's installation, where the

sense of touch is heightened through this absence. Not unlike the waving hands in my

own home movie footage, the single hand in *A Film Projection at Building 70* attempts to

communicate without language, in this case through using the hand to caress and evoke a

response from the image. Even Mindy Yan Miller's installation, although it uses video to

project the imagery, still lacks direct sound. The sound of the lullaby is distanced from

the scene through its placement at the front of the gallery space, and it is not clear

whether Miller is actually humming the lullaby herself. The music acts differently from

the spoken word, and may instead be a case where sound serves to lull the viewer into

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[116] Arnheim, Rudolf. "Film & Reality." Cohen, Marshall, and Gerald Mast, eds. Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. 254.

focusing more closely on the imagery and allowing him/herself to become engrossed in the action.

The content of the imagery in relation to memory and the senses has already been explored at length in chapter three. The impetus behind the creation of these works, upon inspection, is a feeling of disjunction between how a memory has formed itself and how a photographic image presents itself. It surfaces as motivating factors behind both the content of the imagery and the film techniques that are utilized to present it. This sense of disconnection from memory in the face of the photographic image has been stated most clearly by the Yvonne Singer. When we spoke, she revealed to me how she came to choose her particular archival footage. With the footage of herself twirling like a ballerina, she had remembered that film existed of the event, and through watching it, she remembered its occurrence. Yet with the footage of her and her brother fighting over the doll, she had remembered the incident and went in search of the event on film. Curiously, when she did recover the footage, she noted that her memory of the event differed somewhat from how she had remembered it. She admitted that "the film footage that I saw was not as clear and obvious as I had thought it was."[117] This is made evident through the technical procedures that were undertaken in the work. The film footage underwent the optical printing process, was slowed-down, reversed, and repeated. By reworking the imagery, Singer was able not only to present the construction of the image, but also to search for an alignment between what the footage presented and how her own memory had stored her memories.

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[117] Singer, Yvonne. Personal Interview. op.cit.

The use of reversal is a technique that is particular to Singer's installation, so I will discuss that first. The technique is actually quite subtle, and I wasn't aware of it until Singer told me about all the steps of manipulation the footage had undergone. In the sequence with the twirling girl, she twists in one direction, and then the film skips slightly, and she twists in the opposite direction. The alteration is a detail, and does not make a great deal of difference towards the reading of the event. In the second sequence, however, Singer reverses the motion at the instant where the doll drops out of the girl's hands. Symbolically, this changes the event quite dramatically. In the original footage, the doll drops out of the girl's hands – one could say that she loses the tug-of-war with her brother. But after the manipulation, the doll is not lost – it falls out of her hands briefly only to be picked up again. It changes the reading of the situation in that Singer changes the documentation to show that the doll never really escaped her and that there was no 'winner' in this tug-of war. The footage Singer has chosen to present shows us a stereotypical young, feminine girl. But by making this slight alteration, Singer presents a girl that is just slightly more in control. She "brings the doll back into her hands",[118] thereby allowing her to retain possession, and also control. The alteration is also significant given the fact that the footage of this particular event differed from how Singer had remembered it to be. Maya Deren, who makes many pertinent comments on film technique in her article "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality", suggests that the use of reverse motion, "when used meaningfully, it does not convey so much a sense of a backward movement spatially, but rather an undoing of time."[119] In this light,

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[118] Ibid.
[119] Deren, Mary. "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality." Cohen and Mast, ed's. op.cit. 60.

Singer's use of reverse motion could be viewed as a desire to reverse time, to go back to the film footage and change its presentation.

Slow motion is a technique that all three installations share, one that is most noticeable in *Papa* and *Projections for the unseeing*. The use of slowing down the action in these works results in a similar effect as the lack of sound: it draws attention to the action itself. Maya Deren cites a few interpretations on the use of slow motion and how it registers on the viewer:

> Depending upon the subject and the context, it (slow motion) can be
> a statement of either ideal ease or nagging frustration, a kind of
> intimate and loving meditation on a movement or a solemnity which
> adds ritual weight to an action.[120]

With Miller's installation, the sound of the lullaby creates an atmosphere whereby her actions represent both an intimate, loving meditation *and* a grave solemnity. The soft lack of focus in the image that results from her slow hand gestures is calming, but the action itself is deeply melancholy. Her gestures (in much the same way as the hand that caresses the photograph in Geleynse's film) develop into a sense of ritual in this slow, deliberate presentation.

Slow motion is also a way of taking the image out of real time. It is an alteration of how we normally view the world, and relates more closely to how we process and make meaning of experience. Deren likens the slow motion effect to childhood nightmares, where fright makes it impossible to run, or to run with incredible effort and slow speed.[121] This relates especially well to *Projections for the unseeing* where ·

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[120] Ibid. 59.
[121] Ibid. 59.

childhood events from film are reworked and presented at a slow pace that echoes the human heartbeat. Narrative memories also accompany the film, both describing fearful memories about trying to swim or being afraid of a decapitated doll. The use of slow motion can be interpreted as a desire to depict not so much an element of the real as an interior, emotional ability to make sense of the real. Thus it is an element of memory. Certain events, seemingly quotidian to others' eyes, become taken in for one reason or another, and held in memory. There, they can be played over in the mind, and a split second event suddenly seems like it lasted much longer. Or, something might be agonized over and built into a dramatic and extended occurrence that at the time, only lasted a second or two.

A similar association can be made with the final film technique that these artists adopt – the repetitive film loop. The use of repetition can have a number of significances in relation to these works. One is that the loop places the photographic image into a new relationship with time. Rather than looking at time as linear (past/present/future), the notion of time as cyclical is suggested. Julia Kristeva's essay "Women's Time"[122] makes a distinction between these two concepts of time. Linear time is part of historical time, whereas cyclical time is more closely linked to women's time (the menstrual cycle being one example). J.T. Fraser also points out the cyclical process of time in nature, citing the lunar and solar cycles, and the biological clock in all its aspects.[123] In terms of humans and a biologically cyclical sense of time, placing these sequences in repetition looks at

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[122] Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Time." The Kristeva Reader. Ed. Toril Moi. Oxford: Basic Blackwell, 1986. 187 – 213.

[123] Fraser, J.T. "Biotemporality: The Cyclic Order of Life." Time: The Familiar Stranger. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987. 112 – 130.

time in a more personal manner.[124] This seems appropriate, given the self-examination

that makes up so much of these investigations. By placing these images back into a real

sense of time, they also lead to a contemplation of time in general - meaning, they refer

back to what it means to have part of the self in the image that is re-presented to that

same self years later. The photograph, by using light to include part of that moment in

time, disrupts a linear sense of self and time. Perhaps in looking at an image of the self, a

disjunction of identity begins to manifest itself. This was addressed in a different manner

in the discussion of the photographic encounter and the mirror moment.

This cyclical reference to time also relates to the way memories play with time.

In memory, time can be extended, shortened or replayed ad infinitum. One event can be

plucked from the real and become a memory that acts itself out over and over, often

without any real control on the part of the individual, as though the moment is caught in a

snag in the mind. Utilizing repetition as a film technique can have the effect of adding

what Deren previously described as 'nagging frustration' to the scene.[125] While she

characterized this as an effect of slow motion, in these installations, it is found more

strongly in the continuous repetition of the sequences. These actions repeat themselves

without resolution, but their content deals so strongly with searching and probing that a

lack of resolution becomes frustrating. Watching the hand feeling the surface of the

image in *A Film Projection at Building 70*, perhaps one begins to desire something else –

some breakthrough. Film and television conditions a viewer to expect change and plot

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[124] Genevieve Lloyd presents an analysis of the self in relation to time by looking at philosophers from Augustine and Kant to Nietzsche and Proust in Lloyd, Genevieve. Being in Time: Selves and Narrators in Philosophy and Literature. London: Routledge, 1993.
[125] Ibid.

but Geleynse does not allow the imagery to succumb to this desire. Instead, film and viewer are caught in a vortex, watching the hand locked in these movements as though it is trapped and stunned by a desire to feel beyond the photographic image. The mechanical reproduction of the sequence suggests that the mechanics of film and photography do not allow for a satisfaction of a desire to feel beyond the screen.

Mindy Yan Miller places her own action at the forefront by repeating it physically rather than mechanically. The lack of resolution is heightened when it becomes apparent that Miller is actually eating this photograph over and over. A mechanical reproduction, according to the artist, would subtract from the poignancy of her actions. Her physical repetition was a metaphor for "trying to hold onto a state", a state that was actually emotionally damaging.[126] She told me that "it was about trying to hold onto that, holding onto the death of my father. And it seemed like I was stopping my life."[127] This repetition, then, emphasizes the emotional stalemate her body is acting out. And because the image is not just of her father, but also of herself, she seems to be also holding onto more than 'her father's death'. It seems as though, by bringing the photograph into her body, she is also trying to hold onto (or make real) the memory that is captured in the image. It is an artificial memory, one that shows a bond between father and daughter that was not nearly as strong as the image portrays. Perhaps in her father's death, this image of closeness was one she wanted to make part of her actual memory. Unlike Singer's adaptation of film footage to coincide with her own memories, through repetition, Miller seems to be trying to cement this document into her memories, even to replace them.

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[126] Miller, Mindy Yan. Personal Interview. op.cit.
[127] Ibid.

And watching the act repeat itself demonstrates the ultimate impossibility of this – that

memory and image cannot necessarily be reconciled.

A futile gesture? (Towards a conclusion)

Maya Deren wrote in regards to repetition in film that it "can change the quality

of the scene from one of informality to that of a stylization akin to dance: in so doing it

confers dance upon non-dancers."[128] As with the other film techniques that have been

discussed, repetition places emphasis on the movement in the scene. The everyday

scenes that Yvonne Singer has chosen take on a greater weight through their repetition.

They are imbued with similar qualities found in the other two installations and given the

air of ritual. Watching the movement in each of these three installations is not unlike

watching a dance – one where the same sequence is performed to exhaustion.

The question is raised: what have these efforts achieved? Their searches are

unresolved, continuing in a loop without end and without progression. While there may

be no conclusion to these searches, perhaps reaching this state of awareness is exactly

where the achievement lies. These installations stand in acknowledgement of the push

and pull that characterizes the photographic encounter. While the image is revealed to be

an unfulfilling substitute for memory, the lure to lessen the distance between the image

and the self is revealed, considered, and acted-out.

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[128] Deren, Mary. op.cit. 63.

CONCLUSION

Restrictively visual, static, permanent – a photograph is all these things. But perhaps these installations have inadvertently picked up on the one element that compels people to keep taking photographs and rely on their ability to document the past. Although there are strong discrepancies between memory and photography, the photograph physically contains part of the past. The 'umbilical cord' of light that formed the subject into an object for the viewer's gaze is an intrinsic, although perhaps obscured, element of any photograph. It is this, I feel, that has driven these installations into being. Each piece is a probing search in its own way. In *Projections for the unseeing*, Yvonne Singer systematically breaks down and reconstructs her home movie footage, revealing all the layers that compose its construction. She rebuilds them using her own voice and the contributions of her own memories. Singer's search is a physical manipulation of this archival footage that does not result in any answers. Her work still maintains a sense of the incomplete and unresolved. Wyn Geleynse's *A Film Projection at Building 70, Granville Island, Vancouver* probes the image through touch. A hand's caress searches the surface of the image for something on the other side. The gestures are caught in a loop, placing the act into a permanent state of incompletion. The same is true of *Papa* – Mindy Yan Miller is caught in the act of consuming this photograph of herself and her father. It represents a desire to reconcile her memories with the image; one desire at odds with another to destroy the existence of this document; both operating in a state of irreconcilability. Each search is one that is self-reflective, one where there is personal involvement in the image and its production.

The lack of resolution in these installations does not reflect a failure to understand the lure of the image, but rather a struggle with the understanding of its dual nature. This document from the past represents an element of the Real: the "That-Has-Been" which is such an inescapable and yet also ungraspable element of the construction of the photograph. Despite the separate reality of the image itself, which hovers on the edge of being a simulacrum, there is a faint but lasting connection to the original moment. The absolute intangibility of this moment is perhaps the only conclusion that these installations can reveal.

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Fig. 1   Wyn Geleynse, Family Portrait, Detail, 1986-87, black and white Kodalith transparency, ground glass, plinth, 16mm projector, 16mm film loop, loop cassette, timer, projector stand, 177.8 x 45.7 x 203.2. [Oakville Galleries, Radiant Places: Bill Barrette and Wyn Geleynse: 9.]
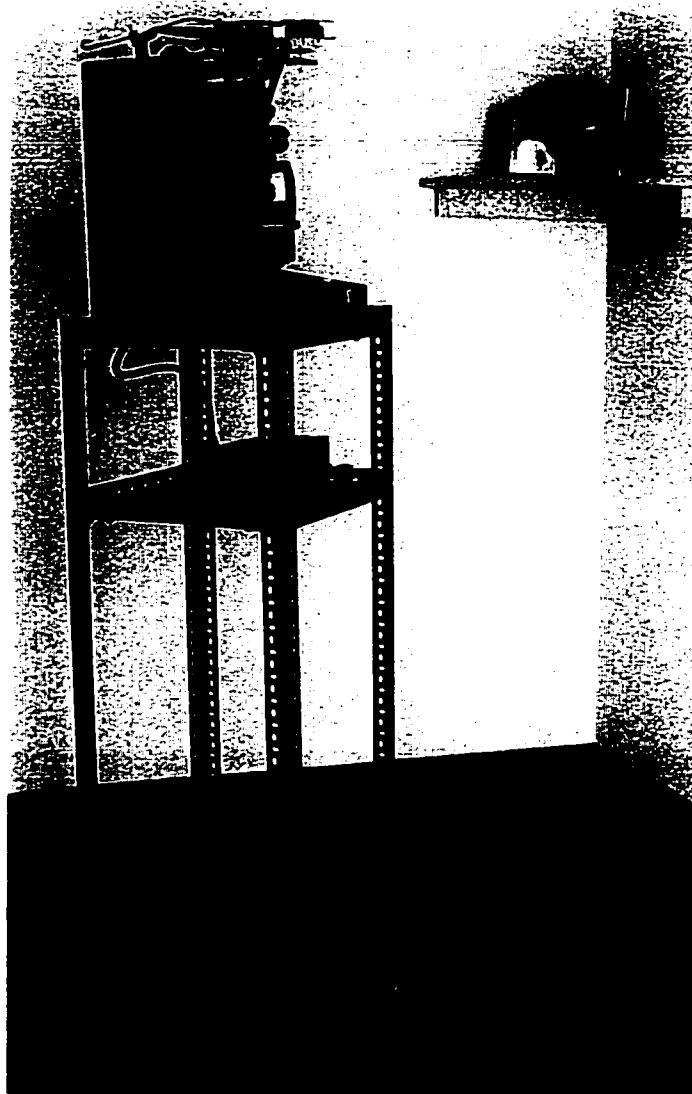
Fig. 2 Wyn Geleynse, Home Movies, Detail, 1986, 16mm projector, film loop,
film loop cassette, projector stand, timer, shelf, 20.5 x 20.5 black and
white photograph, gold frame, 8.9 x 12.7 gold photo frame. Edition of 2.
[Oakville Galleries, Radiant Places: Bill Barrette and Wyn Geleynse: 6.]
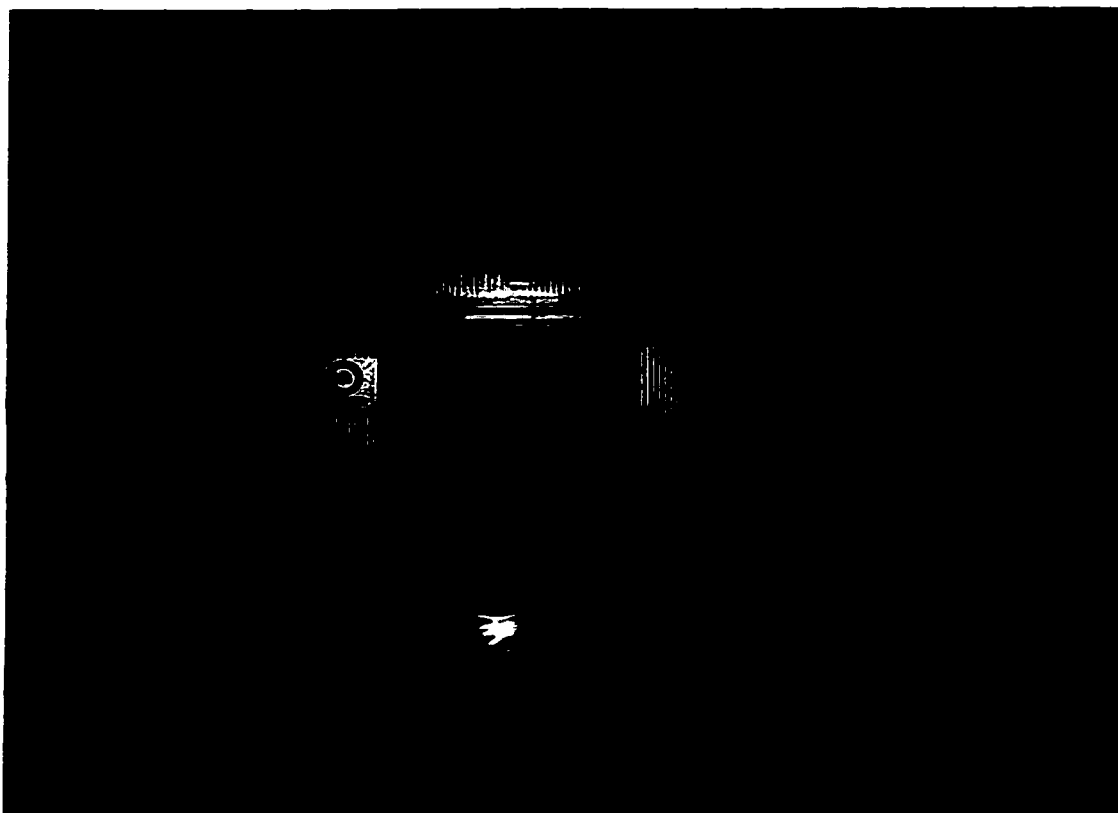
Fig. 3 Wyn Geleynse, A Film Projection at Building 70, Granville Island, Vancouver, B.C., Detail, Sunday, July 29 to August 2, 1990, 8:30 to 11:00 pm each evening, 16mm carbon arc projector, 16mm colour film loop, film cassette, 5' x 8' selectively ground plexiglass screen, building 70 Granville Island. [Presentation House Gallery, Wyn Geleynse: Film Works.]

Fig. 4   Wyn Geleynse, A Film Projection at Building 70, Granville Island,
Vancouver, B.C., Detail, Sunday, July 29 to August 2, 1990, 8:30 to 11:00
pm each evening, 16mm carbon arc projector, 16mm colour film loop,
film cassette, 5' x 8' selectively ground plexiglass screen, building 70
Granville Island. [Presentation House Gallery, Wyn Geleynse: Film
Works.]
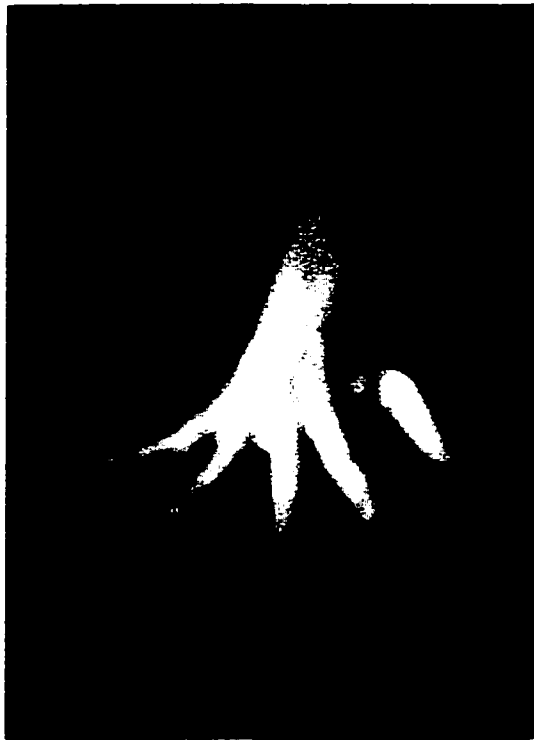
Fig. 5 Wyn Geleynse, Caress, Film Still, 1996, 16mm carbon arc projector,
16mm film loop, selectively ground plexiglass screen. [The Power Plant,
Liaisons.]

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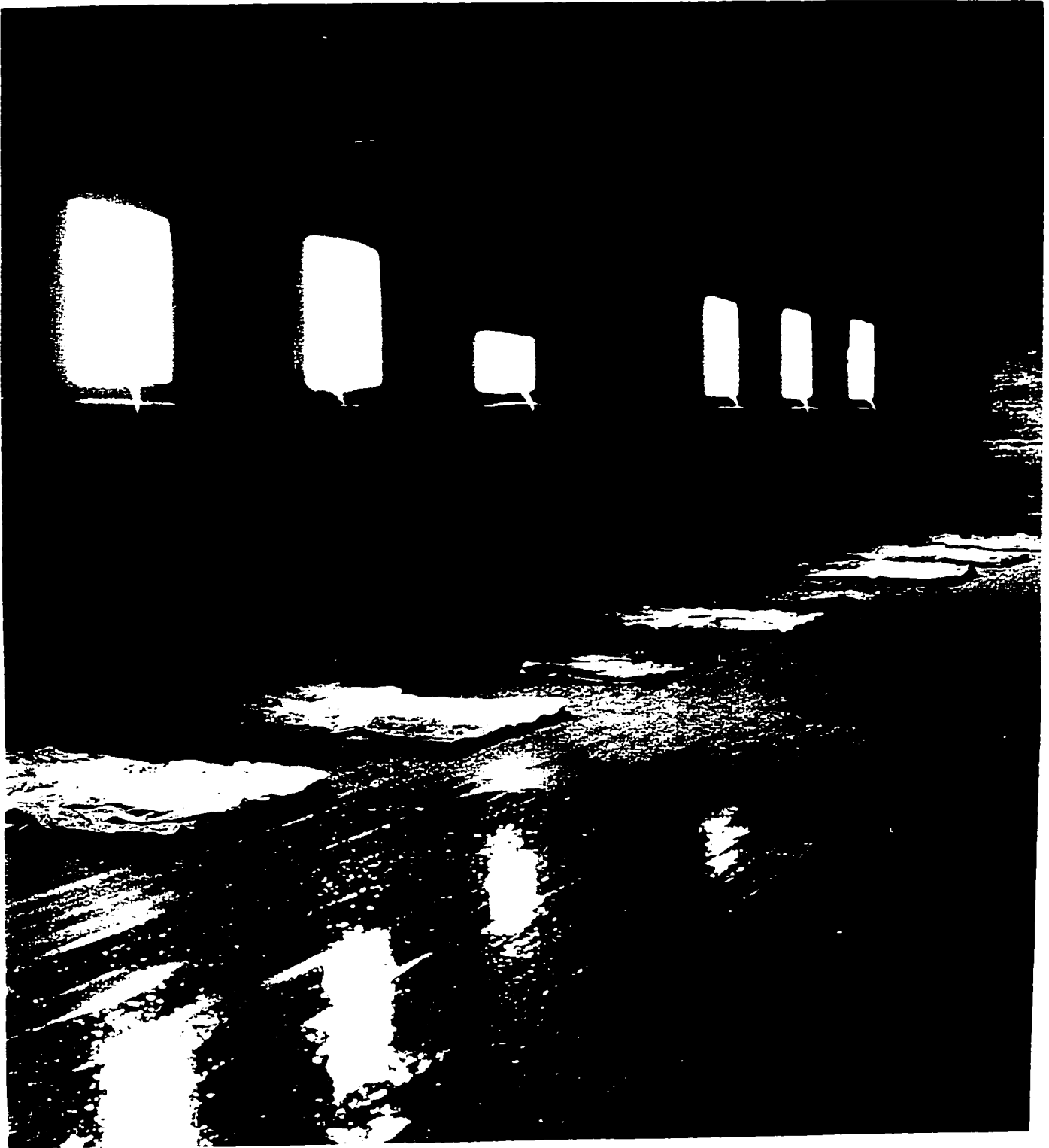
Fig. 6 Mindy Yan Miller, I Fell Asleep, Installation View, 1989-92, used
clothing, nine bed forms, each 3.18 x 182.88 x 91.44. [The Koffler
Gallery, Mindy Yan Miller: Chorus: 7.]
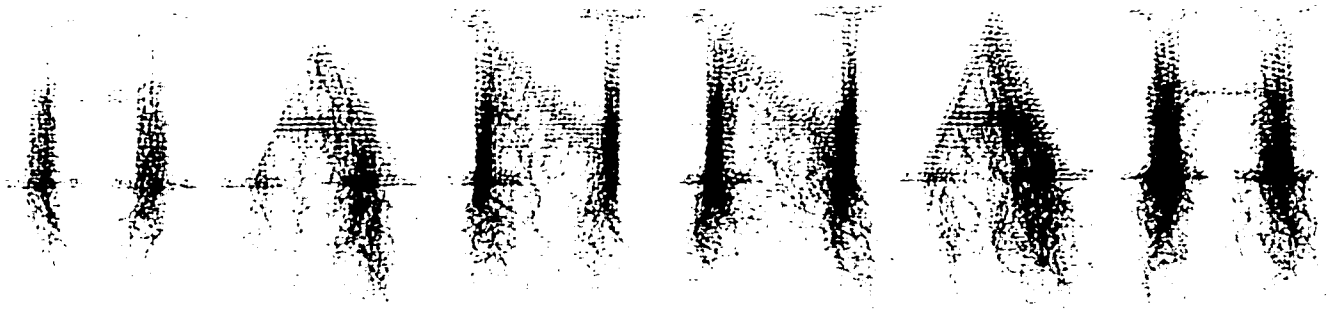
Fig. 7   Mindy Yan Miller, Every Word Their Name, Detail, 1993, straight pins, hair, pin letter skeleton: 18.4 x 129.   [The Koffler Gallery, Mindy Yan Miller: Chorus: 4.]
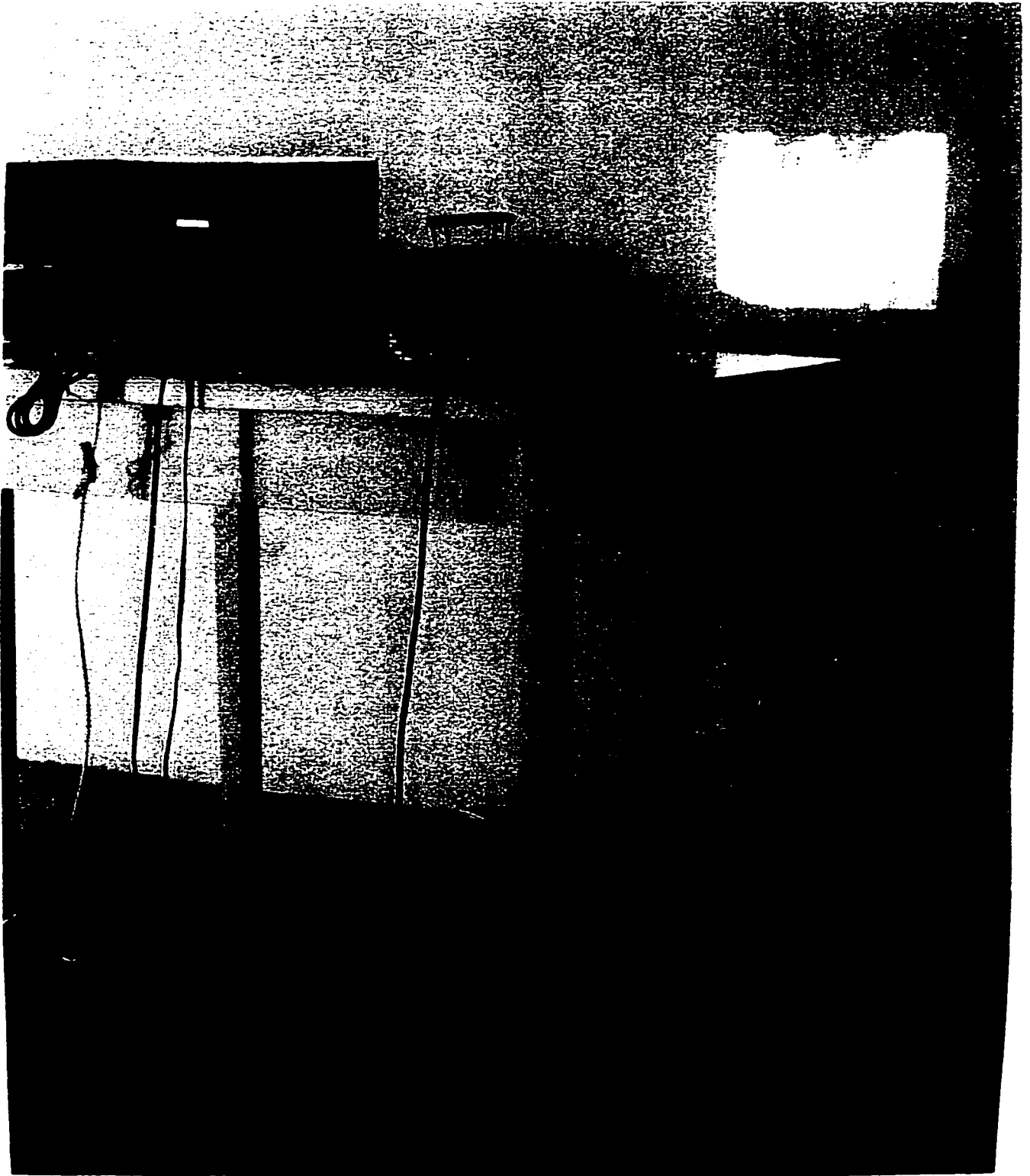
Fig. 8 Mindy Yan Miller, Papa, Installation View, 1995, video installation, image size: 23 x 30.5. [The Koffler Gallery, Mindy Yan Miller: Chorus: 14.]
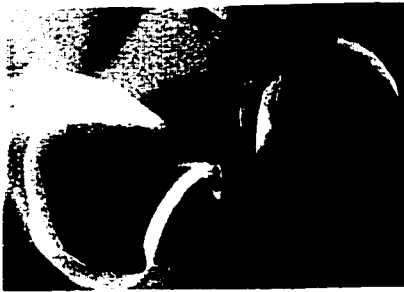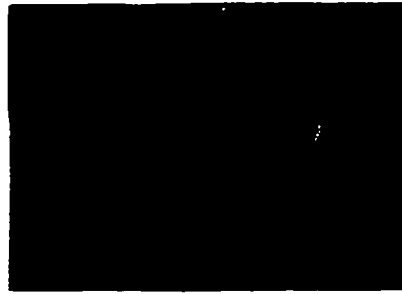
Fig. 9 Mindy Yan Miller, Papa, Details, 1995, video installation, image size: 23
x 30.5. [The Koffler Gallery, Mindy Yan Miller: Chorus: 15.]

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Fig. 10 Yvonne Singer, Veiled Room, Installation View, 1998, polyester sheet
curtain fabric, steel cable, metal hooks, silkscreened text on curtain, video
loop from 8mm home movies, television monitor, dimensions variable.
[Christine Conley, Parachute 95: 46.]

Fig. 11 Yvonne Singer, <u>Projections for the unseeing</u>, Installation View, 1997,
16mm film projectors, film loops from 8mm home movies, magnifying
lenses (from a photocopier), steel frames, motors, dimensions variable.
[Courtesy of the artist.]

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Fig. 12 Yvonne Singer, Projections for the unseeing, Installation Detail, 1997, 16mm film projectors, film loops from 8mm home movies, magnifying lenses (from a photocopier), steel frames, motors, dimensions variable. [Expression, centre d'exposition de Sainte-Hyacinthe: Brochure for Projections for the unseeing.]
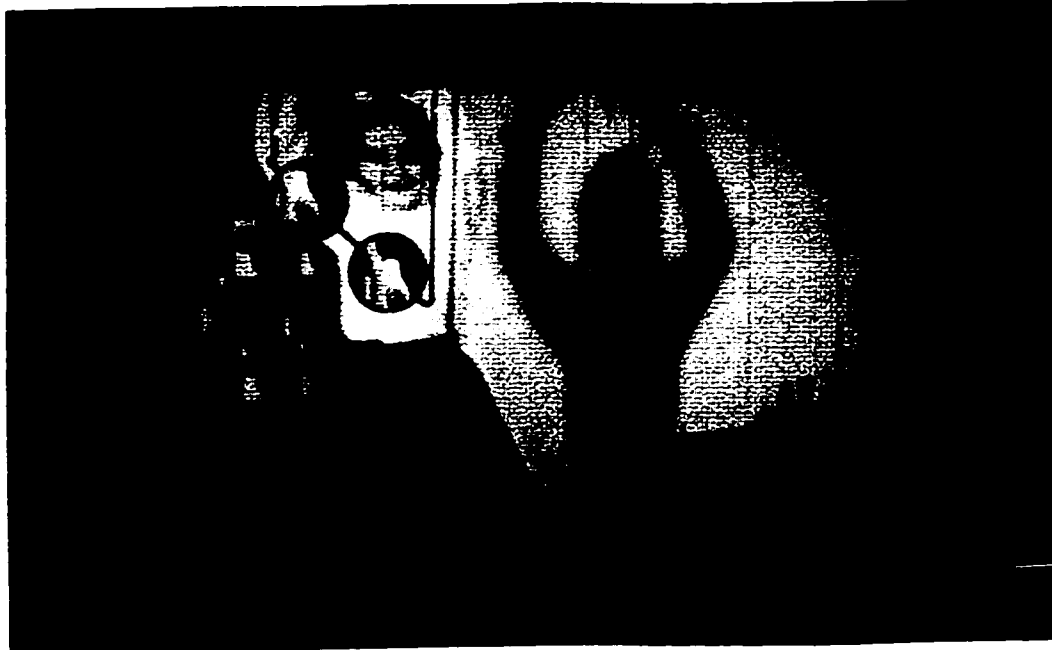
Fig. 13 Yvonne Singer, Projections for the unseeing, Installation Detail, 1997, 16mm film projectors, film loops from 8mm home movies, magnifying lenses (from a photocopier), steel frames, motors, dimensions variable. [Expression, centre d'exposition de Sainte-Hyacinthe: Brochure for Projections for the unseeing.]

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